

# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/47 September '12

## THE ROGUE'S LIFE



**MAY THE SHADOWS GUIDE YOU**

by Christopher R. Rice

**MONSTER SLAVERS**  
by David L. Pulver

**WHO'S GONNA BUY THIS?**  
by Michele Armellini

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE THIEVES' GUILD**  
by Matt Riggsby

**THE EMPEROR'S FINEST**  
by Kenneth Peters

**SAFES AND HOW TO OPEN THEM**

**DEALING WITH ROGUES**  
by Megan McDonald

by Roger Burton West

# STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Stock #37-2647

# CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR .....	3
MAY THE SHADOWS GUIDE YOU .....	4
<i>by Christopher R. Rice</i>	
WHO'S GONNA BUY THIS? .....	10
<i>by Michele Armellini</i>	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE THIEVES' GUILD .....	15
<i>by Matt Riggsby</i>	
EIDETIC MEMORY: MONSTER SLAVERS .....	20
<i>by David L. Pulver</i>	
THE EMPEROR'S FINEST .....	24
<i>by Kenneth Peters</i>	
SAFES AND HOW TO OPEN THEM .....	32
<i>by Roger Burton West</i>	
DEALING WITH ROGUES .....	36
<i>by Megan McDonald</i>	
RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE: LOOK AT WHAT'S ALREADY IN THE CLOSET .....	38
<i>by Steven Marsh, Pyramid Editor</i>	
ODDS AND ENDS .....	40
<i>featuring Murphy's Rules</i>	
ABOUT GURPS .....	41

## 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:* Systemless Features

### COVER ART

David Patrick Menahan

### INTERIOR ART

Greg Hyland

For the rogues we love . . .

# IN THIS ISSUE

Keep your friends close and your enemies closer – they might be one and the same! This month, we look at the world of rogues and the obstacles they face.

If all seems lost – or if you just need an edge in your criminal efforts – *May the Shadows Guide You* with a miracle or two. This adaptation of **GURPS Powers: Divine Favor** describes a god who looks after rogues, miscreants, and freedom-lovers – and the miracles he gives to those who believe.

You've had a hard night redistributing wealth. Now you need to ask: *Who's Gonna Buy This?* Step into the world of professional fences and their methods, then make use of a fence **GURPS** template and sample character.

Discover where fantasy and reality intersect with *A Brief History of the Thieves' Guild*. Written by **GURPS Low-Tech** co-author Matt Riggsby, this rules-light overview is inspirational for any rogue hoping to gather with like-minded souls.

In the latest installment of *Eidetic Memory*, **GURPS Fourth Edition** co-architect David L. Pulver looks at professionals that many may find unpalatable: *Monster Slavers*. Discover the ins and outs of capturing critters for your own ends, with a **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**-suitable template and an assortment of gear they might use.

Many rogues are measured by the opposition they face, and if you're a criminal in the Roman Empire of 258 A.D., you're bound to run up against *The Emperor's Finest*. Learn about this era's laws and its enforcement, plus nuances of third-century **GURPS** character creation and three templates to get you started.

Moving forward in time, if you're a criminal in any relatively recent era, you'll do well to study *Safes and How to Open Them*. Learn about this common obstacle plus **GURPS** details on the high-tech gear used to overcome them.

If someone in the party is going to act outside the law, everyone would do well to learn tricks for *Dealing With Rogues*. Discover some techniques to ensure unity, curb player resentment, and create adventurers with roguish abilities who aren't above the law.

This month's *Random Thought Table* looks at recent **GURPS** releases and how they change the lives of thieves (including two new possible quirks). *Odd and Ends* presents some askew twists on typical thieving tales, and *Murphy's Rules* might just steal your grumpiness if you're not looking.

If you're a thief, don't ask your physician what you should take. Just read this month's issue of *Pyramid*, and learn how to improve your rogue's life!

Editor-in-Chief ■ STEVE JACKSON  
e23 Manager ■ STEVEN MARSH  
**GURPS** Line Editor ■ SEAN PUNCH  
Assistant **GURPS** Line Editor ■  
JASON "PK" LEVINE

Art Director ■ SAMUEL MITSCHKE  
Assistant Art Director ■  
BRIDGET WESTERMAN  
Production Artist ■ NIKOLA VRTIS  
Prepress Checker ■ MONICA STEPHENS

Chief Operating Officer ■ PHILIP REED  
Marketing Director ■ MONICA VALENTINELLI  
Director of Sales ■ ROSS JEPSON  
Page Design ■ PHIL REED and  
JUSTIN DE WITT

# FROM THE EDITOR

## THE FANTASTIC AND REALISTIC

I remember a Green Lantern graphic novel written by Larry Niven (called *Ganthe's Tale*) that had a cool moment where Green Lantern saves the day by approaching – but not breaking – FTL speed, enabling his ring's light to shift from green to yellow (the only color that harms certain entities). The color-shift phenomenon was an odd bit of hard science for what was usually a loose “science fantasy” character, but it fit perfectly.

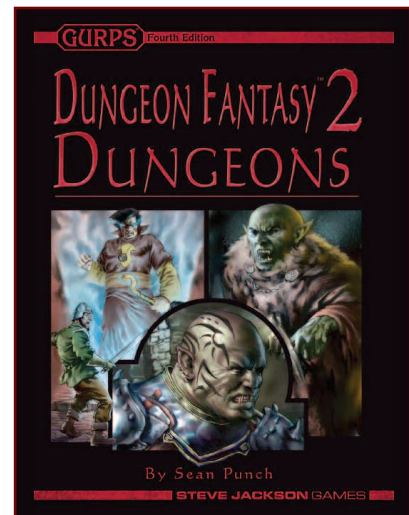
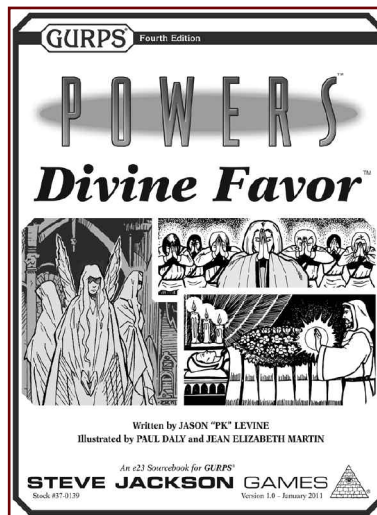
That doesn't have much to do with thieves, but it *does* relate to this issue of *Pyramid*. As I assembled this issue, I was reminded again that one of the great strengths of this fine magazine (and *GURPS* in general) is the ability for the fantastic and realistic to exist side by side. An improbable article about a deity who hears (and answers) the prayers of thieves is nearby a realistic depiction of Roman law enforcement. Similarly, *Pyramid* is an ideal home for ideas that start out fantastic (“no, there weren't dungeon-fantasy-style thieves' guilds”) and move to the realistic (“... but how close can we get to that

idea – and what cool ideas emerge as a result?”). Plus *Pyramid* always works well with ideas that aren't incredibly common – like David L. Pulver's *Monster Slavers* article on pp. 20-23 – and makes it feel both fantastic and realistic.

Perhaps it was inevitable that this intermingling of the realistic and fantastic would come to mind during the rogue-themed issue. After all, thieves in the real world have existed as long as there has been something to steal (and a sapient concept of “property”), yet tales of heroic, fantastic thieves are as old legend. We hate the guy who breaks into our home, yet we love Han Solo. Let contradictory ideas flourish evermore . . . in the pages of *Pyramid*!

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of fantastic ideals and realistic expectations, was there something in this issue that stole your heart? Or did you want to press charges against one of these articles? Let us know how were doing privately at [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or join the community at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



*Pyramid*, *GURPS*, Warehouse 23, and the all-seeing pyramid are registered trademarks of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated. e23 and the names of all products published by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated are registered trademarks or trademarks of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated, or used under license. *Pyramid* is copyright © 2012 by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated. All rights reserved.

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

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

# MAY THE SHADOWS GUIDE YOU

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

Thieves, con men, and other “street operators” usually work on the fringes of the law, which means that they more or less function outside of society (and all that that entails). This tends to create an environment where they develop their own beliefs, gestures, or even languages. In many works of fiction, thieves have their own set of gods they pray to, heroes they admire, or even a system of gestures that only they know (e.g., “thieves cant”).

Here, then, is a description of one possible faith system for thieves . . . because every good rogue needs someone to pray

to when things go wrong. It also assumes a medieval-like setting – such as most fantasy campaigns – but can be adapted to use in modern-day games or perhaps as a special club in Victorian times. You will need *GURPS Powers: Divine Favor* to make full use of this article (but see *So Now I'm a Priest?* on p. 9 for an alternate idea), plus a few other resources, depending on the prayers used. Those planning to run *GURPS Banestorm*, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, *GURPS Infinite Worlds*, or *GURPS Monster Hunters* campaigns obviously need those books as well.

## THE UNSEEN HAND

The Cult of Vayadu – pronounced “vay-AH-due,” and sometimes spelt as Vyabdu – is a secretive group, allowing it to be dropped into nearly any setting. It may be an ancient society in the criminal classes; a “forgotten” religion, recently rediscovered; or an import from another country – perhaps along with another country’s organized criminals.

Ceremonies are fairly straightforward and simple, with a silent litany said in utter darkness being the most common. A few fanatical adherents prefer more spectacular forms of “worship”; committing an act of blatant thievery in the name of Vayadu is the most popular.

Most governments and rulers actively suppress Vayaduian cults wherever they find them, not because of the criminal problems that they can bring but because Vayadu isn’t just a patron of thieves. He also embodies such ideas as freedom of choice and the right to choose one’s destiny. This often conflicts with the dogmatic methods of local churches and institutions who would rather keep their subjects thinking less about their current lives and more about their “afterlives.” Strangely enough, Vayaduian worship is often found among the ranks of the local politicians due to the deity’s influence on intrigue and other “shadow-games.”

Vayadu is said to be the patron god of freedom of choice, intrigue, secrets, shadows, things that are lost, thieves, and thievery. Typical followers include assassins, conspirators, freethinkers, mercenaries, orphans, politicians, thieves, and

treasure-hunters. With this peculiar mix of people, places of worship can be found nearly anywhere.

### VAYADU, THE HIDDEN LORD

Not much is known about the Hidden Lord other than the fact that he concerns himself with all manner of secrets, the lost, and intrigues. Some of his other monikers include the Keeper of Secrets, the Shadow-That-Watches, and the Weaver. He might also have names specific to certain regions, places, or even particular worshippers.

He is known among the other gods as a rebel, troublemaker, and freethinker. It is suggested that he was not born to his divinity but that he took it from another god as a mortal (though no one truly knows). True or not, it gives him the air of an usurper, similar to the way “old money” might view the *nouveau riche*. Over the years, he has built up quite the following, especially after his rather epic battle with an unnamed deity.

Like Vayadu, this unknown god was in life a thief and murderer-for-hire. Having taken offense to Vayadu drawing away several of his own worshippers (mostly those seeking lost or hidden treasures), he decided to kill Vayadu. The battle was said to have lasted a full day and night, and raged across many planes of existence until finally Vayadu learned of the resting place of his foe’s heart (which he had placed in a jar and hid away). The shadowy god destroyed the jar and its contents, thereby absorbing the defeated deity’s power and taking his worshippers.

While he is often associated with both secrets and hidden treasure, he doesn't go out of his way to keep such things hidden. For those skilled enough to find such treasures or learn such truths, he does not try to deprive them of those hard-won prizes.

Vayadu is a meddler and keeps close tabs on all his worshippers (even if this is not the norm for the setting). The GM should allow all worshippers to make use of the *Man Proposes, God Disposes* rules (*GURPS Fantasy*, p. 148), even if others are not permitted to rely on them in the campaign.

## Priests

Priests of the Hidden Lord tend to have their fingers in all the local pies, providing services for all worshippers, regardless of occupation or inclination. The priests themselves tend to come from all walks of life and may be of any age or sex. The only thing they have in common is the day when their god called for them to take on more duties, and they answered.

Most priests do not advertise themselves (for obvious reasons), though they do try to be available to their flocks. They are more open in areas where they are not actively persecuted. If local politicians and policy-makers are worshippers, other area worshippers tend to receive unofficial religious freedom; local politicians will not *want* their chosen religion to be one that is persecuted.

Priests use the rules for *Divine Favor* instead of the standard magic system (but see *So Now I'm a Priest?* on p. 9). As paragons, they must select -10 points from among the following:

- Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5].
- Compulsive Scheming [-10\*] (p. 7).
- Odious Personal Habit (Mysterious) [-5].
- Sense of Duty (Coreligionists) [-10].
- Vow (Never tell someone else a secret he didn't discover on his own) [-5].

Other disadvantages may be taken with the GM's permission as long as they fit his campaign's outlook on Vayadu. Other traits appropriate for worshippers (especially priests) include: Acute Senses (any) (p. B35), Blessed (p. B40), Charisma (p. B41), Cultural Adaptability (p. B46), Flexibility or Double-Jointed (p. B56), High Manual Dexterity (p. B59), Perfect Balance (p. B74), Rapier Wit (p. B79), Smooth Operator (p. B91), Social Chameleon (p. B86), True Faith (p. B94), and Zeroed (p. B100).

In addition to the new prayers described in this article, priests may take any of these learned prayers from *Divine Favor* (pp. 7-16): Confidence, Consecrated Ground, Divine Guidance, Eclipse, Feed the Masses, Final Rest, Holy Touch, Lay on Hands (but not the enhanced version), Powerful Conviction, Raise the Dead, and Traveler's Blessing. (Unless otherwise specified, the priest may also learn the enhanced versions of learned prayers that have them.) The following learned prayers described in *Dungeon Saints* (from *Pyramid* #3/36: *Dungeon Fantasy*) are also suitable: Eyes of Hell, Mantle of the God of Lies, Petrify, and Servant of the God of Lies.

## Sayings From the Shadows

*Freedom is a cause all its own:* If for no other reason than to be able to choose to do something.

*May the shadows guide you:* The equivalent of "good luck."

*May the sun shine upon you:* You wish someone ill luck or harm, or – if used with a specific action or task in mind, such as "May the sun shine upon your journey to the Isla Della Cova" – a schadenfreude hope that he will fail at his task.

*May that which is hidden remain so:* Be quiet, or this conversation needs to stop now.

*The best web is that which goes unnoticed:* The best plan or action is one that cannot be easily understood.

# NEW LEARNED PRAYERS

These prayers are all formatted and detailed similarly to those of *Divine Favor*.

## MINOR BLESSINGS

*Minimum Reaction:* Neutral

### Secret Cache

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 4.

*Learned Prayer Cost:* 2 points

You have a special ability to hide items where you can recall them to you at will. These objects must be of a size that you can reasonably hide on your person, and you may hold up to 10 lbs. within your cache. To place an object in your Secret Cache, you must make a Holdout roll (subject to all the usual penalties and modifiers; see p. B200). Once in your Cache, it is undetectable

by mundane senses and can only be withdrawn by you. If you die, all objects placed within your Cache are lost.

*Statistics:* Payload 5 (Accessibility, Only items you could reasonably conceal on your person, -10%; Cosmic, Doesn't count against encumbrance, +50%; Divine, -10%; Requires Holdout roll, -10%) [6]. *Feature:* Weight limit is based on a static BL of 20 lbs. instead of using actual ST.

### Supreme Sneakiness

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 4.

*Learned Prayer Cost:* 3 points.

This miracle lends you some of the deceptive capacity of Vayadu, adding +3 to any Acting, Camouflage, Disguise, Holdout, Shadowing, and Stealth roll you make. These bonuses last for an hour, or long enough for you to make use of the bonus for one roll, whichever is *longer*.

*Statistics:* Craftiness 3 (Divine, -10%) [14]. (Craftiness is a Talent from **GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents**, p. 9.)

### **Spider Climb**

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 5.  
*Learned Prayer Cost:* 4 points.

So long as it can support your weight, you can move over any surface (even a vertical one) or ceiling at half your normal move, without needing to make Climbing checks.

*Statistics:* Clinging (Divine, -10%) [18].

### **Burglar's Blessing**

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 6.  
*Learned Prayer Cost:* 5 points.

This prayer muffles the sounds you effect, making you silent as a cat. You gain +5 to Stealth (+10 if perfectly motionless) against attempts to hear you.

*Statistics:* Silence 5 (Divine, -10%) [23].

## **MAJOR BLESSINGS**

*Minimum Reaction:* Good

### **Veiled**

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 7.  
*Learned Prayer Cost:* 7 points.

With this blessing, you are hidden from the scrying and detection by others, even *deities*. Whenever anyone uses any ability that attempts to gather facts about you, detect your location via remote viewing, special senses, etc., they suffer a -5 modifier. Furthermore, your true name is hidden from all but your god. This is similar to the Zeroed advantage but not as absolute, but you don't need to worry about all the hassle that comes with that advantage.

*Statistics:* Obscure 5 (Clairsentience; Always on, -50%; Cosmic, +50%; Defensive, +50%; Divine, -10%; Extended, Detect, Divination, Para-Radar, +60%; Selective Effect, +20%; Stealthy, +100%) [32] + Obscure True Name [1].

### **Burglar's Blessing (Enhanced)**

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 8.  
*Learned Prayer Cost:* 9 points.

Like Burglar's Blessing (p. 6) but better, this prayer makes you completely silent. You gain +10 to Stealth (+20 if perfectly motionless) against attempts to perceive you by hearing.

*Statistics:* Silence 10 (Divine, -10%) [45].

### **Secret Cache (Enhanced)**

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 9.  
*Learned Prayer Cost:* 10 points

As for Secret Cache (p. 5), but you may hold up to 80 lbs. within your cache.

*Statistics:* Payload 40 (Accessibility, Only items you could reasonably conceal on your person, -10%; Cosmic, Doesn't count against encumbrance, +50%; Divine, -10%; Requires Holdout roll, -10%) [48]. *Feature:* Weight limit is based on a static BL of 20 lbs. instead of using actual ST.

## **MIRACULOUS POWER**

*Minimum Reaction:* Good

### **Masterful Locksmith**

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 10.  
*Learned Prayer Cost:* 12 points.

This ability allows you to open any lock, safe, etc. *instantly* without the need to touch or manipulate it, as long as you are within 10 yards of it. You don't even have to see the lock, as long as you know where it is. Roll against the better of DX or DX-based Lockpicking, at +12 and with no penalties for time, equipment, lighting, etc. Use the same rules against an electronic lock, but at "only" +7. Success unlocks it immediately; if you fail, the consequences depend on the particular lock.

This blessing applies to any lock whether it is a padlock, the lock on manacles, etc. It does *not* work on physical restraints like chains, ropes, etc. or locks protected by magic or supernatural effects that render it unpickable.

*Statistics:* Accessory (Lockpicks) [1] + Efficient (Lockpicking) [1] + Lockpicking (A) IQ+8 [32] + Skill Adaptation (Electronics Operation (Security) defaults to Lockpicking-5 for the purpose of circumventing Electronic Locks) [1] + Speed-Picking (H) Lockpicking-2 [9] + Telekinesis 6 (Divine, -10%; Specific, Locks, -60%) [9] + Unusual Technique (Speed-Picking) [1] + Work by Touch (H) Lockpicking [6].

*Assassination is an art, milord. And I am the city's most accomplished artist.*

*– Brent Weeks, **The Way of Shadows***

## Veiled (Enhanced)

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 10.

*Learned Prayer Cost:* 13 points.

As for Veiled (p. 6), but you are *completely* immune to detection. You simply cannot be found by any of the methods mentioned in that entry.

*Statistics:* Obscure 10 (Clairsentience; Always on, -50%; Cosmic, +50%; Defensive, +50%; Divine, -10%; Extended, Detect, Divination, Para-Radar, +60%; Selective Effect, +20%; Stealthy, +100%) [64] + Obscure True Name [1].

## Cloak of Shadows

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 11.

*Learned Prayer Cost:* 15 points.

By gathering the shadows around you, you can become invisible. This does not require a roll but you must be in a shadowy area (Vision penalties of -3 or more) to activate it. Once you leave the darkened area, you may remain unseen for one minute. You can still be heard!

*Statistics:* Invisibility (Can Carry Objects, up to Heavy Encumbrance, +100%; Divine, -10%; Switchable, +10%; Trigger, areas of darkness, -20%) [72].

## Shadow-Walker

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 12.

*Learned Prayer Cost:* 20 points.

You can become a *living* shadow at will. Your equipment transforms with you, up to Heavy Encumbrance; if your gear exceeds that limit, the GM decides what's left behind. This form allows you to flow over walls and floors at your usual ground Move, slide through the small cracks in dark places, and to slip along walls and ceilings at half Move.

Furthermore, you may flit from shadow to shadow, teleporting yourself (and your transformed equipment) up to 100 yards away from your current location as long as there is a nearby shadow that you could walk to. For the purposes of this ability, a shadow is defined as being big enough for you to step into and have at least -2 to Vision due to low or little ambient light. To utilize this form of movement, make an IQ roll and add modifiers for distance and preparation (see p. B98 for more details). If the combined penalty is too great, you can expend fatigue – every 1 FP spent removes 1 point of penalties. If you succeed, you immediately vanish and appear at your new destination. If you fail, you stay where you are. On a failure, you go nowhere on a critical failure, in addition to any other effects, you shadow-walk to the wrong place (GM's call).

All physical attacks do half damage to you in this form. Most energy-based attacks do normal damage – except for *light*-based attacks, which do 50% extra damage. Magic and other purely mental abilities affect you normally.

While in this shadowy form, you cannot perform any purely physical attacks or actions. However, you *can* pick up objects (you may carry up to Light Encumbrance), which then become

shadowy themselves. They revert to solid form the moment you let them go.

All of these benefits do have a downside: For every 15 seconds you are in an area of bright luminescence or are exposed to sudden bright flashes, you lose 1d FP, ignoring DR. This lost FP can only be regained by switching back to your normal form. If you reach 0 FP, you instantly revert to your normal form.

*Statistics:* Shadow Form (Can Carry Objects, Heavy Encumbrance, +100%; Divine, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, Weakness\*, -54%) [68] + Warp (Accessibility, Only to places you could reach normally, -20%; Cannot blink, -20%; Divine, -10%; Extra Carrying Capacity, Heavy Encumbrance, +30%; Gyroscopic, +10%; Range Limit, 100 yards, -40%; Special Movement, Must be able to walk a few steps, -10%; Special Portal, Darkness no greater than candlelight, -10%) [30].

\* This is priced as Weakness (Bright light, 1d per minute; Fatigue Only, -50%; Reduced Time 2, +40%) [-54].

## New Disadvantage

For more information on Compulsive Behaviors in general, see pp. B128-129.

### Compulsive Scheming

-5 or -10 points\*

You cannot stop yourself when it comes to creating complex plans, involving yourself in conspiracies, or fomenting your own intrigues. This does not mean you try to help with just anyone's plans, but if you would conceivably be involved anyways, you must make a self-control roll.

You hate simple plans of action. Although you are not necessarily impractical, you prefer the byzantine over the easily understood. Make a self-control roll to stop yourself from unnecessarily complicating a given situation, participating in local political intrigues, etc. A failed roll means you *must* to make it more complicated than necessary.

You have a -1 reaction to those who know about your scheming ways, or -2 against those who prefer methods that are straightforward, simple, or dislike lies or obfuscation.

Compulsive Scheming is worth -5 points, or -10 points in settings where intrigue is frowned upon.

## WORLD-SHAKING MIRACLES

*Minimum Reaction:* Excellent

### Masterful Locksmith (Enhanced)

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 13.

*Learned Prayer Cost:* 26 points.

As Masterful Locksmith (p. 6), but the DX or Lockpicking roll is at +5. As well, you have the same +5 on all ST, DX, and Escape rolls to break free in close combat or squeeze through narrow openings . . . and if someone *does* catch you and ties you up, you need only wriggle for a second to *automatically* escape any bonds, bindings, chains, etc., holding you!

*Statistics:* As for Master Locksmith (p. 6) [60] + another +5 to Lockpicking [20] + Insubstantiality (Accessibility, Only to cause bonds to fall off, -50%; Divine, -10%) [40] + Slippery 5 (Divine, -10%) [9].

### **Shadow-Walker (Enhanced)**

*Learned Prerequisite:* Divine Favor 15.

*Learned Prayer Cost:* 34 points.

As for Shadow-Walker (p. 7), but you may carry up to Extra-Heavy Encumbrance (instead of Heavy). As well, you can travel up to 1,000 miles (instead of just 100 yards) by walking through

shadows; however, you must be able to see the destination or have visited there before (see *Removal*, p. B98, for details).

*Statistics:* Shadow Form (Can Carry Objects, Extra-Heavy Encumbrance, +150%; Divine, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, Weakness, -54%\*) [93] + Warp (Accessibility, Only to places you could reach normally, -20%; Cannot blink, -20%; Divine, -10%; Extra Carrying Capacity, Extra-Heavy Encumbrance, +50%; Gyroscopic, +10%; Range Limit, 1,000 miles, -15%; Special Movement, Must be able to walk a few steps, -10%; Special Portal, Darkness no greater than candlelight, -10%) [75].

\* As for Shadow-Walker.

## OTHER CAMPAIGNS

Worship of the Hidden Lord can be easily ported to other campaigns; after all, one of the basic tenets of its religious dogma is the keeping of secrets. For campaigns set in the Victorian era or a steampunk setting, a Vayaduian cult can serve the same purpose as any other secret group like the Illuminati or Hellfire Club: a place for adherents to relax or discuss ideas or philosophies that are not considered socially acceptable by the rest of society (*especially* politics and other political intrigue). Houses of Shadow (the name of temples devoted to Vayadu) might exist nearly anywhere in such settings or perhaps in only one particular spot. Perhaps Jack the Ripper was an adherent to the tenants of Vayadu, showing his adoration of his god by ritually murdering his victims.

Campaigns taking place in modern times should prove equally interesting, though most national governments will consider such a shadowy organization a “cult” by default. Of course, when those who worship Vayadu can literally walk through shadows and ignore most locks and restraints, it does tend to give others pause. Vayaduian cults could be mixed up in nearly anything in such a setting, from gunrunning to supplying freedom fighters with the resources needed to throw off the shackles of an oppressive government.

Worship of the Hidden Lord in the far future is also possible. Adherents make excellent spies and Machiavellian manipulators on a planet-wide scale. Perhaps there is something in the darkness other than Vayadu himself, and he is attempting to protect humanity from such horrors. Perhaps Vayaduian worship originates from an alien or lost race; his last temple might be on a burnt-out world where no other life exists.

In a science-fiction setting, he doesn't even need to be a god! He could be a multidimensional life form that enjoys being worshipped as one. He then uses his vast power to grant his followers abilities unlike any other in the campaign.

Here are four more examples for using the Hidden Lord in various *GURPS* settings.

### **BANESTORM**

The world of Yrth is chock full of secret societies, conspiracies, and guilds for thieves, which makes adding a cult of Vayadu fairly straightforward. The easiest way to do this would be to integrate Vayaduian worship as a (secret!) theme in any number of thieves' or assassins' guilds.

The GM should decide if Vayadu's outlook on freedom meshes with the Ministry of Serendipity. If not, an entire campaign could be made up of an alliance between the church of Vayadu and the Underground Engineers. Vayaduian worship will probably be considered a nonhuman religion (*Banestorm*, pp. 81-83) even if its origins dictate otherwise.

*Occasionally words must serve to veil the facts. But let this happen in such a way that no one become aware of it; or, if it should be noticed, excuses must be at hand to be produced immediately.*

– Niccolò Machiavelli

### **INFINITE WORLDS**

*Infinite Worlds* campaigns allows for too many possibilities to exhaustively cover. However, it should be presumed that Vayadu is a real entity and that he somehow grants powers to his worshippers. Whether he is just a ridiculously powerful mage or entity is up to the GM, but cults and places devoted to him could appear on any worldline. The GM should decide how his worshippers react to others, and whether they help or hinder Infinity, Reich-5, etc.

One possibility is that Vayadu is (or was) a very powerful god, but at some point, his worship declined. He ended up joining the Cabal as a grandmaster, his intentions being to spread his worship through the multiverse so he can once again regain his mantle of godhead.

## DARKEST DUNGEONS

Vayaduian worship fits right into *Dungeon Fantasy* with few problems. After all, dark deities with seemingly unfathomable goals are bread and butter in such settings. The GM should first decide whether Vayadu is a “evil god” or simply misunderstood. The latter opens more player options, but the former can be useful for campaigns needing a large organization to pose as a threat to adventurers.

Clerics and holy warriors of the Hidden Lord should use the rules for priests of night and holy warriors of night (*Dungeon Fantasy 7*, p. 24). The GM should allow Vayadu’s clerics and holy warriors to purchase the New Realm (Rogues and Messengers) power-up (*Dungeon Fantasy 11*, pp. 22-23) at character creation even if he doesn’t allow this for anyone else. Many clerics (and holy warriors) also mix professions (see *Dungeon Fantasy 3*), typically training as assassins (*Dungeon Fantasy 12*, p. 9), ninjas (*Dungeon Fantasy 12*), thieves, or scouts. Any of those four professions who want to add a little holy magic to their repertoire should add the cleric or holy warrior lenses. An especially interesting idea might be for a entire clan of ninjas to devote themselves to Vayadu – use the ninja template with the cleric or holy warrior lens. These terrifying incarnations of the night are silent and can at their targets while remaining completely hidden.

The material from *Dungeon Saints* (see *Pyramid #3/36: Dungeon Fantasy*) is especially appropriate to use Vayadu in a *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign.

## THE SHADOW HUNTERS

In the *GURPS Monster Hunters* series, Vayadu becomes not just a keeper of secrets and shadows, but also a silent protector of humanity, an unseen guardian keeping the worst terrors at bay. While anyone can espouse the beliefs of Vayadu, the crusader can actually call on him for tangible assistance.

The brother or gifted templates (*Monster Hunters 4*, pp. 5 and 8) are also suitable, as is the scout (*Monster Hunters 4*, p. 14); simply add Mysticism abilities to the optional list of advantages they can purchase. Adding the mystic lens (*Monster Hunters 4*, p. 22) to any of the other templates works equally well. Those who are not using *Divine Favor* will have to retrofit some of the Learned Prayers into Mysticism abilities, but that should be a fairly straightforward process. Crusaders should choose Shamanic for their particular Theology specialty, though in some settings it may make sense for Vayadu to be a loa, and therefore Voodoo is a better fit.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice is a devout worshipper of the Hidden Lord, using his god-granted abilities to stay hidden in his dark lair. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he dreams of being able to write full time one day, or at least eke out a living doing it. He wishes to thank L.A., who in addition to being his own personal muse, helped him craft quite a bit of this article. Finally he thanks his gaming group for being the test subject . . . err good players that they are, his good friend Antoni Ten Monrós for being his usual fantastic self, as well as Emily “Bruno” Smirle, Robert “RevBob” Hood, and Elizabeth “ArchangelBeth” McCoy.

## So Now I’m a Priest?

This article relies heavily on *Divine Favor* as the main source of supernatural power granted by Vayadu. Those without access to it or who do not wish to use it in their campaign can keep much of the flavor of Vayaduian worship by substituting standard spells for learned prayers. Any spells that can be used to influence minds or conjure darkness/light are prime candidates. The following list itemizes the most obvious choices; the GM is encouraged to add to it to suit his campaign and how he views the Hidden Lord. All page references are from *Magic*.

Alertness (pp. 133-134)	Levitation (p. 143)
Apportation (p. 142)	Light (p. 110)
Avoid (p. 140)	Lighten Burden (p. 143)
Blackout (p. 112)	Locksmith (p. 143)
Blade Turning (p. 167)	Manipulate (p. 145)
Blur (p. 113)	Mass Daze (p. 137)
Body of Shadow (p. 114)	Night Vision (p. 111)
Climbing (p. 35)	Persuasion (p. 45)
Continual Light (p. 110)	Quick March (p. 144)
Dark Vision (p. 111)	Rear Vision (p. 134)
Darkness (pp. 111-112)	Remove Shadow (pp. 110-111)
Dull (Sense) (p. 133)	See Invisible (p. 113)

Dullness (p. 134)	See Secrets (p. 107)
Fear (p. 134)	Seeker (pp. 105-106)
Foolishness (p. 134)	Sense Danger (p. 165)
Forgetfulness (p. 135)	Sense Emotion (p. 45)
Freedom (p. 148)	Sense Foes (p. 44)
Gloom (p. 112)	Shade (p. 113)
Haste (p. 142)	Shape Darkness (p. 113)
Hide (p. 113)	Slow Fall (p. 144)
Hide Emotion (p. 45)	Strengthen Will (p. 136)
Hide Thoughts (p. 46)	Touch (p. 35)
Hinder (p. 36)	Trace (p. 106)
Insignificance (p. 48)	Turn Blade (p. 166)
Invisibility (p. 114)	Undo (p. 145)
Jump (p. 143)	Wallwalker (p. 144)
Keen (Sense) (p. 133)	Weakness Will (p. 136)

The GM might even allow the above spells to count as a single “college” for the purposes of the One College Only Limitation (p. B67), cheapening the cost of Magery. It should also be noted that, since only one Seek spell is on this list, for Seeker, the GM should change its prerequisite of any two Seek spells to Sense Emotion and Sense Foes.

# WHO'S GONNA BUY THIS?

BY MICHELE ARMELLINI

When considering illegal activities, in both their actual nasty incarnations and their flashy fictional versions, people usually focuses on the thieves, robbers, and scam artists who grab the loot. However, an aspect of their “trade” that is often glossed over, in fiction and RPGs, is how to turn the stolen goods into actual wealth.

Often, the movie capers are exceptional one-off jobs that come with a unique customer. Sometimes, both in real life and

in fantasy, the problem doesn't exist in the first place, the prize being cash.

In reality, and especially for run-of-the-mill activities that are necessary for full-time rogues who need to make a living out of this, selling that booty is necessary, difficult, and risky. They will need to find a buyer: A receiver. A handler of stolen goods. Or, in the underworld's parlance, a fence.

## THE FENCE

The term “fence” comes from the notion that the person buying from a thief would do so under the “defence” of secrecy. The word is at least three centuries old. Regardless of the title, buyers of stolen goods must have always existed. Receivers aren't needed if the criminal makes personal use of the goods, but true rogues aren't impulsive shoplifters or hungry street urchins. Rather, the thief seeks out a businessman who can help turn items into cash. Fences are these merchants; they purchase in order to resell – for a profit, naturally.

Not all fences are created equal. Nevertheless, they all have a few things in common:

- Direct or indirect relationships with suppliers (that is, thieves), or an ability to carry out risky, impromptu transactions.
- A point of sale (physical, virtual, or a network of people), where to meet end buyers.
- Ready availability of cash.
- A legitimate “front” occupation or business.

Those wads of cash, always at hand to pay for significant deliveries, are a temptation for robbers. So, most sizable operations have a further requirement: security, usually in the form of affiliation or standing cooperation with organized crime. Alternatively, receivers rely on their own force (many pawnshops have a gun under the counter for this reason) or reputation.

### ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

These are ordinary citizens who buy stolen goods occasionally. They usually purchase from thieves they are at least vaguely acquainted with, and sell them to neighbors and acquaintances. They'll take goods of limited value, because they lack a stockpile of cash; thus, they have little need for serious

security. They avoid illegal goods – unless they are foolhardy. Professional rogues should avoid these beginners, unless they themselves are small fry. These buyers are *amateurs*; they are a risk, and they may crack under police pressure. However, jaded adventurers may appreciate that these receivers will be less adept at driving hard bargains (the Merchant skill should be used mercilessly). Also, these buyers might be manipulated (Intimidation, Fast-Talk), reversing the normal balance of power between thief and fence.

### SIDE GIGS

The legitimate activity of some occasional receivers is their main source of income, but fencing is a lucrative side business. They may own or run a corner shop, a pawnshop, a second-hand outlet, or a flea-market stall. Many of these people are cautious, and tend to build lasting relations with chosen suppliers. Rogue PCs might develop these as Contacts, but they aren't the guys to go to with a treasure chest full of gold.

Other fences in this class have no standing contacts with any thieves! Instead, they prefer to face the high risk of dealing in stolen goods by working with people they'll likely never see again. It's the form of bargain that begins with “look, man, it fell off from a truck.” Nowadays, this risk is taken for minor transactions, by persons whose legitimate job puts them in contact with lots of strangers: taxi drivers, bartenders, and shopkeepers. If rogues must sell their loot immediately, outside of their normal channels, they'll need to use skills such as Streetwise (to locate promising areas or activities), Observation, Diplomacy (to make their offer without offending anyone), and Body Language.

## MOM-AND-POP FENCES

These remain small operations, but the focus is on fencing. The legitimate business can be any of those mentioned under *Side Gigs* (p. 10), but now it's a "front" to cover the main, illegal activity.

These receivers often have a number of regular providers, but they may be willing to take "walk-in" thieves. With strangers, they take precautions, such as demanding a good story (which will allow them to plausibly deny knowledge that the merchandise was stolen) and going through the motions of compliance with the laws. Dealing with minor buyers requires either established relationships, or skills such as Acting, Streetwise, and Law (Local).

One variation is the residential small-time fence. Rather than work out of a shop, he does business out of his own home, often in a difficult neighborhood. Since he can't rely on regular customers, he's got a good sales network. Everybody in the projects knows they can get second-hand items at bargain prices, if they don't ask stupid questions. Residential fences prefer small-sized items (especially cheap jewelry and consumer electronics) because they have no place to store large goods or quantities of items. Being introduced (Streetwise again) is probably necessary for selling to these businesses. It's worth noting that end buyers cannot ignore they are purchasing stolen goods, so, if the rogues want leverage on the fence, they can apply pressure on usual customers. However, the neighborhood toughs will have an understanding with this receiver.

## PROFESSIONAL FENCES

These almost always have a legitimate business "front," of the types mentioned above or such as a cash converter, small supermarket, bail-bond agency, or a wholesaler. These businesses often specialize in second-hand items, damaged goods, overstocks – all alibis to cover the stolen goods.

They are the kind of buyer described with greater detail in *GURPS Mysteries* (p. 42). They handle more, under every respect: a greater volume, value, and variety of goods. They will buy anything, because they can always find someone who will take the items. For movers and shakers at this level, connection with organized crime is necessary. They may have their own small organization, within the legitimate firm. They don't deal with newcomers, but they have a sizable number of established thieves, and they can quickly get references.

An alternative is the hustler. Fencing is a professional venture for him – alongside other, no less illegal businesses. Besides being a receiver, he may be a successful pimp, a drug dealer, or a member of the racket. Hustlers are dangerous partners to deal with, because their "front" is thin or nonexistent and because the police may be onto them not just because of fencing, but also because of any of their other activities!

*I used to know a shop that would take anything off you, absolutely anything.*

*– Anonymous Mansfield thief*

Dealings with professional fences require thieves to use their Contacts and Reputation, as well as skills such as Streetwise, Merchant, other influence skills, and maybe Economics.

## MASTER FENCES

This term is used for "the fences' fence," an important racketeering criminal who never sees thieves, but buys wholesale stolen goods from professional receivers. These are useful if selling the booty becomes a full-fledged adventure. The PCs are told by a first-level fence that he can't take the merchandise, because of the volume, quality, or danger involved. There's somebody who could, but he doesn't normally deal with people like the PCs. They'll need to work their Contacts or Patrons, gain a meeting, impress the man, and negotiate from a position of weakness. Everything required when working with a professional fence will be needed in spades in this case, too.

### *E-Fences*

Online auctions and sales can eliminate some of the inherent dangers of fencing (such as having to keep around wads of cash) and with the initial investments (in a legitimate business). Although all types of fences may trade stolen goods over the Internet, low-end hustlers or amateurs are the most likely to do so. Thieves may have to use a combination of street smarts and computer savviness to find and deal with buyers electronically.

## SPECIALISTS

The categories above will buy nearly anything, but some receivers don't; they only desire one specific type of good, such as jewels, magical items, or works of art. They may be jewelers, auctioneers, art merchants, or intermediaries acting on behalf of private collectors. These buyers are much more careful than a neighborhood fence, and they interact only with few trusted suppliers. Their security measures safeguard their providers, too. They might make specific requests from their contacts, which is always interesting for adventurers, and pay two to three times more than the thieves could get elsewhere.

The problem for the PCs is becoming established with such a special fence. One flashy adventure seed is to gather intelligence about a planned theft, and beat the regular suppliers to the job. Now the fence has to contact the PCs if the collector is to get his masterpiece.

Rogues will need specialized knowledge if they don't want to be ripped off by such a buyer. Connoisseur, Jeweler, Artist, Forgery and Expert Skills will be handy.

# FENCE CHARACTERS

A receiver can be very useful as a NPC if the adventuring party consists of rogues. The NPC might work as a fence for them; having a trusted, fair buyer for goods they have to get rid of quickly is so important that he might be an Ally. Fences also work well as Contacts, able to provide key adventure information. What's the really hot stuff? What's behind the surge in art thefts? Who's planning a difficult "job"? Where's the market for necromantic scrolls? Which watchmen like presents? In reality, fences are never Patrons to anybody, but in setting that romanticizes the underworld, that might be possible.

## Attributes

High IQ is recommendable for all businessmen, and more so for those in a risky field. Nonetheless, many actual fences make do with average smarts, and a PC-level one can work with IQ 11. Good Perception is important for receivers.

## Advantages

Dealing with people – often dangerous, addicted, and criminal people – is a key ability of fences, so they make good use of Charisma, Sensitive, and social advantages that tie them into the local underworld network, such as Contacts, Favor, Patron. Their resources will not appear often, and they will rarely be reliable. Established receivers often have a Reputation speaking for them, too. According to real-life fences interviewed by criminologists, they have to be resourceful, so Luck and Versatile are useful. If they are successful at their jobs, they have Wealth and maybe Lightning Calculator. Several Talents are appropriate for fences, particularly Business Acumen, Smooth Operator, and Street Smarts.

## Disadvantages

Greed, Jealousy, Miserliness, or an Obsession linked with making money are all plain but realistic motives. Being thick-skinned may actually help – Callous and Selfish would represent this. These people may have Enemies and a bad Reputation with law-abiding citizens, as well as a Social Stigma (Criminal Record).

## Skills

Merchant and Streetwise are the skills no fence can make do without. They are fish that need water to live in, so they'll have Area Knowledge and maybe Current Affairs (Business or Regional). Depending on how large and thriving their business is, receivers may have Accounting or Administration. Getting out ahead in every transaction is helped by skills such as Acting, Carousing, Detect Lies, Fast-Talk, and Intimidation.

Specialist fences know about their chosen field. Thus, they have Animal Handling (any), Connoisseur (any), or Jeweler. They might possibly have Forgery to get around complications with titles of property or certificates. The same applies to buyers of illegal goods, who will have, for example, Armoury or Occultism (Demonology). They will not be competent enough to actually make the stuff, but they'll be able to assess its value, state of repair, or flaws.

Well-rounded receivers have more of what it takes to be shady: Gambling, Holdout, Law (Local), or Scrounging, for instance. They are no fighters, but they may make use of Easy combat skills, such as Brawling, Guns, or Knife. They usually must move around quickly on their own, possibly carrying some of their stuff, so they know Riding or Teamster at lower tech levels, and later Driving, maybe coupled with Smuggling.

Modern handlers of stolen goods have Computer Operation – at high levels if they are e-fences (p. 11). Some specialists also have Electronics Operation (Communications, Security or Surveillance) in order to deactivate positioning devices and electronic tags.

*Some of your better thieves  
... might stop by just to get the  
gossip, to find out what was  
going on. 'Cause there wasn't  
much that happened that I  
didn't know about.*

*– "Sam Goodman,"  
professional fence*

## FENCE

60 points

A professional receiver who makes a living by buying and selling stolen goods, this template represents a person who's moving beyond the amateurish level to play in the big leagues! This blueprint is useful for the player decides that he wants his character to pursue this disreputable career. It also serves as a detailed NPC.

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

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

**Advantages:** 15 points chosen from among Charisma [5/level], Luck [15], Sensitive [5], Smooth Operator 1 [15], or Versatile [5]. • A further 10 points chosen from among Contact Group [Varies], Contacts [Varies], Favor [Varies], Patron [Varies], Reputation [Varies], or Street Smarts 1 [10]. • A further 10 points chosen from among Acute Vision [2/level], Business Acumen 1 [10], Lightning Calculator [2], or more Contacts and Contact Groups.

**Perks:** One of Base†, Brotherhood†, Cheaper Gear†, Forgettable Face, Headhunter, Gangster Swagger, Good with Criminals (*don't* stack this with Sensitive, above), Permit†, or Vehicle†.

**Disadvantages:** -20 points chosen from among Addiction (Tobacco) [-5], Greed [-15\*], Jealousy [-10], Obsession (any) [-5\* or 10\*], Odious Personal Habit [-5 to -15], or any physical Disadvantage [Varies]. • A further -15 points chosen from among the previous traits or Callous [-5], Enemy [Varies], Reputation [Varies], Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5], or Selfish [-5\*].

**Primary Skills:** Area Knowledge (Local) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Merchant (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; and Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-11.

**Secondary Skills:** Current Affairs/TL (Business or Regional) (E) IQ [1]-11 and Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-12. • 4 points chosen from among Accounting (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Administration (A) IQ [2]-11; or an increase in any primary skill. • 4 points chosen from among Acting (A) IQ [2]-11; Body Language (A) Per [2]-12; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-11; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-11; or Intimidation (A) Will [2]-11. • One of Animal Handling (any), Armoury/TL (any), Connoisseur (any), Electronics Operation/TL (any), Mechanic/TL (Automobile), Occultism, or Professional Skill (Antiquarian), all (A) IQ [2]-11; Chemistry/TL, Forgery/TL, or Jeweler/TL, all (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; or Observation (A) Per [2]-12.

**Background Skills:** 5 points chosen from among Guns/TL (Pistol or Shotgun) or Knife, both (E) DX [1]-10; Savoir-Faire or Scrounging, both (E) IQ [1]-11; Gambling, Hold-out, or Smuggling, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Law (Local) (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Urban Survival (A) Per-1 [1]-11; or more secondary skills. • One of the following packages, as appropriate for the character's TL:

1. Two of Riding (any) (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Current Affairs/TL (Business or Regional) (E) IQ [1]-11 (take the option not chosen as a secondary skill, above); Teamster (any) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; or Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-9.
2. Two of Driving/TL (Automobile) (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ [1]-11; Electronics Operation/TL (any) (if already chosen as a secondary skill, above, choose another

speciality), or Research/TL, both (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; or Computer Programming/TL (H) IQ-2 [1]-9.

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

† Must select a speciality.

## New Technique

For more about techniques, see pp. B229-233.

### Trading in Illegal Goods

Hard

*Default:* Merchant-3.

*Prerequisite:* Merchant; cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

Merchants who lack Streetwise at 12 or more and don't specialize in illegal goods are at -3 when dealing with these. However, a relatively unconnected fence (Streetwise 11 or less) – even if he's an amateur – can still learn the basics about these dangerous ventures.

### Customization Notes

Successful, established fences may have Wealth (Comfortable) or higher, and Status 1 or more. Racketeering fences who are successful will certainly have a criminal Patron. They will also have a Duty to the “family.” They may have a past as thieves themselves, and thus know skills like Lockpicking.

Conversely, beginners and part-timers typically have no more than 20 points in the advantages listed above, and may be Struggling. They may well lack the skills that are linked with a criminal background.

The (fictional) counterpart to the gentleman thief is the jet-setting fence. His links with the underworld may be well-known and politely ignored, or a Secret. He'll have Wealth and Status. He is likely to specialize in artworks, high-class jewels, or antiques. Connoisseur is a must.

*Nothing can be more just than the old observation that “if there were no receivers, there would be no thieves.”*

– Patrick Colquhoun, *London Magistrate* (1796)

# A SAMPLE FENCE

Erri Capudan is a master merchant who owns a minor but flourishing trading house in East Tredroy (see **GURPS Banestorm**, p. 142). He mainly deals with valuable artworks, antiques, jewelry and anything packing the most value per weight. He has contacts all over Cardiel and al-Wazif. Master Capudan is a Muslim convert who gets along with anyone.

That's the surface. Actually, Capudan is a professional fence specializing in stolen magical items. Unknown to all (and he tries to avoid wizards who may sense it), he has basic Magery,

which allows him to distinguish fakes from real magic-imbued things. Having begun as a con artist targeting the minor magical items of wealthy households, he has established Contacts and other relationships that provide him with what he needs – stolen goods, information, protection from the law. His advantages show how such a network is all important for successful fences. While not being a member of the Thieves' Guild, Capudan is an affiliate of one its families (and gives them a generous share).

Even though he's mostly interested in magical items, he takes in nearly anything else. Capudan has a good Reputation within the underworld, but he's careful not to have it easily associated with his name and face (hence the low frequency of recognition). Even so, the game is dangerous, as powerful mages are likely to disapprove of Erri's activities; one of them is already keeping tabs on him.

Master Capudan avoids physical confrontations. He's good at negotiating his way out of difficulties, but he also retains a bodyguard. Even so, if the situation warrants it, he'll throw one of his fine small knives and make for the door.

(Tough but fair buyer; The underworld; 7 or less) [1]; Smooth Operator 1 [15]; Status 1 [0]\*; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

*Perks:* Base (Garret used as untraceable warehouse); Cheaper Gear (Magical items); Good with Criminals. [3]

### Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Enemy (The Emir of North Tredroy; Watcher; 6 or less) [-3]; Greed (12) [-15]; Jealousy [-10]; Secret (Fence) [-20]; Unfit [-5].

*Quirks:* Careful; Dislikes bounty hunters; Likes playing chess. [-3]

## Recommended Reading

Steffensmeier, Darrel J. *The Fence: In the Shadow of Two Worlds* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1986). The fence in his own words and deeds.

Sutton, Mike. *How Prolific Thieves Sell Stolen Goods* (Internet Journal of Criminology, 2008, [www.internetjournalofcriminology.com](http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com)). Field research about stolen good markets in Britain.

## ERRI CAPUDAN

100 points

A short, well-dressed man, with dark-brown hair, eyes, and trimmed beard.

**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 10 [0].

Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 8. 5'5"; 140 lbs.

### Social Background

*TL:* 3 [0].

*CF:* Christian Yrth [0]; Muslim Yrth [1].

*Languages:* English (Native) [0]; Arabic (Broken) [2]; Ladino (Broken/None) [1].

### Advantages

Acute Vision 1 [2]; Contact (Ghalil the apprentice mage; Thaumatology-12; 9 or less; Usually Reliable) [2]; Contact (Roger the City Watchman; Criminology/TL3-12; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [1]; Contact Group (Thieves; Skill-12; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [5]; Favor (Patron, the Governor of East Tredroy; 6 or less) [2] Lightning Calculator [2]; Magery 0 [5]; Patron (Al-Hashemi Family; 6 or less) [5]; Reputation +2

### Skills

Accounting (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Acting (A) IQ+1 [2]-12†; Administration (A) IQ [1]-11‡; Area Knowledge (Tredroy) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Body Language (Human) (A) Per-1 [1]-11; Carousing (A) HT+1 [1]-11‡; Connoisseur (Visual Arts) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Current Affairs/TL3 (Business) (E) IQ [1]-11; Current Affairs/TL3 (Tredroy) (E) IQ [1]-11; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [1]-11‡; Diplomacy (H) IQ [2]-11‡; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [4]-13‡; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [2]-12‡;

Jeweler/TL3 (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Law (Local) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Merchant (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Observation (A) Per [1]-12§; Occultism (A) IQ [2]-11; Riding (Equines) (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [1]-12‡; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [2]-12‡; Thaumatology (VH) IQ-3 [1]-8; Thrown Weapon (Knife) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Urban Survival (A) Per-1 [1]-11.

\* Includes +1 from Wealth.

† Includes +1 from Smooth Operator.

‡ Bought up from Merchant default.

§ Includes +1 from Acute Vision.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michele Armellini lives in Udine, Italy, with his very understanding wife, Silvia. He wrote about thieves and fences (strictly as RPG characters!) for Italian-language sources. He makes a living out of foreign languages, but he loves dabbling with and studying the obscure and the uncanny – and trying to convert them into game mechanics! Apart from things he has published in Italian, he has written for *Pyramid*, and he is the author of **GURPS WWII: Grim Legions**. He is also the author or co-author (with Hans-Christian Vortisch) of several other e23 products: **GURPS WWII: Their Finest Hour**, **GURPS WWII: Doomed White Eagle**, and **GURPS WWII: Michael's Army**.

*The big thing in fencing is to be known and to have the outlets. Say a thief has . . . a truckload of something. Where's he gonna go? The little dealers can't handle that, so he has to come to someone like me.*

– “Sam Goodman,” professional fence

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE THIEVES' GUILD

BY MATT RIGGSBY

One fixture of fantasy RPG settings is the thieves' guild. Criminals belong to a formal, even officially recognized organization. The guild operates like any other trade organization. It may help recruit new members, train them in the profession, adjudicate internal disputes, guarantee the quality of work, aid afflicted members, hold an official monopoly on the activities in its purview, and even be accredited to represent its membership before official bodies.

Organizations of that nature are, historically, largely fictional. This is not to say that organized activity of what folks

might regard as a criminal nature did not exist. Far from it! However, when it did happen, it took quite different forms.

*Opportunity makes the thief.*  
– English proverb

## RURAL CRIME

Given the nature of pre-industrial society as something rural rather than urban, criminals mostly preyed on targets far from the reach of centralized authorities and law enforcement.

### BRIGANDS

Most criminals were brigands, more or less organized thugs who went on quick raids against travelers and isolated settlements. Raiding for fun and profit was common among nomadic or semi-nomadic societies: Vikings, Bedouins, countless native American groups, and so on. In such societies, raiding parties were *ad hoc*, formed for a particular season or expedition rather than standing bodies. Membership was typically voluntary, but since raiding was profitable and somewhat glamorous, raiding parties rarely lacked for members. Leadership could go to a permanent chief or a temporary war leader selected for the occasion. Depending on the discipline expected of the raiders, Social Regard can be as suitable as Rank for such a position (the nominal leader will at least be listened to, even if he can't issue enforceable orders). Reputation and social skills are useful prerequisites for obtaining it. Rules for distributing loot varied from share-and-share-alike to gleeful competition for the glory of getting the most plunder.

Raiding certainly wasn't limited to low-tech barbarians. With poor law enforcement in remote areas, anyone with reasonably

good knowledge of the terrain and local traffic and the wherewithal to briefly assemble a group of armed men could get good money from highway robbery, even in civilized lands. Peasants living near caravan routes, for example, might keep an eye out for small or weakly defended groups of travelers, and supplement their income by robbing them. This could happen even in a seemingly well-ordered country. In the 13th century, England's Henry III was furious when he discovered that a number of his own officials around Southampton, including men sent to put down brigands, had taken to raiding merchants.

If they attracted too much attention to be able to reside in civilized areas, as Henry's misbehaving officials did, European brigands actually did resort to living in the forest, like the legendary Robin Hood. However, what kind of community they may have formed for themselves is not attested to outside of fiction.

Later in the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, many groups of brigands had a distinctly military character, largely because they began as discharged veterans. One of the better-documented examples is the Coquillards, active around eastern France in the middle of the 15th century. The end of the Hundred Years War left large numbers of mercenaries at loose ends. With nothing else to do, they took up drinking, gambling, and a whole range of crimes to pay for it all, from burglary to beating up and robbing travelers on the road.

They wandered about in small bands, used an elaborate slang dialect (see *How Bona To Vada Your Dolly Old Eek*, p. 17) and sometimes claimed allegiance to a “king of the Coquillards,” though the king’s identity, if there was one, remains unknown. They had no apparent large-scale organization beyond their shared origin, resembling post-WWII American motorcycle gangs.

Other groups of brigands used more formal military structures because they *were* regular military units. Around the same time the Coquillards appeared, entire armies turned to brigandage as wars ended or their masters ran out of money to pay them. They shifted back and forth between fighting for political masters and fighting on their own behalf, either for loot or protection money. Such units were found all over the continent, but were most developed in Italy. The politics and finances of the 14th century led the city-states of the peninsula to hire entire armies on a short-term basis. However, as the only game in town when it came to fighting, these mercenary armies got to the point where they could threaten their employers with desertion or destruction. Not only could they freely plunder any town that took their fancy, they could make even more by threatening potential targets until they coughed up protection money.

Probably the most famous of the large “free companies” is the White Company, over 5,000 men strong at its height. It was led during its most active years by the Englishman Sir John Hawkwood. Over the course of a quarter century, the White Company fought both for *and* against Florence, Milan, Pisa, and the Papacy. Throughout the period, the White Company appears to have retained a conventional military hierarchy: “lances” of three to six men organized into intermediate units, which were in turn under senior officers (see *GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence*, pp. 15-18, for more details). However, the company had some structures and practices unlikely to be found in a conventional “national” army. For example, it had a legal and clerical staff to handle contracts and finances. The company was also, for at least part of this

period, somewhat democratic, with senior officers elected by the troops.

## PIRATES

As the forests and deserts had brigands, the sea had pirates. And just as some brigands were soldiers at loose ends, some pirates were sailors without naval battles to fight. Several pirate contingents appear to have been, or at least started as, the navies of small states, either constructed natively or hired as mercenaries. When the conflicts for which they were assembled ended, they carried on raiding, a task that could be as lucrative as it could be politically or ideologically useful. In the late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, the Hospitallers based in Malta attacked both Muslim pirates and Muslim commerce. More ambitious pirates would even strike out on their own, capturing ships, attacking targets of opportunity on land, and selling protection against their own raids.

National navies that practiced piracy as a means of staying useful and gaining revenue during periods of relative peace probably kept full military discipline and other practices (off-season raids, after all, would be an activity filling in between bouts of their “real” job). Most other pirates, however, operated like part-time brigands, opportunistically raiding other ships on lawless seas and carrying out some other occupation most of the time.

Nonmilitary pirates were remarkably egalitarian for their time. One of the earliest indications we have of the internal structure of a pirate group concerns the *likedeelers*, 15th century pirates who operated around the Baltic and North Seas. Their name is derived from their practice of giving their members equal shares of loot. By the Age of Sail, pirates had developed fairly sophisticated articles defining organization and conduct, including officers who were elected or otherwise limited in their authority; see *GURPS Supporting Cast: Age of Sail Pirate Crew* (p. 5) for a detailed example.

*When you go on a night journey, though you may have only a few small treasures with you, you'll take every stirring shadow, each moonlit reed for a sword or cudgel. But the empty-handed traveler whistles his way past any highwayman.*

– Juvenal, *Satire*

## URBAN THIEVES

Piracy and organized brigandage are hardly what anyone thinks of as a “thieves’ guild.” What of associations of burglars and pickpockets? Despite both contemporary and historical fantasies of organized urban thievery, the available evidence suggests no medieval equivalent to the Cosa Nostra. Still, that doesn’t mean that thieves were completely without criminal associations or links to officialdom. Evidence suggests that many thieves did work together with other thieves. However, rather than operating in an elaborate formal hierarchy, thieves operated within a social context of real and potential allies.

### MAKING FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES

In Europe, criminal associations, such as there were, were generally small and very personal in nature. They were partnerships rather than hierarchical organizations. These partnerships were usually twos or threes, but more were possible, and any given thief might know dozens of other potential allies.

## How Bona To Vada Your Dolly Old Eek

Classic RPGs feature a distinctive language for rogues, sometimes using the historical name *thieves' cant*. Like other elaborate social conventions attributed to the underworld, thieves' languages are exaggerated by legend and fiction. Thieves and vagabonds probably never created their own completely distinct language unless they were from a particular ethnic group and therefore spoke a separate language anyway.

However, they *did* have their own means of communication. The lowest classes of society through Europe used elaborate slang to identify one another and communicate without authorities understanding them. Grammar and large classes of words like prepositions and articles would belong solidly to the local root language, but notable chunks of vocabulary might draw from rhyming slang, novel nonsense words with similar sounds to original words they stand for, figurative uses of other words, borrowed words from other languages (Romany dialects were

a notable source for these argots on the continent), and so on. Fans of mid-century pop culture can get something of the feel of deliberately obscure dialects by listening to slang-heavy Rat Pack-era recordings (Frank Sinatra once appeared in a brief guide to contemporary slang) or "Julian and Sandy" sketches from the BBC radio program *Round the Horne*, featuring the British gay/showbiz dialect Polari.

In *GURPS* terms, a thieves' cant doesn't qualify as a language or other distinct trait. Rather, much as knowing military acronyms and similar jargon is an application of Soldier skill, use of appropriate jargon is covered by Streetwise skill. Because slang vocabularies have local and even occupational flavors (for example, the speech of beggars is different from that of prostitutes, which is different from that of thieves) and mutate rapidly, the GM may want to apply familiarity penalties if a character has been out of circulation for a while or has to work in an unfamiliar community.

If the initial partnership was successful in committing a crime together, they would be encouraged to do so again, carrying out a string of illegal activities and occasionally adding trusted new people to their partnership. While they might lack a hierarchy, they didn't lack form. Thieves would often formally swear to one another to work together, not betray one another, and share the loot equally. There's even a recorded instance of thieves formalizing their alliance by taking their oaths in front of a witness, a favored fence who was responsible for bringing them together.

There were several notable places to meet fellow thieves. Since many people came from the countryside to the city to find riches, they frequently picked up traveling companions on the way. The difficult circumstances of travel could easily push them to desperate measures, establishing a criminal partnership from the very beginning. Then as now, prisons were another place to build working relationships with other criminals. Though prisons were used mostly for the short term (holding criminals before trial or in the run up to carrying out punishment), those people who were held could usually mix freely and make arrangements for what to do next after their brief incarceration.

Finally, though many clichés are amplified by fiction if not completely false, one is absolutely true – they meet at a tavern. Countless criminals testified in court to having met their accomplices at an inn and planned crimes over cups of wine and beer. At one point, a curfew was imposed on taverns in London to put an end to the late-night socializing that led to the planning and commission of crimes. This suggests that far from needing organizational abilities and traits reflecting levels of authority, the pre-industrial equivalent of a gangster really needs Carousing skill.

### OUR GANG

Hints of larger and more structured dishonest organizations are in the historical record. However, in many cases,

fact intertwines with products of the imagination or leaves much unclear.

The earliest suggestion of officially sanctioned thievery comes from the first century B.C. A description of Egypt makes a passing mention that thieves must register their occupation with a chief of thieves. Any property stolen by registered thieves must be returned if the owner can identify the goods and pay a ransom of a quarter of their value. It's not clear from the description whether the chief of thieves is the head of a thieves' organization or an official in charge of controlling thieves. As a character, a registered thief might qualify for a very limited form of Legal Immunity.

The first full and detailed description of a highly organized, hierarchical criminal community with officers, procedures, codes of conduct, and official recognition appears in the story "Rinconete and Cortadillo," written by Cervantes around the turn of the 15th century. In it, the titular characters (a pair of thieves who meet on the road to Seville) are surprised to find the thieves of that city so well-organized. For example, the thieves' guild of Seville has an apprenticeship program to bring up young new thieves, formal hearings to settle disputes between members, and sufficient official recognition that Rinconete and Cortadillo must register their professions at the city's customs office. Given the depth of detail the story presents, it's disappointing to remember that Cervantes was a satirist. Certainly, he had better than average insight into Seville's underworld (he served three years in prison there), but it seems likely that the guild is a massive exaggeration in pursuit of an artistic goal.

### Paris

One scholarly observer of 17th-century Paris described a parallel underworld society operating in a slum. Residents organized themselves in imitation or perhaps just parody of more "official" bodies. This neighborhood, the Cours des Miracles, was purported to be ruled by a sort of king, the Grand Coesre.

This pseudo-official oversaw a hierarchy of enforcers and senior criminals who educated new criminals and kept them in line. His subjects were largely petty con men, each using a particular trick assigned to them by the Grand Coesre to elicit sympathy and alms from those wealthier than themselves. For example, some feigned fits in public, while others claimed to have been robbed. Assuming the Grand Coesre wasn't a contrived office like the similar "King of the Gypsies," developed to bilk the authorities, this was certainly an organization of not particularly trustworthy individuals, and as much a beggars' guild as a thieves' guild.

## Further Reading

Cervantes, Miguel (Walter K. Kelly, trans.). *Exceptional Novels* (George Bell and Sons, 1881).

Geremek, Bronislaw. *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

McCall, Andrew. *The Medieval Underworld* (Sutton, 2004).

### Ottoman Territories

In medieval Islamic literature, there are mentions of criminal *futuwwa*. A *futuwwa* (the name implies youthful manliness or perhaps chivalry) is a fraternal organization that purports to support some virtuous or charitable cause. The term came to be used by bands of warriors vaguely resembling trade organizations and the fighting monastic orders in the Crusader tradition. However, it also came to be used for bands of brigands resembling those appearing in the wake of the Hundred Years War, as well as urban street gangs. By the 12th century, numerous *futuwwa* in Cairo had acquired a reputation for, if not lawlessness, then at least riotous behavior, organizing hunting parties and feasts as a pretext for drinking and all kinds of sexual impropriety. (They were apparently very good at knives, crossbows, and stick fighting.) Leadership appears to have been fairly loose, with a popularly selected sheikh as the nominal head of the group (probably qualifying for a level of Rank). Some of these organizations turned to crime in a more serious fashion, to the point where in modern Arabic, "*futuwwa*" is synonymous with thugs.

Visitors to some Ottoman territories noted that stolen goods might be returned for a fee if authorities could be persuaded to discuss the matter with the sheikh of the thieves' *futuwwa*. This suggests that, in some places, they had become strong and well-organized enough to control criminal activity. However, it's not

clear if the area a *futuwwa* controlled was a neighborhood, a town, or an entire region. The relationship between thieves and officials appears to be less official recognition and accommodation of thieves and more corruption of officials.

### Japan

Among the 17th century's precursors to the *yakuza* were the *tekiya*, a class of traveling peddlers notorious throughout Japan for flashy salesmanship and shoddy merchandise, often in combinations that went well over the line into fraud.

With their travel, showman-like approach, and low reputation, the *tekiya* are often compared to 19th-century snake-oil salesmen or 20th-century carnies. They also fenced stolen goods and may have been involved in thefts themselves. Since they were widely disliked and composed largely of social outcasts, they had no one to turn to for protection or coordination with other peddlers but one another. They formed cooperative organizations administered by regional *oyabun*, who controlled which merchants could work in a given territory, organized security and the dates and locations of *tekiya* fairs, and collected dues from the *tekiya* for their work. The *oyabun* took on a paternal or big-brother role, using ceremonies resembling those in weddings and voluntary sworn brotherhoods. Like *futuwwa* sheikhs, they would have a level of Rank.

In the 1730s, *tekiya* societies were granted formal recognition, with *oyabun* gaining the rights (similar to those of *samurai*) to have a family name and carry two swords. (In *GURPS* terms, this might allow them Status 1, though they would also carry a Social Stigma for their involvement with a dubious trade.) Although the *tekiya* engaged in more or less legitimate trade, they are generally believed to have continued their illegal activities as well, so this is an almost unique instance of official recognition of a criminal organization. However, the recognition was of a purportedly legitimate organization that carried on its criminal activities in secret; it was not a mark of tolerance for an overtly criminal organization.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The perpetrator's rap sheet lists degrees in anthropology and archeology. His current alibi is working for a large producer of medical systems. Accomplices include his alleged wife, a juvenile, and several canine co-conspirators who are named but don't come when they're called anyway.

*Despite their newfound legitimacy, however, the gangs continued to nurture some thoroughly criminal traits. They would take into their vast network wanted criminals and other fugitives; their protection rackets expanded along with their territory; and their frequent brawls with other gangs often turned tekiya meetings places into armed camps.*

– David E. Kaplan and Alec Dubro,  
*Yakuza: Japan's Criminal Underworld*

**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# *Hot Spots:* **Renaissance Florence**



**Intrigue and politics. Artistry and adventure.  
Festivals and food.  
Welcome to the center of the world – Florence!  
Available now on e23!**

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

# EIDETIC MEMORY

## MONSTER SLAVERS

BY DAVID L. PULVER

There are many types of loot that a roguish adventurer can carry out of a dungeon, but one of the more lucrative is something they usually kill and discard: the monsters themselves.

Intelligent monsters like orcs often fight to the death because they see no hope of mercy. Medieval societies lack the resources to incarcerate prisoners for long periods, and unlike knights, monsters lack wealthy relatives to ransom them. So, adventurers traditionally slay any dungeon denizens unwise enough to surrender. But massacre need not be the only solution. Another is to offer mercy, take captives – and sell them into slavery.

The institution of slavery exists in most ancient and many medieval civilizations, so there is every reason to believe slave markets would exist in a dungeon fantasy setting. Because dungeon adventurers (and the society that produces them) have no compunctions about charging into monster's lairs, killing them, and taking their stuff, few will complain if they drag any survivors out with them in chains. Even in enlightened realms where human or demi-human slavery is illegal and the Powers of Good hold sway, intelligent monsters may be seen as little better than beasts. Clerics may have few objections to enslaving monsters – first, because they are not human or near-human; second, because it's nicer than killing them outright.

### CAPTURING THE MONSTERS

Monster slavers use various tactics. The simplest one is to kill about half the monsters, then call on the survivors to surrender or die! Use the rules for negotiations (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 10). You can substitute Intimidation for Diplomacy, but no monsters will pay attention unless they're losing. Make sure someone is available who can talk to the monsters! It's hard to negotiate with cornered orcs if no one speaks Orcish.

If they don't surrender and the party has a cleric, alchemist, or other magical healer along, incapacitated monsters can be cured.

Once the monsters give up, they'll need to be restrained. See *Chains and Irons* in *Dungeon Fantasy 2* (p. 12) for tying up nonhuman monsters – a Knot-Tying skill roll and (monster's BL/50) lbs. of rope. Collaring or binding them into a coffer – a connected chain of captives – makes it easier to lead them out of the dungeon.

Skilled slavers may develop more sophisticated capture techniques, using exotic weapons like bolas, lassos, or potion grenades. A wizard with mind control spells, especially area-effect ones like Mass Daze, are useful. Some dungeon monsters are themselves slavers and may make deals, e.g., orcs or shadow elves may have goblin captives they're willing to trade away.

### THE MONSTER SLAVER

250 points

You are a professional monster slaver. Maybe you've also captured animals or human slaves, but now your specialty is the capture and resale of nonhumans. You combine the strength of a warrior, the cunning of a thief and the fighting skill of a scout. You are often a skilled trader as well, to get good prices. Unlike many adventurers, you are willing to talk to monsters, and may know several of their barbarous languages.

**Attributes:** ST 13 [30]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13 [0]; Will 14 [10]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 7.00 [10]; Basic Move 7 [0].

**Advantages:** Outdoorsman 2 [20] and Wealth (Comfortable) [10]. • 20 points chosen from among ST +1 or +2 [10 or 20], DX +1 [20], HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20], Per +1 to +4 [5/level], Basic Speed +1.00 [20], Basic Move +1 to +3 [5/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Danger Sense [15], Fit [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Language Talent [10], Languages (any) [2-6/language], Luck [15], Night Vision 1-9 [1/level], Peripheral Vision [15], Rapid Healing [5], Signature Gear [Varies], Weapon Bond [1], Weapon Master (one weapon) [20], or increase Wealth to (Wealthy) [20] for 10 points.

**Disadvantages:** -15 points chosen from among Bully [-10\*], Callous [-5], Greed [-15\*], or Overconfidence [-5\*]. • Another -35 points chosen from among the previous traits or Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5], Intolerance (Nonhumans) [-5], Lecherousness [-15\*], Loner [-5\*], No Sense of Humor [-10], Odious Personal Habit ("Brutal slave master") [-5], Sense of Duty (Adventuring companions) [-5], Social Stigma (Disowned) [-5], Trademark [-5 to -15] or Xenophilia [-10\*].

**Primary Skills:** Net (H) DX+1 [8]-15; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-15; Knot-Tying (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Merchant (Slaves)† (E) IQ+2 [4]-14; Tracking (A) Per+2 [2]-14‡; and Whip (A) DX+1 [4]-15. • One of these two combat skills packages:

1. Shield (E) DX+2 [4]-16. • One of Broadsword, Shortsword, or Spear, all (A) DX+2 [8]-16.
2. One of Broadsword or Shortsword, both (A) DX+2 [8]-16. • One of Bolas or Lasso, both (A) DX+1 [4]-15.

**Secondary Skills:** Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; First Aid (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Naturalist (H) IQ [1]-12‡; Observation (A) Per [2]-12; Hiking (A) HT [2]-12; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Traps (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; and Wrestling (A) DX [2]-14.

**Background Skills:** 8 points in improved primary or secondary skills, or Brawling, Fast-Draw (any), Garrote, Jumping, or Knife, all (E) DX [1]-14; Boating (Unpowered), Riding (Horse), or Throwing, all (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Seamanship (E) IQ [1]-12; Interrogation, Leadership, or Fast-Talk, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Navigation (Land or Sea) (A) IQ+1 [1]-13‡; Carousing or Swimming, both (E) HT [1]-12; Running or Sex Appeal, both (A) HT-1 [1]-11; or Search (A) Per-1 [1]-11.

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

† An *optional* specialty; see p. B169.

‡ Includes +2 for Outdoorsman.

## Customization Notes

Monster slaves may be of various races, but are often humans or shadow elves. A common variant is the slaver who has a bit of magic.

*Magical Slaver:* A slaver who has learned a smattering of spells – perhaps he once enslaved a mage! Reduce ST to 12 (saving 10 points), spend 15 of your 20 advantage points on Magery 1 [15], and *add* five spells, all (H) IQ [2]-12 (including +1 from Magery). A good set might be Daze, Foolishness, Haste, Hinder, and Rooted Feet.

*First, wars produce a lot of prisoners, and medieval societies lack the resources to imprison such people for long periods. Enslaving them may seem more moral than simply massacring them!*

– **GURPS Banestorm**

## SLAVING PARTIES

Some adventurers will find monster slaving lucrative enough to make it a focus of their expedition. It's a good way to clear out the dregs of an upper-level dungeon! In addition to slavers, other character types are helpful to have on a slaving expedition. A wizard is *always* useful, but the following archetypes bring unique talents.

*Barbarians* with their great strength are handy when subduing larger monsters. ("Someone hold that ogre while we collar it!")

*Bards* are surprisingly useful for a slaver, because their musical influence and mind-control magic can sing or sooth monsters into submission.

*Clerics* that specialize in healing are very useful to have along, so injured monsters can be fixed for the auction block.

*Knights* with heavy armor can risk taking damage when trying to subdue the more powerful monsters. A wealthy knight can might have contacts for selling slaves.

*Martial artists* with Judo or Pressure Points can capture opponents alive.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

In addition to the usual adventuring gear a party engaged in monster slaving may want special equipment.

*Extra Bandages or First Aid Kits:* These should be at hand for patching up injuries the merchandise sustained when captured. Surgical instruments are useful for removing body parts from a captive that are just too dangerous to allow it to keep attached, such as chopping off a scorpion-man's sting.

*Collar:* A heavy iron and leather collar that locks around the neck with rings for attaching a chain or leash and provision for a padlock. Also functions as an anti-garrote collar (+4 DR vs. strangling or garroting damage). It takes four seconds to attach. DR 4, HP 8. \$45, 1.2 lbs.

*Grooming Supplies:* Some soap and water may improve the sale value, especially if selling pleasure slaves or gladiators; see *Low-Tech* (p. 36).

*Lasso and Bolas:* These require skill to master but are good for capturing smaller monsters. Their short range is rarely a problem in a dungeon.

*Mittens, Leather:* Padded cloth and leather mitts that lock on paws or hands, preventing manipulation and use of claws, effectively giving No Hands. Take four seconds to attach; protect hands with DR 1. \$20, 2 lbs.

*Muzzle:* An iron muzzle that will prevent a monster with teeth from using them to bite (and also muffle speech). It takes six seconds to attach. Protects the face on a roll of 1-2 on 1d with DR 2. \$60, 1.5 lbs. Adjust for SM.

*Nets:* The best weapon for capturing medium or large monsters is a thrown net. Get several! Once a monster is thoroughly tangled up, it can be threatened with a spear or burning oil, trussed up, or if necessary, beaten unconscious with clubs or staves.

*Potions:* Of those detailed in *Dungeon Fantasy 1*, the most useful to slavers are Sleep or Weakness in grenade form. Be wary, though: These potions are expensive and only good once each – if used to capture monsters with a poor resale value, you might have thrown away your profit!

*Provisions:* There's no point capturing monsters and letting them starve to death; get a supply of cheap food and plenty of water. Beware: some monsters are fussy eaters ("want man-flesh!"). If desperate, food problems could always be solved by feeding uncooperative captives to other captives of a different race. Just *threatening* to feed your goblins to your minotaur may get them to eat their porridge.

*Restraints and Torture Devices:* Necessary for securing and disciplining captives. A slaver needs rope or cord for tying up captives, and several padlocks for attaching chains and collars.

Statistics for rope and padlocks are in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*. Rules for restraining monsters are in *Dungeon Fantasy 2*. For a wide variety of shackles, stocks, whips, etc., see *GURPS Low-Tech* (pp. 130-131). To capture pixies or giants, see *Adjusting for SM in Low-Tech* (p. 8).

*Secure Holding Area:* After you've dragged monsters out of the dungeon, it's time to put them back in one! In practice, renting a barn at a nearby village, chaining them up, or a basic stockade is usually fine.

*Traps:* Portable spring-loaded leg-hold traps are useful. Set them in corridors to trap small groups of wandering monsters, then pounce! See *Dungeon Fantasy 1* for statistics on man-traps and monster-traps. For more option, see *Traps in Low-Tech* (pp. 122-123).

*Whip:* A whip is more often used as a symbol of authority or a means of inflicting punishment, but many monster slavers, especially shadow elves, master the art of using one in combat and take pride in their whip skills. Heavy whips that would lacerate human flesh can be just the thing for disciplining thick-skinned monsters.

## THE MARKET FOR MONSTER SLAVES

Who buys monster slaves and what are they worth? Many communities may need additional labor, especially if the depredations of monsters, warlords, or plagues have decimated humanity. Dungeon monsters are unlikely to be skilled craftsmen – most are stigmatized as brutal savages or worse – but they are often strong, tough, and used to living rough. No one is going to trust monsters to perform skilled jobs, and most aren't really suited for polite society anyway. That tends to leave occupations where they can be chained up and forced to work on pain of death.

*Mine Slaves:* Any sort of work in mines or quarries is back-breaking and dangerous labor, with plenty of unskilled jobs for slaves. Instead of human slaves, why not use monsters who are both hardy and accustomed to underground pits and tunnels? Dwarves may pay well for them – what dwarf wouldn't secretly delight in seeing orcs and goblins in chains?

*Galley Slaves:* Chaining slaves to row in galleys is historically a TL4 innovation, but this isn't history, is it? Besides, if they *do* revolt successfully, the GM can have pirates crewed by monstrous former galley slaves ravaging the seven seas, which is entertaining.

*Gladiatorial Arena:* Many societies do not have these, but if a bread-and-circuses tradition has survived, then the arena will have a steady demand for monsters, both as regular gladiators and exotic grotesqueries.

*Farm Labor:* Less likely than the above options, since there's usually enough serfs and peasants to go around. Moreover, enslaved monsters often do poorly in the sunlight and are too dangerous for the more open conditions of a farm or plantation. However, slaves sold to dwarves, shadow elves, or the like might work in underground mushroom fields.

*Slave Soldiers:* These require a significant investment in training and officers, but there may be warlords with janissary armies who take monster recruits. Some may prefer child monsters to indoctrinate while young. Markets for slave soldiers pay well but are hard to find and may be a great distance away from the dungeon – perhaps even overseas in foreign cultures.

*Pleasure Slaves:* Some brothels, harems, etc. may pay to acquire captives that are both monstrous enough to enslave yet simultaneously attractive. These are rare and specialized, so prices are often high, and buyers are few.

## WHO TO ENSLAVE?

A monster slaver's goal is to capture creatures that can be subdued, and for which there is a market. It is no good trying to enslave creatures too fierce or stupid to obey, or too powerful or stubborn to break. Many intelligent monsters are too mad, insubstantial, or possessed of innate weaponry to make good slaves. A fire-breathing dragonborn, brain-eating horde zombie, or a mind-blasting elder thing won't sell well!

The bread and butter of the monster slaver, then, are IQ 6+ "mundane" intelligent monsters (see *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level*), and in particular, that subset of intelligent monsters known as "monster races." These races have Social Stigma (Savage) and are often Ugly or worse, so no one cares what happens to them.

*Coleopterans:* These multi-armed humanoid beetles are likely to be popular as mine slaves, galley slaves, or gladiators. Because they have extra arms, they can do more work and so will usually fetch at least +50% price!

*Cat-Folk:* Racial laziness makes them poor laborers, but their exotic grace gives them value as gladiators or, if of Attractive or better Appearance, as pleasure slaves.

*Corpse Eaters:* Far too icky for anything except a gladiatorial arena. Even then, they are a poor choice for regular attractions due to the smell.

*Dark Ones, Shadow Elves, and Infernals:* Generally too arrogant or powerful to make menial slaves, they will sell as pleasure slaves or gladiators.

*Faerie Folk:* There's a long tradition of forcing faeries into servitude, but this is usually only done by evil characters. They won't work, but fauns and nymphs may sell as exotic pleasure slaves in disreputable areas.

*Gargoyles:* If chained to prevent them flying far, they can make decent gladiators or miners, but are tough to handle.

*Goblins:* They're too cowardly to make good gladiators or slave soldiers but are as strong as humans, so will make excellent mine slaves. Many are already enslaved by orcs; thus, they are used to submission to stronger masters.

*Half-Orcs and Orcs:* A staple of the slaver. Most are sent to the mines, the galleys, or, if available, the gladiatorial arena. Slavers claim they work under a brutal master, but any sign of weakness can lead to revolt. They usually have no compunction about enslaving humans, dwarves, etc., themselves – turn-about is fair play.

*Hobgoblins:* Their strength is useful in the mines, but their bad tempers make them hard to manage.

*Minotaurs:* Their habit of going berserk under stress makes them too dangerous for most occupations, but they make excellent gladiators.

*Ogres:* These powerful humanoids are *highly* valued as mine slaves and gladiators due to their strength. They're too large to make good galley slaves.

*Reptiloids:* The dragon-blooded are dangerous, but ordinary lizard men can make useful slaves. They are especially valued as gladiators for their exotic appearance. Some tend to be climate-sensitive, though.

*Trolls:* Occasionally enslaved as gladiators or miners, but usually too weak, nasty, or powerful.

*Wildmen:* Like orcs, these “savages” are valued for their strength, and wildmen slaves may be sold as miners, galley slaves, or gladiators.

## SELLING THE SLAVES

The smart party sets up in advance of any expedition meetings with local merchants in the area who have appropriate contacts with slaves. This minimizes the time needed to hold and feed captives.

It helps to have a variety of slaves to sell to different buyers. For example, the GM could decide that a group of slave merchants may want no more than 1d-2 pleasure slaves, 1d gladiators, 4d mine slaves, and 2d galley slaves. The GM might also rule that some markets don't exist locally. If no gladiatorial arenas exist in their own country, for example, the PCs may have to meet foreign traders or establish overseas contacts.

Slaves can be disposed of like any other specialized loot. The basic value of a slave is equal to five year's wages at the best job he could qualify for as a free man (see p. B518). For a typical monster slave, that is the unskilled job of laborer in fields, mines, or a galley. As this pays about \$120/month, it means an average slave sells for \$7,200. Multiply this by 1.5 for a race that has advantages that make it potentially very useful as a laborer, like Extra Arms.

This assumes ST 11 (BL 24 lbs.). Stronger or weaker slaves adjust the price: multiply by BL/24. If arenas exist, a gladiator or slave soldier may sell for more (multiply by DX/10) but usually a slave merchant only wants to buy a few.

Pleasure slaves generally sell for \$2,000 times the point value of their Attractiveness – maybe more if they are a highly exotic race like Infernals. Filthy slaves may have reduced Appearance of 1-2 levels until cleansed up.

Slaves with racial Bad Temper sell for half as much. Those with racial Laziness are 1/4 value for as miners, galley slaves, etc. Slaves who go berserk sell only to gladiatorial arenas, and are half value there. A premium will be paid if a slave is a craftsman such as blacksmith (+50%). Crippled slaves will not sell; injured slaves are half cost. Slaves that speak a language no one in the area can understand may be -10% value.

That gives the maximum sale price. How much the adventurers get when selling depends on their own wealth and skills. Use the usual rules for disposing of dungeon loot: You must get it to a market, and how much you get depends on the Wealth level of the adventurer doing the selling.

Opening up a market for slaves can be challenging, but once adventurers get word out, slave traders – individually or in caravans – may visit to buy live merchandise, or even send agents to set up shop. These slave merchants are middlemen. As such, an adventurer can really expect to only get under 50% of market value after other modifiers. If the nearest town or village is on a seaport or river, slave ships may even put in. This might open a market for galley slaves, slave soldiers, or gladiator slaves that doesn't exist locally.

Alternatively, enterprising adventurers may arrange to cut out the middleman and sell the slaves themselves for full price. If they don't have a particular market – such as a nobleman, craft guild, or dwarf lord in need of labor – they might arrange with local authorities to incorporate a monster-slave auction into the local market day or fair. This may require a slaver's guild license or a pay-off (maybe \$1,000 or more). The party might also have to cage and feed slaves for weeks before each market day or fair opens up. Nevertheless, a well-managed slave auction may be the hit of any local fair, with travelers and locals coming from all around to gawk at the parade of monsters as they go on the block. Just hope the monsters don't have any friends or relatives who decide to emerge from the dungeon to crash the party. If something goes wrong and the monsters escape, it could be a massacre!

## ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid SF fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*. Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating *Transhuman Space*, co-authoring the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* anime RPG, and writing countless *GURPS* books, including the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and the *GURPS Spaceships* series.

**GURPS**® Fourth Edition

# DUNGEON FANTASY™

BY SEAN PUNCH! AVAILABLE NOW!

[e23.sjgames.com](http://e23.sjgames.com)



**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

# THE EMPEROR'S FINEST

BY KENNETH PETERS

*From the forest came the sound of trampling feet. It was the eirenarch of Cilicia, Perilaos by name, a man from the top ranks of the city's elite. Perilaos came suddenly upon the bandits with a large force and killed them all, except for a few he took alive . . . When they came to Tarsus, he put the bandits in jail.*

– Xenophon, *Ephesian Tale*

The year is 258 A.D. The power of the Roman Empire stretches from the rugged hills of Britannia in the northwest,

to the plains of Assyria in the east. Its people level mountains, humble barbarian tribes, carve out farms in savage lands, and build roads to link every province to the glorious megalopolis of Roma. For its citizens, the borders of the empire mark the limits of reason, order, and civilization. But seething beneath the *Pax Romana* is darkness and barbarity, treason and dishonor. Who can the Romans call on to guarantee their property and their lives in this violent age? What malcontents lie just beyond the sacred borders of the cities and towns?

This article looks at the enforcers of Roman law and order in the tumultuous third century, as well as the enemies of the established social order. It can be used as a reference for any fantasy or historical setting, and is especially useful when combined with the *Roma Arcana* setting from *GURPS Fantasy*; *GURPS Imperial Rome*; or the *Roma Universalis* setting first described in *Pyramid #3/20: Infinite Worlds*, with additional material in *Pyramid #3/24: Bio-Tech*, *Pyramid #3/27: Monsters in Space*, and *Pyramid #3/30: Spaceships*.

## *Roma Universalis*

The *Roma Universalis* setting features a fantastic, high-imperial flavored Roman Empire that extends throughout the solar system with the aid of wooden sky galleons plying the aetheric winds (see *Pyramid #3/30: Spaceships* for more information on these craft). The material in this article can be used unchanged, with rugged *eirenarchs* venturing out onto the Martian plains and sly *frumentarii* boarding sky galleys to spy on the Han Dynasty or deliver secret orders to Flavian units on Venus.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE EMPIRE

*Anyone who studies ancient Rome knows that there were no police. And yet, the same individual also knows that there were, here and there, chasers of bandits, night watchmen, **stationarii**, and in fact a host of other groups of men recruited by one governmental official or another in hopes of keeping the peace.*

– Michael Peachin

Before Augustus, elected magistrates and their staff were the primary law enforcement agents of the Roman people. Because this system was unable to cope with the violence and chaos as the Republic disintegrated, the first emperor reorganized the traditional offices responsible for public order, created military and paramilitary units responsible for handling large-scale disturbances, and instituted reforms in the legal system that began the slow process of centralizing

power with the imperial court. During this process of consolidation, most areas of the new empire were allowed to govern themselves in their traditional manner, albeit with the provincial governor and imperial procurators ultimately holding veto power over local initiatives.

Now, in 258 A.D., Emperor Valerian controls an extensive network of informers, professional spies, military police, civilian inspectors, and public slaves that he can employ to enforce his decrees in even the smallest settlements at the edges of the empire. Some he uses to prosecute enemies of the traditional social order (such as Christians), and others he places at the disposal of governors and other officials for various security tasks. This situation evolved over the decades, as the power (and insecurity) of the imperial leadership increased.

For at least the first two centuries, the Romans were content to limit their meddling in provincial affairs as long as taxes were paid and internal problems did not require the attention of the legions. By the reign of Trajan, the emperors became increasingly involved in local economic, political, religious, and security issues after a series of uprisings and the threat of large-scale brigandage. After the Edict of Caracalla in 212 A.D., practically every free person in the empire was a Roman citizen. Thus, local systems of law and governance also became largely superfluous, as Roman citizens could simply appeal decisions to the Roman courts, or request the attention of the governor (or the emperor himself in some cases). The image of the emperor and the imperial system of governance also places great demands on the *princeps* to appear personally involved in even the most trivial details of his subjects, from ruling on property disputes to singling out individuals for praise and honors. In addition, the emperor owns land and economic interests throughout the empire, which further incentivizes him to control local behavior and activities.

*Dura lex. Sed lex. [The law is hard. But it is the law.]*

– Roman proverb

## LOCAL LAW

Most law enforcement in the empire is handled within the community through informal channels and appeals to supernatural forces. (Threats of retribution by ghosts or other spirits was taken very seriously in the ancient world, and is a *real* policing power in settings such as *Roma Arcana!*) In towns and cities, private citizens and clubs (*collegia*) are often recognized by their community to have jurisdiction over petty crimes in their neighborhood. They turn over criminals to the local magistrate for questioning (that is, torture) and judgment.

Larger towns have night watchmen (*vigiles* or *nyktophylakes*) – either paid professionals or conscripts – but their primary duty is to guard against fire and put down riots, not chase cutpurses and burglars. These individuals deal with local problems and have limited authority and jurisdiction. The town councils can use public slaves or hold certain elected offices responsible for public order. In the western empire, these were often appointed from magisterial attendants (*apparitores*). In the east, they were sometimes special assignments such as “town guardian” (*astynomos*) or “chief of the guard” (*archiphylax*). In the Byzantine Constantinople, the *kerketon* under the *praitor ton demon* filled these functions; see **GURPS Hot Spots: Constantinople, 527-1204 A.D.**, p. 18.)

Most provinces can also call on various militias composed of local citizens paying their labor tax. Often referred to as tower guards (*burgarii* or *magdôlophylax*), these individuals perform the boring and thankless task of ensuring tolls and tariffs are paid at key travel chokepoints. They also carry messages between cities, guard criminals, and provide (poorly trained and equipped) bodies to bulk up any posses needed for major police operations. Their main role is to *deter* crime and

banditry. They will seek out the nearest military post or *eirenarch* (see *Officers of the Peace*, below) if they spot major trouble; they hole up in their guardpost or tower until reinforcements arrive. Most of these postings are for a few weeks or months, but are relatively prestigious, considering the alternative work assignment is usually hard labor!

## REGIONAL LAW

*However often the Pomptine marsh and Gallinaria woodland are made safe again by armed guards, the highway robbers stream in again, like beasts to a feeding ground.*

– Juvenal, *Satire*

Vast areas of the Roman Empire are only loosely governed, but towns and cities can counter major bandit and criminal activity by calling up armed posses and supporting vigilantes to kill or capture particularly notorious rogues. As long as these “official” warbands do not cause too many problems, the provincial governor and emperor ignore any questions about legality and jurisdiction. Endemic issues can also be addressed by expanding the number of conscripted guards, but by the third century, permanent municipal officers often are appointed in each city to deal with major crimes and banditry. Comparable to Wild West marshals, they are empowered by the councils of the major cities and not the central government. Technically, they have authority throughout the entire province, but this obviously overlaps with other cities and *their* officers – which can result in very tricky arguments over jurisdiction and honor!

## Officers of the Peace

In the east, each large city has a set of public offices, known as the *eirenarchate*, who serve as provincial guardians. This is an illustrious, but expensive and hazardous, post to hold. Commission is often avoided by qualified candidates! In fact, wealth is often the *only* requirement, and even children can be appointed as *eirenarch* if their families can contract out the required security force. *Eirenarchs* are practically guaranteed to attain the highest administrative posts in their cities (if they survive), and are responsible only to their city council and provincial governor.

Each city puts forth a list of nominees to one or more *eirenarchates* to the provincial governor, who selects the appointees for a one-year term. Despite the power and influence they could hold, nominees often campaign *for* their erstwhile competitors to avoid the cost and threat to life and limb and escape the loss of honor that outright avoidance of duty would cause.

Beneath each *eirenarch* is a pair of patrol lieutenants (*paraphylakes*). These officers, selected from upwardly mobile middle class families (Status 1), perform most of the day-to-day policing in the city’s immediate territory. Each *paraphylax* is accompanied by a trio of lightly armed deputies (*diôgmitai*). The *eirenarch* and his lieutenants are equipped with the best weapons and armor available, and mounted on horses, but the deputies are often on foot and equipped with only a sword and linen armor.

Together, the *eirenarch* and his officers are responsible for hunting down bandits and other criminals, interrogating them, and then writing a report to be delivered to a Roman magistrate or provincial governor. The responsible *eirenarch* personally delivers the report and testifies at the trial, and can be prosecuted for providing false information.

In the west, similar magistrates are given titles such as “prefect for defending against bandit attacks” (*praefectus arcendis latrociniiis*) or “prefect of the watchmen” (*praefecti vigilum*), but with no set organization or duties.

## NATIONAL LAW

The Roman Empire deals with most major outbreaks of brigandage and social unrest as a military problem – there is no organization like the modern FBI that attempts to enforce edicts at a wide area. The emperor relies on his secret police, the *frumentarii* (see below), to preempt threats to his life and power, and can detach units of his Praetorian Guard to assist local crime fighting (especially in Italy). However, he has few tools to deal with problems that cross provincial borders that do not rely on using the legions.

This relative weakness of the central government means that sections of the empire are practically independent nations, free to operate under their own laws and system of government. As long as they do not call attention to themselves they will rarely be bothered (the closed community of Jewish scholars responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls is an example).

The closest equivalent to a national policing force is the common practice of detaching soldiers from the legions for long-term deployment as guards along major roads, at strategically significant river crossings and road junctions, and at trading hubs. These *stationarii* are professional legionnaires, and the assignment is seen as a reward for good performance (as it obviously means the soldier does not need to perform

more laborious tasks and is not under the harsh discipline of a centurion every day). *Stationarii* are alert and aggressive, as a satisfactory performance can lead to promotion and positions of greater authority. Soldiers could take advantage of their power and authority, but egregious abuses are usually prevented by their supervisors, known as *regionarii*. The *regionarii* are outposted centurions (usually attached to a governor’s staff and Military Rank 3) in command of at least 10 *stationarii* and two cavalymen. These district officers perform a security role much like an *eirenarch*, but with broad powers to corvée deputies and request legionary backup within their somewhat restricted area of responsibility (which could be as small as a town, or an area the size of a province, depending on the population and importance of the local urban centers). They also receive petitions from civilians; as the *regionarii* outrank most other peacekeepers, and have limited ties to the local elite, they are often asked by the rural population to investigate and punish illicit activities of the urban-based policing forces.

As the empire does not recognize a “national border” in the modern sense, soldiers and citizens often range back and forth as the influence of the empire itself waxes and wanes. (The *limes* in *Roma Arcana* are definitely boundaries, though!) To keep watch on these fuzzy boundaries between “empire” and “barbarian lands,” the legions detach individuals, or even entire units, of their cavalry scouts as pathfinders (*exploratores*) or spies (*speculatores*) to monitor barbarian settlements and protect the watchtowers, patrol forts, and signal stations that keep watch for invaders and raiders along the frontiers.

## Roman Legal Practices

Some aspects of the Roman legal system remain in use to the modern day (both in Latin terminology and elements of common law). However, key differences in mechanisms and attitudes require modification to the guidelines given for *Legal Enforcement and Jail* (pp. B507-508).

**Arrest:** Once a case had been accepted by the magistrate, the defendants have to be brought to court. Most come willingly, but this may be a difficult task in the case of elusive malcontents, traveling merchants, or the rich and powerful; private individuals often have to take matters into their own hands to get the accused into court (dragging them by force in some cases).

**Trial:** Roman magistrates are not particularly interested in the *truth*; instead, they are concerned about determining

which traditional remedy applies to the case. Defendants are often at a significant handicap once a trial begins – in some cases, only the *degree of punishment* can be argued, not the merits of the case itself!

**Jail:** The Romans do not, as a rule, incarcerate people as punishment. Maintaining such facilities is expensive and does not fit with most Romans’ views of justice. Roman prisons house those awaiting execution or judicial torture, or are a flight risk.

**Bail:** In most Roman legal cases, the accused is free until the conclusion of the trial. However, this freedom can be hedged with various limitations, such as making his Patron legally responsible for his appearance at court.

# THE ROMAN SECRET SERVICE

Governors plot in secret in bids for the throne while rapacious taxmen turn whole provinces against the empire. The countryside swells with bandits, and barbarian raiders roam unopposed on the coasts. Faced with such threats, the emperor can trust only a handful of men to ferret out traitors, assassinate his enemies, interrogate malcontents, and keep his deputies in line. These select agents are the *frumentarii*.

Literally “grain men,” the *frumentarii* were once simply logistical planners for the far-flung Legions. However, by the reign of Hadrian, it became obvious that their contacts in the frontier and among the merchant class, as well as their outsider status in the capital, could be adapted to more strategic purposes.

The difficulty of central administration with TL2 transportation and communication technology, plus the real and imagined insecurity of the emperor, further increased the demand for capable men who could carry out, or ensure others carried out, imperial proclamations.

## Duties

The third-century *frumentarii* are a pool of “jack of all trades” agents to whom the emperor can assign important tasks in far-flung regions of the empire and have some expectation that his orders will actually be followed. However, the strict delineation of duties common to modern intelligence and police agencies does not exist in the ancient world. The closest modern U.S. approximation to the *frumentarii* would be a combination of Postal Service, FBI, CIA, GSA, and Special Forces!

*Frumentarii* assignments include shuttling messages between bureaucrats in the capital, snooping on a senator’s conversations as he tours the baths, guarding politically important individuals before trial, assassinating dangerous cult leaders, arresting corrupt governors, organizing the grain purchases for the legions deploying to fight the Sassanids, collecting taxes in areas where normal methods have failed, and so on. In addition to having the coveted right to use the Imperial Post system to quickly travel around the empire, agents can request backup from the *vigiles*, Legions, or even the Praetorian Guard to perform their missions. Very few people may tell a *frumentarius* “no” in matters of imperial security!

## Recruitment

Most *frumentarii* begin their service as common soldiers in the legions (Military Rank 0). Literate soldiers who show some skill with logistics and administration are selected for special duty and sent to the capital to serve as a supply liaison with the central government. Each Legion has between five and 10 *frumentarii* billets they are required to fill, and new recruits are selected when a replacement is needed.

*Frumentarii* technically remain enrolled with their Legion, but they are no longer part of its chain of command and do not march with it to war. Instead, they fall under the command of the *princeps peregrinorum* (Chief of the Foreigners), a senior centurion (Military Rank 4) who reports directly to the emperor and praetorian prefect (who, by the third century, is effectively the chief administrator of the empire).

Members of the social elite (Status 1 or 2), who directly enroll in the legions as a junior centurion (Military Rank 2), can request assignment as a *frumentarius*, but a career in the secret service is no guarantee of advancement in Status upon retirement. Nonetheless, it can be a *safer* career path, given the various civil wars and purges of the senior military ranks by vengeful or paranoid Emperors.

## Training

All new agents are assumed to be proficient in basic military skills and physically fit, but additional training is needed to ensure that they can carry out their duties. After arriving at the *Castra Peregrinorum* in Rome (the *frumentarii* headquarters, located on the Caelian Hill), the newly recruited agent works much as the *frumentarii* have for centuries – as supply clerks – purchasing and arranging the transport of grain (*frumentum*) and other food items to the frontier forts and legionary detachments. This is critically important work, and puts the agent in contact with traders, messengers, high-ranking staff in the provinces and Legions, and other individuals who will be important Contacts later in his career.

In preparation for further duties, the agent is also instructed to keep abreast of any developments at the capital and provinces that may impact logistics or the security of the military (e.g., news of a crop failure, rumors of a governor hiring mercenaries, or the abandonment of barbarian trading posts that may presage an invasion). Field assignments are allowed after the agent proves his loyalty and competence. All training is on the job, under the supervision of more experienced agents.

# A PROPER ROMAN RASCAL

For the most part, Roman characters only require the *Basic Set*. However, some traits must be interpreted in a manner that reflects the realities of ancient Rome and the circumstances of the time period. See *GURPS Imperial Rome*, *GURPS Low-Tech*, and *Roman Technology* in *Pyramid* #3/30: *Low-Tech* for additional character notes.

## TECH LEVEL

The Roman Empire is TL2, with some items from higher TLs in regular use. This restricts what skills are available for law enforcement and skullduggery in a realistic low-TL campaign; the concepts behind Forensics are unknown to even the savviest *CSI: Roma* investigator, for example! Also, there is not yet a body of knowledge built up for Criminology, Cryptography, Intelligence Analysis, or Lockpicking – realistic PCs may not learn these skills above initial defaults at character creation.

These limitations don’t necessarily apply to other Roman settings; *Roma Arcana* magistrates may rely on Criminology for example (*GURPS Fantasy*, pp. 216-217). Access to (fairly) reliable divination and deific guidance/meddling can make almost anything possible.

## CONTROL RATING

The Roman state enforces minimal administrative and legal control over the provincial governments, and many maintain government systems and laws that have changed little over the centuries. However, the Romans and regional elites maintain an effective Control Rating of 4 over most urban areas. The average adventuring party could easily be mistaken as a bandit group; *stationarii* and roving *eirenarchs* take a very dim view of armed outsiders and possible malcontents roaming around!

Outside of the towns and cities, many laws and edicts can be ignored, unless agents of the government are physically present as enforcers. Even so, they still fall under the control of local tribes, petty warlords/nobles, and criminal gangs. Thus, vast tracts of the empire are effectively Control Rating 2.

The Romans consider most lands outside the empire as Control Rating 0 lawless areas, filled with subhuman barbarians and vicious beasts, but these are usually at least Control Rating 1 if inhabited.

## Roman Robin Hood?

While there is a Roman literary tradition of roguish bandit-kings who lead their men with pure force of charisma and outlandish antics, most brigands in the empire do not fit the archetype of the “social bandit” who robs from the rich and gives to the poor (while having jaunty outings in the local woods and mocking authority figures).

The typical bandit in the third century is part of an ad hoc group of desperate men and women who rob and plunder only as the opportunity arises, but are otherwise farmers, pastoralists, or travelling merchants. Most have no goal beyond living another day, and, in the often violent and brutal reality of the ancient world, will kill and steal from those hardly better off than they are. A common tombstone epitaph in the empire is “killed by brigands.” Even children, pilgrims, or small groups of soldiers are not safe from attack.

Most Roman highwaymen have no political aspirations, and there is almost no concept of “guerrilla fighters” or “insurgents” who fight for political independence from Rome. Individuals with anachronistic ideas of national liberation can simply move away from centers of imperial power, and the overwhelmingly savage response of the legions is a strong deterrent to any uprising.

## ADVANTAGES

Some advantages require modification for a third-century campaign.

### *Alternate Identity*

see p. B39

Local municipalities keep records of those living in the area for tax purposes, but it’s possible to have previously established personal relationships and business interests in another area under a different name, which may qualify the character for this advantage. Simply moving far away and starting over will probably result in losing all Contacts, Reputation, Status, and Wealth, so is not something done lightly!

### *Legal Enforcement Powers*

see p. B65

“Jurisdiction” is a very loose concept in the third century. Those with Legal Enforcement Power can usually arrest anyone, anywhere in the empire, as long as they follow proper procedures and the criminal is within their reach. This means that governors have authority over those from outside their province if they are caught within it, and *eirenarchs* or other regional enforcers can chase criminals across “provincial lines” without issue (assuming they don’t come across their

local contemporaries, who may view *them* as intruding criminals or competitors).

*Burgarii* and most regional paramilitaries have limited authority to arrest and detain suspected criminals. This is effectively an Office (**GURPS Power-Ups 1: Perks**, p. 18).

*Vigiles* and other city militias have Legal Enforcement Powers [5], but almost unlimited power over property in emergencies.

*Eirenarchs* and similar municipal officers have Legal Enforcement Powers [10]. Their subordinates often have the same powers, but they act in the *eirenarch’s* name, and he is personally responsible for their actions.

*Stationarii* have Legal Enforcement Powers [10]. They carry out orders from the praetorian prefect or the provincial governor, with a flexible scope of authority and area of responsibility. However, they do have a set base of operations they cannot abandon.

*Fruentarii* acting as agents of the emperor have Legal Enforcement Powers [15] and broad latitude in carrying out their orders.

*Governors* have Legal Enforcement Powers [15] and nearly unlimited power in their province. The only exception is capital crimes committed by influential Roman citizens (generally Status 3+), who can appeal a decision to the praetorian prefect or emperor (which requires a trip to Roma).

## *Legal Immunity*

see p. B65

The gulf between the social ranks in the empire is vast, with the rich and powerful able to flout many laws, or receive a slap on the wrist if they are brought before a magistrate. Roman elite have Legal Immunity at the 5- or 10-point level to represent their *de facto* immunities, exemption to torture, and avoidance of the harshest penalties in capital cases. Only the emperor himself can grant Legal Immunity [15], but there is *never* immunity to torture or execution in the case of treason or conspiracy – both of which are often broadly applied.

*Bardic Immunity* does not exist. Daring to insult the emperor, his family, or a member of the upper classes will lead to a beating or charges of treason.

*Diplomatic Immunity* does not exist. Diplomats are usually granted the same rights as local nobles, but *custom* dictates how they are treated, not international agreement or law. No concept of a “diplomatic pouch” or complete legal immunity exists. Instead, diplomats should have at least Legal Immunity [5] to represent their latitude of action, and Allies or Contacts to avoid more dangerous entanglements.

## *Rank*

see p. B29

Administrative, Military, and Religious Rank form an integrated system in the empire, and respectable Romans move between them as part of an honorable career (*cursus honorum*).

These positions are usually acquired as a by-product of social standing. High Rank does *not* add any additional Status.

Members of the *frumentarii* and other detached soldiers advance in Military Rank. Most militias and peacekeepers use Administrative Rank.

Although some magistrates perform police functions, Police Rank does not exist. Instead, it is a traditional component of Roman Administrative and Military Rank.

## DISADVANTAGES

Brigands and other rogues often have little access to TL2 Roman medicine, and bear the effects of untreatable congenital handicaps and physical impairments. Soldiers and government agents have better medical care, but even a minor combat wound can result in death or infirmity. See **GURPS Low-Tech** for additional complications arising from pre-modern medicine.

### Addiction

see p. B122

A Roman addict has a limited repertoire of vices to select from. Tobacco is unknown, as are many other highly addictive and totally addictive drugs. Opium is a possible vice, but quality and potency varies wildly between manufacturers and batches. Marijuana is available, but normally used for ceremony. No laws exist against intoxicating substances, which will limit the profits of anachronistic drug kingpins!

### Alcoholism

see p. B122

Alcoholism is the only widespread addiction in the empire, but is not necessarily *cheap*. No self-respecting senator is going to be seen drinking a poor vintage! Transporting (or stealing) high-quality wine and beer is a very profitable business.

### Code of Honor

see p. B127

The Romans have their own traditional codes of conduct and standards of acceptable behavior. The chief virtues of a good citizen are clemency (*clementia*), discipline (*disciplina*), justice (*iustitia*), and manly courage (*virtus*). Love for your fellow Roman, charity, and turning the other cheek *are not* Roman virtues!

*Code of Honor (Roman)*: Defend your family's reputation; do not tolerate insult or insolence from those beneath you; respect your ancestors and Rome's traditions; face hardship and peril without complaint. *-10 points*.

See **GURPS Fantasy** (p. 219) for an alternate take on Code of Honor (Roman).

### Cowardice

see p. B129

Despite the Romans traditional abhorrence for cowardice, it's not worth any more points in a third-century campaign. Backing down from a direct threat can certainly impact Reputation, but there's nothing in the Roman code of honor that says you can't cut your losses and make a strategic retreat!

### Social Stigma

see p. B155

Several important groups in the Roman Empire have distinctive Social Stigmas.

*Criminals (latrones)* may have a Criminal Record if their actions are well-known (but remember that there is no photography or centralized record-keeping). Dangerous or notorious rogues and renegades who have been captured and sentenced to labor in the mines or die in the arena are tattooed (Distinguishing Feature) and Subjugated.

*Freed slaves (libertus)* are Second-Class Citizens with restricted franchise and looked down on by full citizens. Freedmen and women may be reverted back to slaves if they are convicted of serious crimes.

*Foreigners (peregrini)* are considered a Minority Group. While in Roman territory, they can make limited use of the law, but are at a handicap compared to full citizens. Most "barbarians" fall into this category, unless they are willfully ignorant of Greco-Roman culture.

*Slaves (servus)* are Valuable Property. However, a Roman slave may have relatively high Status and Wealth, especially if he is owned by the emperor! Slaves have limited to no protections under the law, and can often be casually abused or even killed without significant repercussions (these kind of violations are treated much like animal abuse is in modern times).

## A Primer on Roman Honor

*There is no one so wild as not to be greatly moved – if not by the desire for those things honorable in themselves – then by the fear of reproach and dishonor.*

– Cicero, *The Orator*

Romans live in a face-to-face culture with their lives on display to the entire community. To live in obscurity is not only physically impossible, it makes a person less than human. In **GURPS**, a Roman's honor is composed of prestige (Status) and innate splendor (Charisma), together with accumulated glories and praise (Reputation). The total positive reaction-roll modifier is an expression of the character's eminence (*dignitas*) in society. For a realistic Roman character, this is among his most defining characteristics – even more so than Status or Rank. Even the most miserable low-ranking soldier or brutal cutpurse keeps track of every tiny change in his relative honor and compares it with that of his peers.

Obviously, a brigand or spy lacks high Status, but he can still maintain a public image as a person of integrity and virtue if he has a smooth tongue and appears to be in good standing with the community. Alternately, those who live in the underbelly of Roman society may reject traditional notions of honor – for these groups, the usual reaction-roll penalties for disadvantages such as Social Stigma and a negative Reputation are treated as positive reaction-roll modifiers.

Women are Second-Class Citizens. Legally, a woman is also a minor throughout her life, but this is a formality. In actuality, women face no significant legal handicaps. They can own

property, run a business, and even organize criminal fraternities just like their male counterparts.

*All the provinces lay cowering and enslaved by fear since many spies went round all the cities listening to what people were saying. It was impossible to think or speak freely, when all temperate and just liberty of speech was destroyed and everyone trembled at his own shadow.*

– Aelius Aristides, *Regarding the Emperor*

## TEMPLATES

These are three examples of Roman agents and rogues who can be used in campaigns.

### SECRET AGENT (FRUMENTARIUS)

100 points

*A soldier, dressed like a civilian, sits down by your side, and begins to speak ill of Caesar, and then you too, just as though you had received from him some guarantee of good faith in the fact that he began the abuse, tell likewise everything you think and the next thing is – you are led off to prison in chains.*

– Epictetus, *Discourses*

You are an experienced secret agent, as skilled with eavesdropping as you are with the sword. You've proven your loyalty and capability, and are now assigned to a secret long-term mission by the emperor himself. As one of the most trusted agents of the emperor you have broad latitude of action in the performance of your duties, and are above the law in most respects. However, the emperor himself will handle your punishment if you prove to be an embarrassing failure!

**Attributes:** ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 10 [0].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Dam 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 13 [5]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

**Advantages:** Legal Enforcement Powers [15] and Legal Immunity [15]. • 20 points chosen from among Contacts [Varies], Cultural Adaptability [10], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Higher Purpose [5], Language (Native/Accented) [5], Language Talent [10], Military Rank [5/level], Social Chameleon [5], or Social Regard (Feared) [5/level].

**Disadvantages:** Duty (Emperor; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]. • -30 points chosen from among Bully [-10\*], Callous [-5], Curious [-5\*], Enemies [Varies], Fanaticism [-15], Greed [-15\*], No Sense of Humor [-10],

Overconfidence [-5\*], Paranoia [-10], Reputation (Informer) [Varies], Sense of Duty [Varies], Vow [Varies], or Workaholic [-5].

**Primary Skills:** Administration (A) IQ+1 [4]-13 and Intelligence Analysis (H) IQ [4]-12. • One of Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-13 or Interrogation (A) IQ+1 [4]-13. • One of Shadowing (A) IQ+1 [4]-13 or Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-12. • One of Search (A) Per+1 [4]-14 or Smuggling (A) IQ+1 [4]-13.

**Secondary Skills:** Broadsword (A) DX [2]-11; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-12; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Soldier (A) IQ [2]-12; and Teamster (A) IQ [2]-12.

**Background Skills:** Riding (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ [1]-12; and Shield (E) DX [1]-11. • Two of Current Affairs (Politics) (E) IQ [1]-12; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-12; Religious Ritual (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; or Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

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

### MILITARY SCOUT (EXPLORATORES)

100 points

*It is essential to know the character of the enemy and of their principal officers – whether they be rash or cautious, enterprising or timid, whether they fight on principle or from chance and whether the nations they have been engaged with were brave or cowardly.*

– Vegetius, *Concerning Military Matters*

You're a specialist in reconnaissance, sabotage, and raiding. You proved to have an almost prescient skill in locating barbarian raiding parties, and the provincial governor trusts your advice on selecting safe travel routes even over his own staff. Your skills have not gone unnoticed by the imperial authorities. Now you're on detached duty, performing special missions both inside and out of the empire where speed and a keen eye are essential.

**Attributes:** ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 11 [10].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Dam 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 14 [15]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

**Advantages:** Fit [5] and Legal Immunity [5]. • 35 points chosen from among Combat Reflexes [15], Contacts [Varies], Cultural Adaptability [10], Danger Sense [15], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Higher Purpose [5], or Military Rank [5/level].

**Disadvantages:** Duty (Empire; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]. • -30 points selected from among Code of Honor (Roman or Soldier's) [-10], Bloodlust [-10\*], Curious [-5\*], Enemies [Varies], Fanaticism [-15], Loner [-5\*], Sense of Duty [Varies], Stubbornness [-5], Vow [Varies], or Workaholic [-5].

**Primary Skills:** Broadsword (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Observation (A) Per+1 [4]-15; Riding (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Shield (E) DX+2 [4]-13; and Soldier (A) IQ+1 [4]-12.

**Secondary Skills:** Area Knowledge (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Navigation (Land) (A) IQ [2]-11; and Tracking (A) Per [2]-14.

**Background Skills:** First Aid (E) IQ [1]-12; Religious Ritual (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Survival (any) (A) Per-1 [1]-13; and Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-10.

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

*Magistratum metue.  
[Fear the magistrate.]  
– Roman proverb*

## INFAMOUS BANDIT (LATRONES FAMOSI)

100 points

*In the Roman Empire, however, violent lawbreaking was endemic, and the origins of the malefactors are roughly comparable to those of bandits in the early modern period. . . . Those most susceptible to this kind of misconduct in the Roman context, were people fleeing crop failures, tax burdens, and wars. In other words, fugitives (often debtors), army veterans and deserters, gladiators and runaway slaves (the so-called *servi fugitivi*), that is to say, people who had learned to survive through violence, who had easy access to weapons . . .*

– Werner Riess, *The Roman Bandit (Latro) as Criminal and Outsider*

The Roman countryside does not lack for a multitude of petty criminals, rebels, and highwaymen who waylay travelers for money, ransom, or the clothes on their backs. You were a leader of a group of desperate peasants, escaped slaves, nationalist insurgents, and losers in the periodic civil wars. They found themselves cast out of society with no other way to make a living but to take what they needed from others.

## Bibliography

Austin, N. and Rankov, N. *Exploratio: Military & Political Intelligence in the Roman World from the Second Punic War to the Battle of Adrianople* (Routledge, 1998).

Brooking, Emerson. *Roma Surrecta: Portrait of a Counterinsurgent Power, 216 BC – AD 72* (CUREJ, 2011).

Fuhrmann, Christopher. *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

Sheldon, Rose Mary. *Intelligence Activities in Ancient Rome* (Routledge, 2005).

Sinnigen, William. *The Roman Secret Service* (The Classical Journal Vol. 57, 1961).

Sinnigen, William. *The Origins of the "Frumentarii"* (Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome Vol. 27, 1962).

By sheer charisma or luck, you have survived capture by your nemesis, the *eirenarch* of what was once your home city. Instead of being thrown to the beasts in the arena as you deserve, you've been offered a pardon in exchange for your help with a particularly . . . delicate . . . problem your skills and contacts can help with.

**Attributes:** ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 11 [10].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Dam 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [5]; Per 13 [5]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

**Advantages:** 30 points chosen from among Allies (Gang), Charisma [5/level], Contact Group [Varies], Contacts [Varies], Daredevil [15], Fearlessness [2/level], Fit [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Luck [15], or Social Regard (Feared) [5/level].

**Disadvantages:** Enemy (Former victims; Hunter; 9 or less) [-20]. • -30 points chosen from among Bully [-10\*], Callous [-5], Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5], Cowardice [-10\*], Debt [-1/level], Duty [Varies], Fanaticism [-15], Greed [-15\*], Missing Digit [-2 or -5], Overconfidence [-5\*], Reputation (Bandit) [Varies], Selfish [-5\*], Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5], or Trickster [-15\*].

**Primary Skills:** Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Smuggling (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; and Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-13. • One of Leadership (A) IQ+1 [4]-13 or Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-13.

**Secondary Skills:** Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-12; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Observation (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Savoir-Faire (any) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-14. • Either Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-11 or Intimidation (A) Will [2]-13.

**Background Skills:** Four of Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Detect Lies (H) Per-2 [1]-11; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-10; Religious Ritual (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Riding (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Smuggling (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; or Traps (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

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

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth Peters is listening in on you right this moment. He expects to hear nothing but praise about this article, or the emperor will learn of your treasonous attitude.

# SAFES AND HOW TO OPEN THEM

BY ROGER BURTON WEST

Strongboxes in various forms have existed for centuries, becoming increasingly important as the cash economy outpaced the development of retail banking, and increasingly large sums of money could be stored as banknotes rather than as cumbersome precious metals and coinage.

In historical settings, there are three major periods of safe-cracking with three distinct flavors. In the 19th century, safe-men are the aristocracy of criminals, with a long apprenticeship before they could be considered masters of their trade. Between the World Wars, they're still skilled technicians, but a man can get a good reputation with only basic lockpicking skills if he sticks to older safes. Explosives offer a shortcut to those who don't have the patience for the old approach. After the Second World War, safes get sophisticated enough that other approaches predominate. Today, a safe-cracker is an old-fashioned criminal, and may well be looking for a way to go legitimate before his line of work becomes completely obsolete.

*For a job with you he'll  
come. Cesar! There's not  
a safe that can resist Cesar  
and not a woman that  
Cesar can resist.*

*– Mario Ferrati,  
in Rififi*

## A HISTORY OF SAFES

The first recognizable modern safe was invented in the early 19th century as a means of proof against fire rather than burglary. William Marr's 1834 patent of a double strong-box had the space between the two boxes filled with sawdust, which would insulate the contents in case of fire (and, when heated, would release some water vapor to make the contents harder to burn). Other, extremely similar patents followed

from such designers as Charles Chubb and Thomas Milner. These used various other packing materials (including alum/gypsum mixed with the sawdust to increase the amount of water available). Great demonstrations were organized by the manufacturers, in which their safes were buried in bonfires (or, later, set atop piles of gunpowder) to demonstrate their durability.

These early iron safes were opened illicitly by the common burglarious tools of the era: levers, drills, hammers, and wedges. Thus began a periodic arms race between the manufacturers and the cracksmen (and, occasionally, other manufacturers). From 1864-1865, a series of safe-breakings took place in the city of London, culminating in the Cornhill robbery of John Walks jewellery shop in Sun Court. When the criminals came to trial, publicity as to the ease of their break-ins led to a variety of lawsuits against safe-makers, and to a plethora of new safe designs. Things slowed down for a while after the commercial development of the time-lock from 1873 (a precaution against hostage-taking). By 1890, steel began to be available in quantity and at a sensible price. It could be bent into round corners, thus cutting down on the number of joints compared with a structure of riveted iron plates.

British and American safes developed more or less in parallel, and manufacturers on both side of the Atlantic were happy to knock each other's products. American safes had a reputation for novelty and efficient light weight compared to British brute strength and traditional style. In practice, they were quite similar.

## The Golden Age of Safe-Cracking

The golden age of safe-cracking came after the First World War. The combination of unemployed men with military skills and the new tooling and machinery developed for munitions manufacture led to a new generation of safe-breakers.

These years saw the rise of safe-blowing. Nitroglycerine had been available for some time, but the popularity of dynamite led to nitro being more readily available. Buying dynamite, or stealing it from a quarry, didn't arouse suspicion the way buying nitro did. Once acquired, the dynamite could be boiled to release it; roll against Chemistry or Explosives (Demolition), either at -2, with failure by 2 or more meaning an explosion.

Nitro's liquid nature lent itself well to infiltration into the tiny cracks between a safe's door and its body – or, even better, into the key-way of the lock. A tiny explosion here could destroy the lock and allow the safe to be opened via its handle – and, with luck, avoid damage to fragile contents.

The rise of oxyacetylene cutting – developed in 1903 but becoming popular only in the 1920s – precipitated the hazard of burning a safe’s contents before it could be forced open. It also led to the development of a heat-conducting copper layer in the more expensive safes, to slow down this sort of torch.

The 1920s also saw the first development of the anti-explosive relocker – a system for jamming the safe closed if exposed to the shock of an explosion. The safe would then have to be broken apart with great force rather than quietly opened. Better safes included combination-locked hard-steel shutters in the key-way of the locking mechanism, to stop nitro from being poured in there.

A safe-blower of this era can often be identified by his bad hearing and shaky nerves. He may, especially in America, be known as a “yegg” – possibly from John Yegg, supposedly the first safe-blower to use nitroglycerine. However, the term was also used to refer to burglars in general. There are persistent rumors that some of these men would carry a few ounces of nitro injected into a rubber ball worn on a string under the shirt. Be careful whom you punch in the 1920s!

## *The Next Safe-Cracking Era and Its Decline*

The Great Depression and Second World War slowed development, and more importantly deployment, of new safes. When many trained men came onto the criminal market, they found that many of the safes they were going up against might be 30 years old or more. Explosives were used much more than before, and the angle grinder became widely available in the 1950s. While newer safes would certainly have relockers (either anti-explosive or, particularly after the thermic lance became popular in the 1960s, thermal, to secure the safe if the temperature became too high), older ones generally didn’t. Further developments on the defensive side included the use of aluminum plates to conduct heat away from a cutting torch, and more sophisticated relockers.

However, the days of the safe-breaker were numbered. Safes were now sophisticated enough that learning how to get into them became a major undertaking. More crucially, softer and more lucrative targets became available, particularly as businesses and banks moved away from cash to paper or early electronic transactions. The 1960s saw a huge rise in robberies of cash in transit, from trains or bank vans, which required rather less specialized skill and more willingness to indulge in

violence. If something did have to be got out of a safe, it was often easier to bribe or threaten someone into opening it than to go in the hard way.

Indeed, even when the diamond-core drill became widely available in the 1990s, robberies of banks in the United Kingdom continued to decline. The safe-cracker’s art had largely died out, being kept alive only by the occasional legitimate expert working for a safe company and brought in when a safe had been accidentally locked. All the same, most modern safes now incorporate discs of mild steel scattered through the concrete insulation layer, which will clog up such a drill.

### *Mechanic (Locks and Safes)*

This new specialty of Mechanic deals with the construction and repair of locking mechanisms. It is distinct from Lockpicking in that it does not cover illicit opening techniques. Rather, it represents knowledge of the workings of locks, how they go wrong, and how to correct the problems. A competent safe-cracker will have both this *and* Lockpicking.

## **ANATOMY**

A safe is essentially two hardened metal boxes, one inside the other, with a nonmetal insulating layer between them. The materials range from iron and sawdust to steel and concrete. A vault is conceptually the same thing as a large safe. See *Safes (GURPS High-Tech*, p. 204) for some specific examples of safes.

The door contains the locking mechanism. Usually, this is in two parts, with a keyed or combination lock moving a small latch that then allows the main bolts to be withdrawn via a handle or wheel. Multiple bolts operated by the same wheel become popular from the 1860s.

Relockers make the safe unopenable if triggered. They typically take the form of a steel cable under tension, connecting weaker items (plates of glass for an anti-explosive relocker, or low-melting-point metal for a thermal relocker). If the weak item breaks, the tension is released. The relocker then is triggered, either driving extra bolts between door and frame or removing a vital pin from the normal opening mechanism. At this point, the safe can only be opened by brute force. A sufficiently subtle – or sudden and violent – attack may bypass such safeguards.

*Terry Leather: A bank, as in rob? How would you know about a bank?*

*Martine Love: I’ve been seeing this guy, runs his own business – security systems. Next month they’re installing new alarms in a bank in Marylebone. Seems like the trains have been setting off the tremble alarms in the vault, and so they’ve had to turn them off. So for a week or so, they won’t have any.*

*– The Bank Job*

For purposes of drilling and explosions, a safe should be considered a structure (see p. B558), with (for a relatively small model) as much as 1" of steel, up to 6" of anything from sawdust to concrete, and another inner layer of steel. This casing is Homogenous, and typically has HT 13-15. However, the hardness of materials isn't completely reflected in the DR and HP system: a mild steel drill will never penetrate an armored steel safe, and an oxyacetylene cutter will never burn through concrete, no matter how long you use it for.

If access can be gained to the safe's locking mechanism – for example by infiltrating a soft or liquid explosive through the keyhole (a condom was a popular tool for this) – it may well be a much softer target than the safe body. See *Locks (High-Tech*, p. 204) for some specific examples, or assume a DR of 3-12 and 3 HP.

In the real world, breaking into a safe without using explosives may take many hours, perhaps even days. If the safe can

be moved to a more secure site, this will make life much easier, though it does make the theft obvious. For this reason, safes are generally built as heavy as possible, often half a ton or more, and secured to the structure of the building in which they're installed.

## IN THE GAME

During a period of intense development (such as the mid-1860s or the early 1920s), a safe-cracker who isn't up to date with the latest tricks will suffer a familiarity penalty to his skills. This may be as much as -1 per month he's been out of circulation, until he takes time to familiarize himself with new developments. Even outside these times, a newer safe will often simply be impregnable to an older cracking technique; the GM is well within his rights to rule such tasks impossible without even asking for a skill roll, though the thief may not be aware of the situation until he makes the attempt.

Conversely, an old safe – and, since safes are big and immobile, many old ones are still in use – can be surprisingly easy to open, particularly since older designs are often used for training locksmiths. Higher-tech burglars therefore get a *bonus* equal in size to the penalty under *Tech-Level Modifiers* (p. B168); e.g., a TL7 thief has +3 to pick TL5 locks and +1 to pick TL6 locks.

To attack a safe, the first necessary task is research. Ideally, the safe-cracker may even be able to find out the locations of the weak spots built into many safes to allow for opening in emergencies, but as one might imagine, the manufacturers hold onto this information very carefully. At the very least, the types of defense built into the safe need to be discovered, either by determining its make and model or by observation from an inside man (via social engineering skills and observation). General knowledge of this sort of information is covered by Expert Skill (Locks and Safes), or by Mechanic (Locks and Safes) (p. 33). Research in the right places will also yield it.

Approaches to opening a safe or a vault without the key include the following.

*Manipulation:* Picking a lock, or listening for the combination. The manipulator with his stethoscope is a cinematic creation, but some cheaper combination locks are susceptible to this sort of technique; better ones use lightweight components and careful design to avoid leaking information. This is essentially a Lockpicking roll with a base time of one hour; the rules for *Time Spent* (p. B346) are likely to be useful against tougher locks.

*Combination Guessing:* If the combination has been set to something memorable to the owner, this may often be guessed. Research will give likely numbers (often birthdays, anniversaries, telephone numbers, and the like). The more complex the lock, the more likely the combination will have been written down somewhere; one American burglar asserted that his first port of call was always the card-index, under "S."

### *Eddie Chapman (1914-1997)*

After Chapman deserted from the Coldstream Guards in the 1930s, he became a safe-cracker for gangs in the West End of London, using gelnite (blasting gelatin) to gain entry – thus getting his usual associates the nickname "Jelly Gang." He also had affairs with a number of women on the fringes of high society, later blackmailing them. His career often left him in prison, and the Second World War found him locked up on Jersey. At this point, he volunteered to spy for the Germans and then became a double agent for the British. He does not appear to have returned to safe-cracking after the War.

### *John Ramensky (1905-1972)*

Ramensky was a Scottish safe-breaker (or "peterman") of Lithuanian extraction, who started his criminal career as a housebreaker. Throughout the 1930s, he blew open safes belonging to small businesses around Glasgow, but doesn't seem to have had much joy of his earnings. He spent some years in Peterhead prison – from which he escaped five times – where he refined his knowledge of explosives from more experienced petermen. His distaste for violence against policemen earned him the nickname "Gentle Johnny." He was finally released in 1942 and promptly recruited by SOE as a safe-cracking instructor – technically, he was enlisted in the Royal Fusiliers. While records are unclear, he may well have been sent into occupied Europe ahead of the invasion forces to retrieve German documents.

### *Richard Feynman (1918-1988)*

During his work on the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, a bored Feynman took to cracking safes as a hobby. His attacks were typically indirect. He worked out how much "slop" there might be in the mechanism of a combination lock, meaning that a theoretical 100-position dial might have only 20 effective positions, and developed a technique to retrieve two of the three combination numbers by moving the dials and feeling their response while a safe was legitimately open. He gained a reputation as someone who could open safes when combinations had been lost. He maintained his reputation by always taking at least half an hour in private to do so – generally by opening the safe in the first few minutes, then reading for the remaining time.

*Brute-Force Search:* It is possible to conduct an exhaustive search of the entire combination space of a lock, one possibility at a time, usually with an auto-dialing machine. The machine will have to be built for the particular type of lock, requiring both Machinist and Mechanic (Locks and Safes) rolls. Even then, the work is likely to take many hours.

*Drilling:* With access to information on the “drill points” (intentional weak spots) in a safe design, it may be possible to get in very quickly indeed. Without that, drilling is still useful for getting more information about the interior of the lock mechanism. Since this has been a preferred technique since drills became available, safes generally defend against it by having hard plates surrounding critical components. With the right equipment, a successful Mechanic (Locks and Safes) roll can give +1 (+3 for a critical success) to a Lock-picking attempt. However, a normal failure is likely to trigger relockers or other precautions.

Other ways of gaining information include use of fiberoptic scopes or X-ray machines to study the interior of the safe. Note that modern safes use many nylon components, since it's hard to tune an X-ray machine to penetrate steel but still show the lighter material.

If more subtle means have failed, it may be time for brute-force techniques. These generally involve skills such as Forced Entry or Machinist for prying, cutting or burning one's way in; Explosives (Demolition) for blowing the lock, or even the whole safe; or Engineer (Civil) followed by one of the other skills, for digging a tunnel to an unprotected vault wall.

Working on the lock may be muffled with blankets; working on the whole safe or vault is extremely noisy. The more energy is used, the more likely it is that the safe's contents will not survive; cutting a hole with a thermic lance can easily ignite paper inside a safe. Of course, sometimes that's a good enough result.

## EQUIPMENT

*Oxyacetylene Cutter* (TL6). This gas mixture burns at about 6,300°F, enough to cut through most steels. It actually works by bringing the workpiece up to ignition temperature, then blasting it with oxygen to let it burn, which makes it useless on concrete (non-flammable) and on high-carbon steels (which will melt rather than start to burn, then foul the working space and cool down). It should be used only in a well-ventilated space. The apparatus consists of two gas tanks (with a half hour's supply of oxygen and acetylene each), and regulators and hoses to connect them to the cutting head. The equipment does 1d-3 burn per second of operation. It treats the DR of mild steel (p. B558) as *semi-ablative* – reduce DR by 1 for every 10 points of *cumulative* damage rolled, as long as the torch is used constantly. It does *not* treat the DR of concrete as ablative, however. As the device inflicts an average of 1.5 points of damage per second, it can cut a man-sized (one-hex) hole in 2" mild steel in about 14 minutes (the first 1,120 points of damage remove DR, then another 150 reduce the wall to -HP). An extra set of gas tanks is \$200 and 30 lbs. Smaller models (half the cost, weight, and cutting time) can be worn as a backpack. Safe operation requires the Machinist skill. \$300, 45 lbs., LC4.

*Thermic Lance* (TL7). The thermic or thermal lance burns iron rods (sometimes mixed with magnesium or aluminum) in high-pressure oxygen to generate a cutting flame

at 7,000-8,000°F, enough to burn through steel and concrete. The end of the fuel tube is preheated and lit with an oxyacetylene torch, and produces noxious fumes while in operation. This relatively lightweight model consists of a lance handle and hose, an oxygen tank (with an hour's supply) and regulator, and a set of iron rods. A single 2' rod (0.5 lb., \$50) will fuel it for around 50 seconds, doing 1d burn per second. A *cinematic* lance could do 20 times this! It treats steel as semi-ablative (as for the oxyacetylene cutter, above) and concrete as fully ablative (reducing DR by 1 for every point of damage rolled, to a minimum DR 3). A lance can thus burn through a reference safe – 2" steel (DR 112, HP 75) plus 6" concrete (DR 72, HP 72) – in about 11 minutes. An extra oxygen tank is \$100 and 30 lbs. Heavier models, consuming more iron and oxygen and doing higher burn damage, are available, but are generally nonportable. Safe operation requires the Machinist skill. \$10,000, 100 lbs., LC2.

## REFERENCES

*Bank Job, The* (Roger Donaldson, 2008). A heavily fictionalized recounting of events surrounding the 1971 Baker Street robbery (via a tunnel from a leather-goods shop two doors down), one of the last of the classic vault jobs.

Byrne, Richard. *Safecracking: Tales and Techniques of the Master Criminals* (Grafton, 1991). This readable review of the history and mechanics of safe-breaking includes a huge number of potential scenario seeds, for PCs on both sides of the law.

*Rififi* (Jules Dassin, 1955). French film noir, notable for its central half-hour heist scene (often imitated in real life as well as in later films), conducted largely in silence.

Safeman ([safeman.org.uk](http://safeman.org.uk)) and Peterman ([peterman.org.uk](http://peterman.org.uk)). Two brief reviews of the history of safes and the techniques used against them, particularly in Britain.

*Score, The* (Frank Oz, 2001). A solid modern thriller, apparently the origin of the idea of filling a safe with water before detonating explosives; this could be effective, though most safes are insufficiently sealed.

*The crime problem is in part  
an overdue debt that the country  
must pay for ignoring for decades  
the conditions that breed  
lawlessness.*

– Chief Justice  
Earl Warren

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roger Burton West is a British computer wrangler and role-player who has been known to poke bits of spring-steel through small holes in an experimental manner, but has no inside knowledge of safes. Really. His gaming website is [tekeli.li](http://tekeli.li).

# DEALING WITH ROGUES

BY MEGAN McDONALD

Rogues are necessary for a well-rounded party, but having a less-than-lawful character in a group of generally good folks can be difficult for the rest of the party, the GM, and even the rogue himself. Players are often forced to resort to meta-gaming to avoid doing what good people would probably do in these circumstances: turn the rogue over to the authorities or otherwise kick them out of the group. Here are a few options to help these adventurers be more agreeable.

## FOR THE OTHER PARTY MEMBERS

Players intending to roleplay lawful characters can try to work in some reason to not want to turn on the rogue. One technique is to create a backstory that involves the rogue. Maybe the rogue is the younger brother you promised your parents to look after or a cousin your mother has begged you to help. Maybe you grew up together, and your fond memories of childhood keep you from turning him in, despite his proclivities.

The two adventurers don't have to necessarily have a lengthy, shared past. It could be a one-off event that's caused you to think kindly of him. Maybe the rogue once saved your life, on purpose or even accidentally, and you now feel an obligation to put up with a certain level of criminality. Did he once run into you on the street in the process of running from authorities, unwittingly knocking you out of the way of an oncoming threat? Did his activities cause you to miss work and avoid a terrorist attack?

Maybe the thief merely reminds another party member of someone he cares about. Does the rogue look like your deceased younger brother, or talk like a favorite relative? This kind of ineffable connection can be enough to justify not wanting the rogue to come to harm.

Another option is a shared external affiliation. You could work for the same company, worship the same deity, or belong to the same secret fraternity. Higher-ups or compatriots might not look kindly on you turning over one of their own, and your own continued association with the group might require you to put up with behavior you would otherwise refuse to tolerate in other circumstances.

Keep in mind that these connections don't require anyone in the group to *like* the rogue. Friendship or fond feelings aren't necessary to prevent turning the rogue in. Indeed, hating each other – while still allowing for the rogue to exist in the same company – can be a lot of fun for the group.

## FOR THE GM

One way for the GM to help ensure that the party doesn't turn on the rogue is to make him integral to the plot. This doesn't mean that the rogue must be the protagonist of the story. Rather, he could be the only one who knows how to get to the wizard's hidden keep or have the only vehicle that can get everyone to the next destination. Maybe the traps in the dungeon will only respond to one who is a descendant of the king who built it. Give the party a reason to want to keep the rogue around (outside of his "professional" skills), at least for a while. Hopefully, after he builds up good will or proves himself, the party will no longer want to turn him in for the reward money.

The GM may also need to reflect on how best to model the rogue's abilities in the game. Thief interests include a lot of solo activities – robbing houses, picking pockets, sneaking around, etc. – which he can't do with plate-mailed allies hanging around. Often, being effective means separating from the party. This can lead to ill will from the rest of the gamers if they feel as if the rogue (and his player) is taking up all the GM's time.

A few methods can minimize this effect while still allowing the rogue to engage in these activities. One is to streamline the thieving process to one die roll per "job" or per type of activity, regardless of how many jobs the rogue intends to pull. For example, if the rogue slips out after bedtime to case a few houses, just do one stealth roll and one search roll and apply the results to all the houses. Or, just do one "casing" roll that incorporates both types of skills (perhaps by averaging multiple skills, depending on the game system).

Another option is to make sure the rest of the party has something equally important and interesting to do while the rogue adventures solo. They might be put in charge of devising a strategy for the next encounter; given a roleplaying opportunity to play out; or set up with an in-character game (say, dice or cards), with the results earning them something of value in game (such as information, money, or an object that comes with solo-opportunity plot hooks of its own). A welcome side effect of this may be to show the rogue player what a good time the group has without him, perhaps encouraging him to limit his solo activities in the future.

If scheduling permits, the rogue's extracurricular activities could happen at the end of a session; game those actions with the player after everyone else has gone home. Alternatively, it may be possible to deal with the thieving some other time, via email or phone or at a separate meeting, if those actions aren't going to directly affect the rest of the adventure.

## FOR THE ROGUE

One option for the rogue is to play a “good” character. This allows the player to create someone with rogue abilities that isn’t going to be a liability to the rest of the party. Examples include a reformed thief or someone who learned these skills legally; see below for some suggestions. Such a hero won’t engage in game-derailing activities, and thus shouldn’t be a moral problem for the rest of the group.

For those who don’t want to play someone strictly good, another option is to curtail those illicit activities. This doesn’t mean refraining entirely from thieving, but rather being selective – don’t go out every night or take every opportunity for larceny that presents itself. Minimizing the need for the GM’s solo attention may prevent the party from wanting to exclude the rogue.

Finally, if you can’t be good, be loveable. A charismatic character can earn a lot of leeway from the rest of the party by being entertaining. Play a rogue with a great sense of humor, for example, or one that has an interesting obsession or hobby that amuses the other group members. (This will probably only work if the *players* find him funny, though . . .)

Being loveable can also include being willing to play the hero; saving fellow party members from certain death earns a lot of good will. It can be an interesting challenge to come up with a valid, in-character reason to do this . . . especially if the rogue isn’t normally a good person.

### Rogue-Like Character Archetypes

The following character types aren’t thieves, but share a lot of the same skills. Playing one of these professions will allow you to use rogue skills without being an outlaw.

*Circus Performer or Carnival Kid:* People who grow up in these environments often have a lot of unusual skills. Acrobatics, sleight of hand, and dancing are all fairly obvious, but also consider exceptional social skills. Many such individuals have learned to spot marks, entertain crowds, and draw attention.

*Government Agent:* Spies, agents, and other intelligence operatives are trained with skills similar to those possessed by thieves. They’re tasked with catching rogues and other criminals and are thus usually interested in upholding the law, not breaking it.

*The Magician’s Assistant:* Spending several hours a day watching someone perform tricks will certainly result in you picking up a few things. The magician’s assistant can be well-versed in sleight of hand, showmanship, and the finer workings of traps and other devices.

*Actor and Showman:* Actors often have to learn different skills to better perform their roles. An actor who once played a master thief might possess some of the same skills (if at a lower level than the real thing). Actors are usually quite good at charismatic and social skills: deception, intuition, and – of course – acting. They might also have stage combat training, dancing, acrobatics, or other physical skills that require high dexterity.

*The Reformed Thief:* Sure, maybe you were once a bad guy, but you’ve seen the light. A reformed thief will still be able to do all of the things he once did, only now he uses those skills to help instead of harm. How you left your former profession can also make for a good backstory with plenty of hooks.

*Oliver Twist:* A criminal-raised child (like *Oliver Twist*) or one groomed to be a thief will have the skills but not necessarily the

desire to use them. This is similar to the reformed thief, but without the criminal record or the change of heart.

*Locksmith:* Locksmiths learn the fine art of picking locks, but not with the intention of committing crimes. This affinity for lock-work might also give them an advantage with traps and other tests requiring manual dexterity.

*Hacker:* In modern or futuristic campaigns, someone with programming skills can function very much like an old-school thief. They might be particularly good at cracking security, breaking electronic locks, or introducing viruses into a target’s electronic systems to create a distraction.

*Maintenance Worker:* The humble maintenance worker probably possesses a wide range of skills that could be used for nefarious purposes. He might know how to pick locks, avoid security features, or mix chemicals to produce ill effects – all for perfectly benign reasons: He forgot his keys once and had to break in, learned which cleaning chemicals to never use together, and avoided security cameras when sneaking off for unscheduled breaks. They’ll also possess mechanical skills for repair work, which might be useful for trap-disarming situations.

*Private Eye:* Surveillance, tracking, and deductive reasoning are all skills that a private eye is likely to have. Not criminals but not law enforcement, a private eye can operate on the edges of society. A distaste for black-and-white moral codes and a willingness to sometimes bend the rules is a benefit in his line of work, giving him the skills and the temperament to act as a rogue in the party.

*Thieves respect property;  
they merely wish the  
property to become their  
property that they may  
more perfectly respect it.*

– G.K. Chesterton,  
*The Man Who  
Was Thursday*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan McDonald has been writing professionally since 2006, specializing in gaming, crafting, and cooking. Megan runs games at conventions and for friends, and has been playing roleplaying games (computer, tabletop, and play-by-email) for 15 years. Her life goals include being the first person to win a Pulitzer Prize for a video-game tie-in novel, and playing the voice of the computer in a movie, television show, or video game.

# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

## LOOK AT WHAT'S ALREADY IN THE CLOSET

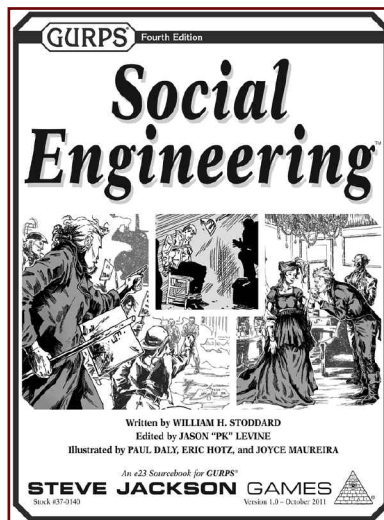
BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Sometimes being a good rogue means not changing your tactics, but getting the most out of the resources you already have. As I looked over a list of recent *GURPS* releases, I realized how many are especially suitable for shadowy types. Here, then, is an examination of some titles from the past year or so of releases, and how they intersect with more unsavory interests.

### A SOCIAL-EST MANIFESTO?

The expanded and consolidated options of *GURPS Social Engineering* are a great boon for nefarious adventurers. Many players – myself included – get into the habit of defining “rogues” as “guys who pick pockets and disarm traps.” However, they’re also the ones who trick the guards with some idle chitchat, put feelers on the streets to get word on unusual activity, or engage in elaborate con games.

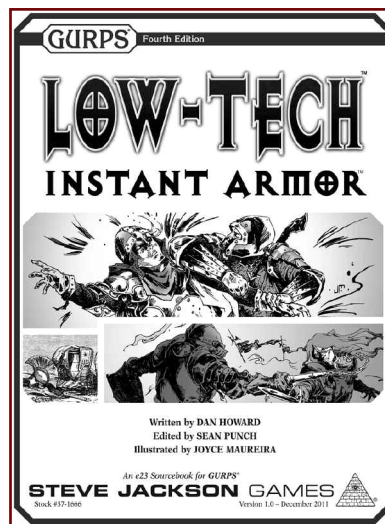
From a character-design standpoint, it can be useful to look through *Social Engineering* to see if any possibilities there spark ideas. From there, it’s simple to determine which skills and advantages work to implement those malicious activities. In PDF form, *Social Engineering* also makes it easy to search for existing



skills on a rogue’s character sheet and see what options that opens up.

### WEAR WEIGHT . . . WAIT! WHERE?

In a fantasy/medieval campaign, thieves often need to make some of the most difficult design decisions about their gear – every extra ounce of protection or weaponry is an ounce less of loot! *GURPS Low-Tech: Instant Armor* makes fiddling with various options so much simpler: “What do I gain if I just wear leather only over my chest?” Or: “If I need to drop my gloves, how much do I need to steal to make it worthwhile?” It may not seem like much, but having the discrete pieces readily available opens up new possibilities for the discriminating cutpurse.



### “TEAM C, YOU INFILTRATE THE MARKETPLACE . . .”

One fun but little-explored concept for many rogues is the criminal network. *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 15: Henchmen* opens up the doors of that line (and, for intrepid tinkerers, other *GURPS* games) for having a bunch of lower-powered minions able to do your bidding. If you’ve ever fancied yourself commanding a batch of irregulars, consider being a lower-powered adventurer who’s sunk a bunch of points into a group of underlings. (That “11-20” column on p. 26 of *Henchmen* should prove especially inspirational . . .)

## POINT, SET, MATCH!

As far as radically altering the face of *GURPS*, there might not be a more revolutionary (yet fully optional) supplement than *GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys*. To explain why, I'm going to talk about an unrelated game.

Back in my days of *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, my character maxed out his Theology skill (starting with a high initial skill and slowly increasing it as the campaign progressed). This cost an untold gob-pile of character points, and it never came up in game enough to justify the expense, but it fully fit with the concept. However, it might have been an interesting to have been true to the concept – “my hero is really good at this not-terribly-common skill” – but in a different way.

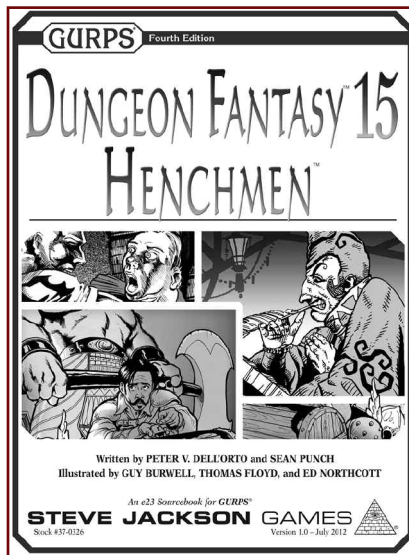
*Impulse Buys* expanded and unified the concept of buying successes using character points in *GURPS*. Now, instead of being at the mercy of spending 20 points on a skill to get it to a high-enough level where you can be reasonably confident in your abilities, you can just toss a point or three at the roll itself and be assured success. The interesting thing is that – from a munchkinly point of view – if a skill isn't used much, it can be more effective to dump the points you would have spent on the skill into a “pool” of points you can draw upon to be automatically successful.

For example, let's say you're playing a rogue who's basically good (p. 37), but still has the skills a rogue might have. By the character concept, you decide that – if he wanted to – he could make a living as pickpocket. Rather than dump (say) 24 points into Pickpocket to get it to attribute+5, spend 1-4 points to bring it to a much more modest level, then choose to purchase successes as needed. If you don't expect to pickpocket more than 10 times in the course of using the character, it's cheaper to spend the points on successes than the skill itself. (Plus, there's the fact that dribbling out 20 points over the course a character's life may be less painful than dropping them up front in a skill.) In fact, you might even be able to codify this in a quirk or two.

### Successful at (Ability)

If you have this quirk, you will always spend any points necessary (if possible) to buy success on that ability's roll. For example, if you critically fail at a Traps roll but have the Successful at Traps quirk, you will spend the 3 points to make it a successful.

If you don't have the necessary points, the GM might require you to use one of the options under *Paying Fate's Price* from *Impulse Buys* to pay for this – especially if you've



craft will be *exceptional*.

It is possible to combine the Successful and Unbelievable quirks. This means you will always spend the points needed to turn any roll of that ability into a critical success.

shirked this quirk too often by making sure you're out of character points!

### Unbelievable at (Ability)

This is similar to Successful at (Ability), above, except you are ensuring that – whenever you have a successful use of the ability – you will spend any bonus points needed to make it a critical success. (It does *not* require you to spend points to ensure success in the first place!) Curiously, this ends up being *less* limiting at lower levels of skill; if you never roll a success, you never need to pay to upgrade it to a critical success. This can be fun from a roleplaying standpoint: You may not be very good at cooking, but if you do manage not to burn yourself in the kitchen, what you

### Future Tense

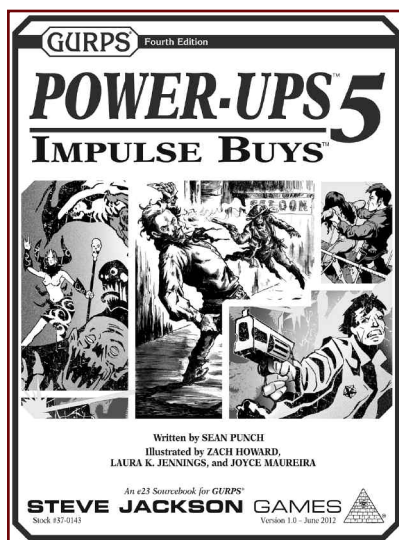
Although this issue mostly deals with past and present criminal activity, we'd be remiss if we didn't point out quite probably the most useful treatise on futuristic felonies ever released. Despite the name, *Transhuman Mysteries* isn't just useful to those playing in the *Transhuman Space* line. It details a mind-blowing assortment of tomorrow's wrongdoings – what the criminals of tomorrow try to do, and how authorities try to stop them. It's essential and inspirational reading for high-tech hijinks.

### Other Options

*Impulse Buys* contains a plethora of other options especially appropriate for thieves. Fortune often favors rogues, and spending points to get a bit of serendipitous edge is well within many such concepts. Again, reserving pools of points specifically for this purpose can make for interesting character concepts. Rather than spend points at character creation on Luck or Serendipity, keep those points aside to tweak more targeted rolls. It may not be the most point efficient, but it can certainly open up new possibilities.

## 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. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.



# ODDS AND ENDS

## NOT SO UNSAVORY

*Dealing With Rogues* (pp. 36-37) includes a number of ideas for making “heroic” characters with the skills of a thief. These ideas show how to turn typically unsavory activities into something more noble.

*Pockpicketing:* The adventurer rogue gets wind of a vast conspiratorial pickpocketing plot against prominent business people. The heroes have a way to trace stolen objects (tracking devices, magical beacon, etc.), if they can get them in the hands of the thieves. Unfortunately, the heroes aren’t trusted by the victims (or, alternatively, the criminal network will learn if the PCs interact directly with the targets). The plan? Inverse pickpocketing: Plant traceable objects on the victims that will hopefully be stolen by the thieves, and follow that item back to their lair. It’s a plan so crazy, it just might work. (Another option is to inverse the inverse: Some of the heroes discover unusual items planted on their persons . . . and then catch thieves trying to steal them back?! The PCs are now in the middle of a strange plot.)

*I’ve Got Your Back:* Parasitic creatures have taken control of powerful individuals it would be best not to harm (the royal court, the entire ruling council, or the like). The rogue needs to kill the entities without being seen . . . and without harming the infected individuals. This may be the only time the thief gets to backstab the king *and* get lauded as a hero for doing so!

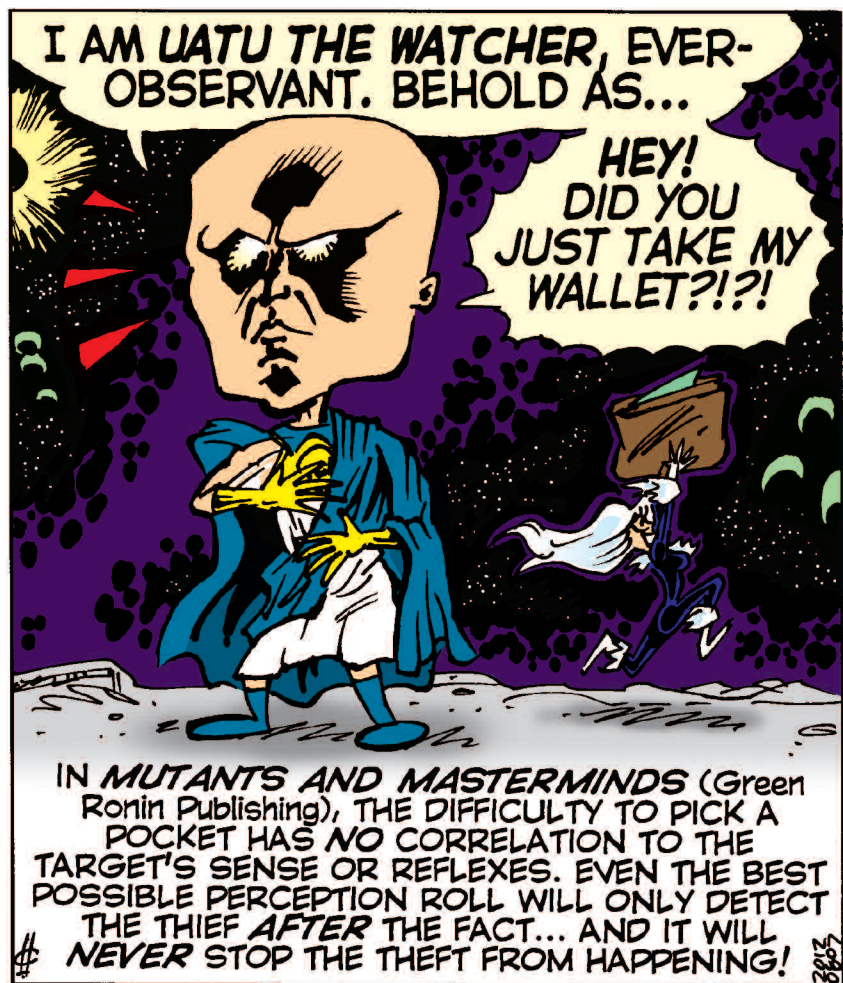
*Take Only Prisoners, Leave Only Deadly Hazards:* This dungeon has a large number of traps. Fortunately the rogue is exceptional at disarming them. Unfortunately, the dungeon is the domain of a powerful spirit who is more than a match for the heroes. It knows all aspects of the dungeon . . . including whether any of its precious traps have been set off. The heroes need to sneak through the dungeon, avoiding signs of the spirit, *and* make it past all the traps without leaving them so damaged that the entity will know they have been tampered with. (As a supplemental complication, the heroes need to rescue a clueless nonadventurer from the center of the dungeon. Getting back through the dungeon with a wriggling mundane without setting off traps? Trickier.)

*This Doorway Is Broken:* This door automatically locks every five seconds, and each

point on the margin of success on a Lockpicking roll causes it to open to a different destination: Success by 1 makes it open in one spot, success by 2 opens to another locale, etc. *Failure* on this roll causes it to open to its mundane “real world” destination. A critical success creates a gateway to heaven, while a critical failure has it open a portal to hell.

# MURPHY’S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



Got a *Murphy's Rule* of your own? Send it to [murphy@sjgames.com](mailto:murphy@sjgames.com)

## ABOUT *GURPS*

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

*New supplements and adventures.* *GURPS* continues to grow – see what’s new at [gurps.sjgames.com](http://gurps.sjgames.com), or visit [www.warehouse23.com](http://www.warehouse23.com).

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

*Internet.* Visit us on the World Wide Web at [www.sjgames.com](http://www.sjgames.com) for errata, updates, Q&A, and much

more. To discuss *GURPS* with SJ Games staff and fellow gamers, come to our forums at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com). The *Pyramid* web page is [pyramid.sjgames.com](http://pyramid.sjgames.com).

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

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

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

## STUCK FOR AN ADVENTURE? NO PROBLEM.

**e23** sells high-quality game adventures  
and supplements in PDF format.

- Get complete sample adventures free for *GURPS*, *In Nomine*, and *Traveller*!
- PDFs from the major players in online publishing: Ronin Arts, Ken Hite, Atlas Games, and 01 Games.
- New gems from up-and-coming publishers, like Atomic Sock Monkey Press and Expeditious Retreat Press.
- Digital editions of out-of-print classics, from Oracles and the complete run of ADQ to *GURPS* China and *GURPS* Ice Age.
- Fully searchable files of *GURPS Fourth Edition* supplements.
- Original material for *Transhuman Space* and *In Nomine*, with new *GURPS* supplements from Phil Masters, David Pulver, Sean Punch, and William Stoddard!
- Buy it once; have it always. Download your purchases again whenever you need to.



Download ● Print ● Play  
**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

e23 is part of Warehouse 23, the online store at Steve Jackson Games.  
Warehouse 23 is also the official Internet retailer for Atlas Games, Ninja Burger, and many other publishers.  
Visit us today at [www.warehouse23.com](http://www.warehouse23.com) for all your game STUFF!