

PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/5 March '09

**HORROR
& SPIES**

THE X-TERMINATORS



by Sean Punch

**NEW GURPS ADVENTURE!
A VERY COLD WAR**

by James L. Cambias

THE BLACK CHAMBER

by J. Edward Tremlett

THE BRICKS OF MARÛ-DÛ

by Steven Marsh

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Article Colors

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

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

Dark Blue: *GURPS* Features

Purple: Other Features

Green: Recommended Reading

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IN THIS ISSUE

Men have spied on threats (and each other) since they first discovered shadows. But the shadows can hold secrets older than humanity. What happens when you combine espionage with horror? Secrets battling secrets . . . and the theme to this month's *Pyramid*.

Pyramid brings you more support for your *GURPS* campaigns with *The X-Terminators* by Sean Punch, *GURPS* line editor and agent of [FNORD]. Building off *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*, this article brings you three new templates designed to ramp up your monster-hunting adventures. Use them in conjunction with the three types of loadouts in *GURPS Loadouts: Monster Hunters*.

Once you've got your characters, drop them into the newest *GURPS* adventure, *A Very Cold War*; set at an icy Swedish research station. It's written by James L. Cambias, co-author of *GURPS Space* (among others).

For those who prefer espionage to monster hunting, introduce the group to *The Black Chamber* (revealed by J. Edward Tremlett). This super-secret organization tracks the progress of those who want to bring about the end times.

Need something for the PCs to chase after? Whether they're part of the Black Chamber or stumble onto the secret by themselves, *The Bricks of Marû-Dû* (detailed by Steven Marsh) is just the thing to seek.

In this month's *Random Thought Table*, we look at what the horror and espionage genres bring to each other; why *are* they such a good match?

Code Words provides some props to lure investigators into the horror. GMs can make their own secret messages, or use the ones provided for two articles in this issue.

Odds and Ends offers more useful bits, including a laugh amid the growing horror with *Murphy's Rules*. Two columnists give their views of other interesting material for horror, espionage, and conspiracy games with *Recommended Reading*.

The issue closes with a *Last Word* from Eloy Lasanta, CEO of Third Eye Games and creator of *Apocalypse Prevention, Inc.* Find out what he has to say about the intersection of horror and espionage.

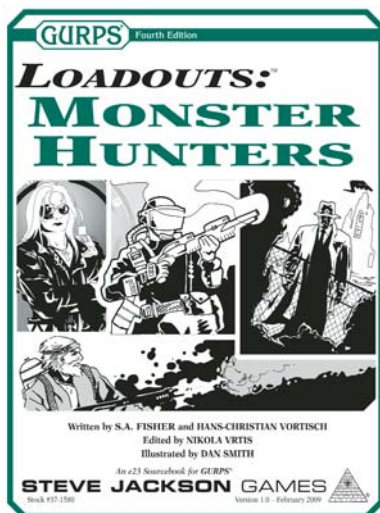
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FROM THE EDITOR

You asked; we listened! This issue contains the first full adventure we've seen in the newest version of *Pyramid*. Check out *A Very Cold War* and heat up your **GURPS** horror-and-spies game.



bad guys. *The Bricks of Marû-Dû* can serve as an adventure series or even campaign framework for many established games, including **GURPS Black Ops**.

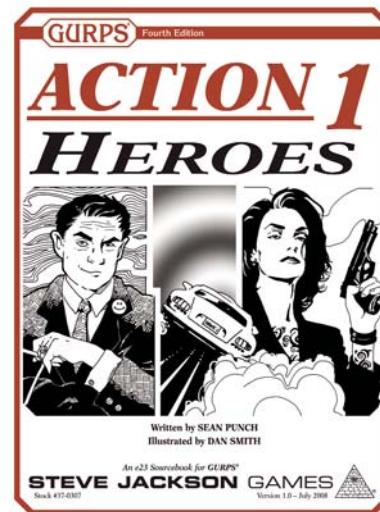
As we continue to experiment with the electronic format, this month we're including a JavaScript program that allows you to generate your own code pages like those featured in *Code Words*.

We've also maintained our tradition of including lots of modular material, designed to be useful for as many campaigns as possible. Sean Punch's *X-Terminators* nicely dovetails with several recent books (**GURPS Action 1: Heroes** and **GURPS Loadouts: Monster Hunters**, pictured here). *The Black Chamber* can be plugged into many horror/espionage games, as good or

As ever, we enjoy getting your thoughts about the magazine. You can write to us at pyramid@sjgames.com, or – for comments intended as part of a larger discussion – you can post to the Steve Jackson Games Forums at forums.sjgames.com, under the *Pyramid* sub-forum.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

We love to get your feedback! Please feel free to send letters and comments to the address above. In addition, we're looking for "New Tricks for Old Dogs"; did you think of a clever use for an article in a past issue? Maybe you use the Vulture Squad as a PC group for a one-shot, or maybe the Perfect Defense imbuements inspired an entire campaign focused on magical armor. If so, e-mail us a brief (no more than 400 words) description of what you did and how well it worked.



The game system is going forward and breaking new ground . . . and it's getting fun. Pyramid is acting as a multiplier to this excellence and excitement.

– Jeffr0, on the Steve Jackson Games forums

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A VERY COLD WAR

AN ATOMIC HORROR ESPIONAGE ADVENTURE FOR *GURPS*

BY JAMES L. CAMBIAS

On October 1, 1946, the submarine *U.S.S. Toro*, cruising on the surface near Narvik, tracked an unusual pair of meteors. They were moving west-to-east, then both *changed course* to the southeast. Their impact site was the waters of Lake Tornetrask in far northern Sweden – confirmed by observers at the Abisko Scientific Research Station on the lake. This incident sets the stage for this *GURPS* adventure; although it takes place in Sweden in 1947, the time frame and location can be changed to better suit the needs of the campaign (see p. 15).

In the past year, Sweden has been plagued by “ghost rocket” sightings – strange projectiles or lights passing overhead. (See the top box on p. 11 for more information.) The first confirmed impact forms the basis for this adventure. Both Swedish and American authorities are anxious to learn the true nature of the “ghost rockets” – are they Soviet missiles? Or something stranger?

Ghost rockets over Sweden!

The U.S. government has assembled a multidisciplinary team of investigators from the armed services, the defunct Office of Strategic Services, the new Atomic Energy Commission, and National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (in other words, the heroes). Because Sweden is a neutral country and wants to remain that way, the team must be civilian; military officers should be in civvies rather than uniform. If the team wants special equipment, the Navy can lend a couple of “frogman” suits equipped with first-generation SCUBA gear, plus a towed metal detector to find the rockets under the waters of the lake.

The mission objective is simple: Recover one or both of the objects from the lake, determine what they are, and document everything. Cooperate with the Swedes but don't reveal anything about American aircraft, rocketry projects, or knowledge of similar strange events.

ON THE SCENE

It takes two full days to fly from New York to Stockholm (via Newfoundland, Ireland, and London). From there the heroes hop to the Swedish air base at Lulea, at the far northern end of the Baltic Sea.

At Lulea the investigators meet Captain Matthias Larssen of the Swedish Royal Air Force, their liaison for this mission. Larssen is in the Intelligence branch, which is in charge of “aerial phenomena investigation.” He is very interested in recovering one of these ghost rockets. During the eight-hour drive from Lulea to Abisko, the captain can give the heroes a complete account of the ghost-rocket phenomenon (see top box on p. 11). As their car pulls into the tiny lakeside village at sunset, the first flakes of snow are starting to fall.

Captain Matthias Larssen

201 points

Captain Matthias Larssen of the Swedish Royal Air Force is a skilled and hardworking officer in the Technical Intelligence branch. His job is to gather and analyze information on foreign technology. He is also a Soviet spy. Ever since the Germans invaded Norway, he has been passing information to the Russians. During the war, it was on Nazi technology, but now he concentrates on letting his masters know what the West has discovered about Soviet hardware.

Given that horror often encompasses supernatural or magical abilities and espionage often incorporates high-tech or advanced gear, combining the two means that many gaming supplements can be used as support material.

THE BLACK CHAMBER

AN AGENCY FOR DECRYPTING THE END TIMES

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

The National Security Agency, known as “The Puzzle Palace” and “No Such Agency,” is charged with intercepting and decoding foreign communications and intelligence, and protecting Americans from suffering the same fate – or so they tell the world. The Agency’s full range of activities is highly classified, as are its exact budget, number of employees, and full remit. Even those who work at its headquarters haven’t a clue as to the whole.

Perhaps that is just as well. Since 1952, the NSA’s most classified duty – known only to a small, insular body within it – has been to monitor for signs of the “End Times,” as prophesied by alien gods, extra- and ultra-terrestrial intelligences, and their human (and half-human) worshippers. Reports of numerous encounters with the Mythos were painstakingly collected and cross-referenced by a faction of the famed Black Chamber after World War I. “Decommissioned” in 1929, the body’s secret work was shuffled back into the State Department, where it continued in the hands of a few, brave people until it found a better home in the NSA.

Today, the Black Chamber uses the Agency’s technology and techniques for its lonely, mind-shattering mission: collating and deciphering information, and spying on the ultimate enemy. Where possible, they have pockets of activity annihilated; mostly, however, they take a “wait and see” approach, knowing too well that the End Times are coming and there may be little they can do about it. Still, they remain hopeful.

This article presents the secret history of the Black Chamber. Also included is a description of what the Chamber “knows,” how it does its business, and what steps it takes to fight “the enemy” when it can. The Black Chamber should be useful in any horror games that permit inspirations and possible sourcing from H.P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos. The secret group could be a campaign patron, an anonymous (and dangerous) sponsor

or enemy, the bloody end of a long trail of bodies, or purely background for such campaigns.

Assumptions of the Black Chamber

This article is assumed to take place in the world of H.P. Lovecraft’s Mythos, and any books that provide information or details on those works can be used as the threat the Black Chamber fights against (especially, of course, the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG). However, there is nothing so integral to its concept that these references cannot be replaced with other Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. As such, by changing the names and natures of its enemies, the Black Chamber can be inserted into various games, such as *Delta Green*, *Conspiracy X*, *GURPS Horror*, *GURPS Black Ops*, *GURPS Cthulhupunk*, and many others.

BLACK CHAMBER, BLACK FILE

The Army and State Department created the Black Chamber as a joint entity after World War I, using techniques and personnel its forerunner, MI-8, had cultivated during the conflict. The war had proven that America needed peacetime code-breakers, but at the time, America regarded espionage as something done only begrudgingly. As Henry L. Stimson famously (and facetiously) remarked, “Gentlemen do not read each other’s mail.”

Determining standard gear for agents can be a big time saver. As a potential starting point, check out GURPS Loadouts: Monster Hunters.

About GURPS

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

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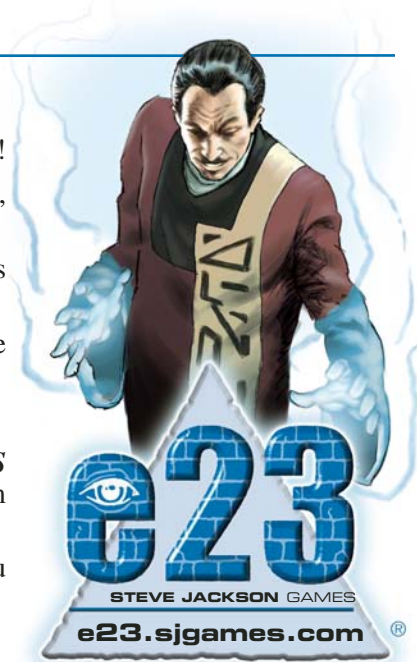
Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all **GURPS** releases are available on our website – see above.

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

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