

PYRAMID[®]

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URBAN FANTASY II

SAFE AS HOUSES

by Christopher R. Rice

TRAITS FOR TOWN

by Sean Punch

CITY BOTCHES

by Phil Masters

BELIAL'S BASTARDS

by David L. Pulver

HUNTING THE CABAL

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THE WRAITH OF PRECINCT 13

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FESTIVALS OF THE UNKNOWN

by Jessica Wolfman

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IN THIS ISSUE

The streets have a magic and life of their own . . . as the heroes might learn, if they're nosy or unlucky. This issue revisits the intersection of urban roads and fantasy lanes, with incredible results.

When you're running from things that go bump in the night, you want to go somewhere that's *Safe as Houses*. Learn **GURPS** mechanics for what makes a structure easier to defend from paranormal threats, plus relevant traits for monsters. **GURPS Horror** (p. 77) told you what a Bad Place is; this feature tells you how it gets that way – and how to cleanse it.

Towns aren't just for selling your loot! Sean Punch, mayor for life of the **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** line, expands the possibilities of that series with *Traits for Town*. This indispensable guide tells adventurers what works (and how!) in urban environments.

A love of motorcycles can band folks together from all walks of life . . . or unlife! In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of **GURPS Technomancer** – delves into the history and members of *Belial's Bastards*, a monstrous motorcycle club that controls a little U.S. town in any urban-fantastic game.

It's bad when random supernatural entities threaten the sanctity of human dwellings. When they come together for a purpose, it's time to go *Hunting the Cabal*. Find out how you can combine **GURPS Cabal** with **GURPS Monster Hunters** to take your urban-fantasy campaign to a new level. You'll get tips for designing a "conspiracy of monsters" and how to include it into campaigns, a new lens, tips for using templates, suggestions for tweaking the Ritual Path Magic system to make it "Hermetically sealed," and more.

When a bad cop gets even worse, he becomes *The Wraith of Precinct 13*. This threat has systemless details on background and motivation, plus **GURPS** stats for what might be the revenge-filled revenant . . . perhaps one of many!

Stir up urban encounters with *Festivals of the Unknown*. This set of tables helps you decide on the who, how, and why of holidays for any game's setting.

Spells that go wrong within municipal limits are *City Botches*. Phil Masters – archmage of **GURPS Thaumatology** – examines the variety of urban-specific disasters that can occur with the **GURPS** spell-failure table.

Random Thought Table reveals a secret that's staring you in the face, while Odds and Ends seems oddly familiar (at least, it will eventually) and features a Murphy's Rules that's as magical as a punch in the jaw. Get ready for a night on the town; it could be the time of your life!

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.)

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features

Purple: Systemless Features

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FROM THE EDITOR

THE CITY NEVER SLEEPS

Once you view urban environments as aboveground dungeons, the world is never the same. And if they're teeming with magic or fantastic elements . . . well, it's like the perfect melding of danger and 24-hour pizza.

This is our second issue focusing on the magic of cities (and vice versa). We look at some secrets hiding in plain sight (pp. 35-36) and other secrets that could hide more firmly in the shadows. *Pyramid* prides itself on providing both ready-to-use campaign-building material and bits that can be added to your own campaigns. This issue is no exception, with an assortment of material that should find homes in many thau-maturgic towns.

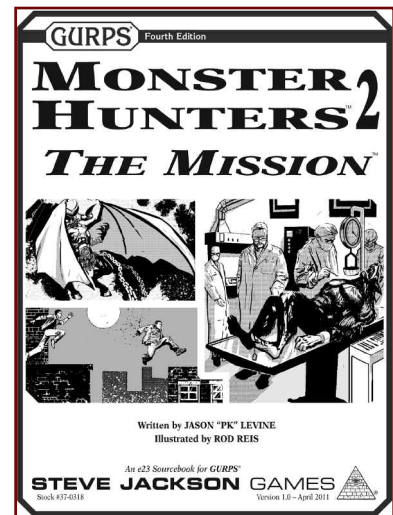
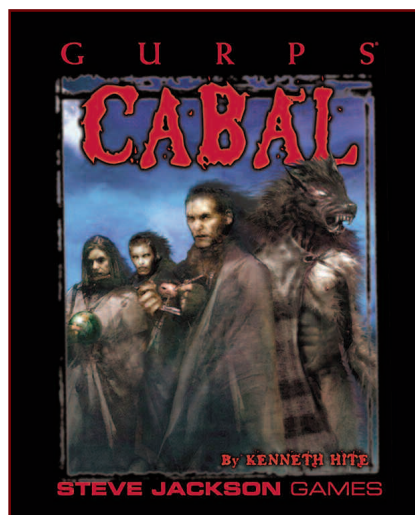
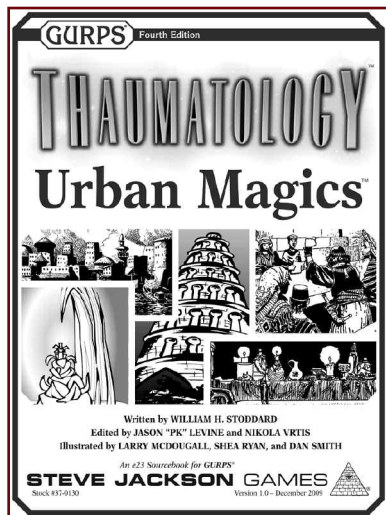
WE BUILT THIS CITY ON ORCS AND TROLLS?

One challenge we have when we make this kind of issue is trying to figure out exactly *how* you're using these articles.

That's where you come in. Every issue we encourage you to write to us (privately or publicly), to let us know how we're doing. As we zero in on our fifth year of this volume of *Pyramid* (has it been almost five years already?!), long-time readers are aware that we've made a number of adjustments over the years; we've added more of some kinds of articles, gotten rid of some feature types, and tried to make this the mag *you* want. As the old headline said in the first volume of *Pyramid*, "We're reading your mail." Just like urban developers (see what we did there?), it's an ongoing process, but it's one we're committed to – just like we hope you'll continue to let us know what's working for you and what isn't.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of writing to us, how much fun was this trip to the city? Was it a magical time or a miscast spell? Let us know privately at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the magi at forums.sjgames.com. (And if you participate in – or *start!* – any conversations about *Pyramid* on any other online venues, let us know! Our all-seeing eye can't be *everywhere* . . .)



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WHAT DOES A THRESHOLD PROTECT?

Threshold energy is strongest in physical barriers (such as walls, floors, ceilings, roofs, and so on), but also manifests around portals (windows, doors, chimneys, etc.). This means that most Thresholds do not extend further than the walls of the dwelling they are bound to.

A powerful enough Threshold (a final TR of 15 or higher) *also* protects the property around it, and any substructures attached to it (such as porches or balconies). Treat any substructures and property (including any buildings on the property) as if they had a Threshold equal to the main dwelling's rating *minus* five. Family chapels, cemeteries, and the like are treated as having the main dwelling's *full* rating if they are hallowed, -5 if they are unhallowed, and -10 if they are blasphemed or profaned. This means a powerful enough Threshold *can* keep unwanted supernatural creatures off the property, much like holy ground (see below).

Threshold energy has difficulty collecting around impermanent or movable structures (like tents or RVs). When calculating such a structure's Threshold Rating, include an additional -5. Don't count this penalty when determining the effects of a damaged Threshold (see p. 9). Theoretically mobile structures that haven't moved, however, are not subject to this penalty.

This assumes all external parts of the house are protected equally; in some campaigns, this might not be true. The spooky basement and creepy attic are staples of horror fiction, while windows and (closet or open) doors can be "gateways" for some beings. For such games, the GM can treat any basement or attic as having a lower Threshold than the rest of the dwelling. The dwelling's Threshold Rating minus two is fair for spooky areas, but the GM could assign as much as -5 for extreme locations, such as murder-site basements or attic-prisons. A particularly detailed GM could even assign individual rooms their own variable rating. This would work best in games revolving around haunted houses or similar locations.

For further information on haunted houses, see *Madness in the Floorboards* (p. 9).

HOW DOES A THRESHOLD PROTECT?

Threshold energy protects the occupants of its dwelling in the following ways.

- A Threshold's main benefit is its ability to keep out unwanted supernatural creatures. Whenever *any* creature with the feature "Affected by Thresholds" tries to enter a dwelling that has an active Threshold, it must make a Quick Contest of (ST + Will) / 2 vs. effective TR. Success allows entry, but the creature suffers an Affliction (p. B428) based on his margin of success: Agony for a margin of 0-1, Terrible Pain for a margin of 2-3, Severe Pain for a margin of 4-5, Moderate Pain for a margin of 6-7, or Topsy for a margin of 8-9, or none for a margin of 10+. If a creature fails by 3 or more, it's Nauseated for minutes equal to (Threshold Rating - HT; minimum of one minute) and cannot enter. Failure by 10 or more means the creature cannot *ever* enter that particular dwelling as long as it remains inhabited by the current inhabitants; the being must leave immediately. This restriction disappears if the entity gets voluntarily invited in.

- The protection extends to a supernatural creature's paranormal powers or abilities. Use the rules for magic, below.

- The Threshold affects certain forms of magic when cast against a dwelling's inhabitants, but only within the bounds of the Threshold. Whenever someone uses magic against those protected by a Threshold, he must make a Quick Contest of Will + Magery (or other applicable Talent) vs. its effective TR. Success means the spell functions normally; success by 10+ means the mage ignores the Threshold for 24 hours when casting spells. Failure on this roll means the caster suffers a penalty equal to the margin of his failure on all rolls pertaining to casting that spell; failure by 10 or more effectively nullifies the spell *and* means the caster cannot try to cast magic against that particular Threshold for (1d + margin of failure) hours.

Natural Places and Houses of Worship

The rules here assume Threshold energy only forms around dwellings the inhabitants consider "home." However, church and cemeteries were traditionally considered "holy ground" and thus inviolate to many supernatural beings. To represent this, treat churches and other places of worship as if they were dwellings, with clergy being their "occupants," even if they don't *live* there. Parishioners are treated as guests, unless they volunteer there frequently. Parsonages and rectories are usually treated as part of the church proper for the purposes of their Threshold Rating, but *can* have their own ratings at the GM's discretion.

Optionally, some natural places might have a Threshold without any (current and/or sapient) occupants, for whatever reason the GM likes. The GM picks the "heart" of a particular natural place and gives it a rating of 15 or more, while treating the surrounding area as if it were a

connected property (above). This could be generalized further, so that a specific *environment* has its own Threshold; e.g., rivers and other flowing bodies of water could prevent supernatural creatures from crossing them. The GM should restrict this to a few types of creature (e.g., vampires or ghosts) or add caveats (e.g., vampires cannot *physically* cross running water, but they can be carried over in a boat or other vehicle).

Even more radically, the GM could assume that certain *times* (day, night, dawn to dusk, etc.) have Thresholds. In such situations, the GM may decide a supernatural creature's lair is exempt from this and allow it to move freely – while inside. For example, the day could have a natural Threshold Rating of 20! None but the most powerful creatures of the night could be active during the day, with most being forced to stay wherever they were when the sun rose.

CABALISTIC HUNTERS

Using *Monster Hunters* templates to make Cabalistic characters is a natural fit. The following sections provide nuance and adjustments for creating “champions” (or villains) of the Cabal.

CABALISTIC MOTIVATIONS

While the forces that drive one to *join* the “Grand Conspiracy of Monsters” are as varied as those that compel monster *hunters*, the motivational lenses from *Monster Hunters 1* tend not to fit for most Cabalists. Instead, use the following lens, and see below for customization notes.

New Motivational Lens: Cabalist

15 points

You are a member of the Cabal – you’ve been accepted and initiated, selected your ultors and passers (below), and taken your oaths of secrecy. As a result, you’re *in*. You have access to the Cabal’s secret knowledge, and can present yourself to a local lodge when traveling and (hopefully) be received with at least passing hospitality. See *Illumination* (p. 22) for other potential ramifications of Initiation into the Order.

Advantages: Claim to Hospitality (Cabalistic Lodges) [5] and Security Clearance (Cabalistic Secrets) [5]. • 30 points chosen from among Ally (Cabalistic) [Varies], Contact (Cabalistic) [Varies], Contact Group (Cabalistic) [Varies], Patron (Cabalistic) [Varies], or template traits or customization suggestions (see below).

Ultors and Passers in Play

As mentioned under *Mutual Protection Society* (p. 21), all Cabalists have two *ultors* looking after them, and two *passers* for whom they look after. (See *Ultors and Passers*, *Cabal*, p. 25.) In practice, this is generally a wash for PC Cabalists . . . two Allies who you can only really count on in limited situations (often *after* your death), and an identical Duty to two others. If a player wishes (and the GM allows), a Cabalist character can pay points for more formidable and/or reliable ultors – Allies, or even a Patron – or designate a sidekick as one of his passers (no additional game effect). It may be tempting for a party of Cabalist PCs to go “round-robin,” designating each other as ultors and passers so that they only have to look out for teammates, but this means that no *outside* help can be counted upon if the group ever bites off more than it can chew.

Know Thy Enemy: The Cabal

Whether hunting Cabalists, or conspiring with them, monster hunters will find that certain skills are indispensable in ascertaining the ins-and-outs of the Cabal and its members: Hidden Lore (The Cabal) (A) IQ [2]; History (Esoteric) (H) IQ-1 [2]; Occultism (A) IQ [2]; Savoir-Faire (Magical) (E) IQ+1 [2]; Thaumatology (VH) IQ-2 [2]; and any skills relevant to the particular Cabalist(s) in question – who could be faeries, “rogue” witches, vampires, etc.

Disadvantages: Secret (Member of the Cabal – if you blatantly give away the Cabal’s Secret, such as their existence, or any of the secrets of Hermetic Magic, you’re a marked man; Possible Death) [-30].

Skills: Hidden Lore (The Cabal) (A) IQ [2] and Savoir-Faire (Magical) (E) IQ [1]. • Choose one skill from *Know Thy Enemy: The Cabal* (above).

Customization Notes

Accursed: Whether by birth or calamitous event, you’re a *freak*. You might be a vampire, embraced unwillingly into the dark folds of undeath; or a psi whose powers caused you to be ostracized. Either way, you probably joined the Cabal for its “mutual protection society” (p. 21) aspect, though it may have come to mean much more to you since then.

Ancient: You (or your “family” – whether that’s a sorcerously gifted human lineage, a vampiric bloodline, etc.) have been in the Cabal for centuries. Even if you haven’t been initiated into the Inner Circle yet, you’re as close to blood aristocracy as the Cabal has. You often tend to cling to the Old Ways – whatever those may have been in your day – and look down your nose on the whelps who play petty games in the night without properly honoring their Elders. You likely have a Patron, in the form of a powerful family or elder within the Cabal, or possibly some sort of Social Regard that applies to fellow Cabalists.

Expatriate/Fallen: You used to belong to some *other* supernatural faction – perhaps you’re an outcast angel who defied Heaven, or were on the losing side of a power-struggle in the *Pavane des Vampires* (*Cabal*, p. 23) – and joined the Cabal when something happened to expel you from that group. You may well have Enemies from your former life, as few such societies suffer turncoats gladly, but may also have the inside scoop on them (in the form of Hidden Lore, etc.).

Seeker: It was your curiosity that got you into this mess. You couldn’t help but seek out the occult, the Weird, the *other-than-normal* . . . and that brought you to the doorstep of the Conspiracy. Being the curious type, you decided that – rather than start a radio show or blog to “expose” Them – you’d poke around inside a little, see what *other* secrets they kept . . . and *ohh*, the wonderful secrets you’ve found . . .

KINDS OF CABALISTS

Most of the *supernatural* templates from *Champions* are suitable for Cabalist characters – primarily the inhuman, psi, sage, and witch. Other characters *could* fit (see *Other Templates*, p. 25), but in general, the Cabal only accepts those who are “more” (or less, depending on your point of view) than “merely human.”

Inhuman

Probably the most common type of Cabalist – not specifically *vampires* or *werewolves*, but inhumans in general, make up a plurality within the Cabal.

FESTIVALS OF THE UNKNOWN

BY JESSICA WOLFMAN

One aspect of creating realistic and interesting backgrounds for a world is its cultures' use of holidays. Holidays are a good way to show what a society, race, or religion sees as significant. These tables provide a quick method for the GM to design holidays. The table helps determine not only the reason for the day but also holiday traditions, which can be turned into potential hooks or opportunities for roleplaying. Arriving during a celebration can be an unexpected twist for the adventurers as they enter a new town or country (or planet, or dimension).

PURPOSE

Determining the purpose is the first step. Although there are many different reasons to have a holiday, they tend to fall into a few specific categories. Roll or pick from the following table. Roll 1d, 1d.

- 1, 1-2 – The holiday is the observation of a repetitive, *natural* event: an equinox or solstice, the end of the winter rains, the start of the new year, when the World Tree blooms, etc.
- 1, 2-4 – The holiday marks the time of planting or harvesting.
- 1, 5-6 – The holiday is a celebration of love, marriage, or fertility.
- 2, 1-2 – The holiday is a re-enactment of an important historical event, such as a famous battle or escape from a disaster.
- 2, 3-4 – The holiday is intended to appease, honor, frighten, or bring forth a specific kind of supernatural being, such as gods, demons, the dead, saints, or ancestor spirits.
- 2, 5-6 – The holiday marks the birth (or other form of arrival to the world) of a famous or holy person.
- 3, 1-2 – The holiday marks the death (or ascension or disappearance) of a famous or holy person.
- 3, 3-4 – The holiday is an observation of a religious revelation or miracle.
- 3, 5-6 – The holiday is a symbolic cleansing of sins, ignorance, sorrow, etc., or represents the symbolic renewal of purity or innocence.
- 4, 1-2 – The holiday is a celebration of independence, emancipation, armistice, or victory.
- 4, 3-4 – This holiday was declared holy (or unholy) by a god or other supernatural entity.
- 4, 5-6 – This holiday is a commemoration or observation of an important event. Roll 1d: 1-3 – a mundane event (the coronation of the king, the end of a war, the date a notable law was made, etc.); 4-6 – a supernatural event (the appearance of a god's avatar, the closing of the Gate to Hell, the slaying of the dragon that had devastated the kingdom, etc.).

- 5, 1-2 – The holiday honors a particular group of people (parents, soldiers, laborers, elves, etc.).
- 5, 3-4 – The holiday commemorates the founding of a country, organization, religion, etc.
- 5, 5-6 – The holiday is a day of penance or mourning.
- 6, 1-2 – The holiday is a festival of lights (to bring back the sun/goodness or to banish the dark/evil).
- 6, 3-4 – The holiday denotes a change in lifestyle, such as coming of age.
- 6, 5-6 – The holiday is used to demonstrate pride in something.

TRADITIONS

Holidays tend to have associated traditions: people put up decorations, buy gifts and candies, spend days cooking, wear a specific color, put on parades, dress up in costumes, camp out at stores for the sales, and more. For many, these traditions are the entire point of the holiday; *not* taking part is seen as strange, sad, or even blasphemous.

The GM may roll or pick as many times as he likes on the following table, although one to three events is usually enough. Roll 1d, 1d. Reroll results that contradict a previously chosen tradition.

- 1, 1 – The holiday is marked by revels, feasts, singing, dancing, games, and overindulgence. Parades, marches, pageants, or mock battles are held. Events that are normally banned – such as gambling, stage plays, or public drunkenness – may be allowed openly.
- 1, 2 – Roles are reversed. Members of the lowest classes are treated as nobility and vice versa, men and women take on the other's roles, etc.
- 1, 3 – People wear specific types of outfits, such as masks, full costumes, special jewelry, formal or traditional clothing, body or face paint, or nothing at all. People may also dress up their animals.
- 1, 4 – Light is important. Candles of a specific type, number, or color may be burned, perhaps over a period of days; people may decorate their houses with lights or wear them on their clothing; or torches (or sparklers or light sticks) may be carried, often in procession.
- 1, 5 – Bonfires are lit, so that something can be burned (perhaps in effigy), people can dance around them, or objects can be placed inside for purification.

ABOUT *GURPS*

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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.

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