


PYRAMID[®]



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TRAVELS AND TRIBULATIONS

MAGNIFICENT MENAGERIE

Christopher R. Rice

THE KLINIK NOVA

David L. Pulver

THE DEPARTMENT

Phil Masters

HAVE GAME, WILL TRAVEL

Jason Brick

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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

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- Brown:* In Every Issue
- Green:* Columnist
- Dark Blue:* GURPS Features
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IN THIS ISSUE

When you break it down, adventure gaming is generally about going to interesting places and dealing with problems both along the way and at your destination. This month in *Pyramid*, we look at the world through the eye of travelers, explorers, and those who encounter and resolve interesting situations.

Highly competent, highly dramatic Victorian-era heroes most certainly should inquire herein about *The Department of Unconventional Philosophical Resolutions*. Phil Masters – author of the recently released *GURPS Steampunk 2: Steam and Shellfire* – reveals the secrets of this British organization designed to deal with scientific situations that are a little *too* cutting edge. Find out what it takes to be an agent of the Department in terms of *GURPS Action* templates, what equipment agents typically have, ideas for campaigns, and information on how the setting for the Department fits into *GURPS Infinite Worlds*.

In the *GURPS Technomancer* setting, one of the big changes magic brought to Earth (known as Merlin to denizens of *Infinite Worlds*) was the creation and mutation of strange, dangerous creatures . . . including six new members of what may be puckishly thought of as *Merlin's Magnificent Menagerie*. Christopher R. Rice – co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* – presents you with manticores, lizards, storm scorpions, and more, suitable for a *Technomancer* game or (of course) waiting to make their way into *your* world. Each critter comes with complete *GURPS* stats.

The fate of your country is at stake, and your agency needs you to travel to *The Klinik Nova*, a medical facility in Switzerland. There, you must resolve the situation with the vicious heir to a mob before he can take over as its leader. In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Ultra-Tech* – offers a modern-day adventure outline that's perfect for *GURPS Action* or other high-octane games, and can even be translated to *Technomancer*. The outline includes a background, a timeline, room descriptions for the clinic, *GURPS* stats for key individuals, and a map of the building plus two handout versions that reflect variants the heroes might access depending on how they decide to accomplish their mission.

Going to a destination isn't just a means to an end; it can serve as the springboard for memorable adventure itself, provided your motto is *Have Game, Will Travel*. Long-time *Pyramid* contributor Jason Brick looks at how you can add realistic location details, travel challenges, and flavorful roleplaying opportunities for would-be tourists to your game.

This month's Random Thought Table expands on the notion of travel, with a few more ways to add to the allure of visiting new places.

Places to go, people to see, things to do . . . it's practically a hero's creed all by itself – and it's what's in store with this month's *Pyramid*!

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FROM THE EDITOR

STAMP YOUR OWN PASSPORT TO ADVENTURE

I was once stranded in Atlanta's airport overnight, as a result of an overbooked plane and no prospects for additional flights until the morning. I had no place to stay and was frugal (broke?) enough that I didn't want to try to get a hotel, so I just stayed at the airport. It was a surreal experience, this gargantuan structure, which had previously been a cacophonous hub of activity, now nearly silent by the dearth of people. Sleep deprivation probably contributed to this eeriness, and my mind filled with possibilities for gaming potential. (Several years later, I even turned some of the experience into the airport section of *D6 Adventure Locations*.)

My experience wasn't unique. I've read countless stories of being trapped at airports; some folks have even done amusing videos while there, the iPhone era allowing for on-the-fly filmmaking. In fact, I mention it to spark memories about aspects of your own travels that might prove sources of inspiration for adventures and character backgrounds. My philosophy in my gaming writing has been to encourage thinking

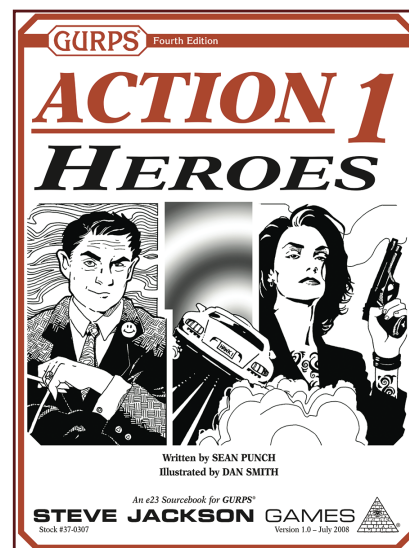
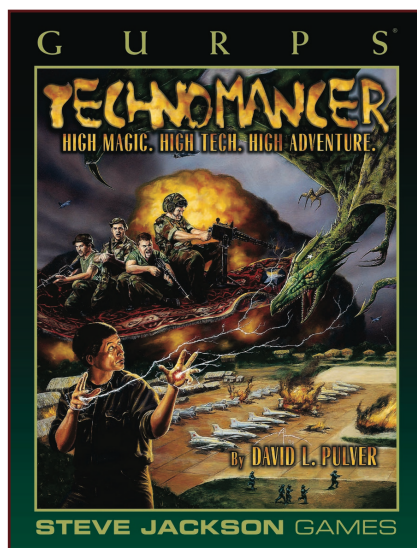
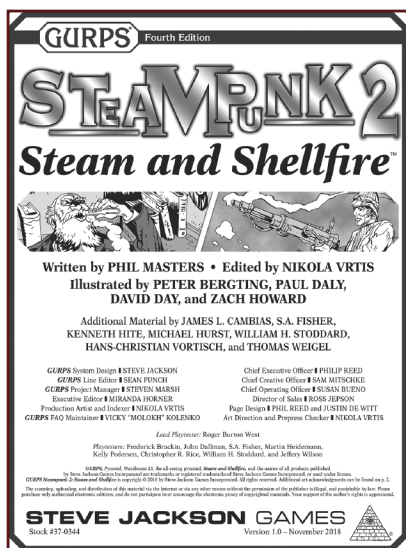
about things in new ways and hopefully to give you the tools you need to make your own gaming as awesome as possible.

This issue is devoted to looking at strange places with the eyes of a tourist. The James Bond or Indiana Jones films aren't exciting because they could take place in any abandoned warehouse; they're exciting because they go places we never can, meet people we never will, and do things we never dare.

They say that the very act of *anticipating* a vacation is often more enjoyable than the act of actually *being* on a vacation. Our heroic lives revolve around the notion of going to another world; don't sell the trip short. Enjoy the ride. But don't forget to watch out for the giant mutated lizards or criminal gang leaders on the way.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

We know you have your choice of gaming products, and we thank you for flying Air *Pyramid*. How well did this in-flight magazine work for you? We always like to hear from those who've traveled with us. Share your thoughts publicly at forums.sjgames.com, or privately via pyramid@sjgames.com.



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The Darkest Department

In fact, while the primary elements of a game using the Department are *Action*-style dramatic adventuring and steampunk visuals and technology, a third element can be introduced from time to time – a distinctly darker, very *Gothic* sensibility. Although PCs, as Departmental agents, see themselves as defending the world against crazy or misguided eccentrics and their peculiar ideas and inventions, the fact is that those ideas and inventions *work*, which should worry thoughtful heroes. When the light of reason is shone into dark corners, it

can lead to some unpleasant discoveries. Furthermore, some of the people exploiting mad science should by rights be pillars of society, and it should occur to the PCs that if they fail too often – indeed, if they fail even *once* on some matters – it would be bad news for the whole world. Not only can the darker products of unconventional philosophy call for the occasional *Fright Check* (pp. B360-361), but some things that PCs encounter should trigger *Fright Checks From Social Disorder* (*Steampunk 1*, pp. 40-43), complete with results from the *Shocking Revelations Table*.

THE SETTING IN THE INFINITE WORLDS

As an optional possibility . . . When Infinity Unlimited discovered the timeline where the Department exists, they initially saw it as a fairly close parallel, with a present in the mid-19th century and a certain amount of eccentric technology that was inevitably described as “steampunk.” Researchers eventually pinned down a divergence date – 1771, when Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot’s experimental steam wagon performed surprisingly well (evidently not suffering the first automobile accident that *may* have happened on Homeline). The French National Arsenal continued to dabble with steam, and after the French Revolution, the technophile Napoleon took this further. Steam tractors pulled artillery to Waterloo, while other experiments such as Fulton’s submarine (see *GURPS Vehicles: Steampunk Conveyances*, p. 10) also saw action.

Although this made no significant difference to the Napoleonic Wars – early steam wasn’t *that* useful, and the British turned out to know more about steam engineering than the French – it set the tone for the new century. Radical experimental technology was pursued with ever-more-enthusiastic interest, and eccentric natural philosophers could often find backers. Political and military history, however, mostly followed the Homeline pattern, although Infinity historians mutter that many nations are becoming caricatures of themselves – the officious British, megalomaniac Prussians, ramshackle Austro-Hungarian Empire, disintegrating Russia, and freebooting U.S.A.

Initially, Infinity agents suggested that this timeline should be put in the “Britannica” category (*GURPS Infinite Worlds*, p. 116); although the British Empire doesn’t actually rule the world, it’s close to the height of its Victorian glory, and its government and their scholars seem to have a good handle on the new weird technology, which can only serve to cement British power. However, further study has called some of this initial thinking into question. Although the 1771 date is the point of *provable* divergence, there is evidence in the timeline’s historical texts of “weird science” influence on much earlier events, while a lot of the steampunk tech depends on divergent physical laws or even something close to magic. This now looks like more of a far parallel with significant inertia; nor does British dominance look quite so secure, given what local mad science might accomplish. A Patrol supervisor argued effectively that code-naming the setting

after the best-known period proto-SF author was most appropriate, making this timeline Verne-1.

Infinity treads carefully here, with no tourism and only carefully controlled research permitted; the Patrol doesn’t want either a mad scientist or the Department getting wind of The Secret. (Some researchers grumble about the timeline’s closed status, but the words “mad science” make Patrol officers think “better safe than sorry.”) Fortunately, the Nazis of Reich-5 don’t seem to have stumbled across the place yet (and if they do, the Patrol will likely respond with a lot of force – a Nazi alliance with the local Prussian government would be no joke), while Cabal activities on the timeline *seem* to be limited and localized.

VERNE-1, 1868

Current Affairs

The complex balance of international intrigues and treaties between the rival nations of Victorian Europe and the rising power of the United States is prone to disruption by all manner of mad science and accelerated technologies.

Divergence Point

1771; Cugnot’s steam wagon works well enough to spark interest in radical technologies and super-weapons.

Major Civilizations

Western (multipolar), Orthodox (empire), Islamic (multipolar), Chinese (empire).

Great Powers

British Empire (representative democracy, CR3), French Empire (representative democracy, CR3), Prussia (dictatorship, CR4), Austro-Hungarian Empire (dictatorship, CR3), U.S.A. (representative democracy, CR2).

Worldline Data

TL: 5+2 (with a *lot* of peripheral superscience)

Mana Level: low

Quantum: 4

Infinity Class: Z4

Centrum Zone: Inaccessible

Tail Sting (14): 1d+1 impaling + Lightning Aura (above) + follow-up 1d-1 burning surge (18 ten-second cycles). The follow-up does *not* reduce DR. Once the subject is reduced to 2/3 HP by this damage, they acquire the Numb (p. B146) disadvantage. At 1/2 HP, they become unable to move as all their voluntary muscles lock up (treat this as paralysis, p. B428)! The scorpion can attack a specific body part such as a hand or arm, in which case the affected limb is immediately paralyzed. Reach C-2.

Traits: 360° Vision; Clinging (Move 3); Cold-Blooded (65°); Combat Reflexes; Control Thunderstorms 3 (Accessibility, Only after consuming at least 3d damage of electricity or electrical attacks, or in a high-mana area; Emanation; Independent; Mana-Sensitive; Natural Phenomena; Reduced Range, ×1/2; Reflexive); Damage Resistance 36 (Absorption, Heals HP or FP; Cosmic, Extended to internal damage; Limited, Electricity-based attacks); Extra Legs (Eight Legs); Horizontal; Hyperspectral Vision; Immunity to Electrical Conduction; Immunity to Noxious Electrical Effects; Invisibility (Fringe); No Fine Manipulators; Noisy 1; Social Stigma (Monster); Striking ST 2 (Stinger Only); Super Jump 3 (7-yard jump; Temporary Disadvantage, Noisy 3); Supernatural Features (EVP, micro-EMP bursts, and similar electrical phenomena); Terrain Adaptation (Desert and Weather*); Uncontrollable Appetite (12) (Electricity); Vibration Sense (Air); Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-14; Jumping-14; Stealth-16 (14 vs. Hearing, 10 if using Super Jump); Survival (Desert)-12; Weather Sense-14; Wrestling-14.

Notes: Storm-scorpion carapaces are biological superconductors, highly prized by manufacturers and research firms. An intact scorpion can sell for as much as \$10,000 (*tripled* if you can catch it alive – make sure your pickup is insulated against electrical surges!). Making armor out of it adds +9 CF per +1 DR (+3 DR vs. electrical attacks), and it provides up to +6 DR for +54 CF; it makes an excellent Kevlar vest insert!

* Removes any penalties for fighting, running, etc. in dangerous weather.

WECHUGE

Another one of those weird things: Was it caused by Trinity or do we now notice it because of Trinity?

Wechuge are zombies. With ice. Kill it with fire. No songs. See what I did there? Pop culture aside, don't let them touch you and definitely don't let them bite you. If they do, see a med-mage pronto – or you know, die, come back, and then go eat your friends. Your choice.

– Ava Merlin, *Shadowwalker: Following Trinity's Shadow*

Wechuge (pronounced “way-choo-gay”) are the frozen corpses of those who died in the wilderness in winter. Said to be possessed by malevolent spirits of the cold, wechuge are part zombie, part cannibal, and part ice spirit. Their faces and bodies are concealed by accumulated ice and snow, making them look like grim snow-people. Their bite has the chill of winter, and their claws are supernaturally sharp ice that carries that same chill. Despite their appearance, they have an animal cunning and are surprisingly agile. They make no

sound, except a low gurgling when close to a target. In ice and snow (or when utterly still), they are near impossible to see or hear.

ST: 13	HP: 13	Speed: 5.50
DX: 11	Will: 12	Move: 5
IQ: 6	Per: 10	Weight: 150 lbs.
HT: 11	FP: N/A	SM: 0
Dodge: 9	Parry: 10	DR: 3* (Tough Skin)

Bite (12): 1d cutting + follow-up 1d-1 fatigue. Treat this fatigue as due to being in a cold environment (*Cold*, p. B430). If the target is reduced to 1/2 FP by the follow-up attack, they suffer from moderate pain (-2 to all DX, IQ, skill, and self-control rolls); if reduced to 1/3 FP, they are paralyzed instead. If the attack struck a limb, the *limb* is paralyzed! Reach C.

Grapple (12): No damage, but on further turns can squeeze (*Choke or Strangle*, p. B370) at ST 14.

Ice Claw (12): 1d-1 cutting + follow-up 1d-3 fatigue. Effects of the follow-up are the same as for Bite (above). Treat as a weapon, not as a body part. Reach C, 1.

Traits: 360° Vision (Panoptic 2); Appearance (Monstrous); Chameleon 2 (Ice/Snow); Combat Reflexes; Dark Vision; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Indomitable; Infectious Attack (Accessibility, Fatal attacks by bite only); Injury Tolerance (No Blood; No Vitals; Unliving); No Sense of Smell/Taste; Silence 2; Social Stigma (Monster); Terrain Adaptation (Ice/Snow); Uncontrollable Appetite (12) (Flesh); Unfazeable; Unhealing (Partial); Vulnerability (Fire ×2).

Skills: Brawling-12; Stealth-12 (14 vs. Hearing, 16 if motionless; 14 vs. Vision against a snowy backdrop, 16 if motionless); Wrestling-12.

Notes: Neither has nor uses FP. Sterile.

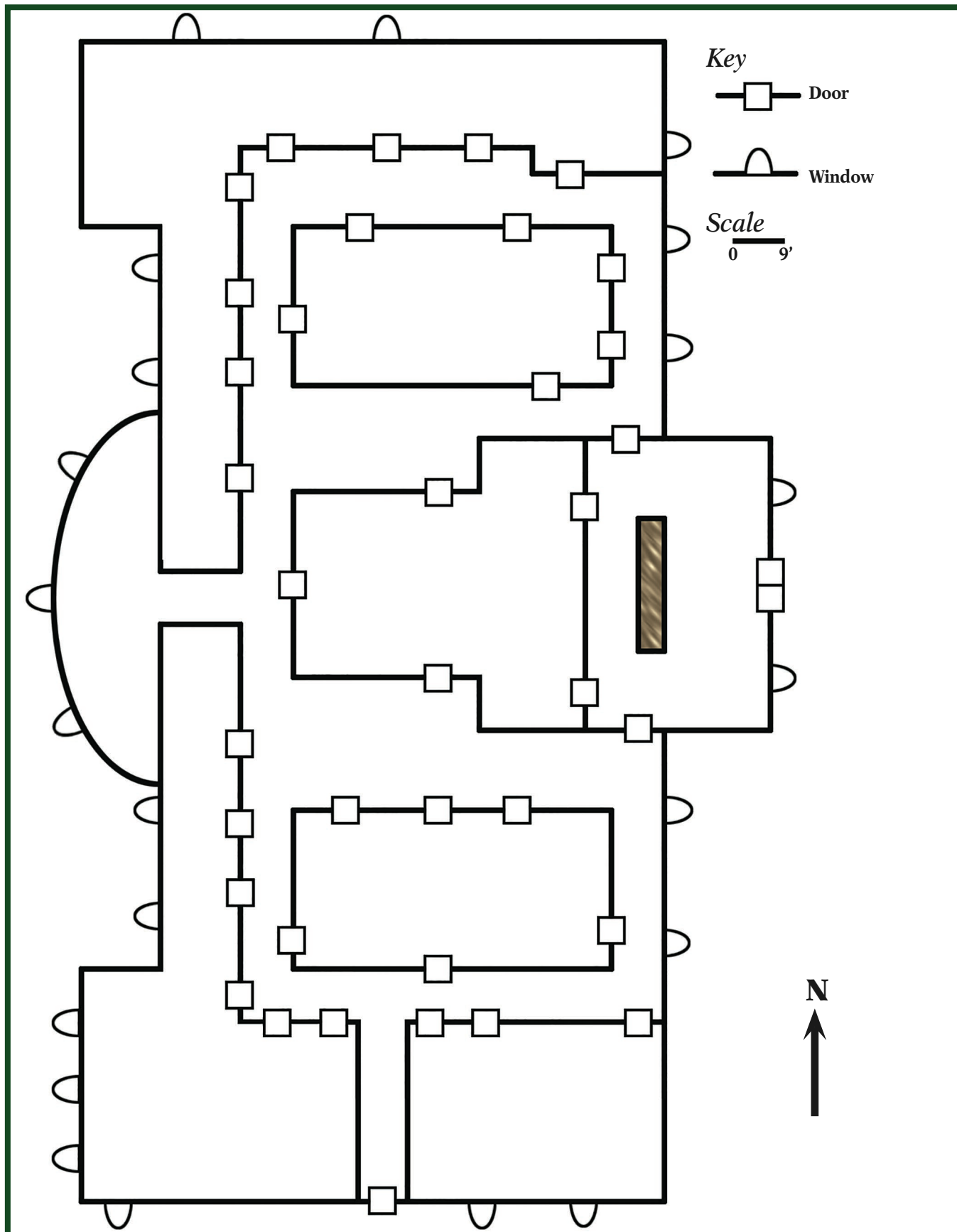
* This DR is semi-ablative and reduced by 1 per 10 points of damage inflicted, to a minimum of DR 1 (the leathery hide hidden under the ice and snow).

In the first story, Wechuge is described as a bad man who “stayed by himself and followed people's tracks.”

– Robin Ridington,
Little Bit Know Something

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice has his own menagerie at home (well, cats, but they count). From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's spinning words and whimsy into gold. He's the co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* and *Dungeon Fantasy Traps*. Of course, if he's not writing material for *GURPS*, he's blogging about it. Visit his site “Ravens N' Pennies” (www.ravenspennies.com) for more *GURPS* goodies. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group (the Headhunters); Beth “Archangel” McCoy, the “Sith Editrix”; and Joshua Burton, for being most excellent sounding boards.



FLOOR PLAN OF KLINIK NOVA, WALK-THROUGH VERSION

This map represents what agents might see by walking the building's perimeter and the internal halls.

ABOUT *GURPS*

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

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