

PYRAMID[®]



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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

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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!

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

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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.

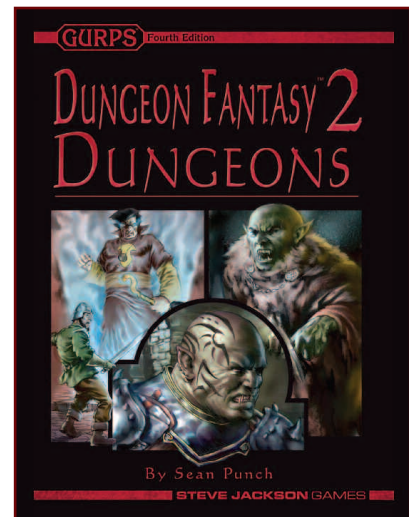
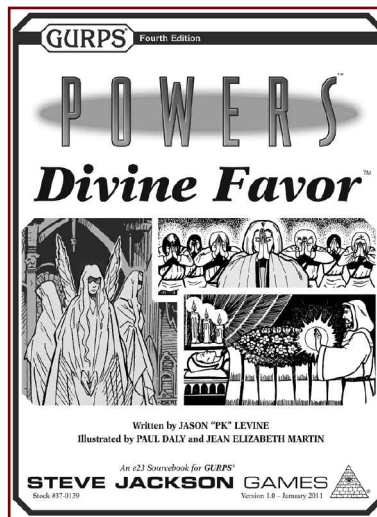
That doesn't have much to do with thieves, but it *does* relate to this issue of *Pyramid*. As I assembled this issue, I was reminded again that one of the great strengths of this fine magazine (and *GURPS* in general) is the ability for the fantastic and realistic to exist side by side. An improbable 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, or join the community at forums.sjgames.com.



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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.

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*).

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.

ABOUT *GURPS*

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