

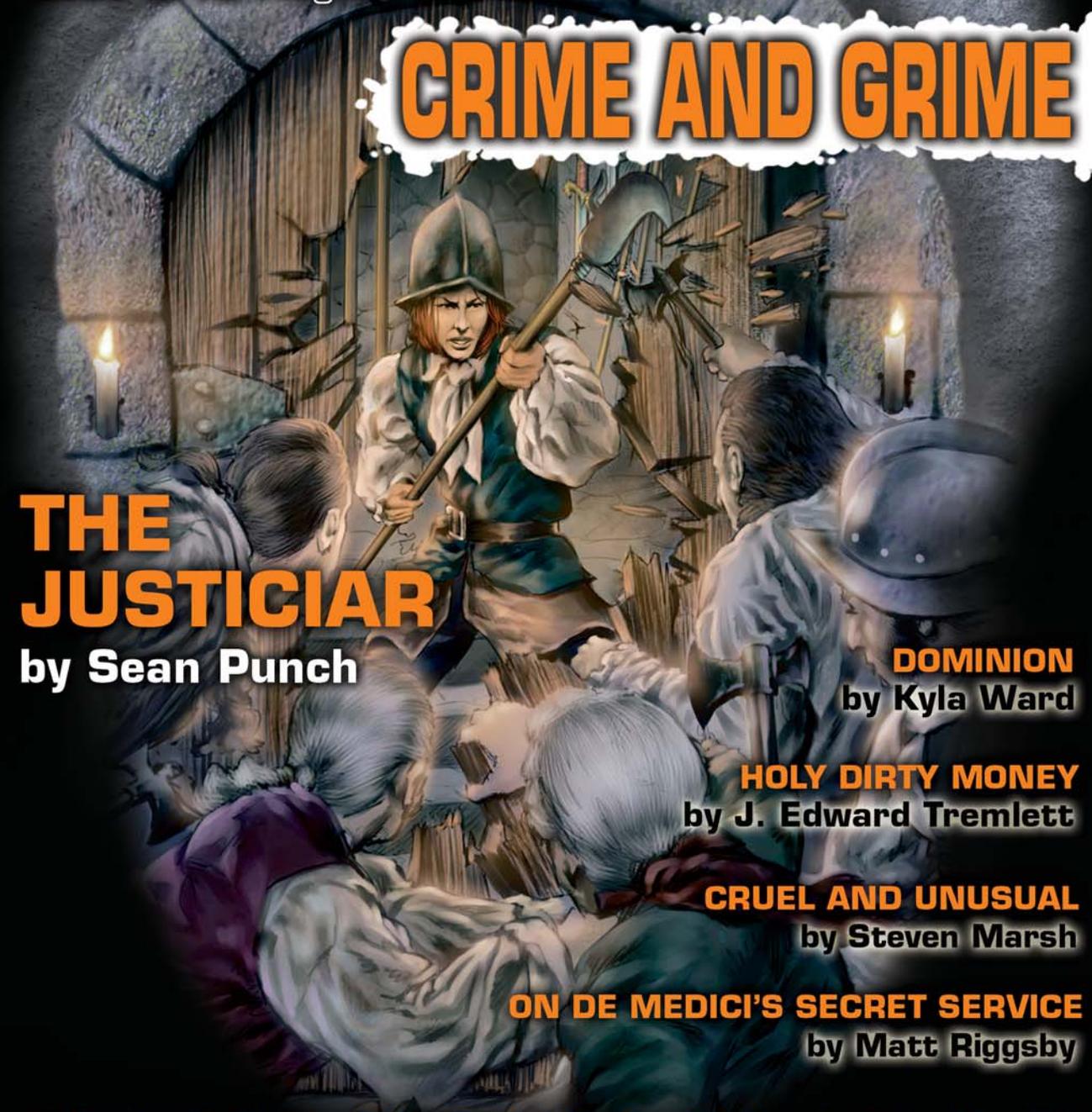
# PYRAMID



Issue 3/10 August '09

## CRIME AND GRIME

### THE JUSTICIAR



by Sean Punch

**DOMINION**  
by Kyla Ward

**HOLY DIRTY MONEY**  
by J. Edward Tremlett

**CRUEL AND UNUSUAL**  
by Steven Marsh

**ON DE MEDICI'S SECRET SERVICE**  
by Matt Riggsby

# STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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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

This month's theme is "Crime and Grime," where we talk about fantasy/historical folks who live a life of crime and those who live to stop them.

The agents of order are no longer abstract, impersonal forces in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy!* *GURPS* line editor and *Dungeon Fantasy* mastermind Sean Punch presents *The Justiciar*: a template for those who wish to enforce The Law.

For anyone looking for a career on the edge of the law, Matt Riggsby, author of *GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence*, discusses the *amici degli amici*, or friends of friends, who are *On de Medici's Secret Service*. To aid these would-be agents in patrolling and investigating their domain, a full-color map of Florence, Italy during the Renaissance is included.

Those who claim to support the ultimate law are sometimes guilty of the ultimate crimes. Learn more about a real-world type of crime and the near-extinct mindset that permitted it to exist, in J. Edward Tremlett's *Holy Dirty Money*.

In Kyla Ward's *Dominion*, the land has been brought together under the rule of a single king. In this strange new era, the kingdom needs a few brave souls to act as agents of law – a kind of medieval "FBI." This systemless setting can be overlaid on many other worlds, and it contains an explanation of the legal system and the powers it bestows to catch lawbreakers.

No matter where you are, someone's going to do something that catches the law's attention. Rather than simply killing off PC criminals, GMs can turn the punishment into something *Cruel and Unusual*, a generic table of 18 sentences that all serve as the beginning of an adventure, not the end.

In *Random Thought Table*, the editor offers a brief examination of how magic might affect the dispensing of justice.

When the PCs decide to improve their fortunes through random pickpocketing or burglary, GMs can *Deal the Loot* with a set of generic cards that add randomness and complications to ill-gained wealth.

*Odds and Ends* offers some humor with *Murphy's Rules*, as well lots of ideas on taboos, customs, magic, and laws. Discover which games offer even more insights on crime and mysteries in bygone ages with *Recommend Reading* from Matthew Pook and Andy Vetromile.

Finally, the *Last Word* is delivered by Simon Washbourne, author of the *Medieval Mysteries RPG*. What is the last word on crime and grime, and why can it be expensive to annoy a medieval coroner?

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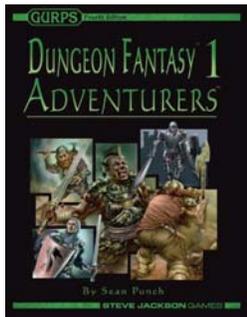
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# FROM THE EDITOR

## ONE GOLD PIECE, TWO SIDES

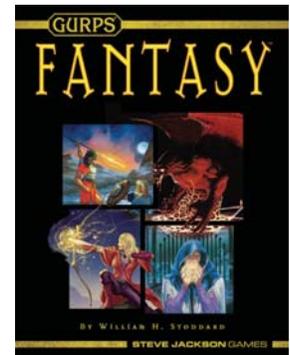
In assembling this issue, I had one of those realizations that seems obvious in hindsight, but still took me by surprise. This issue's theme – “Crime and Grime” – has to deal with criminals and those who try to deal with them, in a fantasy/medieval context. But the interesting part is that both sides of the equation are eminently gamable and have a rich context within the RPG world. Thieves (and thieves' guilds, pick-pocketing, etc.) were there almost at the primordial ooze of gaming, as were paladins – and by extension templars, fighter/sheriffs, “city watches,” and peacekeeping nobles. This is somewhat unusual; it's not like (say) playing dungeon-dwelling monsters has ever caught on with the same vigor as those who hunt such creatures. The possibility of supervillainous roleplaying games pale in comparison to their heroic costume-clad counterparts.

But there's an appeal both in fighting the good fight in the name of the law, and taking to the shadows, living off scraps and wits. This issue explores both halves, with some insight



into crime and criminals, plus the forces that seek to wipe them out. Even better, both halves are useful in the same campaign. After all, a description of a secret organization that fights criminals is useful as backbone for an adventuring group *or* as an enemy force that smart PC thieves need to outwit and avoid. The ability of articles to pull double-duty is an interesting technique, and it's one I hope to repeat in the future. (And yes, this is a hint for would-be writers.)

Speaking of which . . .



## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

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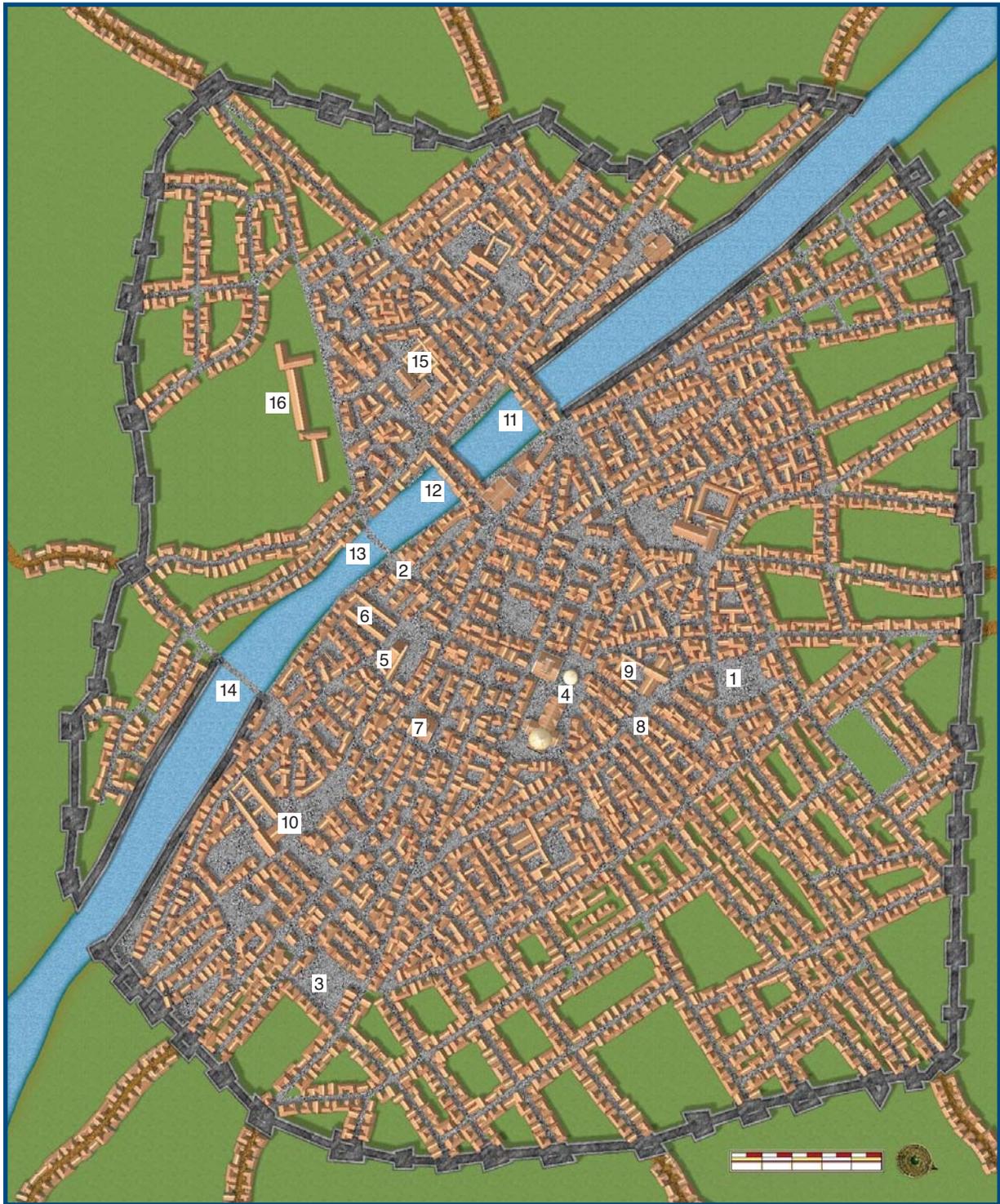
*I was only skimming the [Pyramid #3/7] PDF to get a general idea of what was covered in this issue, and the opening vignette sucked me in until I'd read most of the article before I came up for air. Articles of this high quality are one of the reasons I've subscribed to all three incarnations of Pyramid.*

*– Cap'n Q, on the Steve Jackson Games forums*

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## Map of Renaissance Firenze

Scale: 1" = 400 yards

- 1. Mercato Centrale
- 2. Mercato Nuovo
- 3. Mercato San Ambrogio
- 4. Il Duomo
- 5. Palazzo della Signoria

- 6. Palazzo Uffizi
- 7. Bargello
- 8. Palazzo Medici
- 9. San Lorenzo
- 10. Santa Croce
- 11. Ponte alla Carrara

- 12. Ponte Santa Trinita
- 13. Ponte Vecchio
- 14. Ponte alle Grazie
- 15. San Spirito
- 16. Palazzo Pitti

# HOLY DIRTY MONEY

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

In a time when the Canon Law of the Church ultimately trumped all forms of secular jurisprudence, there was one holy crime that proved difficult to stamp out. Named after Simon Magus – a magician who reputedly offered the Apostles money for their “gift” – simony was the performance of official spiritual duties for a direct fee. It covered the taking of money for sanctifying grace, but also applied to selling holy goods and offices and any other service the Church could provide.

Given the nature of the Church at that time and the general ignorance of the population, simony – like other forms of low-level corruption – was widespread and almost untraceable, making it a difficult practice to curtail. Medieval charlatans in need of a good racket should take note of this most abominable crime, as should GMs in search of criminals, local color, and possible plots. To that end, this article presents a brief overview of the practice, what one could do with it, and how it might be dealt with under Canon law. There is also a discussion concerning how supernatural powers might fit with the crime, as well as campaign ideas based around simony.

## THE NATURE OF THE CRIME

It is difficult to overexaggerate the power of the medieval Church. The average medieval Christian – both pious and superstitious – may have relied on the authorities to protect his life, but he was far more concerned about his spiritual welfare. The Church provided grace throughout life, and the disposition of the soul after death. While the worst the state could do was get you killed, the Church could excommunicate you, guaranteeing an eternity of suffering. People lived and died by the word of the Church. They would gladly give what they had to secure its good graces and, through those graces, salvation.

However, while the Church was powerful, it was also rife with corruption and corrupt people. All tithes led to Rome, and it was not at all difficult to siphon off monies into one’s pockets and not record their having been received; it was as easy as taking “alms” and pocketing the proceeds. It was also not difficult for a charlatan to join minor orders, so that he might receive the protection of Canon law, which was separate from and superior to secular authority – and far more lenient. Furthermore, while there is some controversy as to how rotten

the culture was as a whole, there is no denying that there were some rather venal goings-on behind the scenes.

There was also the ignorance of the church-going population to consider. Largely illiterate, woefully uninformed, and deathly worried about their souls, the common people were easily fooled by seemingly pious scam artists. They would gladly seek out someone claiming to be a pardoner to buy an “official” indulgence, even if they didn’t know what an official indulgence might look like. If they wanted to avoid heavy penances for their sins, they would gladly pay a fee to have them lightened. If the plague was at their door, they would gladly buy “holy” items to keep it at bay. If on pilgrimage, they’d listen to just about anyone who could quote Latin and claim to be able to show the way – for a little monetary aid, supposedly for the nearest abbey.

In short, simony was a perfect crime, aimed at a perfect audience in a perfect time. Given human nature it is little wonder that it was so widespread. The real wonder is how the Church managed to finally stamp it out.

## FORMS OF FALSE GRACE

The ways to employ simony to enrich oneself are as limitless as the imagination, but it pays to start out on the right foot.

First, one must either be in the service of the Church, or appear to be. Being a full member of the priesthood required a life-long commitment to a busy schedule and a restrictive code of behavior, which might cramp the style of some. A person could instead easily secure minor orders, provided he had the time to make the minor commitment – and indeed many con men did, if only to be a part of the Church and therefore held to Canon law. Given the ignorance of the population it wasn’t hard to merely disguise oneself as a traveling monk or pardoner: proper attire, a tonsured head, and the ability to quote Latin was all the convincing that some marks needed.

Once one fits – or looks – the part, it’s simply a question of asking the right people for favors in exchange for performing your duties in an official but inappropriate manner. Prescribing light penance for heavy sins in exchange for some consideration is the most common form of simony.

*In some societies, an accuser who cannot prove his case winds up being the one punished, because he wasted the court’s time.*

## Comparative Values

Use this scale to determine exact values appropriate to the game system and setting. The values can be used to determine monetary restitution and fines.

Sheep/Pig – 2 coins.  
Cow – 10 coins.  
Silver goblet – 20 coins.  
Deer or other prime game animal – 20-30 coins (nominal value).  
Wagon, log cabin – 50 coins.  
Fashionable suit of clothes – 50 coins.  
Horse – 60-90 coins, depending on training, stamina and appearance.

Gold ring – 100 coins.  
Suit of full plate – 100 coins.  
Fellable timber – 100-200 coins for the usual barge or wagonload.  
Fully trained war horse from good stock – 200 coins.  
Farmhouse – 200 coins.  
Carriage and team – 300 coins.  
Gold ring with gem – 300 coins.  
Large wooden and brick house, river barge – 400 coins.  
Annual production of a village – 500 coins.  
Annual production of a noble's estate – 3,000 coins.  
Annual production of a wealthy noble's estate – 5,000 coins.

### Crimes Against the Land

These are crimes that can be committed against nobles, again generally by commoners.

*Disobedience:* This is a convenient catch-all, hearkening back to the days when peasants were “owned.” Failing to show respect, concealing income, damaging property, etc. may incur fines, flogging, or hanging – and that's if the matter is brought before a magistrate. It is generally accepted that this applies to acts committed in a noble's own domain, rather than, say, on the streets of a Free City. Nevertheless, of all the laws currently requiring clarification, this is top of the list.

*Tax Evasion:* In the case of taxes paid to the landowner, this covers both failure to pay assessed taxes and attempts to reduce assessment by hiding crops and animals, or falsely claiming crippled family members. The penalty is usually a fine of 10% of the amount owed on top of the due tax, often leading to debt (discussed previously).

*Vert and Venison:* This is an ancient right converted into a law that theoretically conserves the natural resources of an area. A landowner owns all products of his land whether or not these are currently being exploited. Thus if prospectors were to discover a gold mine, all gold from it would belong to the landowner and not them. For peasants, this means no killing wild animals (venison) or felling timber (vert) without their lord's permission, upon pain of fines and flogging. For nobles, it means making sure hunting parties do not spill over into somebody else's forest; multi-generational feuds have started that way.

### Crimes Against the Crown

These are the biggest crimes. No one gets away with these.

*Interfering with a Court of Law:* This is a new law, enforceable by direct royal action that can involve armed troops and a fine of up to 500 coins. Interference may include withholding assistance and concealing accused criminals. It might possibly include attempts to bribe, but any such case has yet to come out.

*Interfering with a Royal Messenger:* The ability of the king to govern depends upon the speedy and reliable conduct of messages from place to place. Anyone who intentionally delays a royal messenger by commandeering horses set aside for their use, refusing them assistance, or in any other nonfatal way is fined 500 coins. Killing a messenger counts as treason. If the “royal messengers” are magical in nature, the same basic provisions apply.

*Tax Evasion:* This covers both a noble's refusal to pay assessed tax and deliberate attempts to mislead the tax collector as to the number of villages on an estate. Nobles are fined in the same manner as commoners, with an additional 10% on top of the assessment.

*Treason:* This covers any attempt whatsoever to undermine the authority of the crown. Traditionally, this includes armed insurrection; attempted assassination; and killing magistrates, tax collectors, and messengers. However, it can be stretched in a number of directions, including giving the king bad advice. Stealing taxes definitely counts. Penalties include confiscation of land, banishment from the kingdom, and death. Nobles are beheaded; any treacherous commoner is likely to be tortured.

### Inheritance

The King's Law honors primogeniture, with land and title going to the firstborn son (or daughter in the absence of sons). This can be contested. If the obvious heir can be demonstrated treacherous, insane, or terminally dishonorable, a more suitable relative may receive the inheritance. If there is no suitable heir, the inheritance reverts to the Crown. Such matters are always settled at the King's Court.

Peasants generally have little to leave their descendants, although houses and families are assumed to go together. At present, inheritances consisting of business interests and property such as factories and shops are untrodden ground. If a dispute was brought before a magistrate, it would be dealt with under an existing category such as Theft or Debt.

*When a community lacks the resources to enforce punishments, becoming an outlaw is a simple process – a person runs away. However, an outlaw's family and/or associates may suffer punishments instead.*

## 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](mailto:info@sjgames.com). Resources include:

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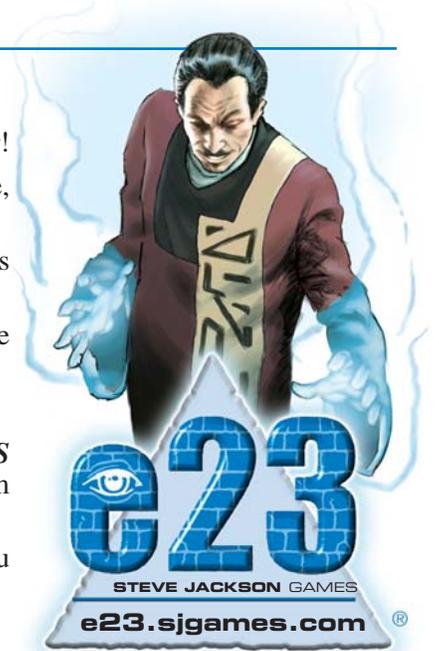
*Errata.* Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases are available on our website – see above.

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