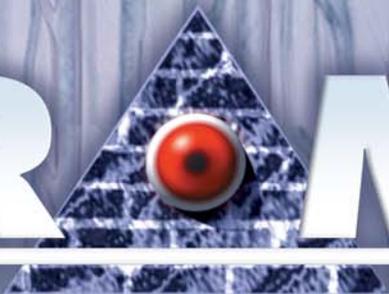


PYRAMID



Issue 3/11 September '09

CINEMATIC LOCATIONS



GOING PLACES!

by Matt Riggsby

THE SHADY REST ROADHOUSE
by Loren K. Wiseman

THE IMMENSITY
by J. Edward Tremlett

THE TEMPLE OF SOBEK, THE CROCODILE GOD
by S.E. Mortimer

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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- 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

When it comes to cinematic locations, this issue of *Pyramid* has enough ideas to pack a passport full of adventure!

Matt Riggsby (author of *GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence* and *GURPS Locations: The Tower of Octavius*) offers two “locations” – complete with full-color maps – that can serve as their own focus or as a means of getting to *other* adventures. By air or by sea, you can’t go wrong when you’re *Going Places!*

Loren Wiseman (*GURPS Traveller*) takes the gaming classic of the “adventurous tavern” and turns it on its ear; now *it’s* the interesting place to visit! Based on a real-world recent-past locale, *The Shady Rest Roadhouse* is sure to be a memorable night out.

Since Egypt is always the source of great cinematic action, S.E. Mortimer takes you on location to *The Temple of Sobek, the Crocodile God*. Whether tracking down ancient secrets or modern-day supplicants worshipping an ancient god, the Temple can serve as an action-packed source of hieroglyphic pyrotechnics.

J. Edward Tremlett offers an “exotic but dangerous” secret base in *The Immensity*. What will adventurers do in exchange for the impossible power this place offers – and what shocking secrets does it conceal?

Alternate Locations provides over a dozen easy ways to transform a mundane location into a memorable one. Pick an option or roll randomly!

Need a headquarters to call home, company offices to steal secrets from, or a building to set a hostage situation in? Then try this issue’s insert, *The Office Building*, which offers maps that you can print out and use to quickly create your very own modern multi-story structure.

Pyramid Editor Steven Marsh makes the case that *Locations Are People, Too*, in this month’s *Random Thought Table*. Reviewer extraordinaire Matthew Pook suggests some ideal location-centered games in *Recommended Reading*. And, of course, you can locate your monthly dose of humor with *Murphy’s Rules*, plus some “odds and ends” that round out the magazine.

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FROM THE EDITOR

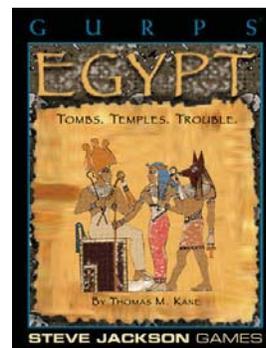
FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE, VIA ACTION

This issue of *Pyramid* – the one you’re holding in your hot little hands (or, more likely, PDF reader) – is set in the action-packed world of modern cinematic adventure. But as we were assembling this issue, we realized something: “Modern-day” is actually an amazing era to set adventures in, since most possibilities are available. Sure, it can cover recent phenomenon such as office buildings and halls of mirrors (which we’ve got), but it can also include more “pulp” offerings such as roadhouses and dirigibles (yes to both!). Action-adventure movies have been set in all of those places.

Or going further backwards, you can even set an adventure in ancient temples (check!), taking a cue from high-octane films such as *Stargate* and *The Fifth Element*. Or you can go future-scientific, with ultra-tech weapons lying in wait in an impossible other-dimensional fortress (it’s in here!); then you can replicate modern-versus-future conflicts such as *Predator*.



It seems likely that the wide range of locations in this issue owes to the fact that it’s so easy for us, as modern audience members, to envision heroic-action versions of our modern selves just about any other place. Whether it’s a millennia-old crocodile-filled labyrinth, a WWI U-boat, or a techno-horror nightmare, we can see ourselves strapping on modern-day weapons and blowing the heck out of anyone who opposes us in those situations – or, at least, struggling to stay alive.



WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

This issue shakes things up a bit and so – as ever – we love to get your feedback! Remember: We only *write* about evil psychics and all-knowing masterminds; we’re not actually all-knowing or psychic (or evil!) ourselves. Please feel free to let us know what works and what doesn’t. Send feedback and comments to pyramid@sjgames.com, or post online on our forums at forums.sjgames.com.

*... I subscribe to **Pyramid** because you never know what you’re gonna get, and you can find fun, cool stuff that can spark off any campaign, anywhere and anywhen.*

– jimminy, on the Steve Jackson Games forums

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THE SHADY REST ROADHOUSE

BY LOREN K. WISEMAN

The Shady Rest detailed here has nothing to do with the country hotel of the same name in the television series *Petticoat Junction*. This article describes a roadhouse – a rural speakeasy – in southern Illinois that played a major role in a bootleggers gang war in the mid-to-late 1920s. The Shady Rest also served as a headquarters for the Birger bootlegging gang. It has the distinction of being the first spot on American soil to be subjected to aerial bombardment.

WHAT IS A ROADHOUSE?

A roadhouse, for the purposes of this article, is a rural tavern that offers other (often illegal) amusements in addition to alcohol. Roadhouses came about as a result of the freedom of travel that the automobile afforded to Americans in the early part of the 20th century, and filled a need for people to get away from the stresses of everyday life. They were especially common in the Midwest and South, usually located at a convenient distance from cities and small towns, hidden away on back roads to prevent interference from law enforcement. During Prohibition (1919-1933), roadhouses provided rural Americans with alcohol as well as gambling, dancing, and prostitution, all of them illegal and/or immoral by the standards of their locale.

THE SHADY REST

The Shady Rest was a large cabin (see map on p. 12) that stood in a grove of trees about 100 yards back from the road connecting the towns of Marion and Harrisburg (see map on p. 11). It was about equally distant from both. It was part of a cluster of buildings in and around the grove that included several sheds and other outbuildings, the cabin itself, and a roadside barbecue stand that served as a lookout station as well as providing hot food. A neighboring farmhouse was a few hundred yards down the road, but otherwise, the grove was relatively remote.

The Shady Rest was one of numerous roadhouses established by the Birger gang as they moved into bootlegging, but it soon became an unofficial headquarters because its isolated location made it secure from both rival gangs and local law enforcement.

Note: This article's reconstruction of the Shady Rest is conjectural in many spots, as only a few photographs and descriptions of the building exist. Some elements in the descriptions and floor plan were extrapolated.

Exterior

The Shady Rest was constructed of foot-thick logs in a rectangular plan about 40' long and 20' wide. The logs were spiked together and chinked with cement or plaster in order to make the building weather-tight. A narrow porch ran completely along the front side, and there were two chimneys, one at each end. A small lean-to extended part of the building to the back. The building was roofed with hexagonal asphalt shingles over planks. A path from a rear door led to the nearby outhouse, and a cellar door gave access to the basement. It was typical of many buildings in southern Illinois for the time, and it would probably have stood for 50 or more years had it not been destroyed during the Birger-Shelton gang war.

The Shady Rest was known to have been used for illegal gambling, including dog and cockfights, so the grounds had many animal pens or cages and at least one large fighting corral. These were erected specially for each contest and stored in one of the sheds at other times. Powered by an electric generator on site and available at the flick of a switch, floodlights could illuminate the approaches at night. Presumably these were installed when Birger converted the Shady Rest for use as his headquarters, as it is doubtful that an ordinary roadhouse would have such a feature.

Loren Wiseman has published two other interesting modern locations: Private RR Car 1900-1935 and Small Hotel 1900-1940. They're available now from e23.sjgames.com.

THE TEMPLE OF SOBEK, THE CROCODILE GOD

BY S.E. MORTIMER

I am Sobek, who dwelleth amid his terrors.

I am Sobek, and I seize my prey like a ravaging beast.

I am the great Fish which is in Kamui.

I am the lord to whom bowings and prostrations are made in Sekhem.

And the Osiris Ani is the lord to whom bowings and prostrations are made in Sekhem.

– *The Book of the Dead*

The Nile River was the lifeblood of ancient Egypt. It was the principal trade route and the benefactor of many fishermen. It provided resources such as fresh water for washing and drinking, papyrus for making paper, mud for making bricks, and so on. Each year, the river flooded its banks, revitalizing the land and granting bountiful harvests.

In addition, the Nile was full of crocodiles, which could make things difficult for people trying to earn a living on or near the river. Keeping the god Sobek – the crocodile god – pleased ensured that the god's reptilian servants left his human worshippers alone. Furthermore, the god controlled the waters. Pleasing Sobek also meant that the river would continue to bless the land and its people.

In Pliny and Plutarch's writings, the crocodile was seen as a prophet of the annual inundation – the females could anticipate the degree of the coming flood and lay their eggs just above the high-water mark.

Sobek was also considered a fierce hunter and he became the patron of the army. The crocodile's strength and speed was thought to symbolize the power of the Pharaoh; the hieroglyph of a crocodile was even used to represent the word "sovereign" or "ruler."

River towns and cities revered Sobek, but none more so than Arsinoe (which Egyptians called *Shedyet* or *El-Fayoum*); so great was the love of the crocodile god that the Greeks renamed it Crocodilopolis.

THE TEMPLE OF SOBEK

Although the ancient Egyptian deities are no longer worshiped as they were thousands of years ago, it can be useful to understand how they existed back then. Were Sobek to become actively worshipped again, it might be reasonable (and dramatically appropriate) for his followers to revive the old traditions.

Egyptian temple layouts are similar regardless of the gods involved, and the structure was prescribed by Egyptian religious tradition. Visitors to a temple typically approach along a causeway that leads into a large open-air colonnaded courtyard. This is followed by a series of enclosed rooms that gradually diminish in size. Smaller rooms mean more restricted access. The general public is permitted into the courtyard, but only supplicants are permitted to venture into the larger rooms, and officials alone go deeper into the complex.

Columns surround the courtyard, and on its grounds is a large altar or statue of the crocodile god. This leads to the largest enclosed room, which is used to sort out potential supplicants. Only temple officials are permitted to go further inside – to a smaller room that serves as a vestibule to the dimly lit sanctuary beyond. The sanctuary houses the statue of the god where the High Priest performs his sacred rites.

Priests use mummified remains of crocodiles and other animals in their rituals. These remains are stored in deep niches in the inner walls when not in use. Some sites also have catacombs under the building where thousands more mummified animals are entombed.

Some temples keep live crocodiles that live pampered lives. Tame crocodiles dwell in pools where they are hand-fed with honey cakes and choice cuts of meat, and ornamented with gold and jewels. These lucky creatures live in the Sacred Lake – a pool located in the courtyard or just outside and enclosed with a fence or hedge to keep visitors from getting too close.

Justifications to go to the Temple of Sobek in modern campaigns include: religious artifacts (especially biblical ties between Judea and Egypt) and modern-day secrets (there's always turmoil in the Middle East, and no one would suspect hiding current schemes in an ancient temple).

ODDS AND ENDS

THAT'S UNEXPECTED!

Alternate Locations (pp. 32-33) provides ideas for GMs looking to make permanent alterations to a place. But often what makes a location memorable or different is a more temporary or transient change. Here, then, are some unexpected (temporary) changes that can be made to a location; pick an interesting possibility or roll 2d (reading each die individually) to determine one. (Naturally, tweak the specifics as necessary.)

1-2, 1: The location is much darker or more dimly lit than expected.

1-2, 2: The location is much sunnier or brighter than expected.

1-2, 3: The location seems lit at random (some sections bright, some too dim, etc.).

1-2, 4: The location has a horrible organic smell – rotting meat, sewage, or the like.

1-2, 5: The location has a horrible industrial smell – new paint, carpet glue, or the like.

1-2, 6: The location is draftier or windier than expected.

3-4, 1: A group of people sympathetic to the locale are there (on a tour, doing a television report, etc.).

3-4, 2: A mob of upset people is at the location (protesting, looting, etc.).

3-4, 3: Security (perhaps additional) or police are at the location.

3-4, 4: The location is being torn apart by one or more entities (people, animals, undead, etc.).

3-4, 5: The location is much hotter than expected (the air conditioning is broken, the ventilation isn't working).

3-4, 6: The location is much colder than expected (the air conditioning is overworking, the insulation has given up).

5-6, 1: Sections of the location are more difficult to access (large crowds, new intrusive security measures, etc.).

5-6, 2: Sections of the location are closed or off-limits (private function, repainting, remodeling, etc.).

5-6, 3: The location was damaged recently (say, by a storm or looting), and hasn't been permanently or fully repaired.

5-6, 4: The location has terrible acoustics, making communication difficult.

5-6, 5: The location (parts or all of it) is soaking wet.

5-6, 6: The location (parts or all of it) is on fire!

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND

The Little Things

It's the little details that make life – and locations – interesting. Here's a short list of items to casually add to a scene. They could mean nothing, or they could provide GMs and players with inspiration for a new adventure.

- A single item of clothing; if the item normally comes in pairs (such as earrings or gloves), only one is present.
- A novel with corners of some of the pages turned down.
- A small notebook of handwritten, unsigned poems.
- A child's toy – or a piece from a toy.
- A short newspaper clipping (a comic, an obituary, a group of classified ads, an advice column, etc.).
- An empty (or mostly empty) wallet.
- A few coins in various denominations.
- A single eating or serving utensil – clean or used – but no signs of what was eaten or served.
- Some broken glass.
- Small, unlabeled computer-data media (such as a DVD or memory card).



Got a Murphy's Rule of your own? Send it to murphy@sjgames.com

ABOUT *GURPS*

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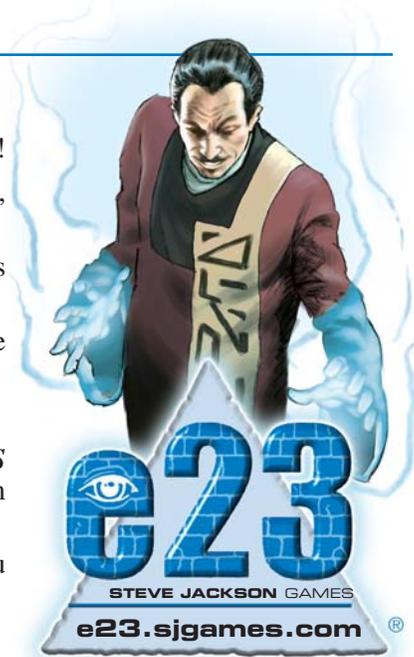
Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases are available on our website – see above.

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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