

CAPERS, CLIFFHANGERS AND THE KANDRIS SEAL



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Capers, Cliffhangers and the Kandris Seal

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Introduction

When Last We Left Our Heroes...

The warehouse lights set down pools of illumination at regular intervals, allowing the darkness to claim the rest. In one spotlight, five men sat at a round table, each of them intent on the cards in his hand. Just outside the gathering, Jack Sweeny sat on a high stool, trimming his nails with a small tool, only occasionally glancing at the game. He leaned against a wooden crate, one of hundreds stored here, and waited.

"You not gonna join us, Jack?" asked one of the men, his thick nose giving him a nasal quality that didn't fit his enormous bulk.

"Nah, Vince, I gotta supervise," he replied off-handedly. He checked his watch.

"You don't really think the Shape has the guts to come in here, do ya? I mean, there's six of us and one'a him."

"Didn't stop him from taking out the boathouse, did it?" Jack asked. "But this time we got what we need to make him feel welcome." The men at the table had heard this kind of cryptic comment earlier in the evening, but neither Jack nor the boss had elaborated, so no one pried. They did all look about the room, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Not, that is, until several loud cracks put out several lights.

"Whussat?" whispered one man as they all pushed back from the table, scattering a few chips as they did so. The assemblage pulled weapons, and hunted the darkness for a target.

"Let's see your hand then, Sweeny," hissed a voice. "I haven't got all night." Gunfire erupted from the table, most of it at random, then stopped just as abruptly. "Nice shooting, gentlemen. Let me show you how it's done." The Shape shifted

from the protection of a crate and boldly strode into the midst of the men. They backed up, stumbling over themselves as they tried to draw a bead, but the dark stranger fired confidently with a pair of pistols. They fell left and right in bloody heaps, and the Shape glided past them silently, his dark cape, suit, and mask making him appear as a featureless blob. Only Sweeny remained.

"If you've got an ace, I'd play it now," the Shape said levelly. He spasmed as a bullet struck him in the shoulder.

"You mean like that?" the gangster asked, stepping aside so another figure could enter from a small crate-laden corridor. The new arrival was unmistakable. It was the Shape. There were small differences – the clothes were a slightly darker, bleaker color, the gait a little different, and where the hero showed his rugged jaw from behind his mask, the newcomer had a crooked mouth with irregular teeth. But anyone at first glance would see the two as twins.

The Shape had time to drop his own jaw, but his opposite raised his guns and the hero was forced to do the same. The two approached each other, a few steps at first, weapons barking, but then both broke into a run. Crates splintered, windows cracked, and the two crashed into each other with a dull thud. Trading blows, the darker man – if man he was – went to work on the Shape's shoulder wound. The injured man slipped loose, leapt onto a crate, and turned in time to receive another round that spun him around and sent him crashing through the window.

"A shame," Sweeny said, looking from the empty window frame to a bloodied hand of cards off the floor. "Vince had a flush."

Welcome to the world of Pulp Kandris Seal. Up to now, the minions of Taint and the super beings trying to hold them back have been couched in four colors, but there was a time when things in the world were black and white. Even before the modern era gave rise to full-blooded heroes ready to face the evil, there were rugged men and determined women (and a few others who don't fit either classification comfortably) battling the flood of horrors in our recent past.

In the first half of the 20th century, with limits on travel, exploration, and communication, it was easier to find a corner of the planet where most men had never set foot, and in these places Chaos could gain a toehold. But they hadn't counted on the willingness of humans to challenge the murky and unlit corners of the globe; to brave uncommon extremes of wind and weather; and to penetrate the dark hearts and terrible rituals of the demons' earthly pawns.

In other words, they hadn't counted on you.

How to Use This Book

Pulp Kandris Seal is a supplement to The Kandris Seal Campaign Setting. This volume gives you the tools you'll need to run a Kandris-based game in the world of the pulps. You'll have high-flying adventures in the tradition of the great magazine heroes and serial movies of the day. Having the core Kandris Seal book isn't a bad idea...it is the basic setting, of course, and has some necessary information to make full use of this book...but there should be plenty of ideas and story fodder here to get a fight between the Tainted cultists and the bullwhip-wielding heroes off the ground and into a zeppelin where they belong.

What's In This Book

This book covers the sorts of stories made popular by the pulp fiction magazines of the early 20th century. That same sensibility made some of its way into the films, movie serials, and radio programs of that era, and this book shows how to make it all come together. You'll find a timeline to show when and where the bad guys' plots get foiled, some notes on major events of the era, and tips on duplicating and using the atmosphere of the period.

There are statistics for allies and villains, and write-ups of some of the major groups and organizations at work. You'll be able to make a character that jumps right off the Saturday matinee movie screen and into the back of a jeep. The heroes will fight with fists and fancy cinematic gizmos, and the villains' pawns will fire back with spells and Chaos-Tainted powers. There's a full-length adventure to start you off, advice on creating your own tales (including a completely outlined "serial"), dozens of adventure seeds and ideas throughout, and cliffhangers galore.

Your playground is the entire Earth, from darkest Africa to the heady mountains of South America, from war-torn Europe to a United States fighting off enemies within and without. And if that gets too boring, you can take off for the stars or delve into mysterious locations only hinted at right here on terra firma. You won't just be living in this world – as a hero, you'll be a part of it, changing things for the better.

And finally, years from now when you've sucked this book dry, you can go to the bibliography for books and movies that will take you further still.

So what are you waiting for, hero, an engraved invitation? The Silver Torrent has just stolen a prototype tank and he's advancing on Chicago, cackling and rubbing his hands together the whole way. You've only got about 10 minutes before someone rolls the "To be continued..." credit.

Chapter One

Two Fisted Adventure: The Pulp Genre

As he got out of the car, Rocky Holt surveyed the field. It was big, the sort of thing he had to till when he was a kid growing up on his dad's farm, and yet he felt no kinship with this place. A tractor sat nearby, and the half-worked land had only one man in denim overalls standing at its center. "Mr. Bramwell?" he called across the distance. The farmer met Holt halfway.

They shook hands. "This here's it," the older man said, leading Holt to the last tilled section of the field. Where Bramwell had stopped the machine, there was a large stone tablet poking up from the dirt. Although it was only partly visible, the agent could see symbols he didn't like carved into its surface. "Dang near busted the tractor rolling over it." Holt swept the soil away from the titled rock with a gloved hand. "Figured it was something you folks would be interested in."

"Thanks for the call, yes. Just the kind of thing we deal with." Holt had a hard time prying his eyes from the disturbing runes.

"Them other fellahs, I told them I'd already contacted..."

"Wait, what other men?" Holt demanded, standing up.

"A guy with a raspy voice?" The farmer nodded. "Okay, Mr. Bramwell, I need you to do me a favor. Can you call my office, the same number as before, and ask for Ted? Tell him I need a couple extra hands and it's an emergency."

"Sure, sure," he said, nodding. He plodded back toward the

farmhouse, and Holt returned to the tablet. He thought about how to conceal it, just in case, and once again found himself entranced by the runes, the symbols, the smooth, sturdy edges...he was lost in it, and barely felt the sudden impact on the nape of his neck.

His eyelids felt like gum as Holt tried to rise. He found himself bound hand and foot with rough ropes, and "Gruff" Goldman standing over him, smiling. "Agent Holt. Sorry about the little headache." That raspy voice, like sand against the side of a steel bucket, grated on the agent no end, and he could see another pair of men with equipment loading the tablet onto the back of their truck. "Don't worry, we'll take good care of it. Just like I'm gonna take care of you two."

Holt rolled on his side and found the old farmer tied up beside him, though the other man hadn't yet woken up from the knot on his forehead. He now saw that ropes connected their feet to the back of the tractor, and Goldman went to fiddle with the controls. With a jolt the vehicle started forward, and the gangster joined his friends at the retreating truck with a doff of his hat.

"Rocky, indeed," Holt grunted as the jagged stones in the soil cut into him even through the gloves and his leather jacket. The machinery chugged across the field with its helpless cargo, a sharp, steep hill looming in front of it...

The World of the Pulps

"We all know it's pulp. Now let's treat it as if it were a masterpiece."

– John Cole, *The Shadow* radio series

Pulp magazines, radio dramas, and movie serials were all popular forms of entertainment during the first half of the 20th century. They shared a lot in common: They were cheap (or in the case of radio, free), easy to crank out, and ultimately disposable. (Not all radio shows were recorded, for example, and tape being the valuable commodity it was it was often reused. Also, like other arenas of film, some serial reels have been lost to time.) Those involved in their production didn't think they were creating art. They were creating

entertainment, and producing it as fast as they could.

They had their origins in much earlier pastimes. Cheap books could be traced back to penny dreadfuls, formulaic stories that usually told the rags-to-riches story of a young man, a freshman in the big city, who eventually makes it big or strikes it rich through hard work, perseverance, and more than a little luck. They all read – and ended – the same way. Magazines would take a novel by some popular writer of the day and print a chapter each week (or monthly, depending on the periodical's schedule) to maintain interest and keep the readers coming back to find out what happened.

Movie serials did not start during the 1930s. They went back much farther than that. Some serialized adventures originated with the silent cinema, offering lurid tales of masked thieves stealing precious object d'art or reigning over the city with terror tactics until they could be brought to justice by determined police officers. The medium didn't really get up the right head of steam until the early 30s, at which point it became a staple of the Saturday morning

matinees. Viewers, usually younger kids, would catch movies, cartoons, and the latest installment of some action-packed adventure over the course of a long afternoon. The Great Depression served not only as a backdrop to these stories, it was a major force in shaping them. Unable to afford fancier forms of leisurely pursuit, people found they could part with a nickel or a dime to read the newest novella in a magazine or watch the short schedule of films, serials, and newsreels.

Pulps, so called because they were printed on thin, cheap paper, were designed to provide the reader with a quick thrill; once you were done, you could leave the book for the next rider on the bus or wrap your fish with it and you were only out 10 cents. Some magazines started out with several different stories running through them, but the format became so popular at its height that entire lines were given over to increasingly specialized genres. One book might be all about the adventures of cowboys while another dealt solely with the private dick, walking the mean streets. Others were more specific still: government agents, low fantasy heroes, even flying aces had the whole volume to themselves.

Who would read such pabulum? Well, some 10 million people a week would do so. Not that everyone was proud of it. Pulps had a reputation for being lowbrow work, a dirty business to publish in, to write in, and certainly to indulge in. Being seen with one of these supposedly juvenile rags was akin to riding in a taxi with a girlie magazine tucked under your arm. So if everyone looked down on it, who was keeping these companies in business? Probably the very same people complaining about it.

What Makes It Pulp?

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

-- *The Hayes Code*

It was thought of as the bottom rung of the industry ladder because it was so morally questionable on the face of it. These magazines were stories about brutal men and loose women. The heroes were just as disposable as the books in which they appeared. Streets are dark and dingy, clothes rumpled from being slept in, the smell of liquor and tobacco hangs everywhere in this world. These were all things the average working joe could relate to during these economically retarded times. But the people in these stories...they did things, saw things, said things that so many people longed to say themselves. They were an escape for the reader. Job not working out? Wife and kids looking to you for their next meal? Then join a masked avenger as he stalks the city. He's rough and tough and takes no sass from anybody. He's quick

with a gun and leaves his enemies coughing up their own blood. The mortgage isn't his problem. His biggest hurdle was a ring of socialist revolutionaries with a bomb who wanted to blow up city hall.

The characters lived fast, hard lives and loved equally fast, distant women, and for all their effort they knew they'd end up either at the bottom of a bottle or the bottom of the harbor. But in the meantime, what a ride. The stories spurned many of the moral sensibilities of the time, forming an outlet for the frustrations and unrealized dreams of an audience worn out by wars and economic uncertainty.

To oversimplify the subject, pulps were for adults; the serials, both radio and movies, were the same thing only shined up for the kids. Again you had a cheap form of entertainment, along with a raft of other cinematic goodies, but the serials were a way to keep the youngsters begging mom and dad for nickels, dimes, and quarters (depending on the era) week after week. You just had to know how this one was going to end...

The heroes were dashing figures whose lives were full of excitement and danger. They were military men or spies or superheroes, and they had a beautiful girlfriend and some of the coolest equipment the kids had ever salivated over. They got to carry guns (the heroes, not the kids), but some of them wore rocket packs or had a horse that would come when they called. They could cloud their foes' minds or climb high to gain illicit entry to anything from a mobster's office to a mountain stronghold. They fought saboteurs and criminal masterminds, and every week they found themselves at the mercy of these vile fiends. Surely there was no way they could slip loose from the conveyor belt in time to avoid the band saw on the table, or make it to the door before the dynamite blew the bus to smithereens, or survive that hail of bullets... was there? You'd have to cough up another dime next week to find out.

Pulp stories are a thin gruel. They were the same ideas trotted out in different packages. They were last-minute saves and fabulous stunts and, in the cheesiest of them, some stock footage reused to save a bit of time and money in filming. Little time was wasted on making the hero (or for that matter the villain) look like a fully formed person with a personality and a life and hopes and dreams. He was his job – cowboy, secret service agent, Mountie – and the full expression of his character was whatever thrilling leaps he pulled off before the chapter ended.

Any depth to his persona had to be hinted at by the writer or assumed by the audience, because on the screen the most fully realized facet of his character was his gimmick. If you were a cowboy you had a faithful sidekick or a trained horse or a fantastic trick shot. The superhero had at the very least a mask that kept the audience guessing (and guess they would...in those days, they didn't always let the viewers in on his true identity until the very last chapter). More likely he also had a weapon like a gas gun or a rocket pack. The space heroes had their ray guns and their space ships, the warrior his trusty sword, and the secret agent a partner he could trust no matter how high the water rose.

And if the hero didn't have it the villain did. The power to turn invisible made knocking over banks a snap. Was his a dysfunctional family life as a child? It didn't matter and never

figured into the story because no one cared. People showed up to see him turn invisible, which he did, once an episode, every episode, until the hero could finally put paid to his evil schemes in "Chapter 15: The Mirage Revealed!"

The hero and heroine, the sidekicks and the villains, had their whole lives down on canvases the size of a magazine, or told in the space of 10 minutes a week.

What Makes the Game Pulp?

Does all this mean the character doesn't matter? Well, yes and no.

Anyone could put on the mask. Anyone could ride the horse, save the girl, stop the villain. If you approached the argument that way, that any officer of the law can pull a trigger, you'd have a pretty shallow selection of heroes from which to draw. That's "all" any hero does in a non-pulp game. He "just" fires a power blast, he "only" throws a punch, he "merely" drops onto the wing of the Death Flier, forces his way inside, and beats the stuffing out of all comers.

The hero in the pulps may not have time to pontificate, but his actions have consequences and meaning. A right hook may seem like an odd way of "expressing" oneself, but in essence that's what the protagonist does. To him, every bullet expended is a cry for justice; every jump from one train car to the next a leap for liberty; each disaster avoided a blow for freedom. Ask the kids if they're getting the message – they're out in the park playing space rangers and trying to pull off the same flip the hero did.

The pulps let people in dire circumstances escape into a world of fantasy that made them feel empowered. Sometimes it was just the cathartic release of a "hero" who gunned down every mobster in his way, and other times it was the somewhat purer impulse to think you could rise above your problems in a rocket pack. The same thrills carry over to a pulp roleplaying game. The villains are still utterly ruthless, the heroes are still ridiculously capable and long-lived, and the settings are still remarkably tolerant of the unbelievable exploits in which both engaged. But

this time, when the kids are flashing their badges or barrel-rolling their Spitfire a mile in the air or karate chopping the guard outside their cell, they're using dice and drinking too much cola. The characters in the pulps didn't need to be fully rounded individuals because they had personalities, millions of them, projected on them by millions of readers and viewers. Now they have you performing the same service.

Let's go, tough guy. The past needs heroes, too.

Elements of Pulp

"Excellent," I cried.
"Elementary," said he.

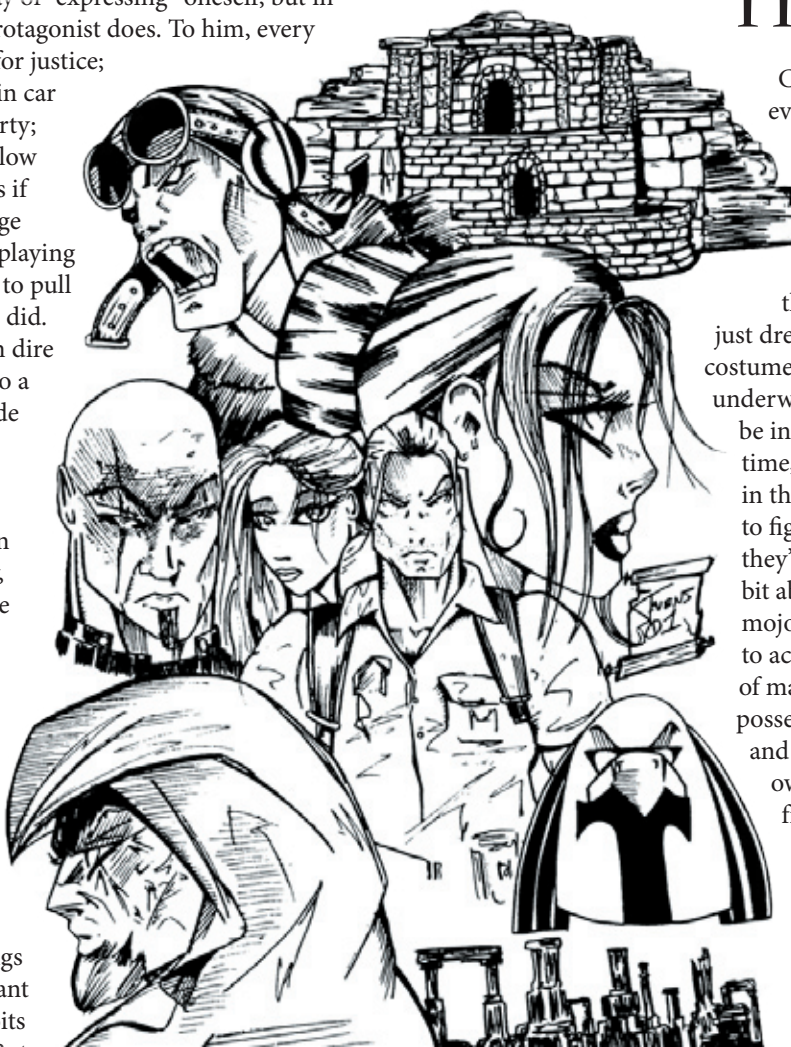
-- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventure of the Crooked Man*

Certain things can always be found in movie serials, radio broadcasts, and pulp stories of the time. Not everything on the list that follows was in every episode or every story, but these are common tropes and the GM ignores them at his own risk.

Heroes

Cool, confident, capable, every story needs heroes, someone to right the wrongs. Sometimes they're masked heroes, good with a gun or quick with a gimmick, though sometimes they're just dressed in an imposing costume and breathe fear into the underworld. They always seem to be in the right place at the right time, and have one more trick in their bag. If they're expected to fight chaos-tainted enemies, they'll have learned a good bit about their foes' uncanny mojo. They may not be able to actively practice any form of magic themselves but they possess a basic understanding and acceptance of it, and their own powers may be derived from effects they do not fully understand.

Many heroes are on active duty with military services or other authorities, like the Secret Service or the Royal Canadian Mounted



Police. The current adventure may be their latest assignment, but it could also be a plot they simply stumbled onto and are now trying to deal with as best they can. Sometimes the mission was given to them through official channels, but once involved the hero and his team find themselves cut off from the usual chain of command (say if they were being held prisoner in an underwater city they were sent to explore). They must then pursue the matter as best they can while trying to uphold the laws and their duties as best they can.

Another large category of hero is the capable everyman. These people aren't given powers that demand action or part of an official unit from the government; rather, they're average folks who get caught up in the villains' plans and they fight the good fight because they understand what has to be done. "Average" here means unaffiliated; their skills in combat and investigation are unmatched, and usually the result of their chosen profession. Cowboys, pilots, mercenaries, athletes, and newspaper reporters all fall into this group. All have seen enough action that they can take care of themselves, and all are pure of heart enough to place the little guy ahead of their own safety.

Women

No doubt the ladies will get better treatment in your campaign than they did in fiction. Back then, they were love interests for the square-jawed heroes, and when the fists started flying their job was to be rendered unconscious with a stray blow at the start so no more harm would come to them.

In a roleplaying game, that sort of thing never flies. GMs should emphasize the better qualities the women of yesterday's magazines displayed – devotion to their friends, quick wits, intelligence – and downplay the negative aspects like simpering and fawning, screaming when captured by the bad guys, and bashing people over the head with lamps. These things don't necessarily have to be eliminated altogether, but like any other stereotype, the novelty will rapidly wear off for a modern audience. Use them only as long as is dramatically appropriate.

Female foils abound in these stories. They may not take center stage or be the romantic lead, but the kidnapped scientist always has a lovely young daughter, and the villain, too, may have offspring of his own. They vie for the hero's attention, and in the case of the bad guy's kids, they may be tempted into doing something that saves the hero's life. This may be a temporary reprieve, and she may betray the protagonist once again if she thinks she was duped or mislead, or her affections rebuffed. Then again, she may really disapprove of her father's methods or way of life, and truly want to become a good person. Sometimes that works out and she starts a new life; other times the best she can manage is to give her life in place of the hero's in a desperate grab for salvation.

These strictures only apply if the characters are NPCs, of course. If they're PCs, the player is welcome to present them as being every bit as capable as their male counterparts.

Villains

You've got the hero and the heroine, now you need a villain. In a serial thriller, the villain is suave and debonair. He's dressed impeccably, his hair is slicked back, and he commands – and receives – complete fealty from his minions. In the pulps, he's more likely to be a product of the times. Sinister figures, typically cartoonishly Asian men with exaggerated, racially biased features, lurk in the shadows until the hero (or more likely his female foil) steps into the picture. At that point he ties them to a post and exposes them to a seemingly exotic torture device drawn from some jungle hell.

In the serials, the villain was often a masked figure, and his identity remained a mystery throughout the run of the picture. Several possibilities were presented, because he always turned out to be someone else in the cast, usually one of the good guys' bosses. Likely candidates were eliminated one by one during the show, and only in the last episode did the audience finally discover who had been behind all the machinations.

If the producers didn't go to the trouble of providing the villain an elaborate shtick and some vaguely menacing alter ego, he might be a more mundane kind of criminal. Robbers, kidnappers, industrial spies...in fact, through the course of the serial he probably enacted more than one of these plots to get what he wanted or to get the heroes off his trail. His followers were the ones doing all the heavy lifting, because the mastermind of the plot had to figure out all the angles (while playing piano and drinking sherry, in accordance with their good breeding).

Occasionally you got a true supervillain, the sort of fellow who wore a ring that could incinerate you where you stood or who controlled the weather or certain animals with means not immediately obvious. They went in for the fancy bad guy long johns, too, though they didn't always wear masks (some of them were simply too daunting or sure of themselves to conceal their true identity – why possess all this power and not let people know about it?). Their schemes were concomitantly lofty as well. Other villains might aspire to threaten part of the world with their latest discovery for control of a country or some monetary gain, but the perversions of the supervillain seldom dipped below world domination, and some were a step up from that.

This was one area in which women achieved a degree of parity with the men: There were plenty of femme fatales working for the wrong side. Slinky and seductive, these ladies might be the main villain's right hand woman, fluttering their eyes to get what they wanted from the hero, or they might be a power in their own right. They still didn't engage others in fisticuffs – they had their thick-muscled minions to do that for them – but they were as vile as the males and just as slippery.

In Pulp Kandris, there's another level to which the enemies can take their game. Real magic suffuses this world, and the villains are going to make use of it. They may have learned a few parlor tricks from the mysterious Orient or some old book, and that's fine for the traditional pulp style, but now there's real power to be had. The price is higher for such offerings, but most of the users probably think if they become

powerful enough they can defy death itself and delay paying that price. A villain can now fight for dominance in more than one world.

Henchmen

If you're going to survive to the end of the novel, you have to hire yourself some minions. Confronting the heroes directly is almost always a bad idea, so putting up a buffer between yourself and them is vital. In the pulps, the enemy's followers always persevered to the end of the story, because that gave the reader time to dislike them (and in the movies, it saved the studios the expense of having to put someone else under contract). There were always a few nobodies in the fight scenes to bump up the body count, but at least one of the minions was a little smarter, a little faster, and a little better than the people under him. He was the one left standing to put the hero into the death trap or drag the girlfriend back to the lair, and he was the last one to go down in the fight just before the good guys confronted the now-friendless mastermind one final time. The name was usually something tough and distasteful sounding, like Mugsy or Brewster, and we seldom found out what his first name was before he was drowned under a boat in the bay.

The Government

Just about everything came back to the government at one point or another. Even if the heroes didn't work for them directly, they were still happy to do their part for the cause. The government sent people on missions, came through with intelligence about the schemes that were afoot, and offered resources to their people and relief to their citizens. For convenience, the G-men were awfully trusting of pretty much any hero who stepped up to the plate. You could be wearing a mask and command the power of the lightning gun and they'd still say, "Thank goodness you're here. The Sumatran Rat is on the prowl!" as nonchalantly as if they were talking to their postman.

Not Quite the Government

If you didn't work for the military and you weren't a member of the Secret Service, chances are you still had an outfit for which you did all your work. You might even be the leader of that team, and the government was all too happy to turn to you for help and advice on their latest crisis. These team leaders were not only the heroes but scientists as well, using the group's resources both to study and improve their own powers and gadgets and to examine the clues discovered during the course of the investigation. It was accepted that,

like the costumed heroes who anonymously worked in tandem with the authorities, your work would be important, and if someone found a vital item – say, a chunk of the secret mineral rock the villain used – it would be given to you for further study. (Your lab was also a lot easier to break into than the Pentagon.)

The Underworld

Sure, everyone on the bad guys' side is considered a criminal, but here we mean the actual underworld. Everyone who wanted to sabotage America's good works or conquer a nation hired someone from the ranks of the lawbreakers to do their dirty work. This included such exotic specimens as aliens from another world bent on taking over the Earth – their workforce consisted almost entirely of thugs and safecrackers, with an alien lieutenant thrown in to watch over the team and give them their marching orders. Now the people for whom the criminals work may be chaos-tainted, or the gangsters themselves may be chaos-tainted. Either way, the underworld has never had many qualms about who they help in these situations, so as long as they've been promised something good, they're in it until the final chapter.

The Plan

The villain needs something to delight over and wring his hands about, and this is where his evil plans come into play. A mastermind is only as good as his next operation, so the GM should take the time to work out what it's going to be. Mind you, if you just want to wing it, a lot of the old plots start to look alike after a short while anyway, so some possibilities are offered in Chapter Eight, along with tips on developing them into a longer running campaign idea.

Weird Science

Tangentially related to the villain's plans is the science behind the story. Some pulps just deal with old-fashioned villains doing old-fashioned larceny, but since Kandris Seal assumes there's a secret war going on behind the veil, the whole concept of suspension of disbelief is already skating on thin ice. The GM might as well throw this old chestnut onto the fire as well.

Weird science can enter the game at several levels. It may be the force commanded by the mastermind that must be overcome by our disadvantaged heroes. It may be the source of the hero's power. Or it may be the MacGuffin that drives the plot along. (You can find more on using the science to create heroes and villains in Chapter Three.) Whatever it is, it has to be dealt with in as consistent a fashion as possible. You don't want to limit the possible uses of this power arbitrarily; you want the players to feel their personae can make creative use of it if they possess or steal it. But like everything else in the pulps, it should be a one-trick pony. Once a movie was over, the writers didn't have to worry about the continued use of the breakthrough in the characters' daily lives. In your

game, if you bring up some fanciful new discovery, you may also have to come up with a reason why it won't help the heroes in the next story arc (this is discussed fully in Chapter Four, as are suggestions for equipment and machines with the appropriate feel). Careful choices when deciding what your weird science idea is may not only eliminate this problem but allow you to continue to take the game in the directions you'd like it to go.

Death Traps

At least once in the story, the characters are going to have to face up to some insidious mechanism by which the villains wish to eliminate their opposition. This amounts to some wholly unworkable scheme involving sliding walls that close in on whoever's trapped in the room. (Sometimes there are spikes, too, which always leaves you wondering how the walls will get close enough together to finish the job.) The challenge with each chapter of a pulp or serial is to come up with some new, fiendish way in which to dispose of those annoying do-gooders. The heroes then have to come up with an equally clever way of slipping through the noose. The methods used don't always have to be some deliberately worked out clockwork device, nor do the heroes have to be taken prisoner; sometimes the moment simply presents an opportunity, and the bad guys take it. This is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

The Death of the Villain

At the end of the story, justice must be done (literally – in early dramas, most codes required that the villains must be shown to pay for their crimes). The main bad guy need not die, though falling into one's own bottomless pit or being crushed by one's own mutated ape is a noble end for any mastermind. Often, especially in the case of masked villains whom the heroes had to jump through hoops to ferret out, the pleasure came in confronting the culprit in his street identity as he sat at the board room table listening to how his plot was foiled.

But yeah, dying's good too. It's all most of them deserve, and the GM ought to think up several ways for the fiend to meet his maker...and perhaps a few ways in which those ends might be avoided, should the villain be so popular that you want to bring him back at some point. Watch your players carefully for reactions at that moment – if it looks like they don't care for the mastermind tripping into his own pit full of venomous spiders, it may mean they were hoping to deliver the final blow themselves. This might be avoided altogether if the GM simply asks the players a few pointed questions about it before play begins, but you don't want to tip your hand. And if the team isn't happy with such a pulp ending, maybe they're playing the wrong game to begin with.

Chapter Two

Cults, Crypts, and Uppercuts: The Kandris Seal as a Pulp Setting

Shots rang out into the bank's lobby, emanating from somewhere within the vault. Police dove for cover behind anything they could find, which wasn't much. Their quarry had eight inches of steel to hide behind.

"Give it up," Officer Bannister called out breathlessly. "There's nowhere to go."

"That's what you think, flatfoot," was the only reply, muttered, so clearly it wasn't spoken for his benefit.

The doors to the street swung open simultaneously. "Bannister?" asked the new arrival. Beside him was another man, dressed in an identical suit.

"Detective Chance!" Bannister sounded relieved. "They've gotten into the vault, but how they think they'll escape with the money..."

Chance nodded to Regal, his partner. Neither man was sure they intended to escape, and if their snitch was right this wasn't just about money. "Back off, we'll take it from here." The two men switched places with the uniformed officers, and the men in dark suits drew their guns and inched forward. "This is Detectives Chance and Regal with the Crime Rangers. Let's not drag this thing out, fellahs. What do you want? 'cause you're not getting it past us."

"We'll see about that, Chance," came the reply. Chance froze. He looked at Regal for some kind of confirmation, but he was stiff with recognition, too.

"That voice...?" Both agents shook their heads. That man was dead, buried in Chapel Cemetery. So who was inside?

They stepped forward, and their powers of reason took

another hit. It was Morgan McCree, his hair slicked, his suit neatly pressed, his signature lapel blossom in full flower. In his left hand, a valise brimming with cash. In his right, a pistol. McCree looked every bit as dapper as he had the day they'd lowered his body into the ground.

"Wearing the same suit, too," the gangster answered, tugging sharply at one lapel with his gun hand, as if he had heard their unspoken musings. With him, three other men. Chance recognized Bert and Bernie Breaker right away, but the third man, his back to them, was unknown. His rumpled suit and worn hat, characteristic of your average hobo, seemed somehow to fit him perfectly.

"Where are my manners?" the smartly dressed criminal spoke up, again as if reading their minds. "There have been a few changes in my gang since you killed me. I needed help if I was going to get back into the robbery game. In fact, the first thing I needed help with was not being dead. Mr. Smythe, this is Detectives Chance and Regal."

The man turned to look at the two, his body seeming to flow like rough water. It was as though he had a misshapen form that wouldn't stay in one place for long, but it filled out his wrinkled suit exactly. "We've met," came a voice like a slow bass drum, "though they wouldn't remember me from that meeting. Humans never do." He pulled back his hat, revealing his face, his terrible smile, his yellowed eyes, his lumpy, hairless head. That smile. They did remember him.

That was why they passed out.

Add Pulp and Stir

"Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid...He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man."

— Raymond Chandler, The Simple Art of Murder

Now that you know a lot of the elements that figure into pulps and serials, you just need to insert those puzzle pieces

into your Kandris campaign. The result isn't going to be a pure version of either, so know that things will change when you combine the two and you'll lose a little of the flavor one way or another. This chapter should help you decide where those alterations are most keenly felt.

Mixing It Up

You can look at your campaign in a few ways. It could be a pulp game that suddenly finds it's up against supernatural horrors. It could be a game about mages and scholars studying ways to defeat their ancient enemies, and with the advent of the Nuclear Age the Fates decided it was time to

offer up some new heroes to fight the good fight. Or you could simply start it off with a mishmash of the two – maybe let the players split into two “teams,” one pulp and one mystical – and let everyone focus their character toward the genre that suits them best. These are all equally viable strategies and no doubt enthusiastic GMs can come up with more permutations, but we’ll concentrate on these three approaches for now. There are settings listed later in this chapter that can stir the pot further.

The Kandris Seal Becomes Pulp

The game is the same as the core book, but the adventures take place 50 to 70 years ago. To the ranks of the mages, the pulp heroes are added. The action can take on a more cinematic flair to duplicate the heroic activities of the past, but even in their own time period the non-magical folks are the odd men out. Fighting the Thirteen still boils down to the superiority of the mystic will, and the other PCs serve in the same capacity as the Dragon Hunters and their kind. While the mages are tossing spells and withstanding magic counterattacks that would outright erase the pulp heroes, these screen idols are fighting off the mundane servants (gangsters, perhaps, or cultists armed with curved knives and no skills) or trying to shift the Philosopher’s Stone from its very precise position on the sacrificial circle of blood.

Mages should outnumber the “regular” heroes since magic is driving the plot. The spell casters aren’t calling all the shots, and they should still defer to the wisdom of the intrepid guide or hardened detective when they’re on their home turf. Settings should vary more. No matter how much you trot the globe to exotic places, though, when you get where you’re going the evil temples look much the same. All those powers have the pulp fans champing at the bit, but they can’t really let loose unless the mages tell them so, for fear of upsetting some invisible cosmic balance.

Pulp Becomes the Kandris Seal

The streetwise heroes and sassy debutantes of the era thought they had a handle on their dingy sidewalks and dank alleyways until the day something came from inside that did not fall at the discharge of a Tommy gun. Enter the mages. They’re used to fighting demons and imps and sealing

up tombs, but theirs is a world of libraries and books, of incantations and fairy fires. Out in the cold they find it seems so unforgiving. Success in the old places was often met with a shining, ethereal light that banished the last shadows after the combat. Here, when you win, you’re lucky if the streetlight is still working.

In the pulp world, the heroes act as a sort of chaperone to the mages. Not that they’re all doddering fools, but not every problem behaves the way you expect it to. The mages agreed to take care of the seemingly invincible beasts now stalking the byways, and the dark heroes intercept or explain the harsh realities. Magic is rare and difficult out here, and some fights are better avoided. The mages find that getting to the magic portal could get them killed; humans don’t understand the deeper threat, and they’d rather shoot you than listen to the explanation. Pulp PCs have the upper hand and victories seem small, leaving mages feeling like senile products of a bygone age.

Kandris and Pulp Together

This is a free-for-all, and one the GM has to keep on top of. It allows the players their greatest autonomy, but it also means the referee has the most work to do. The other two settings have built-in buffers that, so long as players understand and accept them as part of the worldview, prevent some elements from getting out of control. But here he cannot conveniently ignore character creation considerations. The mages are in full force, going after the Keepers of the Broken Circle with unfettered forms of magic, while the street heroes may use magic as one small piece of their character’s makeup. They now view the Thirteen not as an inscrutably evil force in the drawing rooms of high society, to be dealt with by the esoteric masters of the craft. No, if the world plays by any kind of fair rules at all, they have equal ability to take down the children of the night with guns a-blazin’ and a good uppercut. The players may enjoy unrestricted use of the character creation options, but it saddles the GM with a kind of flavorless sameness to both the party and the adventures.

Keeping Everybody Happy

The gamemaster won’t be able to preserve all the facets of both settings when he cross-pollinates like this, so he needs to make sure the players are all getting what they want out of the game. He also needs to check that he’ll like the fusion that results as well – an unhappy GM is an unenthusiastic one.

Most of the changes are narrative, not mechanical, though the rules can play a part as well (see Chapter Three for more on character creation).

Does everyone want to play mages? It might make better sense to continue your regular Kandris game and simply add pulp elements to that. The setting becomes a bit darker and the heroes (and villains) a bit more cartoonish and focused, but the action is freewheeling and there's less philosophy and moralizing about the fight against the Thirteen. Ongoing personal dramas give way to simpler characterizations. If you want the time to match the style you can take it back to the middle of the 20th century, but remember a full-blown mage created for a contemporary setting is a lot more powerful than the sorts of figures that populated the fiction.

Mages of that time period weren't spell casters as we know them; they were heroes whose powers sprang from magical sources, or whose spells were the explanation for the special effects used. The power to cloud men's minds could be the result of willpower, but it might also be an expression of one's mystical strength. Players shouldn't be limited thus, but if they want their PC to use the idioms of the time they should at least try to come up with a motif to play to. They could still be Mordon, Master of the Flame, and there's plenty of leeway there for improvisation. See Chapter Three for more about giving heroes signature powers.

You can concentrate solely on the pulp protagonists. In your version of history, maybe the rise of magic hasn't happened yet. Mages are rare, and those who exist are just as described above. Most of the fighting is done by the "mundane" good guys of this age, and they have their hands full foiling the mystic plots. Perhaps they have a guru of some sort who dispenses sage wisdom to them in their ongoing struggle, but all their sorcerous problems must have a more physical answer save for those occasions when their patron gives them some small boost ("Spread the contents of this vial of the Powder of Arabian Sands across the threshold"). They could even be Earthly heroes working to restore the effects of magic in our world, leading, at the end of their era, to the resurgence of magic and the creation of the Thaumaturgia that characterizes the next. Of course, the demons held behind the Seal are tough opponents even in the core book so handing those duties to non-magically inclined PCs, even on a temporary basis, has dangers of its own.

You can also reverse this. The Thaumaturgia of the present may have the Keepers under glass, but their servants are out in force. As their influence spreads the demons can command a wider segment of society, but their first converts are going to be the criminals. Mages may know how to close a portal to hell or banish a demon, but a gang of gun-toting thugs is a little different. Even if the council's magical skills are formidable, are they the best choice to stop urban violence,

capture bank robbers, and systematically shut down various levels of the mob, all while keeping on top of their rituals?

Getting the pulp heroes involved could happen a number of ways. The Thaumaturgia may hunt down the aged, retired legends of their past and ask for help. They could even offer a youth spell to restore their allies to their fighting form. They could conjure a hole in time and draw the heroes forward, or create a door that allows such passage freely in times of need. If they bore offspring, the heroes' children could be given amulets that channel the spirit and powers of their parents or grandparents. The equipment may be in a museum of some sort (or perhaps the mages kept the gear in trust), ready to be assigned to someone new. Or the council may simply have to track down new people who fit the bill and make them a deal: Cool powers in exchange for help shoring up the Thaumaturgia's shortcomings.

Most likely you'll just mix up the two groups. Some want to play the mystic saviors, come to make the Seal permanent in this purest of ages; others want to be the man of mystery, walking the dark streets and dealing hard justice. The GM should highlight the best features of the two factions. The mages are thoughtful where the pulp models are men of action. The wizards

understand the Thirteen and their lackeys where the dark avengers know how best to navigate the rat's maze of the city. The pulp gang is vulnerable to magic while the mystics are easy prey for the vicissitudes of human nature. Most of these factors should be true whether you're playing pulp in the past or the present.

Surprise!

The gamemaster may also wish to keep his possession of this book a secret, or only allow the players to see or know about certain sections. He can then have the players prepare for a campaign that falls into one camp or the other. Once things are underway he can spring the other half on them. Just as the players feel secure going after the mob with guns akimbo, have something horrible crawl up out of the sewer grate and attack them. Let them decide later if they'd like to continue with those characters or take something from the other half of the equation. If they'd like to switch PC types, you may even find a way to have the pulp character or his adventures presage the arrival of his mage replacement, or vice versa.

A Little from Column A, a Little from Column B

Setting these two genres head-to-head with each other provides a rich gaming experience, but if the two are inextricably linked it might also spell a bit of monotony for the players. There's danger of the Keepers breaking free with the help of gangsters again? Wake us in time for the last reel. Horror and pulp are both popular styles for a reason, and just because you're doing a crossover doesn't mean both must be consistently employed. Either setting does quite nicely on its

own, thank you very much, and the GM shouldn't feel forced to combine them simply because that's one of the stories he told everyone he was going to run.

Alternating from one focus to the other helps break up the pattern. Make one of the stories all about the heroes vs. their masked arch-foe and his desire to sink Manhattan Island into the bay. When that's over and done with you can segue into the discovery of a sinkhole full of sepulchers with arcane symbols. If you unveil every story as the beginning of another demonic plot, the players are always going to be looking for certain standard pieces of the puzzle. If not every story is consistently one genre or the other (or always a mix), your group won't know which chronicles to expect. Plot points could now be terribly important or just a red herring – or the hint of something you're not planning on getting into for six months yet.

Switching also lets you build a better and more believable game world. While running a purely pulp adventure, make sure there are plenty of clues for your PCs to find when they're searching for information.

The Keepers' tendrils stretch far and wide, but not all of it is germane to the problems at hand. Also, be sure you don't bury them so deep in plot hooks that they get distracted from the main adventure. Head them off with comments like, "An interesting manuscript, to be sure, but you also know you'd have to go to the house in London to find someone who can help translate it." The same methods work in reverse while running the Kandris half of the world, of course. The Keepers plan to take over our world, but they're usually part of the secret history so not everyone walking the streets knows about them. Once you've introduced some naïve initiate, though, they become fair game.

Example: Investigating a demonic servant on a warm summer night, the team stops in at their local liquor store for some sodas. They ask old man Werther how things are going, and he mentions some weirdo who's been fumbling about in the back aisle of the store for the last hour. They look into it and find the stranger squatting on the floor, symbols drawn in red fluid on the surrounding tiles, and a single malt being poured into his ceremonial bowl. They've found their target, the party realizes, and after the ensuing combat Werther will never be the same.

You can draw in unconnected people and places as the game goes

on, making it clear nothing is sacred. Without our heroes' intervention, everyone and everything falls to the demons sooner or later. Many more heartaches will come before the threat is finally eliminated. Start with small things and ancillary characters, but drop hints that as the noose tightens the peril posed by the Keepers is going to strike closer to home and on a larger scale.

From the Ground Up

Putting together a campaign requires a number of things, and when you know what everyone wants to play you've got the most important part. Now you have to build your game world, and the best way to figure out what you want is to answer three big questions: Where is it set, what story do you tell, and how do you tell it? The next three sections answer those questions.

Themes

The old stories were woven around some pretty simple ideas; your plot could only become so involved in a monthly magazine. When you play an RPG you'll tell a more intricate story, but if you want to maintain some of that pulp purity of vision it helps to have a theme in mind to keep you on a narrower path. Below are some of the ideas that suffused a lot of the entertainment of the time. GMs can choose one or more of these as the prevailing topics in their plots, or use a different one for each story arc.

Good vs. Evil

This is as simple as it gets but while it's understood there's a bit of this classic struggle at the heart of every campaign, it can be muted or even altogether absent. In a pulp setting or serial fiction the environment provides plenty of challenge, for example, as do simple dealings with the average local on the street, the native tribesmen making their living in harsh conditions, and the police officer

Morality

The GM has to decide just how like the pulps he wants his campaign to be. If he's used to running four-color super stories, the morally ambiguous tales of yesteryear won't track too closely. The pulps were violent, and even the heroes weren't shy about taking out the opposition with whatever means got the job done. The good guys fought for truth and law and the little guy, but that often meant rising above the legal niceties and doling out street justice with a gun. The authors made sure only the villains got taken out, and heroes never killed an innocent person by mistake.

Most groups find that level of bloodshed distressing – they think nothing of swinging a sword at a set of kobolds in a comic book fantasy, but to claim the moral high ground when shotgunning mobsters? Fortunately there's an obvious compromise. There is a battle being fought, but the underworld in this setting is a mystical place filled with demons and otherworldly beasts bent on destruction. They may even have taken over the criminal element in any given city, so if the group wants to take a pulp attitude while keeping their hands relatively clean, the GM should be able to oblige. Any demographic of your standard adventure – the mob, soldiers, cultists, minions, metahumans – may be irretrievably lost to some level of the infernal hierarchy, and may be beyond redemption. Even so, this should be used as a storytelling tool, not as an excuse for using unfettered violence where more restrained forms of confrontation would suffice. Remember, any roleplaying game needs to understand its participants, or the comfort level drops and everyone goes home.

on the beat faced with a deadly fire. Good vs. evil is an uncomplicated theme in the pulps, but it's also possible to develop arcs within your campaign that break away from it to concentrate on the basic strength of character all heroes display. Don't allow every petty theft or grand disaster be the result of some dyed-in-the-wool plot by foreign agents. Your players will derive plenty of satisfaction from entering a metaphorical fire and coming out the other end tempered and better than before.

Patriotism

Most of these comments are focused on American interests, but as long as you paint events in foreign countries with a contemporary brush you can change the venue to an allied nation. France or England would be popular, but everywhere you go there's adventure to be found. If the players want to portray various important members of an African tribe or the fledgling heroes of the nascent Russian meta-soldier project, go for it. Only good can come of such a creative approach to an otherwise familiar genre.

With the ups and downs on the international scene from the 1930s to the 1950s, adding patriotism as your overriding issue can be tricky. It means something different depending on the timeframe. During the wars, America is showing its fighting spirit, but between them it's keeping its own counsel. Things are far bleaker morale-wise during the Great Depression than during the Second World War – at least with hostilities most citizens feel they have a concrete and attainable goal.

If you want to use nationalism as part of your theme, you may want to consider finding out what the players want to be before committing yourself to anything. If they wish to play gung-ho good guys representing the United States, you should probably fix the era sometime during the war. If they want to play crewmen aboard the independent freighter *Endurance*, you could set things during a period of American isolationism. These aren't hard and fast rules, of course. Just because the United States, stung by war and mounting poverty, feels like tending its own garden for a time doesn't mean Americans are any less heroic or any less welcome. But the theme is strongest when it works as a parallel and the events you use to entertain your group are in keeping with the country's attitudes.

During war (or any period where America is going out of its way to involve itself for the betterment of the world), adventures should concentrate on that same spirit. In battle, we commit our soldiers and superheroes. On the home front, we combat foreign agents and saboteurs with super spies and hometown heroes like cowboys, athletes, and veterans.

Character Power Levels

How tough or powerful your characters are can have a marked influence on the theme, mood, and even setting, and the effect isn't always noticeable until after the game has started – sometimes well after. If you wish to run a game using a horror motif, that's imposing to a fresh-faced rookie PC. Doing the same game with characters who have been around the block a time or two before might not be feasible. For example, what does a hero who chucks thunderbolts like baseballs have to fear from a coven of vampires? Not much. It's the same reason the Keepers stay safely locked up behind the Seal in most games – the average PC can't make a dent in that armor. See Chapter Three for more information about how various levels of character ability may affect your choice of settings and how they're presented.

In enemy territory, we focus on secret agents and femme fatales, or commandoes and tank crews. Enemy plans and developing technologies are the targets, unless it's an underdeveloped nation or one caught in the middle of our hostilities. Then we send our pilots, relief volunteers, and any support personnel we can spare. Lay the jingoism on with a trowel, and be sure to add a little gratuitous flag-waving to every session.

Example: Stuntman Stu Purcell has cornered the Commandant, who was trying to set off charges in the courthouse. After taking a severe beating, Stu finally regains the upper hand. Landing one last punch on his German foe, he sends him crashing through the railing into the rotunda below. The GM tells his harried hero that, peering over the broken barrier, he sees the unconscious villain lying squarely across the tiled eagle mosaic

on the floor, and the dislodged American flag flutters down to cover his chest.

When the international stage falls silent we still have intrepid people out in the field but they're mostly on their own. The aforementioned *Endurance* is a good example. It can't count on an American escort through sub-infested waters because that's the kind of naked aggression the government is trying to steer clear of. But the crew, at the very least they need to draw a paycheck and so they're willing to put their necks on the line to get even ordinary cargo to its destination. If you want them to feel like real heroes, have them ferry medicine and other necessities to desperate people in waters they know to be patrolled by German U-boats. Then again, they could confront ship sinkings that turn out to be the work, not of enemy action, but of some benighted sea creature with tendrils reaching for its next meal.

Your player characters don't have to involve themselves in politics at any level to be heroes (and the less part played by those politics the better), but having an identity independent of (and not necessarily separate from) one's national identity should still come into play. Being the lone wolf while the American giant sleeps is harder and might present obstacles that must be overcome. For example, by the end of 1939 Britain is engaged in the war, and a hero visiting there from the States may have to overcome a lot of prejudice from those who feel he's not pulling his weight, metaphorically speaking. Heroes often have to prove their mettle or devotion in unfamiliar situations, but this time it serves the purposes of the story. If successful the character can embody the best virtues of his home country in spite of current affairs.

Note also this is almost by definition how the *Thaumaturgia* is viewed regardless of circumstance. To some they're aloof, ivory tower standoffs who don't care a whit about world events. Those who know them, though, and know their mission also know there's something they

consider bigger and more threatening. The fight against fascism means almost nothing should the Seal be broken. Again, the parallels: The focus of the game should always come back to the guardians of Kandris, and council-centric missions should at some point involve bringing some important campaign figure to the realization that victory in Europe is only part of the solution. Win the war as quickly as possible, for there are darker forces at work who have outlived many of Man's follies. The power of the atom is dangerous, but harnessing its power through its heroes allows us to confront that greater darkness.

Exploration

A lot of the protagonists in the pulps are trendsetters and trailblazers. They could be bush pilots, guides, or scouts, either trying to stay one step ahead of civilization or leading expeditions into the unknown. You can get a lot of mileage (figuratively and literally) from games that focus on the exploration of new lands, and the strange things and peoples encountered there.

Then again, another breed of explorer may never leave his hometown. Discovering new technologies can be just as important to the campaign as seeking out new regions. Filmmakers especially got a lot of footage keeping abreast of new scientific breakthroughs and using them as MacGuffins or plot devices. Yet another wrinkle comes up in a Pulp Kandris game: that of the magical explorer. Like his technologically inclined brethren, this man treats the mystic world with an even hand in an attempt to systematically unlock the other world.

The GM should allow characters the chance to discover new things about their hated foes. Knowledge is power, so even a game set in a single town can ride this theme if the heroes are able to cobble together, piece by piece, a means by which to strike a more permanent

blow against their hoary tormentors. Just staying in one town might get a little old, so the thrill would have to come from piecing together the mystery. Make sure there are always new avenues to pursue...so long as they meet with success, the Keepers will send a steady stream of villains to keep life interesting.

Poverty

Suffering through the Great Depression leaves many people homeless, cold, and starving. Bleak, but not a theme without value so long as the focus is on surviving and improving one's lot and not just grim acceptance of it. Heroes need victories, and as mentioned in Patriotism (above), seeing a change for the better is the next best thing to corporeal rewards.

The heroes may be comparably famished for progress against the Thirteen. If you're going to go with this theme, you might want to hit your players with some serious setbacks. At the very least, establish the campaign in this position by giving everyone a written description of the course of the mystic war up to this point. Paint a bleak picture. Tell them how many good mages have been lost to combat, tomes of spells have been destroyed in mysterious fires, and houses and lines of communication have disrupted not just council dealings but contact with other potential allies with the same problems.

The GM can then set things in motion in two ways. The first is to give the team opportunities for more information they can use against the Keepers. They may now be cut off from many of the resources they're used to having, so even a trip across the state may mean hotfooting it. Make them toil in mundane ways for the pieces you offer them, but make those elements they seek worth having.

Second, show them progress in rebuilding the worldwide efforts. Don't just have them beat



the latest threat posed by the evil servants, have the team grab a valuable book, a key bit of spell ingredient, or a magical device they can use. They should be able to gain something or cost the Keepers something else.

The changes will come slowly at first and then accelerate. A mystic hotline between Washington D.C. and London is reestablished, or some young local townsfolk come to realize a hidden mystic potential. Adventures for these improvements should start with the community. Perhaps the team finds a mage in the heart of the city who can do great things but he's more interested in helping himself get by than helping the effort as a whole. Shown the folly of his ways, he and his equally adept daughter turn out to be a positive boon.

So long as they're rich in spirit, the heroes here will triumph.

Moods

While theme determines the ideas a game explores, mood decides how the GM colors his world. The referee should strive to maintain the same feel throughout his game, at least from one adventure to the next. If PCs find themselves in a grim setting one moment and suffering slapstick antics the next, it's going to break up the ambience for the players. If the group doesn't respond well to one mood, the gamemaster should feel free to alter it for the next storyline, but the less it changes the more realistic the game is going to seem. What follows are some suggestions that could set the tempo for a Pulp Kandris story.

Horror

The driving force behind such a story is the terror of the things the group is investigating. It's a common feel for The Kandris Seal – demons from another dimension are pounding on the walls of this one, trying to get in. Who wouldn't find that creepy? Emphasis should be placed on the uncertainty of any unknown quantity in the story. Are those natives as imposing as they seem, lurking just out of sight of the intruders, or are those drums merely their way of communicating? Is the cave a natural formation, or was it hewn from the rock by taloned claws? The museum's artifacts: curios from a superstitious age, or untapped sources of eldritch power, waiting for the right weak-willed human to crack open the lid?

Make the players sweat the small stuff. They're fighting evil in one of its purest forms, and if they're deep in enemy territory there's a good chance anyone nearby could also be suspect. They should be uncertain whom they can rely on in dangerous situations, and everyone from whom advice or guidance could be gained should be presented as a sinister force until proven otherwise. In most games they may feel the Seal is simply a plot that sits in the background driving their adventures. A few disturbing rumors about enemy activities that are slowly getting closer to the site of the Seal should keep them hungry for news.

Another possibility, if the gamemaster wants to up the ante again, is to release the demons from the Seal. This isn't recommended without some serious planning on his part,

but the early part of this time period is when H.P. Lovecraft wrote many of his Cthulhu stories, so between him and correspondent Robert E. Howard there is precedent for such ambitious storytelling.

Paranoia

A mood with much in common with horror, but best played up if your game is set during the 1950s when the threat of communism looms large over the free world. Although the Red Menace wasn't as prevalent in the serials during its time as, say, the Axis forces during their tenure, they're the villains of choice for a post-World War II campaign. Now the beings beyond the borders of reason are in league with humanity's worst elements, but they intend to have a deliberate corrupting influence on their victims before finally claiming this world as their own.

Unlike horror, here the emphasis is less on the overt doom posed by the bad guys and more on the slow, sure subjugation posed by their ideology. The Keepers aren't as blunt with their plans. An easily won fight, or did the servants deliberately sacrifice some obvious gains? Does that mean they're not after what we thought? How does attacking the museum and stealing nothing win them any momentum? Anyone the PCs meet could be a spy or agent provocateur, but instead of simply getting chewed apart by horrific creatures for trusting the wrong person, they could be slowly poisoned by subtle influences. And a false step from the hero could now spell catastrophe for an entire people or nation, not just some collateral damage.

Comedy

Humor as a mood goes against the grain of most pulps; one is grim and gritty and the other lighthearted. Movies were more tolerant of wit. Regardless, any game will admit humor whether it wants to or not – it is in the unpredictable nature of roleplaying games, after all – so the GM should be prepared to deal with it.

Most of the humor in the serials was provided by one or more comic foils, usually in a supporting or spectator role. The reporter who tagged along for a story, the lowest-ranked officer on a submarine, the vaudeville performer who found himself caught up in events beyond his control, all were on hand to offer wry commentary on the adventure. If GMs can get their players to agree, one character could be singled out for such a position to take the edge of an otherwise serious storyline. It should be noted that comedy relief is not synonymous with incompetence or cowardice – when the chips were down, they were portrayed as tough in a fight and under coercion. They simply didn't put themselves in that position as a hero might.

Running an all-comedy adventure is a possibility, though this should be done as a change of pace rather than the standard fare. The subject is the fight against demons, and it takes a lot of the power of the setting away if it's all played for laughs. But one leg of the journey could involve all manner of mischief, if the team gets into one crazy predicament after another. It would also require non-threatening or low-

powered opponents or challenges, demanding that the players think their way out of a situation instead of leveling their best weapons at it. Unless your players are simply overbearing munchkins by nature, any greater response would be rather cruel.

Drama

Drama probably ties with horror for “most common atmosphere.” If you don’t think you can pull off a good scare, the thriller is not the route you want to go. But drama is the default for just about any campaign, and most referees can accomplish a lot in that venue. Here you’ll throw in a few nods to many potential moods – terrifying occurrences, mysterious goings-on, and some comedy to break things up – but without a pervading sense of any single emotional state, your best bet is to keep things interesting. When there’s a dull moment, the bad guys should attack the PCs or put one of their plans into motion. If the villains have been temporarily dispatched, it’s time for some jaunty banter to release the tension, and the most dashing figure in the party should get to make eyes with the heroine. It may be a catchall category, but don’t assume just because drama is common means it doesn’t need nurturing or maintenance.

Setting

The field is wide open when it comes to the setting the gamemaster uses for his campaign. Not only were Saturday morning movies placed in just about every conceivable world, the pulp magazines were quick to exploit any potential subgenre, no matter how esoteric, they thought might be worth a few more sales. Some popular options follow, and many have the pros and cons of running a game therein.

Westerns

Long a staple of movies and books in general, the Old West (and sometimes the not-so-old West) saw plenty of wear and tear on both paper and celluloid. Adults and kids alike might fill the seats for their favorite cowboy heroes in these serials, several of which were set in this noble era.

The stories may have been anachronistic, but many Old West stories were apocryphal and that never kept anyone from spinning a good yarn around them. Villains are often rustlers or land grabbers; the heroes are ranchers and farmers; they’re all good with a gun, and the death traps were a bit more mundane but no less deadly. Wagons headed for the cliff, leaps to and from the train, escaping the bank or cave just as the dynamite was about to blow...every one a chapter ending.

Whether your skills could be considered powers depends a lot on how you use them. Quick with a gun is a must, and if not a gun then a knife. If you put enough into a skill to eliminate a lot of the more common penalties, your leather-slapping is going to seem supernatural to your foes. And of course you’ll simply knock the gun out of their hand instead of killing them, right boss?

Westerns remained popular throughout the pulp period, though sometimes there were nods to modernization. Cars eventually appeared on the screen, and it wasn’t unusual for Tex to trade shots with masked villains, high-tech scientists, and mysterious, magic using Indian tribes. They showed some of the earliest cross-genre work in cinema, and that’s the skill the referee needs when bringing pulp oaters and the Kandris Seal together.

Space

Hey, film is expensive. A lot of space stories never left the solar system. There were plenty of visiting off-world villains looking to cause trouble right here on Earth. We had the minerals they wanted, or they needed land to expand their empire, or maybe Mars just needs women again. Whatever the reason, the producers gave the heroes a plywood rocket and they left the Earth once a chapter to fight it out on the moon or something else easily represented by the Hollywood Hills. Although they often boasted of conquering the universe, your scope shouldn’t be nearly that lofty. You aren’t constrained by a budget, fortunately, but go easy on making this a big production. Sure, this could be a citywide event, but what made them exciting screen material back then was it was two guys in that rocket and their beefy navigator. The only way they could call in the army was with stock footage. No matter how big your canvas is, the game is about what the pulp heroes can accomplish on their own.

They were astronauts of some sort, though in those days they called themselves the Space Service or something equally cheesy and appealing. For a change of pace you could play a young member of the Junior Space Service, and there was often an alien played by a monkey with a headdress (less appealing as a character option). You might be a citizen from the next planet over, but the budget demanded you still looked human, spoke haughtier, and wore a skirt. The aforementioned neighbors – usually better equipped and more knowledgeable than you – wanted to blast your team into submission (or into atoms) with their weapons and/or conquer Earth. The GM benefits here from whizzo science devices and a potentially unlimited arena in which to plan your adventures, but his players may suffer from having no backup. Cliffhangers are easier because the villain has justifiable access to any kind of technology he wants, but the plots might become merely a question of “Do we go to the aliens, or wait for them to come to us?”

On the other hand, the ease with which producers crossed their subgenres makes it a snap to change the formula a bit. If you want aliens as the bad guys, they could harass other settings. For example, the aliens don’t have to show up in the present. They may have appeared long before now, in the past, even in the Old West. If you feel you need to explain that away, they might have been turned back by heroes of that age. The story now only exists as a penny dreadful or an ancient play no one places any faith in. The aliens could have, if not conquered Earth, successfully planted their agents among the population (maybe they’re shapeshifters, or look like us, or are hidden well, or impregnated our women). They could be a part of the secret history of our planet, or the GM might like

to keep them in the open and create a new timeline. Then it's a three-way fight between us, them, and the Keepers.

Superheroes

The heroes of the day still wore masks but their abilities were more focused (see Chapter Three for examples of signature powers). Like them, villains are one-dimensional. Why control all the elements when your Nullifier Ray gives you the power to walk through walls? Enter a bank vault, escape the heroes' cell, step right into the cockpit of the experimental aircraft, avoid the grenade blast, find out how much the gal reporter has on you in her filing cabinet...the list goes on, and that's just one ability. Your baddie is typically masked just like you, or he may sit in a darkened room with his back to the camera to prevent easy identification, but he's someone you know, someone you think is working with you, and by the end of the movie the mask has to come off. Their schemes tend to be bigger than simple land grabs because it's in the nature of the evil character to become more ambitious – no one uses the power of invisibility to rob a bank just so he can rob more banks down the road.

This is a good setting for letting loose with the gadgets and strange discoveries. Once you've created a bulletproof hero and a lightning tossing villain, you can't stop there. You need new devices for new plots, to be countered with the hero's latest innovation. There's a mystery to uncover (besides "Who is my masked foe?") and bizarre plots to unfurl. On the downside: If you're bulletproof, you're going to be hard to threaten. If you can knock down a wall, you can waltz into the mastermind's lair and snatch him by the scruff of the neck. There can only be so many masked villains before you start to wonder if everyone you know is preparing to take their turn betraying you.

Jungle Adventure

These usually boiled down to one of two things: Someone wanted land, or someone wanted a mine...which, come to think of it, was usually why they wanted the land. You could add a touch of the exotic easily by suggesting the mine held a rich vein of some newly discovered mineral (like "red gold")

or by finding some kooky new application for the stuff you dug up ("Unobtainium is the key ingredient in a new bomb that dissolves gasoline").

The heroes: pilots who learned their (air)craft in a war, young ladies in tight animal skins who swung out of the trees and had a caring animal friend (usually something big like a tiger or a gnu), scientists who surveyed the land, former soldiers who wanted to be guides or lay about enjoying their retirement to a beautiful, untamed land, and businessmen who saw potential and wanted to live the American dream (on, uh, someone else's continent).

The villains: rich land barons who made their money in the Americas and have now come over to...let's say Africa, that way there's pygmies...so they can expand their holdings; gangsters who want the lawless land to remain lawless so they can push the natives around and always have a safe place

to escape extradition; and strange mystic figures from another tribe (or who took over leadership of a tribe by force) who want to control as much of the world as they can because that's what his power of mesmerism is for, right?

The advantages in such a game are that the heroes are pretty much on their own (no one said it was an advantage for the good guys). They have less high-tech gadgetry to work with save what they may have in their guise as scientists or superheroes (for example, they can't get a new Tommy gun every chapter).

Drawbacks include the heroes being on their own – you can't overwhelm them too easily because there's no fallback position if this goes badly. The scenery starts to look the same after a while (every adventure takes place in a jungle, a cave, or a temple), and what's more there are only so many traps you can fall into before

the GM begins to repeat himself (you fall into a pit, you fall under a rolling stone, you fall into a spiked pit, another species of animal crushes you).

Time Travel

Most of science fiction's formative time travel stories appeared during this period, though the subject was a genre (actually a subgenre) all its own. You didn't see a lot of ongoing pulp characters suddenly being thrust through



time within the confines of their own milieu. In movies, the concept wasn't unknown, but it was mostly a gimmick used to tell another story: Someone builds a time machine and it's a way to get the contemporary heroes into a dinosaur epic or have them start fights with Roman centurions. Story quirks like protecting the past from interference or heroes meeting up with their past selves were a more nuanced addition, and again were mostly relegated to self-contained one-off tales.

The traditional heroes-thrust-through-time tale is pretty easy to set up – take one set of good guys and give them someone else's version of problems to deal with. Take anything off this list or one of the other Kandris sourcebooks, focus on its features, and let the players deal with whatever issues arise. Done right, your group will appreciate parallels between the settings. The important thing to remember is the associations should be between important things like the need for heroes in any day or age, and the material that just makes a good in-joke should be minimized or used to highlight the heroes' adventures or their better natures.

Example: Burrows and company have just found themselves transported through time. They're still in Chicago, but instead of fighting Roman Tyler and the Secret Brotherhood in a warehouse they're faced with a cobbled street, curious onlookers, and a small storehouse with an unassuming frontage guarded by a thick, burly man who resembles Roman in no uncertain way. Claiming to be the tyler, the heavyset fellow tells Burrows and his friends to move along. Scratching their heads the heroes move down the avenue, certain that if they're ever going to get back to their own time, they'll need to get into that building.

It's also an excellent way to meld modern elements with pulp should the GM wonder how to bring those settings together. Perhaps the heroes from the past are thrust into the future – our present – and catch a glimpse of how that time period looks. Will they be shocked? Do they consider it a technological wonderland or a depressing confirmation of the descent of mankind? They have a chance to impress their values and attitudes upon the people they meet there (here?). If they stay, they may struggle for relevance with this new existence (see “End of an Era,” below); if they can return to their own time, they'll have a newfound appreciation for the world the way it is.

Should you want to set up a game where the PCs catch a glimpse of impending disasters, compelling them to fix things so the outlook is brighter, there's nothing that says the future you show them has to be the one they know in real life. You might want it to be more pulpy so it fits into the overall campaign. Perhaps the Maylor or the Bedwyr have conquered Earth, or allowed their ages-old fight to spill over onto our planet, rendering it a vast wasteland where enslaved humans toil and slowly die. Maybe nuclear technology has taken its toll and this is a cautionary tale. And the heroes could just be following a villain who's responsible for shattering the world shortly after his arrival with his latest piece of pulp tech. There's another benefit to creating your own timeline – the heroes don't feel used. Forcing the team to “fix” small, real events so Kennedy and King die on schedule is a bit crueler than allowing them to save Earth from total destruction. The real world may have its share of misery, but at least saving everything from the electro-bot invasion lets humanity make

its own mistakes.

If you want another form of “time travel,” characters being sealed into some form of suspended animation is fun. The most important point to contemplate with that is that a return trip isn't even an option. You can't use it as a carrot for the group or get many stories underway with it without formulating a whole adventure, because if the team does wish to return to their home era, finding a way to travel back in time should become the basis for at least several sessions of play. If you want to spring something like this on the players, you may want to feel the situation out a bit first. Perhaps you could try a “traditional” time travel plot before permanently stationing your PCs in the future.

End of an Era

In this campaign, the pulp era is nearing its end. It's a somewhat heavy idea for a game, but that's the point. As one virtue or value after another falls to the onset of the 1960s, characters from this time and place are finding themselves more and more out of their element. Villains don't operate the same, the crimes are becoming different, even the level of violence involved spirals out of control, and the government may no longer be the trustworthy ally it was in better times. The old ways, the crime-fighting techniques of the past, may prove less effective against an entirely new breed of evildoer. In short, the heroes feel obsolete.

As the game enters an era where issues and the people who face them become more complex, the heroes should be faced with challenges that seem unsuited to them. They look into a series of deaths, but instead of discovering that members of a board are being eliminated for their shares in an experimental jet engine project, the person responsible is actually a brutal serial killer whose psychological motivations are murky at best. The party is capable of dealing with some of the issues, but some of their “old-fashioned” attitudes may earn them scorn or ridicule.

This doesn't mean the campaign is doomed from the start, and the gamemaster shouldn't spend the whole game driving home the idea that the heroes are worthless. The point is finding a new position or sense of belonging for themselves or their mission in the new world. That may mean hanging up the cowl and the six-guns, but adapting is the more dramatically fulfilling way to go.

Don't neglect the villains in all this...having them introspectively examine their lives doesn't fit with a pulp game, but it makes perfect sense during the transition to a decade where the entire country is going through social revolutions and losing its innocence through assassinations and unpopular wars. Does it mean anything to be a bad guy when the government itself is fading to a shade of gray? Former villains could find themselves pairing up with heroes, perhaps even becoming heroes, as they work together to understand things – or to fight the new breed of lawbreaker. The game may no longer be pulp per se, but the drive to succeed in spite of the circumstances is.

The story should be upbeat, and end (or mutate into) something hopeful. The player characters are hopefully an inspiration to the next generation of heroes. The younger set

Chapter Two: Cults, Crypts and Uppercuts

are seeing the turmoil in their world, and what better way to close out decades of heroic exploits than to pass your values on to the next page of history? And the GM can then let the heroes play this new crop of protagonists. They carry the torch, and the retired team is still there in the background, watching and ready to dispense further encouragement should their protégés feel the same pinch of doubt. It's a good way to move the sidekicks up to the front lines, too. This is, after all, the destiny for which they've been training all this time.

Another way to go is to play it as a comedy. The “fish out of water” scenario is usually good for a few laughs...the group plays characters who were once heroes and who must drag their younger days out of mothballs. The party will suffer some setbacks as they find the old ways running up against modern problems, and contemporary people will mock them until the team pulls their fat out of the fire. Alternately they could have children, or be the children of the original heroes, and the fun begins when both ends of the generation gap clash over the best way to bring in the bad guys.

Chapter Three

Creating Characters

Hayden Grant turned the corner into the utilities chamber and froze. He was too late – a moment out of the Alpha Spacer's line of sight, and the Body had had time to down the Zero Formula. He was here, but the concoction had rendered the dastard totally invisible.

"Grant," a voice mocked him. "The tables have turned again, eh?" The agent focused on a column at the center of the room. All the equipment, the water, the power and heating for the moon base, everything passed through this room, and under a catwalk at the back – the installation's atomic pile, far below. Beside the support pole sat several crates marked "Dynamite" stacked on a handcart, and atop them sat a box with a switch. His blood turned to water, and his mind reeled.

"If you blow those explosives," he started, taking a hesitant step toward the boxes, "this entire base goes up and you'll have lost everything." The switch on the detonator flipped up seemingly by itself, and a tiny red light blinked to life. Grant hurled himself across the room, only to feel an unseen fist smash downward against his temple.

"Lost? I'll have won, you fool," the disembodied laughter rang out. "I never wanted your precious base for myself. But the World Government's enemies, well, they'd be happy to see this advantage removed forever." The room echoed, and the sound came from everywhere.

"You'll be blown to bits as well," the hero said. He grabbed a long crowbar and began swinging wildly.

"Only one of us is leaving here alive, Grant," the Body explained patiently. "My powers ensure it's going to be me." Grant crumpled under another invisible assault, this one to

his back. "Your friends won't see me enter their rocket. Ms. Davenport won't see my hands encircle her neck...."

Incensed, Grant swept broadly with his arm, desperate to stop this madness. He took another punch to the neck, followed by a kick to the ribs. He spat out the taste of blood and rolled over onto his back, listening as the words circled him like a carousel. "Your partner Farnham will be almost as much fun as you." Grant began crawling toward the pipes, and used them to pull himself up. The sound approached him slowly. "I cannot believe you still push on. The Spacers will give you a nice memorial plaque, I have no doubt. When the Criminal Cartel takes over the Earth, I'll make that invisible, too."

Grant spun a valve, and a gout of steam exploded into the air. A curious hole in space formed in the middle of the vapors, jerking spasmodically in pain. The voice was now a piercing scream with a milky owner, until the intrepid explorer caught it with a solid haymaker that sent it reeling over the catwalk railing. The shriek faded quickly. The Spacer grabbed the handcart and prayed for one more miracle.

"Grant!" Janice yelled, seeing him drag himself into the rocket's cockpit.

"Prepare for takeoff," the big man coughed. "I had to put the explosives in the only place reinforced enough they wouldn't take out the whole base."

"This rocket silo?" Farnham guessed, helping his partner to his chair. Grant nodded. "Are you sure you're all right, Hayden?"

Grant fired the thrusters. "You should see the other guy."

This chapter shows you how to put together a good pulp character. There are some additional considerations when creating them, though many of them are storytelling elements that the GM and players are welcome to ignore if they feel it limits them too much in their play. You'll find some basic character ideas to draw inspiration from, but ultimately what you come up with will depend on the inventiveness of the player – or, in the case of villains, of the referee.

Character Types

You can make any sort of PC you like for Pulp Kandris, and you don't have to start with the contents of this chapter to form a foundation, but there are a few archetypes that appear

more often than others in the genre. Even if you don't plan on playing any of these you should read through some of them. Not only can you make better-informed choices about your character, you can see what your fellow players are liable to come up with and proceed accordingly.

Heroes

The good guys of the pulps are all square-jawed do-gooders, and brains vs. brawn as character qualities are usually a matter of story-driven need. Every scientist knows how to throw a punch, every football hero knows just where to place the dynamite, and military men know just enough about both rappelling and forensics to be an all-around pain in the bad guys' backsides. Your GM may not take such a freeform attitude in play, but you should consider the part you want to play and not just think of your character as a pile of statistics.

Cowboy

A flash of silver, a crack like thunder, and Butch Clancy's gun flew from his hand. His partner reached for his own holster, but another softer, yet no less menacing crack sounded and his pistol tore from leather and flew into the air. Now the two desperados were unarmed, and they saw before them a strange pair of foes: A masked cowboy, clad from head to toe in metallic armor, and a caped bull-fighter wielding a wicked looking whip.

There was always one sort of land grab or another happening somewhere on the range, and to believe the serials you couldn't drive a golf ball in the Southwest without hitting a goldmine. It made a rich stomping ground for villains who wanted to get wealthy fast, if they could only convince the widow Foster, the beautiful schoolmarm, or Judge Cratchitt to sell their interests in their worthless property. If they wouldn't listen to reason, they and their neighbors would become victims of the Phantom Strider and his gang, a masked outlaw whose reign of terror could only be stopped by the cowboy.

He could be the owner of a piece of property, the ranch hand with aspirations of marrying the boss' daughter, or simply the guy everyone in the territory knew they could turn to when a straight shooter was needed to help them out of a jam. The cowboy usually had a lot of talent with a lasso, a horse that knew just when to come, and a gun hand that moved faster than the eye could follow. Plenty of oaters were set during the Old West heyday, but even as modernity began to swallow the scenery with cars and dams his skills remained relevant. All he needed was a good cause.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Cowboys typically have an Indian guide they call friend, or find themselves at the mercy of a local tribe. During any of these encounters they may come across old forms of mysticism or tales told by the tribal elders that draw them into secrets old and new. Even without the direct influence of the natives, a rich culture exists in the Southwest, and caves and old trails could hide mysteries that are no longer spoken of for a reason.

Athlete

Heroes weren't always chosen for their acting ability; often all you had to have was name recognition, and sports stars brought bags of that. The more well-rounded a player you were the better your chances of stardom, especially if it meant they could count on you to wow the kids in the audience with a few nifty maneuvers. Gymnastics, football, and track and field were all the basis for some popular protagonists. Working some of their moves into the plot was a crowd-pleaser that really went over well.

The athlete in movies was more a publicity stunt to draw in the audience with star power, and the star's actual role was whatever else was called for – spaceman, jungle hero, cowpoke. But in a Pulp Kandris game you don't need to make excuses for the hero being exactly what he is, and it's fun to

find uses for those physical abilities against the villains.

In A Kandris Seal Game: A current star wouldn't be as effective a character in your roleplaying game unless every adventure happened during the off season. If he's recently retired, he has more time to pursue his personal vendetta, if any, against the supernatural. Perhaps he's still in touch with old teammates, and the team, which suffered a drop in their stats after he left, is suddenly enjoying a meteoric rise to the top again. A deal with the devil? And since sports has always been a big business and people are so invested in the outcome, there are schemes that can take advantage of this inroad with the masses. All those suggestible people gathered in a circle at the stadium...

Stuntman

Much like the athlete, this was kind of a casting gimmick. Stuntmen didn't have the same cachet as a popular gridiron giant, but tell the kids their hero was being played by the guy who does all those tricky falls and takes those cinematic punches and he'd show up to see what the fellow could do. (The irony in a film was the hero couldn't do all his own stunts for insurance reasons, but that won't stop the player character.)

Movie sets were all over the West, and there was still a much fuller film industry back on the East Coast at the time, so a player who wants to run a stuntman as his persona is in good shape. Not only is it an unusual role, the idea of a movie set or its personnel getting tied up with acts of sabotage is rife with possibilities. If they like, the whole group could play members of a shooting crew who find themselves with a real-life mystery to solve.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Also like the sports industry, movies are a good way to influence people. In the 1940s, three to four times as many people went to the theatre each week as compared with today. Imagine the hypnotic power of the big screen. Now imagine what the Keepers of the Broken Circle could do to those people if they manipulate stars or film figures with the right box office draw. The stuntmen who find out about these machinations are better equipped to handle it than the pretty-boy counterparts they stand in for.

Spaceman

Klm'n'jop was the last of his race. His ancestors had roamed the stars until their fleet was attacked by the Qruvs in the asteroid belt of this remote star system. Crawling from the wreckage of his escape pod, he examined his surroundings. Trees, a small fire around the crash-site, a stream, and breathable air, though the extra oxygen made him hyper-alert and anxious. He took a step and found himself soaring over the trees. The gravity here was so low; it would take practice to walk.

Once we achieve spaceflight, villainy isn't limited to the Earth. The minions of evil will follow us out of the stratosphere to find what new avenues exist for their plots.

Where conventional means of waging war can be impressive and terrible, the scale available when you reach orbit, the moon, or beyond increases the danger a hundredfold. The mastermind won't hesitate to take the purity of our research methods and twist them for his dreams of conquest, especially if he can sneak aboard. The travelers and explorers of this group are a sturdy lot, unsatisfied with the vistas open to them on their home planet. They sate their wanderlust with escape and, while they know there are dangers lying in wait for them out there, they don't always expect them to come from the ranks of their own species.

When the time comes, though, spacemen are ready for the challenge. It's one more tough fight on the road to conquering the next horizon, and it's worth it to make sure people, no matter where they settle, can count on a life free from crime and terror. Villains who think they're different from any other problem faced by our space-bound champions are right: They'll be first in line to get what's coming to them.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Not all foes come from within, especially when you slip the surly bonds of Earth. Aliens have tried to capture or destroy our home, and somewhere out there the Mayor and the Bedwyr lurk, two species among who knows how many that pose all sorts of new threats to us. The Keepers and their followers may know ways of achieving spaceflight unknown to humanity. If they don't want to share it, it may be worth trying to steal it from them for the sake of gaining an edge over our enemies. Then again, it may be a process with too high a cost, which is why only the demons use it. And if we need to get the secret of spaceflight from someone more reliable, well, nothing says every player character has to be from Earth.

Mercenary

Some men claim they're out for hire to the highest bidder, but get them in touch with someone wearing their heart on their sleeve and they just melt. So it is with the mercenary, a fellow who wants to put his unpleasant martial skills to his own profit-making use now that his government's war is over, but who instead finds his values trumping his greed. The bandits try to scare the widow out of her share in the mines, or a defenseless nation making a try for its own form of liberty, and the hero in him bursts out. Faced with the evil mastermind he could have evolved into, the soldier of fortune is locked in a symbolic battle with himself.

In A Kandris Seal Game: The mercenary probably does a few jobs for unsavory characters before discovering his life's work, and the Keepers of the Broken Circle do so love locating a human who has almost as little compassion for his people as they. He could be hip-deep in mysticism before he realizes he's on the wrong side and something must be done now.

Explorer

There are a lot of these folks (and there's plenty of crossover with other archetypes, like the spaceman), and sometimes defining them simply means finding out what they most want to uncover. Does the explorer seek to expand

humanity's knowledge? Penetrate areas of Earth to which no man has ever been? Split the atom? He works to make the unknown known, but what he finds there isn't always pretty.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Cryptozoologists and like-minded individuals sometimes have crackpot theories that get everyone else into trouble ("Come, Captain Hood, I shall show you the proof that dinosaurs still walk the land!"), but they aren't the only ones whose aspirations get them into hot water. The explorer can do that all on his own, especially if he's looking for Loch Ness or the Philosopher's Stone or some such. Enticed by the mysteries of the supernatural, he might set loose something foul before he realizes things have gone too far. This hero won't think twice about his responsibilities for putting that genie back in its bottle, though; he'll gladly give up some knowledge if it means stopping something he's unleashed.

Scientist

No sooner has the scientist developed some new methodology but someone waiting in the wings tries to take what he's come up with and pervert it. No wallflower, he'll fight to get it back or stop those who stole it from using it themselves. That new induction process is for feeding the hungry of the world or stopping America's enemies in their tracks, fiend, not for your personal aggrandizement. If you thought he was good with a test tube, wait until you see him tangling with a masked industrial thief at the edge of a canyon.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Whereas the explorer uncovers what's there to be found or developed, the scientist is usually pushing the boundaries and twisting science to make it work for mankind. If the Keepers can't use his obsession against him, they may be able to use his love for friends, family, and coworkers to get to him.

Debutante

"Get in the car, Missy!" said the gunman. He patted the seat and smiled. In the front seat, his driver looked around anxiously for cops or witnesses.

"Is that supposed to frighten me?" asked the girl, her voice firm and confident.

"Get in, or find out," he replied.

"I think not," she said, suddenly rolling backwards and dropping to the ground. From behind her bullets tore through the side of the car and smashed the windows. The car lurched forward up onto the sidewalk and then into a wall. It expired, following its occupants into the hereafter.

"You all right, ma'am?" asked her bodyguard. Smoke poured from his Thompson machine gun. His hand extended to help her up.

"Dammit," she cursed. "I just got these stockings, and that jerk made me put a run in them!"

Sure, go ahead, make the mistake of thinking she's something nice to look at. Thing is, the debutante can buy

and sell you, and if she wants something money can't buy, she can persuade you to hand it over. She doesn't usually have to land a blow to get her work done, but if she does you can't bet she's not so ladylike as to pull that punch. She moves in higher circles, where even more can be accomplished because she (or her father) has the contacts to make it happen.

You want to believe her when she says she's into you, you poor lug, but it's all a ruse. Her heart goes out to those orphans your boss is trying to displace. She feels for the little ones who can't stand up for themselves, and though she'll never admit it, the dashing hero is the one she secretly hopes she'll end up with. Kidnapping her may get you a temporary advantage, but it also puts her in your lair where she can do the most damage. And when you stop her doing that, she'll apologize, compliment you once more, and you'll fall for it again.

In A Kandris Seal Game: The debutante has an advantage the rest of the heroes don't have: She knows what's going on. The demons have plots unfolding at the highest strata of society, and that's her playground. If the bad guys start slumming, trying to convert the lowest rungs into their agents with promises of power, well, she's there, too. Any plots running through the soup kitchen or the board room are going to make themselves known to her, and though she might scream at the sight of your latest victim, if evil thinks she scares off that easy, remember she's having tea with the archbishop this Saturday.

Playboy

The debutante's opposite number, the playboy has millions and a life of leisure. This doesn't make him soft, though. He has nothing better to do with his afternoon than learn guns at the firing range, ride horses at the stable, learn a third language and a fourth martial art, and arrange for grants and funding for dozens of projects, experiments, companies, and expeditions. He's the mover and the shaker, and he could have your credit line erased with a single phone call. Instead, that one call is to Arthur in the garage...the playboy needs the Mercedes because he's going to come down to his wartime weapons proving grounds and take care of the latest sabotage attempt himself.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Where a lot of heroes interfere with the villains' plans, it's usually the playboy's projects that are getting held up by the mastermind. Sadly, not all his investors are limited to temporal power, and the bad guys may have spells and magic devices that make them an inscrutable thorn. They may be using the research to find information that furthers their magical war, or they may be inserting their energies into the process somewhere along the line to produce greater and more horrible results. The other board members may not even be human, and their idea of a hostile takeover, if it works, occurs in the literal sense.

Pilot

He may fly a plane or a spaceship, operate a ship across the ocean, or run a riverboat up and down the tributary – he's a pilot, and he gets people to where they're going. He usually

knows a little more about the area he's taking people to, but one of the passengers always asks to go a little further. Their hire knows the Amazon, but the scientist he's transporting has a theory about a tribe that lives a couple of clicks deeper in...and the adventure begins. He probably learned his craft in one of the arms of the military, and has other skills to complement it. He'd like to consider himself to be above events, but when his meal tickets get attacked – and one of them is awfully pretty – he jumps in without reservation.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Too many of his clients want the pilot to take them right to where the eldritch horrors hold sway. If the destination is attractive enough, the evil entities or their minions may employ the man themselves to get them there. On arrival, they unmask to reveal what they really are and the nature of their near-unattainable goal; but don't worry, you don't need a crew to save. There will be plenty of homegrown victims at the target site the pilot feels obligated to help.

Mystic

Kizmat carried his dummy back to the dressing room. He took off his cape and his cuff-links. Sweat dripped down under the arms of his shirt, darkening the crisp white cotton. His dummy sat limp and silent. Kizmat regarded it for a moment, and then locked the door.

"You should show 'em some real magic, boss." The dummy's mouth opened and closed, but the voice was in Kizmat's head. "Sometime you should show 'em some real magic."

Kizmat sighed. It was time. Too much of this temptation was going on, and the rewards were minor. He went to his makeup drawer and pulled the vial of acid.

"Whatcha doing, boss?" asked the dummy. There was a hint of fear in its whisper.

"It ends tonight, wood golem." Kizmat poured the vial onto the dummy. The paint on its wooden head immediately began to sizzle and slide away, revealing the glyph of power that Kizmat had etched there nearly a year before.

"No, boss! It doesn't end like this." A scream, silent, yet filling Kizmat's head. "There is a price. You haven't paid the price!"

Kizmat felt the power leaving out into the room.

"The price," the voice trailed off into a whisper. "Price..."

In a game that sets humanity against supernatural enemies, you're bound to come across a mystic or two. He may be an amateur from the viewpoint of the Thaumaturgia, or he may only have practical knowledge of the occult and magery without possessing any real talent to speak of. He may deal in forms of the occult unknown to or not practiced by members of the council. Then again, he may be a star player in the world of magic whom the mages would love to recruit to their side in the war.

Mages per se aren't as well represented in movie serials as they are in pulp novels, but they may be unpredictable heroes with vaguely defined powers; shamans for isolated cultures

with several tricks up their sleeve; pragmatic practitioners with a faceted gimmick or two; or imposing casters whose skill at throwing spells is both prodigious and frightening.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Most uses of the mystic in a Kandris game ought to be pretty obvious. If they're working for the Thaumaturgia, they'll find themselves confronting the servants of evil as a matter of course. If not, they'll discover it's not easy to be a mage in Pulp Kandris without being forced to choose sides or getting caught in the crossfire by the more active participants in the magical community. Just being a spell caster makes you a target for the Keepers, and they won't care how much you protest you're only a spectator.

Villains

In the pulps, the bad guys are even more cookie-cutter than the heroes they fight, so the gamemaster should make every effort to give them a personality and a way of achieving their goals that make them stand out from a crowd (a really evil crowd). There's no shame in bringing these felons to life in ways the serials couldn't be bothered (or afford) to do. Some of the archetypal evildoers (and some means of GM organization) are listed below.

Rank and File

The first thing to consider is your villains have their own station in life. They may not be organized according to a strict chart – though if you want to create such a thing it will certainly add flavor and realism to your evil cliques – but there's definitely a pecking order in even the most disorganized offshoot of organized crime.

There can still be a lot of advancement and demotion if the gamemaster wants it, setting up plots within plans as the various lawbreakers curry favor with their master and try to steal the choice spots in the group's flowchart. Most of the

time a pulp or movie serial didn't last long enough for these added levels of infighting, but if, in true pulp fashion, our heroes encounter some or all of these villains again, it keeps things fresh for PCs to find out the guy they used to beat up on so gratuitously got promoted and now has a team of

his own with which to return the favor. Even worse, if an antagonist seems to have that certain spark that makes the heroes cotton to him, it's a good idea to have him disappear for a while and then resurrect him. He could be the next masked bad guy, and uncovering him will be even more entertaining.

The GM can use these levels to help him put together a game plan for the villains. You don't want every serial to end the same way – no one sees the villain until the last chapter, wherein he is unmasked and sent to prison – so deciding what the players know and when you want them to know it is critical to your pacing. You want the mastermind to make a showing early on so the team knows who it's up against (just knowing there's someone in the shadows isn't terribly informative or intimidating). On the other hand, if he's going to appear in the first few chapters, you'd better make sure he has an escape plan or it's going to be the shortest attempt at world domination ever.

Minion

Pretty much everyone in some sort of organized villainous group answers to someone else, but someone's got to be at the bottom of the food chain. That's where the minions come in. Although the term is used throughout this book to indicate anyone who works for the next stratum up in the hierarchy, here it's used to refer to the last rung on the ladder because calling them "cannon fodder" doesn't really do them

justice.

If there's some menial task the bad guys need done, these are the fellahs they send. They may be the gun-toting hoods with a message or the random cultists waving their hands



around a brazier in hopes of appeasing their dark god. In any case, no one expects them to do much more than “Grab this item from the museum” or “Rough up this storekeeper” or “Stand really close to this flaming pit and chant.” They haven’t much of a shelf life, and they may or may not be accompanied by a character who’s one step further up the totem pole. This mostly depends on whether that guy might get captured – if all the GM wants is for the team to know someone out there has designs on the missile blueprints, no leader is necessary. If it’s more important, something that has to have an actual chance of success, another link in the chain of command might go along to see that the goons do it properly.

Henchman

Another nebulous category, this guy could be the smartest man in a bunch of morons trying to load stolen liquor into the back of a van, or he could be the top villain’s right-hand man. There are any number of layers of minions and henchmen under the leader, so again the position is something of a default. Regardless, it’s expected that the henchman knows something about the larger plan and is worth the player characters’ time and attention.

Henchmen at the bottom are also a source of information – just as the heroes would be interested to know the insidious Malachi is back in action, Malachi will want to hear that his latest opposition is the Free Fighting Legion so he can plan his schemes accordingly. If the henchman is expected to escape for some reason, the referee should make allowances for this and give the thug some skills (or a plan) sufficient for him to slip away.

Mastermind

This is the man at the top of the heap. Anything that happens in the organization does so only because he allows or wills it. He creates the devilish plans and the accompanying deathtraps, and if the team is outthought, outfought, or outgunned, it’s because he’s as ingenious as he claims to be in all those annoying speeches he gives. GMs should make sure their mastermind is a fully fleshed out character with high enough stats that he can pull off some crimes and perhaps even fight members of the whole team to a standstill.

This does not mean the mastermind never works with someone, or even for someone. It’s been known to happen. The heroes charge into the villain’s inner sanctum to discover his plot to detonate every warhead on the east coast, only to be told with a flourish that “Once I’ve done my work, America will be overrun by communist sympathizers!” or something. The Keepers of the Broken Circle may lurk offstage in the shadows, sure, but the mastermind should always be thought of as such. The cool bad guys at the end of the episode are still very much in charge of their own destinies – that’s part of what makes them so wicked. Don’t diminish their standing casually or suddenly turn a bold foe into a simpering lackey. Remember, victory has to count dramatically, and if the players find there’s yet another level of evil to be fought, their victories start to ring hollow.

Types

Knowing who’s at what level of the organization isn’t the only consideration...in fact, it’s the least important and the most boring. Who the villain is, that’s what you need to work out. He’ll probably fall into one of the following categories, though the gamemaster is welcome to add to this list if he thinks of a niche for his evildoer not offered here.

Criminal Mastermind

When crime is the bane of your game, you have a couple of choices. The bluntest tool in your box is the gangster. A good movie can be made up of attempts to finally corner the brains behind a series of robberies – in fact, perhaps the only reason the serials didn’t deal with this more often was because it was so well represented in full-length films and the pulps. This makes a simple crime boss a la Alphonse Capone a bold move on the gamemaster’s part. Choose a line for him: Murder for hire, robbery, theft, kidnapping, he’s not picky. You may end up using all of these and more at some point in an ongoing narrative. Sooner or later the heroes zero in on the operation and close it down.

The criminal mastermind is more often a less vulgar figure, though. He’s dapper and cultured, nothing like the riff-raff he hires for his jobs. They fear him for reasons never fully explained, but it’s a safe bet he didn’t get this fancy mansion by hitting the lottery. He’s probably made examples of a few failures, too. He exudes the air of someone always completely in charge of his destiny (and maybe yours as well), and doesn’t falter until he finally realizes he’s been undone by the clever hero. At that point he tries to make a deal while reaching for the trapdoor button under his desk, the one that made those examples we were talking about...

In A Kandris Seal Game: The mastermind may or may not know what he’s stealing. He may have acquired a taste for magical artifacts or their power, or an obsession may now have hold of him, pushing him to look ever deeper. He may just think these are nice trinkets. The Keepers’ agents may approach him about those items, or they may try to take them, starting a war between two factions that can only end in bloodshed for the innocents caught in the middle.

Alternately, the criminals may be working wholeheartedly for the Broken Circle. If they knew what their allies were ultimately up to they’d run screaming, but the hoods seldom ask too many questions and the dashing villain thinks he’s too clever to be caught flatfooted by another interest.

Supervillain

For every hero that gains powers from the atom or experimental chemistry or some strange ray, there’s a passel of similarly energized bad guys out there who see more practical benefits to invisibility and increased strength. Even so, they feel the need to send their minions out to do their

bidding. Why get involved in a brawl if your men can do the job? Unlike regular superhero games, the GM is probably going to have to let the super sides duke it out once in a while; it seems pretty pathetic for a guy who claims to have ultimate power hide out on a flying disk for 12 chapters like a wussy. Then again, the villain has been known to give his toadies some goodies to help them get away with crimes, so why not the occasional (and temporary) superpower? Arrange to have the heroes face off against a hodge-podge of superminions.

Not every masked villain has superpowers. Often the use of a mask or costume was something meant to scare off the superstitious; it concealed their identity, sure, but it also made them more imposing through anonymity. After a few attacks with the Roman Centurion outfit, the wimps would be on their way out of town and whoever was left was going to be the real troublemaker. But springing actual powers on the team when the climactic scene takes place is another curveball they might not expect, so keep them off their guard.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Nothing says powers can't come from magical sources. The user may not even know his flame blast or increased IQ is the result of such a thing – it looks like the stuff he reads in the comics, so the fact that he gains chaos-taint will come as a surprise to him the first time if the GM uses it that way. And when the temptation comes the next time?

Some villains may know whence their powers arise and just not care (or bother to tell others with whom they work). Once they have a taste they may try to gather artifacts that increase their strength, and the Keepers may shoot themselves in the foot if they gave this ally a taste of power and it creates competition for them.

Spy

America has its enemies, and if the campaign takes place during wartime the trouble with foreign governments is tenfold. The spy doesn't work alone even if the hero does...he'll have a whole ring he looks to for help stealing our secrets, grabbing experimental weapon prototypes, and generally disrupting the country's war effort. He works well as a subordinate of another villain, but even if he's the top man in the organization he'll be pulling a paycheck from somewhere. He may be a citizen of a foreign power, or he may be the type who just sells his services to the highest bidder.

In A Kandris Seal Game: It's possible he's working to undermine the heroes and their nation, but a more interesting use of the spy and his cronies is as a foil for the Keepers of the Broken Circle. Once they discover the existence of the demons, they might see them as an "enemy nation" of a sort and try to steal their secrets or gain their power. The Keepers' are probably too powerful to be subjugated (else the Council would have done it by now), but their agents could give up a lot of information. The Thaumaturgia and the government would both be interested in stopping them from increasing their power base.

Land Baron

This man is found in a variety of times and places. He could be a feudal lord, a ranch boss, or a city councilman. His interest is in getting land from the people who are legally entitled to it. Sometimes the land is valuable in and of itself, as space for building in a new town in the West; other times it's got something on it like a tungsten or gold mine. The baron may also have designs of his own, like building a base on it for a bigger operation. And who knows what mystic significance it has in the Kandris world?

The criminal does anything to remove the owners. He'll start slowly, offering them money (though not nearly what it's worth), then progress to scaring widows and orphans off or even killing the rightful heirs. The terror angle is a popular one – serials are full of vengeful "ghosts" in costumes trying to spook their way to fortune.

In A Kandris Seal Game: The Keepers may want the same land, or they may even be under that land. Surely the demons made some kind of backup plans for accessing this dimension? They might have some kind of contingency under their own seal, and anyone stealing the real estate is either working for the Broken Circle or is playing right into their hands.

Financier

This is similar to the criminal mastermind, but this man's influence comes from his money. Too often, he's above simply being arrested – he can probably pay off a police officer or two, and if that doesn't work he can assemble a team of lawyers to get him off. Money may not solve every problem, but so far the financier hasn't come across one that can't be. Where the criminal mastermind keeps his people in line through influence, brains, and fear, the financier holds power through overwhelming stacks of cold, hard cash. He can stay removed from questionable activities with a money trail, buy as many people as he needs, and dispose of the ones he doesn't. Find someone who possesses all the qualities of both archetypes and he might be unstoppable.

In A Kandris Seal Game: Finding a powerful banker involved with the Keepers would actually be somewhat unusual. They're too practical in most cases to believe in such a thing without unassailable proof; the Broken Circle doesn't have much need of money itself; and the money man depends on maintaining a steady flow and changeover of assets. It's not impossible, of course. The banker need only possess briefly something the agents want and he'll be in it up to his neck. With the funds at his disposal, it's a tossup as to which party has bitten off more than it can chew.

Mixing It Up (and not with the Cultists)

You probably can't count on having a nice, uniform team where one person plays the captain of a ship, another his able mate, a third the spunky debutante who's hired them, and a fourth who's the bulky bodyguard for her. More likely you're going to get a dark, brooding caped vigilante, a leather-jacketed racecar driver, a cynical detective, and a secret service agent. So how do you blend these elements together and make an adventure all can agree to?

First, sit the players down before they ever take pencil to paper and tell them a little about what you want to run. You don't have to tell them everything, but they ought to at least know the timeframe, the city of origin, and anything you categorically do not want to see in your game. If superheroes spoil the atmosphere, tell them that up front so there are no hard feelings down the road. If someone really wants to play one (and this is a pulp game, after all) you can ask them what kind, or you can tell them why you don't believe such a personality is a good fit for this world. One of you may be able to convince the other. If not, then of course the GM's word is final, but keep the idea in mind. Maybe the characters all start out as forest rangers, but stopping the villains from gaining access to a secret mine costs them the life of one of their own who sacrificed himself in a pit of some strange, eerie liquid. And who knows where that might lead?

Step One-A: Make sure the players know something about pulp, and what some of the conventions of the genre entail. It has its own charms and drawbacks and the expectations are different, and while no one expects players to "dumb down" their performances so they fall afoul of the same tricks as their on-screen counterparts, they might want to give a little on some of the comforts they're used to in a contemporary setting. Superpowers are usually simpler, for example, and someone who wants to play a more complicated metahuman with two "big" powers and three minor ones is kind of missing the point. You can allow that as GM, but see if they'll try it your way before muddying the waters. The genre must similarly make sacrifices of its own – the simplistic personas from pulps and serials just won't sustain the interest of a talented roleplayer, so these PCs will be deeper than their fictional inspirations.

Second, have the players discuss their characters. Without a compelling reason not to, you might want to ask that everyone talk about it together. Unlike an espionage game in the modern day, heroes back then had little difficulty working together. There weren't different factions of good guys all working at cross purposes, each with a deadly secret to hide. If you're determined to make a go of a pulp game, the playing group should skip the tortured loner bit. If you are a tortured loner, which is actually pretty typical of some of the pulps' darker heroes, you should recognize that few characters

were ever truly one-man operations. They had snitches, contacts on the police force, and various people who helped (not always without reservations or a little coercion) when a problem fell into their area of expertise. Joining a group isn't such a terrible violation, but if it doesn't suit the player to do so, maybe it's the wrong character to play.

Skills

In the pulps, characters were pretty well-rounded. If they fit a general archetype, chances are they had a broad base of knowledge for all the skills they used. A scientist with a talent for languages usually knew at least a little about a lot of tongues, certainly enough to convey to his companions what the natives were saying (and the translation was never good news). Scientists weren't locked into one branch of physics; they dabbled in several different disciplines that all added up to "rocket scientist." The truly cinematic ones were also medical doctors – anyone who got hurt on the Martian mission was in good hands with the guy who built the ship that took them there to begin with. Some notes and suggestions follow for condensing or combining skills, as well as some pulpish uses for others.

Computers

Most of the computers as we know them in the stories weren't even called computers. It was always some sort of linguistic dodge like robot (even if it didn't move) or "thinking machine." They were an indelible part of the serials and should be included whenever the GM thinks he can get away with it. Being as straightforward a plot device as it is, the referee should treat skills related to its use with a pretty open-handed policy. This isn't the place for codes or "languages" or rolling dice to hack into one. Computers are just part of the plot.

Building, Creating, and Repairing

It may be too broad a category for the GM to feel comfortable placing under a single umbrella, but scientists were super-smart individuals who seemed to know at least a little about any problem that came to light. The GM may wish to have a scientist character take his disciplines as a signature power (see below); if not, he may simply want to limit the technologies the villains will pursue (or wait until the scientist PC gets a new skill). Someone with rockets as his scientific focus isn't going to be much use when the Cloudburster tries to steal or employ secret radar technology, and it's kind of embarrassing to have to ask an NPC scholar for help.

It is not recommended that players be given the same leeway if they're making a hero with crafting skills. An archer character who makes his own special-use arrows might have a craft skill for that, or it may be subsumed into his signature power. But letting him perform any artistic skill (pottery?)

doesn't make sense (though to be fair, neither is it a problem likely to need solving).

Being able to whip something up may become necessary. This is where the group's gadget guy comes into play. Most of what he come up with during a game shouldn't take more than a night or two, and it's usually in response to a specific need, not just some swell new way to increase the group's firepower. If you don't have that sort of tinker in your ranks, you'll have to come up with something else. That's why PCs get the big bucks.

Repairing things may just be a simple plot device. Sometimes it's time critical – get the boat motor going before the enemy ship crushes you – but you won't consistently build 10 minutes worth of suspense through spark plug adjustment. Now, if the team travels to the Alps to meet a guru with information they need for their investigation, being shot down makes fixing their craft one precondition to overall success, and that could play out over several chapters. Repair skill may also allow someone to fix something that helps them avoid another danger. For example, someone trapped in a silo into which the back blast from a rocket will soon be discharged could use repair to fix a series of ladder rungs along the wall. If the character can only repair and not build without buying another skill, that may be limit enough for pulp purposes.

Codes, Runes, and Scripts

Deciphering the many codes employed in a game may make sense as a condensed skill, but it's hardly onerous to demand that someone take these as separate items; it depends on how cinematic you want the qualities to be. If the Keepers of the Broken Circle are going to figure heavily into your game, you'd better have someone who can figure out the runes (unless doing that releases the horrible thing contained inside) and magical scripts that the investigators may run across.

You can probably get by with codes (the sort of thing spies and the military must worry about); scripts (magical writings, mostly found in spell books or along the edges of magic items); and runes (drawn, written, or carved characters with great power – often found warning trespassers, or keeping something locked inside a mystic prison like the Kandris Seal itself). You can cover lots of ground that way, though lacking one such skill may hurt in the long run...especially if the only NPC to whom you can turn is secretly working for the villains.

Demolitions

Not everyone should be able to use them just because they saw it in a movie, but defusing ought to be easier. Don't load up the bad guys with bombs if they players can't handle it (though that includes running away); at the least give them other options for disposing of TNT. Setting bombs is important, though, since the inability to kill the Keepers may mean you have to bury them instead.

Deactivating Traps

It's going to happen – the player character is going to be stuck in a room with the walls closing in. While a hero with mechanical or engineering skills has a decided advantage in such a plight, deathtraps are meant as an opportunity for the players to show off their cleverness. "Roleplay" traps first and foremost, and save the skill use for more directly relevant situations.

Disguise

No need to be too forgiving here. Just remember: If the hero is trying to pass himself off as a known person, it's probably a minutes-long deception the minion will soon trip to. The actor knows he's leaving sooner rather than later, and in a hail of bullets. Being a generic "someone else" should be played for tension. The thugs have never met the fire chief, so pretending to be him can go much longer. Only when the hero makes a critical mistake should the deceit be uncovered.

Driving and Flying

Limiting people to a general class of vehicle is acceptable, but with a vessel-heavy game the standards should be relaxed. Someone who defines himself as a bush pilot should be able to fly most aircraft (and probably flew even more impressive specimens than your average Cessna in the war anyway), and if the villain's plot involves spreading terror with his experimental aircraft then that hero is the logical choice to save the day. On the other hand if the GM won't let you drive the enormous drilling machine into the Earth, it's either too complex or he means for it to blow up spectacularly anyway. Note that most folks can drive land vehicles, cars especially, but "the driver" won't suffer penalties for fancy maneuvers like the rest of his team.

Knowledge

Few skills are defined as broadly as those that involve scientists. The old, doddering fellow who is just as at home describing history as he is at building a time machine to get there never seems to run out of smarts. Again, the GM might want to choose – offer plenty of NPCs from whom the party can request aid, or let the scientists of the group cover most of the bases. Exception: Anyone wishing to know more about the Keepers of the Broken Seal had better know the occult in general or be willing to pay out the nose for that specific skill. That kind of knowledge doesn't come cheaply.

Navigate

Don't make people pay for every state or country they can find their way around, but if the party has a pilot, a guide, and a scientist who claims the lost tribe of Voor is around here somewhere, globe-trotting should already be covered by all the overlap.

Perform

Never underestimate the value of a good performance, especially to primitive peoples who may use it as a primary means of communication. Spies use it to blend into the background...if they can't dance, they'll be spotted immediately.

Languages

If you're going to play jet-setting heroes and see a lot of different places during your campaign, you're going to get awfully tired of the language barrier. When confronted by natives in the movies, it's usually the urbane professor who steps forward and says, "Let me try. I speak a little Um'tapu" or "My skills are a little rusty...but it sounds like some local dialect of Greek." You can fix it with an NPC guide or translator, or be charitable with the language rules.

Of course, once you have to read something written down the issue arises all over again. If you're going to go the whole nine yards with the language guidelines, use them to your dramatic advantage. Have the characters start to make some uncomfortable connections between tongues...is this tribe's word for death the same as the word for death on that tape from Europe they heard back at the lab? They can't understand anything that's written on the crypt, but one character on the structure here in the jungle looks exactly like one they found on a burial mound in Kansas, where six people died.

Research

A little learning is a dangerous thing, especially if you find out how the world really works. The secrets held by people like the Thaumaturgia can be harrowing, sure, but there are few better ways to get an adventure started. Feel free to build to one mystery while investigating another. A character does some research on one thing, and tangentially you drop clues about another. These snippets may reference the spell book the team will follow up on next, the real identity of the ancient mummy mage they'll be pursuing, or the location of the sun temple they don't know they're headed for.

While research doesn't need any strange amendments as a skill, the process should be fairly thin. Deep study does not an adventure make, so most of the time a character goes to look something up, makes a roll, and the result just pops in: "Looking through my father's notes, I found this...do you think it means anything?" Don't even bother with the usual clever player management techniques like "While Fred is



looking up Martians, what are the rest of you doing?" Fred should be done in short order, so don't make any huge plans. This is a pulp story, and something else should happen soon to keep the action moving.

Survival

This may also depend a great deal on your team's travel plans. Do you intend to be in the tropics one week fighting off mosquitoes and climbing the side of a windswept mountain's face the next? You might need a pro to keep everyone from dying of exposure, but can that pro always be a player? Bringing a guide on each trip isn't exactly admitting to failure, but the players should feel like they're the stars of the show. If they have to call someone in every time to shore up their shortcomings, they're liable to feel

like underperforming amateurs. Struggle is good, but if the heroes find themselves endlessly battling the elements, the GM may want to let them use different skills to some extent on additional tasks.

Feats

These feats should convey some of the pulp sensibilities to the Pulp Kandris referee. He need look no further than what's listed here to get some ideas for what actions and abilities make a good character in this genre.

The Advantage Is Mine

Prerequisite: None

Benefit: If you are in your element, the gamemaster allows you a +1 bonus to all combat rolls and a +2 to all non-combat rolls. The GM is the final arbiter of what constitutes an advantageous situation for you, though he should work with the player to lay down some ground rules before play begins. For example, a flying air ace might be considered in his element any time he's behind the stick of whatever form of aerial transport he typically uses and whenever he performs stunts on or around such vehicles (wing walking on a biplane or trying to parachute to safety). If the logical terrain choice for the PC is too broad, the referee may decide the bonuses only apply when the hero is specifically using the environment to his advantage. This typically does not extend to any scene involving the mastermind or the enemy's territory, especially during the climactic battle (though the

villain may also have this feat – it's the gamemaster's option to let two such bonuses cancel out).

Example: Togar the Jungle Lord receives a bonus in his tropical home. Since the whole campaign is set in the thick undergrowth of the African rain forest, the GM tells the player the primitive hero he won't get the bonus just for being on his home turf. He may attack from a tree, travel by vines, or use his sling from an elephant's back, in which case these activities net him the adds to his roll. During the final confrontation with his foe the Scarlet Shaman in the villain's treetop fortress, Togar again forgoes the benefit – his opponent is just as much at home as he, possibly more so.

Normal: Skilled adventurers become at home in dangerous or inhospitable environments, but it takes a particularly talented individual to conquer such a strange clime and make it his own.

Special: A character cannot take this feat more than once. At the GM's option this ability will work in conjunction with the Signature Power feat and any bonuses he and the player have agreed upon.

Animal Companion

Prerequisite: Charisma 12+

Benefit: Similar to a spellcaster's familiar, animal companions are a staple of the pulps and even more so of the movies. With this feat you may choose a normal beast to be a boon companion on your adventures. While the two of you do not share any supernatural or mental bond, you are inseparable and do seem to understand each other at least on an instinctual level. The creature does not need to make checks to behave well, though it will takes steps to defend itself from obvious threats. The character receives a +2 to any skill checks he must make.

Example: A cowboy might have a horse as his companion. The steed would not be frightened away by another gunslinger's weapons fire – no check is necessary. The horse would still rear away from a rattlesnake in its path, and the rider would have to roll against his skill to keep from being thrown.

The beast is clearly more intelligent than others of its species, and will do some standard tricks without need of training. The horse might be able to nudge a door open with its snout or pick up important items with its mouth, and it waits patiently for his master to fall into the saddle from a second floor (though the skill to make that drop is up to the owner). It can also lead its owner to important clues, or lead others to its owner if he's injured. Just as the hero may depend on his companion to provide him with assistance, so does the critter expect to be treated well. If taken by the villains, the good guy needs to go release the animal. A hero won't leave his animal behind. The animal might not figure into an adventure, wouldn't follow its master anywhere unreasonable like a space rocket, and can simply be left at a stable or suitable stall, but abandoning it altogether is not acceptable and may result in loss of the companion with no expectation of a replacement.

Others may make limited use of the creature. Those it knows to be friends may ride it, and it might come close

enough to an ally tied to a post to let them get the knife from its knapsack (and the hero is certainly welcome to order it to perform such tasks). The GM may keep the beast in check if he believes others are making too free a use of its services, and everything it does should ultimately be for its proper owner. He may also (ahem) rein this feat in if the use of the companion becomes too much of a crutch for the party in their adventures.

Other possibilities include a mystic with a raven that perches atop his shoulder; an evil mastermind with a favored snake he keeps in a pit for "guests"; a thief with a ferret that gets into the hard-to-reach places; and a kid with an overprotective dog.

Normal: A character who does not possess this feat must buy animals as usual, and train and ride them according to the (less forgiving) normal rules.

Special: If the hero loses his companion, so long as this was not the result of carelessness or neglect on his part, he may get another one for free. The referee should play this out as an event in the game, though breaking the creature in does not require the training described under animal skills – the GM should gloss over this in play after a few sessions. And really, what kind of sick GM is going to let the horse die? This feat may only be taken once unless the player receives special permission from the gamemaster. Canny pets are characteristic of a pulp adventure, but a whole menagerie is not.

Crackpot Theory

Prerequisite: Int 14+

Benefit: You are adept at coming up with creative interpretations of available information and your belief in science permits a great many odd beliefs. When you take this feat, you must create your own theory. The player should make it up himself, but the GM should then vet it before allowing you to use it. The idea should be something that fits the period, and it shouldn't be anything mundane ("I believe radio technology will eventually depend on frequency modulation instead of amplitude modulation"). It should also be fairly ambitious, something that might even take multiple stories to unfold.

The GM keeps track of your progress proving your theory. Every time you uncover evidence that supports your theory, the referee adds one to your story's total. When you finally prove your theory, he gives you an experience point bonus based on that total as a multiplier.

Example: Professor Whittaker theorizes there is a lost world full of dinosaurs and primitive tribes at the bottom of a volcano somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. During a raid on a safe house for agents of the Keepers, his party comes across a set of maps indicating a series of ancient ley lines that could be used to power an old and dangerous magical ritual. His friends are fascinated at the scope of the operation and discuss how to anticipate their enemies' next move, but Whittaker is distracted by the marks on a map of the Pacific Rim along a series of islands unfamiliar to him. He has his first clue, and the GM adds one point to his theory's total.

Example: Over the last few months, the professor

continued to amass information (and points) regarding his wild rantings. Now, as he and his team rise into the air in Agent Caldwell's aerocopter, he examines the small ceremonial necklace and hugs the camera full of shots of dinosaurs he almost lost his life to keep. His theory total ends out at 7 points, and so his experience total is multiplied by 1.7.

Normal: People in the pulps are used to some crazy stuff, but while some may entertain these notions they certainly don't pursue them with single-minded determination in hopes of bettering one's career. While an insightful player might score bonuses for making some educated guesses during an adventure, they won't get the kind of experience windfall a nutty scientist would.

Special: If the gamemaster doesn't want to deal with the extra bookkeeping, he's welcome to simply assign an experience bonus he feels is concomitant with the effort the player has put into his work. Just be sure not to shortchange the dedicated actor.

Cultural Sponge

Prerequisite: Int 13+, two ranks in Speak Language

Benefit: You naturally absorb things about the strange cultures you encounter. You may not be able to speak the language fluently, but you have a sense of what is being said. You may be able to interpret tribal dances, intuit the intended use for an imposing rotunda, or determine what trade items would mean the most for a particular people. This feat allows a party member to form a bridge between two unfamiliar groups (and not incidentally get the adventure started).

The GM may secretly make a die roll if he judges a situation or rite too bizarre to be understood just by eyeballing it, but the results should be interpreted to keep the game moving. The pacing of events is also maintained if a scientist misinterprets what's going on, but this should never be immediately dangerous – his feat shouldn't get him killed. Use it only as an interesting result for a failed die roll or when you want the players to exercise a little creativity.

Example: The party has met the Da'kai tribe, and they have brought the team to their village where they perform an interpretive dance involving the waving of decorative sticks at people in colorful masks, all in front of an elaborate circle of woven straw. The PCs discuss with Professor Whittaker what this means, and together decide they have been told this village is the passage to the interior of the jungle, wherein the animal spirits the Da'kai worship wait for supplicants in search of knowledge.

Actually what it meant was "Don't go to the Cave of Sorrows; it's guarded by vicious animals, and you'd better have spears," but they'll find that out in good time.

Normal: Usually you need to be able to speak foreign languages, possess knowledge skills about a specific culture, or otherwise know details about the region to which you'll be traveling in order to communicate or get along with foreign cultures.

Special: Cultural Sponge is not limited to foreign peoples (unless the GM prefers that); it can also be used to better understand aliens or even the societies of mystic races.

Hunch

Prerequisite: Wis 13+

Benefit: Once per session, the character may ask the GM for a hint about the adventure or its elements. This does not mean the investigator can sit in his office downtown and make deft observations about a mystery; he has to make a good faith effort to work on the case. But if he gets stuck, he can ask for a little nudge. Since PIs and their ilk are skilled at this sort of probe, the hints can still be fairly far-out examples of free association. The GM need not feel constrained to provide the hero with only "logical" assumptions.

Normal: The player has to do his own sleuthing, and come to all his own conclusions.

Special: This feat should not short-circuit a good story, or allow a gumshoe to correctly identify the guilty party just by glancing down the table at a dinner party. It only hints at potential lines of inquiry.

In a Single Bound

Prerequisite: Str and Dex at 12+ and 11+ (player's choice which score is assigned to which ability)

Benefit: Faced with evil, some heroes are able to call upon amazing stores of energy and willpower at the critical moment to accomplish terrific, well, feats. Once a session, the hero may boost his physical activity to an incredible degree for a single round. When used, he must choose one of the following effects:

- Add 30' to your speed for simple ground movement (running, charging, and so on). Note this is a straight addition to the movement chosen; add this bonus after you have multiplied your speed for a full-round move action.
- Double your speed before applying jumping penalties; for example, the DC for that round assumes a speed of 60' for a normal human. A jump must be part of the move. You cannot "double" your movement for a jump and then just use that to run. When landing, you cannot use your remaining movement to continue running (you're spent just making the stupendous leap); you must still make a Jump roll (trained or untrained), but this is only to determine if you land on your feet or fall prone.
- Add 10' to the distance traveled during a climb; add this bonus after you have multiplied your speed for a full-round move action.
- Swim at your speed score as a normal move action. This use does apply to all movement in the round – if you swim as a full-round move action, you move at double your speed.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times, to allow multiple uses per session. You may still only apply the feat once a round to one form of movement. You cannot, for example, use one such boosted move action to run to the base of a wall and use another boost to improve your climbing

during a second move action. Only one of those movement forms may be boosted.

Just What I Need

Prerequisite: Wis 12+

Benefit: Some heroes are adept at making something from nothing, or are gadget builders of such skill (or eccentricity) that they have items about their person they've forgotten all about. Once per session, the character may pull out some small but useful trinket that could turn out to be just what he was looking for. This includes but is not limited to small hand tools, bits of wire or metal, a key to a long-forgotten lock, or an old wooden dowel.

The devices are never fully functional complex machines. You might have a screwdriver or even a pair of pliers, but an acetylene torch won't have any fuel (or a way of igniting it – but if you can find a use for the empty vessel as is, have at it). The player should exercise some creativity when deciding what he'd like to produce, and the GM is encouraged to deny any request that seems too convenient, silly, or obvious.

Example: “Trick” Williams is locked in an old silo, and a rainstorm threatens to fill his makeshift prison with rising water. He reaches into his bag of tricks...

The GM shakes his head and tells the player that no, a crowbar is far too vulgar a use of the feat, and warns that a key has little chance of fitting the lock even if Trick could reach the mechanism from this side.

...and pulls out a key. Quickly filing it to an angle on one edge against a rough steel shaft, he begins the painful process of diving beneath the water level to start unscrewing the bolts on the silo door.

Normal: They say luck is when planning meets opportunity; let's hope you've planned well.

Special: Buying this skill multiple times allows the hero to make use of it several times a session.

Secret Identity

Prerequisite: None

Benefit: You have an alternate identity that no one knows about, one that lets you pursue your own agenda without fear of reprisals from enemies (or, if that's the flavor of the character or the campaign, from the police). This feat may keep people from knowing you're really the Fiery Falcon, barrio avenger, or it may be a different persona you can step into. For example you might be a private detective who operates as a taxi driver to gather information.

Your ID has all the necessary paperwork to make it look real. You have a driver's license, a P.O. box, and perhaps an office. Most of the details depend on what you need to do the work. If your alternate identity is that of a police officer, you'll have a uniform and the gear, and folks down at the station recognize you. On the other hand, you do not have a whole other character sheet, so any skills necessary to ply another trade are your responsibility. You won't have any extra money (anything you make from having two jobs goes to maintaining your secret or bribing those who help you keep up the lie).

It's not impossible for you to lose the benefits of this feat, but unless it happens as a result of your own incompetence the GM should arrange for a new identity to become available. Establishing and exploring the new persona should be an adventure in and of itself.



Normal: Anyone can throw on a mask or buy a fake ID and work from a position of anonymity, but their deceit is superficial at best and if anyone shows any real determination they can track down the truth. This feat offers a much tougher mystery for potential enemies, one that stands up to scrutiny.

Special: This feat may be purchased more than once; each time, you may create yet another identity upon which to fall back.

Secret Society

Prerequisite: None

Benefit: There are many conflicting interests in a pulp game, and not everyone is even sure who's who until the end of a storyline. This feat allows you to become a member of some special collection of movers and shakers in the game universe. In spite of its name, this feat does not mean you're necessarily part of a completely secret group, or that you wield the true "power behind the throne," or that the organization in question is in any way antithetical to the goals of the good guys or the bad guys.

You are part of this club, and they have specific goals and desires (which you may or may not share – that depends on what you hoped to gain by joining). The group may be small or you may be positioned high enough in it; either way, you can command some small but notable chunk of its resources and personnel. You should work out with the referee something that makes you valuable to the organization; it's not strictly necessary, but it does lay the groundwork for both character development and plot creation if your standing is defined. They may also call on you for favors, and though you need not answer every call to duty, consistent failure to assist them is grounds for expulsion (and no, you don't get a replacement for this feat unless the GM likes the idea of a disgraced member being wooed by another, perhaps competing society).

While you won't be able to call in an air strike on an enemy compound, you do have some pull. Once per session you can get something you need – money, an item, a little help – from your friends. The GM will veto anything that's too inconvenient for the group (or his campaign), or requests he believes have no chance of being fulfilled by that particular interest (the officers' club isn't really suited to providing the advice of an expert in zoology). If all you want to do is borrow something, your favor stands a better chance of being granted. You won't be given any but the cheapest vehicles outright, but even a fancy limo or sports car isn't an outrageous demand if it's only for an evening. If you want to borrow money, that's okay as long as you pay it back. If you need a gold bar to impress a gunrunner or a million in cash to show kidnappers, that's going to raise eyebrows but as long as they think you'll return it they'll acquiesce. The added danger that you might lose it is irresistible drama, and gives the game extra kick.

You may make additional requests per session, but these require a roll as decided by the GM – usually a check against Charisma. You may only make one roll per request; once something has been refused you simply cannot get it this

session. The DC starts at 15 and goes up by 10 for every new roll (this includes failed rolls – if you fail to convince them to loan you a Tommy gun at DC 15, asking for a hidden transceiver is still DC 25). These are guidelines only, and the gamemaster may decide to up the difficulty if it's a big request or he's just tired of the hero asking for stuff.

If the PC member offers the group something truly valuable during the session, the feat is "reset." It has to be something nice and dramatically appropriate, though, and not simply repayment of a debt.

Example: Having borrowed \$10,000 from his secret society, the Modern Knights, Harry Guile goes to the casino to make a spectacle of himself and attract the mastermind's attention. Sitting with Antone Quille at the poker table, Harry cleans up. Not only has he gotten the villain's goat, he's wiped him and his buddies out for over half a million. He returns this to the society's treasury back at headquarters. Harry has made the group a profit, but that's about it. They're no closer to their goal.

Example: Harry returns, hair slightly mussed, from escaping Quille's minions aboard a yacht. He tells Control he needs the Knights' fastest boat. Control points out that they've already spotted him money this week. Harry pulls a folded map from within his jacket and unfurls it across the desk. It's dotted with dozens of what look like missile silos, all labeled in red. Control smiles, reaches for the phone, and calls the motor pool.

Requests for personnel should be mostly information or set dressing. You cannot bolster the ranks of your party with this feat (though of course when the shooting is done the group swoops in to help you clean up the can of worms you've just opened). You could ask for a couple of heavies to accompany you to a bar or into a meeting, and they'll look as intimidating as they can, but if punches are being thrown they'll scarper and try to call you some real help – they won't abandon you, but fighting is asking too much. They serve better as lookouts and messengers.

Normal: Most of the PCs in the game either answer to someone, like military officers who have a chain of command, or are cozy with groups or organizations in the game, like the Science Institute that funds the expedition to get the story underway. (And the players may present the characters they're playing as a form of power group.) A secret society is more of a cooperative effort, and taking this feat allows the hero to make greater demands on his fellows (and they on him).

Special: The referee may allow you to take this feat more than once if you agree it's interesting having you serve two masters (and you may not have designs against either one; maybe you just think both are cool to be a part of). But normally the nature of a group like this demands you be part of only one at a time. The GM may arrange to have you kicked out through no fault of your own and permit you to go to another group, just to keep the game lively.

Sidekick

Benefit: You have a companion, usually your junior, who trails you on your adventures (sometimes without

your blessing). This may be an apprentice in your mystical endeavors; a young boy serving as a cadet in training in the same military or official organization in which you serve; or a thematically linked superhero who follows you into combat to learn the ropes.

The sidekick is often a source of drama as he gets stuck in the same dangerous situations as the hero he accompanies – and to save the GM from capturing and endangering a player character, a session's cliffhanger could be the need to rescue the NPC from some terrible deathtrap. Since the character is buying the feat, though, the sidekick should be treated not as a drawback but a hook for adventure. He won't be as capable as his teacher, but he should provide an advantage in the thick of things. The GM and the player should work together to create a character for the sidekick. The referee may allow the player to dictate the sidekick's actions through

roleplaying (“Boy Electron, seal that hatch!”), but as with any NPC he may veto any course of action he thinks is unsuitable.

Normal: The hero may still convince others to assist him in his efforts, but these will be average NPCs with few particular skills or abilities of note. They also won't be as invested in the PC's work as a sidekick.

Special: This feat may not be taken more than once without special permission from the GM. One sidekick is enough of a handful for any one protagonist. On the other hand, if the junior members of the PC team's organization are intended to be featured players in the storyline, the gamemaster may want everyone to take a sidekick as their first feat, or assign everyone this feat for free as a condition to playing the adventure.

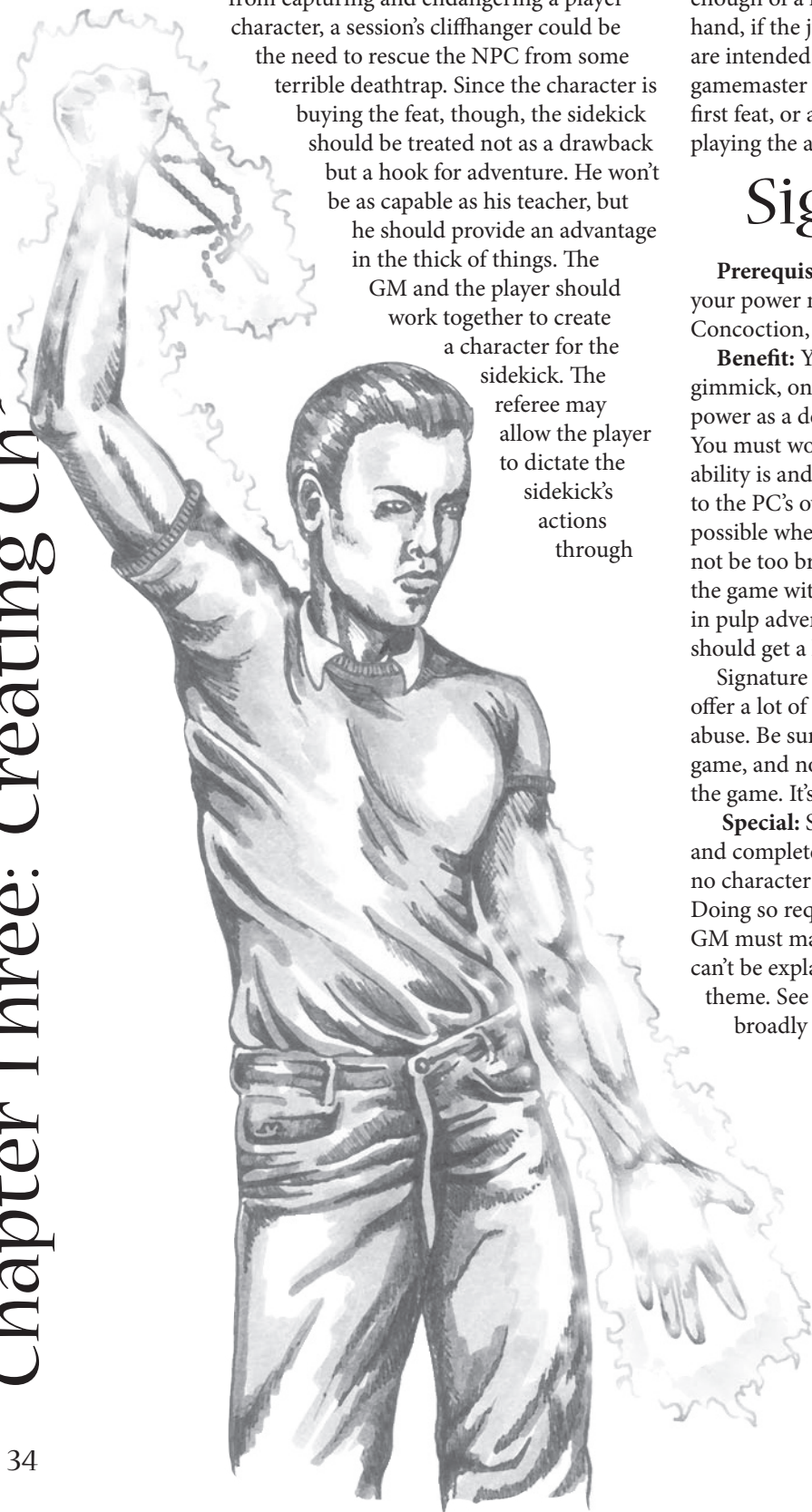
Signature Power

Prerequisite: None, though you and the GM may decide your power must somehow be “activated” (drinking the Lotus Concoction, for example)

Benefit: You possess an unusual power, ability, or gimmick, one that separates you from others, and you use the power as a defining feature of your personality or identity. You must work with the gamemaster to determine what the ability is and what the effects are. A signature power is central to the PC's overall motif, so the GM should be as generous as possible when helping the player develop it. The hero should not be too broadly defined – no one person should dominate the game with a limitless power – but since the protagonists in pulp adventures depend on these kinds of gimmicks they should get a lot of mileage out of them.

Signature powers should be fun, expansive, and utile. They offer a lot of leeway, and therefore there's a lot of room for abuse. Be sure the player wants his for its usefulness in the game, and not because it's a free pass to ignore the perils of the game. It's a tool, and one intended to make things fun.

Special: Since most effects should be all-encompassing and completely defining (that's why it's called a “signature”), no character should be able to take this feat more than once. Doing so requires special GM permission. The player and GM must make sure any additional abilities the hero wants can't be explained as just another part of the overall character theme. See The Advantage Is Mine above for another broadly applied character creation feat.



Powers in the Pulps – What Works and What Doesn't

The GM is the final arbiter of what is acceptable in a Pulp Kandris game, but herein are some things to think about before letting the players hit the books to bring their PCs to life.

The hero was often built around a gimmick or hook that let the audience know who he was and what he was capable of. These “signature powers,” discussed in greater detail below, were even more important to a character than they are to most superheroes today. His personal skills were interwoven with the face he presented to the world, often to the exclusion of personal issues or any real internal character development. A power wasn't just an ability, it was who he was. Characters had to be compelling, and project a figure that would capture the minds of the public. There wasn't time to dig deep into a man's psyche in a brief magazine novel or a 10-minute serial chapter, so people had to think they knew everything important there was to know about him with a single scene or even just the name. You won't have to sacrifice the same development in your characters – yours is a far bigger canvas upon which to draw. But your name should get you into the action as fast as your power does, so keep your gimmick in mind when naming your character – or vice versa.

Some powers fit the milieu better than others. Just about every kind of power you see in adventure stories today had some kind of precursor during the pulp period, but many were in their infancy and others had limits on how far the power extended. The GM will have his own ideas about how the campaign is to run, and when he introduces elements like the Keepers of the Broken Circle into the mix, then he may allow the characters to take a more mature view of the powers available to them. Until then, heed well the conventions of the genre, for they are sacred.

Psionics: Mentalism and mesmerism were two popular subjects at the time, not just in the pulps but in the literature and news of the day as well. Their very essence, in fact, is best summed up by words like mesmerism. You didn't find a lot of psionic characters in the modern sense. People didn't tend to fly through the air through willpower alone. Shields were physical items, not something you conjured between you and a bullet, or things you threw up to protect the contents of your mind. You might take over some poor soul's body by staring deep into their eyes, but you were leaving a post-hypnotic suggestion there, not controlling them like a marionette. Sometimes mind control came into play, but the person was customarily a zombie-like figure, stumbling blindly to their goal. If anyone got in their way with so much as a baby stroller, it was a major obstacle, and anyone who

knew what they were looking for could spot the subject of the power immediately. If you wanted to draw the person's innermost thoughts into the open where you could make use of them, that, too, required a lot of eye contact and a quiet place to work. You didn't do it in the middle of a combat.

Strength: Super strength has been a part of the pulps for a long time, so the ability to perform amazing feats with raw sinew isn't going to break the rules. Not that you want characters who can leap over tall buildings, but circus strongmen bent bars all the time. Maybe the hero can lift a car, but that's just to rescue someone – don't let him use it as a ranged weapon.

Invulnerability: Bounce bullets with the best of them. Very pulp, though the referee might want to draw the line at bazooka shells or something.

Movement: Characters could often fly, some with assistance, others just because they were Too Cool. Other forms were less common or nonexistent, like running fast (this sort of thing appeared in some comics, but not as much in the pulps proper) or teleportation.

Some things are obviously right out, either because they just don't appear (the ability to stretch) or their inclusion was meant only as a tool to create the adventure (time travel, for example). If you're choosing a power, ask yourself: Have you ever seen it done by the hero in a black and white film? If you can't remember any instances of it on-screen, it may not be appropriate for the genre. Talk about it with your GM and see if he can recall it; if not, the two of you may be able to work out a compromise.

Signature Powers

The pulps were home to many super-powered characters, though few of them were quite as deep or layered as the modern ones. They typically had a single motivation (though this could be as broad as “Stop evildoers everywhere”), and depended on one ability or a tightly defined set of powers.

Anyone wishing to be a metahuman in a Pulp Kandris game or wanting to display unusual talent in a specific area should take a signature power. They should also familiarize themselves with the following guidelines. They'll help players and GMs develop better characters in keeping with the conventions of the setting.

One Power Per Person

Heroes and villains both made a lot of hay from having a single, useful power or set of matching powers (cynics might say they made a thin gruel, but it put kids in the theater seats). It was not unusual for a bad guy to stake his entire plan on one discovery – say, a serum that allowed the user

to become invisible – and make the heroes chase their tails trying to overcome that one advantage. The good guys did the same. The power to cloud men's minds, stealth, even a fancy grappling hook gun could be the one defining feature of a hero.

How the person used the power, therefore, became almost as important as the power itself. Anyone choosing to play a PC with a signature power should think about how their ability can variously be exploited. Will it find utility in combat? Both on offense and defense? If the power doesn't do the job in a fight, what does the character fall back on? Does the power only provide an advantage in combat, or can it be used during the normal course of an investigation? If the player can't answer all these questions, it may mean the power or gimmick is too restrictive in its scope.

Characters had flashy names that sounded like they could dish out as much damage as their owners, names like Rex, Crash, Flash, and Duke. Superheroes were the “dark” this or the “masked” that...the names were more literally descriptive than the names you get today. Don't underestimate the impact of the definite article “the,” either.

Secret Name Generator

Step 1: The

Roll 1d6	
1, 2	Name is three words long, prefixed with “The”
3, 4	Name is two words long, no “The,” use steps two and three only
5, 6	Name is two words long, including “The,” and uses word from step three

Step 2: Description

Roll 1d6	
1	Color (crimson, azure, black, scarlet, dark, green...)
2	Metal (golden, silver, iron, bronze...)
3	Fabric (silk, leather, velvet...)
4	Nationality (Cameroon, American, Russian...)
5, 6	Roll again

Step 3: Quality or Characteristic

Roll 1d6	
1	Weapon (katana, sword, dagger...)
2	Supernatural (ghost, wraith, ghoul...)
3	Animal (wolf, bat, hound, tiger...)
4	Profession (slayer, knight, rogue, monk, fisher...)
5, 6	Roll again

Expanding and Limiting Powers

A player who takes a signature power is wrapping a lot of his character's future in that ability. It should already have been discussed with the gamemaster, but the real test of the trait won't come until the heroes are in the thick of their adventures. No one can possibly anticipate every possible use of a power, and the user is going to come up with a lot of new ones on the fly, as dictated by the situation.

When one of his players declares an action that involves the use of his signature in some unexpected way, the GM has to decide if he's going to let the player get away with it. In most circumstances the answer is yes. With so much of his image tied into the ability, the character needs to know he can perpetuate this view of himself as often as possible. The player must still offer a decent explanation for how his PC's power works in this situation, and if he can't the GM is well within his rights to ask the player to pick another action.

Example: Chained to a bomb and left to explode (along with the ship where he's being held prisoner and most of Pier 13), the Grey Grimm looks about at his surroundings in a desperate bid to secure his freedom. The player tells the GM that Grey fires his grappling gun to snag one of the tools in the machine shop. The referee didn't specify too many details about the chamber where the hero was abandoned, but decides this is not only a pretty accurate view of the ship's underbelly, it's also a reasonable way for Grimm to use his signature. The dark hero goes to work trying to escape before the timer reaches zero.

The GM need not allow the power to be automatically successful, especially if the hero's description or idea is less than perfect. The referee may decide the power can't be used that way in this instance, so the next best thing is to allow the hero a partial success.

Example: This time the gunsels are determined not to allow the Grey Grimm to leave the docks with his life (though simply shooting him doesn't seem to occur to them). He's tied with rope, laden with heavy chains, and thrown into the water off the end of the dock. The mugs dust their hands off and drive away. In the dark waters below, Grimm struggles with the bonds. The player asks the GM if he can use the grapple gun to shoot the bonds off. No dice – it's too blunt an instrument for that kind of damage. The GM does permit Grimm to fire the weapon upward, snagging something on the underside of the walkway. Now hanging half in and half out of the water, the old boards creaking under the weight, Grimm has bought himself a temporary reprieve. He still has to relieve himself of the ropes, the weight of the chains, or both; and his body, exhausted from the thugs' beating, is too weak to hold itself up much longer.

The challenge for the hero should be to come up with new ways to use his signature, so while there are some standard maneuvers the character ends up using a lot, he should always be looking for creative solutions to old problems. Just as not every deathtrap can be a room with the walls closing in, standardized tactics should not work over and over. Any

time the gamemaster allows a trick to work, he should take care to explain why the trick works. That way, if a similar situation comes up, the hero may not be able to solve it the exact same way.

Example: Another day, another bomb, only this time the Grey Grimm is sitting on a powder keg – literally – and he's tied to the post behind it. He asks to grapple a tool with which to free himself, but the villains get wiser as time goes by too. The GM points out that Grimm had a machine shop to work with last time, and the bad guys have left the hero very little to work with this time (they need those tools to continue digging for the gold, after all). Thinking for a moment, our shady avenger fires his gun, wraps the cable about one of the timbers, and pulls it loose. This, the player offers, loosens the post to which the protagonist is tied. The GM cheerfully accepts this solution, especially since the hero knows he's giving the referee fodder for further drama. Collapsing this shaft was part of the villains' plans, and Grimm is taking a chance undermining the structure. Snuffing the fuse with a gloved hand, he still needs to find a way out before the tunnel caves in or the robbers get away.

Sometimes a power is clearly not the way to succeed at a given task, and the gamemaster isn't expected to allow invisibility to help a captive character untie himself just because it's the hero's "thing." Nevertheless he should exercise caution when denying the hero use of the power. Taking the ability away from the character altogether is a particularly bad idea unless the GM can really justify it; better to come up with some situation in which use of the power just doesn't seem like the key to success. If it turns out the PC can still pull it off, the GM will probably enjoy the solution too, and the campaign is better for the ingenuity. Villains like to think they've got the good guys right where they want them, and it's all part of the taunting to not divest them of their weapons anyway ("Your powers cannot save you now, fool"). Remember, the hero may show little innovation by getting out of a trap with his power yet again, but then his foes don't show much in the way of smarts if they can't find a way to kill a man in five minutes in spite of that ability. They should have just shot him when they had the chance.

If they like, the GM and the player should come up with some method through which he "gains" his ability, though it's probably only temporary. This may involve taking a special injection, calling upon the gods, yelling a catchphrase, donning an item of clothing or armor, or eating a can of his favorite vegetables. In any case, the hero should be better rewarded at the end of any session in which the referee took away the catalyst for the protagonist's power. If the PC gains his strength by gripping his solar staff and the staff is collected by the villains when they capture him, he should receive special bonuses at the end of the evening (unless he simply grabbed the device back in which case it wasn't much of a drawback for him).

The player is also responsible for making sure his power not only doesn't dominate the game, it doesn't become a crutch that bolsters otherwise sub-par roleplaying. Signature powers should be shown off at least once a session, but if the hero cannot reasonably work his way out of a predicament with it he can find some other way to deal with the problem at hand and show off his power later...it's still a roleplaying

game, after all. If the GM refuses you a use of your power, he's probably trying to get a little something better out of you. If he keeps you from using your ability altogether, it's likely so he can keep some other element of pulp roleplaying healthy.

Sometimes the power is too great, or grows out of control as the setting expands. It's better if the hero then faces greater challenges, since the alternative is to retroactively change the way the power works. If they can agree upon it, maybe the good guy goes into a new stage in his evolution as a hero and something about the power changes. Maybe the old way of activating it becomes too dangerous or addictive, and the one who supplied the power offers some new way of charging up. But if the character is still finding new ways of using his power after all this time, the least the gamemaster can do is find a new way to challenge that champion.

Some Sample Signatures

What follows are some ideas on the sorts of powers your in-game persona can focus on. It's hardly an exhaustive list, and gamers being the inventive sorts that they are, it's only the tip of a tall iceberg.

Weapons: The character has spent years in training with a particular weapon. It could be a bullwhip, a hammer, a firearm, or even something one wouldn't ordinarily consider a weapon, such as a cloak. It may be that the person learned strange new ways to use the device from a secret sect of fighters, or they could be self-trained. Their outrageous skill may be the result of a life spent practicing with the item; a side-effect from using the weapon in their day-to-day work (a construction worker who wields a mean sledgehammer); or a gift, given to the user "overnight" by some mysterious benefactor.

Gizmos: Not quite a weapon, the character uses a tool of some sort to fight his battles. For example, a grappling hook, useful when climbing sheer walls, could also strike an enemy in the gut or face, strangle him, or pull him toward the user. And if you need information, just dangle the offender off the edge of a building. Whatever the gizmo is, it's something the wielder's foes wouldn't expect, or something that catches them off their guard. Ball bearings, a non-lethal gun with different attachments, and even ordinary items dressed up with fancy names like a "multi-crowbar" can carry a hero through many a tight scrape.

Powers: A single ability forms the core of the character concept, though it's usually something with a wide variety of applications. Invisibility was a popular one in the day, allowing one to stealthily engage in espionage. Mind control was common, as was super strength. It's unlikely players will be stumped for new ways to use (and abuse) their powers, but some abilities will better lend themselves to creative interpretation. As this is probably the sort of stat the players are already the most familiar with, it also sees the least discussion here.

Magic Items: This is mostly a cosmetic suggestion. Powers are powers no matter their source, but since the

world of the Kandris Seal is heavily influenced by magic, it only makes sense that some personalities will go with an ability and call it sorcery. It does less violence to the setting if they use magic and put it in a focus, and this forms a nice compromise for players and GMs who want to use the mystic arts without going over the top. And hey, heroes regularly got their equipment stolen by the bad guys at exactly the wrong moment.

Vehicle: A fancy form of transport can add flash to a hero or menace to a villain. In the case of the good guys, they showed up in a snazzy luxury car or under the wing of a fabulously agile flying machine. It's not out of keeping for it to be bulletproof or have weaponry embedded in its hull, but the only real qualification was that it (or the user's preternatural skill behind the wheel) gave the hero an edge over his opponents. Villains usually went for impressive size or overbearing power over straight tactical considerations. They depended on the breathtaking sight of a zeppelin or enormous winged flier hovering into view to cow their victims into submission, or the striking appearance of something more exotic like a subterranean drill breaking through the Earth's crust.

Magic

The Kandris Seal is a supernatural setting, with some of the world's premiere sorcerers and mages using their powers to keep the demons out of our dimension. But things work a little differently in a pulp adventure. Magic was a far more inscrutable force in the early years of pulp fiction. Characters like Conan eschewed the use of magic, preferring to trust their blade and their muscles to keep them alive. Those that did cast spells didn't usually chuck bolts of energy as effortlessly as a modern superhero. Stories about magic that were set in our world, on the other hand, held that sorcery was typically a dark power used only by those emotionless men and beings who were willing to sell their souls for a bit of insight into the arts. Our heroes were above those crafts, and a gun and a good right hook were one's path to victory over the bad guys.

Well, that's no fun.

In a Pulp Kandris game, injecting magic isn't a no-no, but it should be done with a little more care and some respect for the conventions. You don't want your players to feel hamstrung by the heroes of yesteryear; they came to play and they want some of those cool magic effects. So how do you go about loosening the leash so those who wish to play mages can do so without turning your game into a high fantasy dungeon crawl?

Limits on Magic

If you're bringing the magic from the pulps into the game, you may as well bring some of the disadvantages of it as well. For a start, it was complicated. Mages were held in high esteem or regarded with fear. Some average people could effect a little enchantment here and there, but even they were rare and usually just a tool available to the hero. If you wanted a big spell cast, you needed a big ritual. This

might just mean some time (so you won't be using it in combat unless you plan ahead), or it could mean a lot of items, followers, ingredients, and a sacrifice or two. This (and the merciless and ominous jungle drums) give the heroes plenty of time to uncover and foil the plan, or they may have stopped the shaman from getting a key element a couple of chapters ago. Sauce for the goose, though – the heroes are at the same disadvantage if they prepare a spell ritually.

The spell may not be known. It might just be a rumor, in which case someone has to go find it before anyone can put it to use. Like other powers, this could be an origin story and take up a lot of time, or it may be the equivalent of a major scientific breakthrough, so it may be the driving force behind the adventure. At the very least, a player seeking this ability should quest for it to a tribal mage or something in a remote place. That also gives the GM time to think how the power could damage his game, and he'll feel less badly about it if he knows the PC worked for it.

Sometimes magic is common but just not prevalent. Maybe you have the power of mesmerism, but it only works on dogs. Not ideal for the wizard, but the character will probably have fun trying to think of ways to put dogs to use in the game. In the meantime, some fictional mages compensate for this limitation by setting their pet tiger on you instead or beating you with a cudgel – the real power sat in reserve. Just like a signature power, the execution is up to the player. You can have regular magic in your game, but the other side of the coin, the signature powers, probably ought to get almost as much slack in interpreting their abilities. It's a tradeoff to be sure, and maybe it's not even needed to balance the game, but remember to make it a cooperative effort from the beginning lest someone resent how things turn out later on.

GMs may wish to jot down a few ideas about the sorts of spells he would and would not like to allow in his game (much like the signature power guidelines above), then tailor stories to accommodate them. If he gets a sense of what sorts of powers his players would like to pursue, he can try to match his list to the desires of the players. If there are effects that are forbidden in the game, the GM can either outlaw them completely ("Only an evil mage would dare to delve into the foul art of necromancy") or allow the PC to gain some semblance of power that approximates the effect ("While the ability to raise and command the dead seems to elude you, you have discovered that the wall between the lands of the living and the dead is quite thin in places. It may be possible for you to speak with a departed soul").

Advanced Classes

Mad Scientist

Requirements

To qualify to become a Mad Scientist, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

Skills: 6 ranks in either Craft (chemical) or Craft (pharmaceutical), plus 6 ranks in either Knowledge (earth and life sciences) or Knowledge (physical sciences).

Class Information

The following information pertains to the Mad Scientist advanced class.

Hit Die: 1d4

Action Points: 6 + one-half character level, rounded down, every time the Mad Scientist attains a new level in this class.

Class Skills

The Mad Scientist's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Craft (chemical, electronic, mechanical, pharmaceutical, writing), Diplomacy (Cha), Decipher Script (Int), Demolitions (Int), Disable Device (Int), Investigate (Int), Knowledge (arcane lore, behavioral sciences, earth and life sciences, physical sciences, technology) (Int), Profession (Wis), Read/Write Language (none), Repair (Int), Research (Int), Search (Int), Speak Language (none), Treat Injury (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 7 + Int modifier.

Class Features

The following features pertain to the Mad Scientist advanced class; he must meet the prerequisites to use Right Man for the Job.

Estimate Measurement

The scientist can estimate, with a margin of error of 10% either way, measurements. He can determine how long a sickly patient has to live, how long an experiment will take to reach its conclusion, how far away his party is from a given landmark, how much a manned vehicle weighs, and so on.

He cannot make an assessment about something he hasn't at least indirect knowledge of. For example, he can tell you how far away the ship is from the planet Grodos or how long it will take to arrive there, but he couldn't do so if he hadn't at least passing familiarity with it.

Know Device

With a five-minute examination, the mad scientist may intuit the function of a heretofore unknown device. This applies whether the item was built by other ingenious humans or an alien race. He cannot operate it with any notable skill, but he can turn it on, activate it, and (with some difficulty, as dramatic circumstances dictate) turn it off. Given a full 24 hours with it he can work the device with at least as little chance for disaster as an average user.

Name a Cure

Any ailment suffered in remote circumstances may be treated if the proper prerequisites are met (as set forth by the gamemaster). This only works if the player can suggest a reasonable explanation for the remedy, also the GM's call.

For example, trapped in the jungle with a companion who was felled by a poisoned dart, the hero offers that if the party can find the rubang root, it will stop the poison's spread. A bullet wound in the American desert might be better served by suggesting that there's supposed to be an abandoned military base nearby that may have the right supplies. The referee might also allow a less-than-satisfactory explanation to buy the wounded party some time, though not a cure.

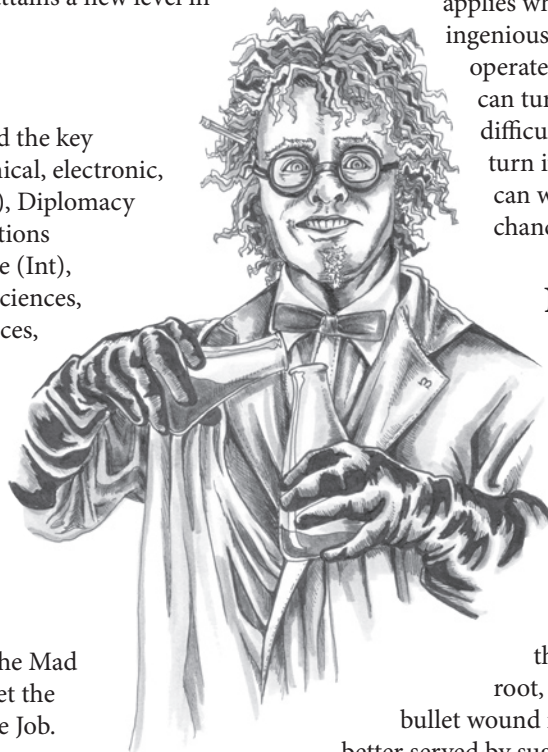


Table 3.1: The Mad Scientist

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Defense Bonus	Reputation Bonus
1st	+0	+1	+0	+1	Estimate Measurement	+0	+0
2nd	+1	+2	+0	+2	Know Device	+1	+0
3rd	+1	+2	+1	+2	Name a Cure	+1	+1
4th	+2	+2	+1	+2	Stabilize Victim	+1	+1
5th	+2	+3	+1	+3	Counter Measures	+2	+1
6th	+3	+3	+2	+3	Those Fools Who Laughed at Me at the University	+2	+2
7th	+3	+4	+2	+4	Perversions of Science	+2	+2
8th	+4	+4	+2	+4	Breakthrough	+3	+2
9th	+4	+4	+3	+4	Right Man for the Job	+3	+3
10th	+5	+5	+3	+5	Marriage of Magic and Technology	+3	+3

Stabilize Victim

The scientist can stabilize a dying character without a roll, and so long as he stays close by (for example, does not leave the village) the victim remains alive (the patient may only be moved to satisfy this requirement if the gamemaster allows it). This does not heal the person before any special treatment is obtained (see Name a Cure, above), though if the GM allows it for this specific illness he can use any normal medical techniques he possesses. This duplicates the scientist's power to diagnose and treat a wounded man in a dire circumstance while others find the weed, blossom, chemical, stone, or other ingredient that saves them.

Counter Measures

If the enemy is using strange or unusual methods or technology, the hero may improvise a counter measure for it. The GM may decide this is only a stopgap action, depending on the needs of the story (so no one shuts down a project before the adventure even gets underway). The player must roleplay some sort of solution. For example, if the villains have a ray that stops vehicles from working, the scientist might suggest surrounding the motor of their craft with a specially treated foil. The referee may decide this only lasts until the villains see someone's vessel has beaten their beam and they crank up the power.

Those Fools Who Laughed at Me at the University

The scientist gets an extra standard action during a confrontation with a rival in the profession. He may choose when to apply the bonus action, though it should be something done to get the better of that competitor (it need not be in combat – it could be as simple as a debate at a conference). He may only apply the bonus once per session. The player and GM should work together to create an NPC with whom there is friction to get the hero started; other adversaries will no doubt arise during the course of the game.

Perversions of Science

No self-respecting scientist can stomach seeing the beauty of pure research perverted to the cause of evil. Once in any scene in which the villain is using new technology to some twisted end, he may add a +3 bonus to any roll made to stop him. He could use this to boost a combat roll while fighting a bad guy armed with the cyclic battery laser, though not to steal the weapon from its secure wall mount. He cannot claim such a bonus for common technology like a Tommy gun; he should be protecting the sanctity of something new or sensational.

Breakthrough

After long weeks (months, years) of study in his chosen field, the scientist finally masters the innovation that puts him on the map. The character chooses one field in which he has excelled, and receives a +3 to all rolls in that arena (choose one craft, knowledge, or profession skill). The hero should describe his advancement; it may come in handy someday. He can choose anything the gamemaster agrees to, though

the referee still determines how far the benefits go.

Example: Dr. Capek has a breakthrough in his work on robot brains and chooses a bonus to his craft (electronics) skill. This comes in handy whether building an automaton or trying to deactivate someone else's. The GM may also allow Capek to buy robot parts cheaper, enjoy bonuses to his interpersonal skills at a conference, and even improve the designs of others.

Right Man for the Job

Prerequisite: Cha 16+

Scientists become keenly aware of who is best suited to a particular task when they formulate and execute plans. Any time the scientist assigns someone a job, that person receives a +3 bonus to his rolls for that action or a related set of actions (so long as his actions apply to his task). For example, the hero may say, "If I can get the engine repaired on this hover rocket, Captain Torque can pilot it to retrieve my daughter from that ledge." Torque would get the bonus to fly the vehicle. If he's beset by henchmen at the ledge, he won't receive the bonus for combat rolls; only when he returns to the controls is the bonus reasserted, and only until the girl is rescued. The scientist can only assign tasks when it's a multistage plan that involves die rolls on his part as well.

Marriage of Magic and Technology

The scientist may use magical components to solve "mundane" scientific problems, with a +2 to his roll for every element for which he offers an entertaining explanation. For example, he might jumpstart a mechanical device with a "charge" from a wand the party has found, or use an elixir as a fuel additive. If these things are chaos-tainted, the hero still incurs any penalties for their use, making this a dangerous ability to employ if you don't know the providence of your supplies. It doesn't get much madder than that.

See Chapter Four for more about magic, spells, and mystic devices.

Chapter Four

Tools of the Trade: New Spells, Artifacts and Other Plot Devices to Get You Into Trouble

Lacey folded a dollar bill into the wizened old woman's hand. She accepted it, tucked it into an old glass jar on the counter, and sat down. She pulled roughly at the young socialite's hand and began tracing something unknowable with her arthritic fingers. "Not a very long lifeline for someone your age, young lady," she said with a smirk, daring Lacey to challenge her.

"You're quite the charmer," Lacey offered. She looked back at the shop window. Sparks was stubbing out a cigarette butt and pulling his jacket closer about him. He looked up and down the street, and occasionally glanced inside. He smiled thinly, and gave her the thumbs-up. Lacey sighed. "Okay, what's next? Crystal ball?"

The old woman pulled out a thin blade. "I can read your fortune in the spattering of a few blood drops," she said. "Oh, but I don't suppose a delicate flower like you has the stomach – or the skin – for such a crude use of my skills."

Lacey pushed her hand forward before she even had time to think. "Start earning your buck, grandma, I'm on a tight schedule here." The psychic's smile faded as though she'd been bested, and she sliced through a bit of Lacey's palm. Lacey made not a sound; it was her turn to challenge the fortune teller. The blood dripped onto the tabletop, then the old woman handed her a kerchief as she stared at the table. She barely seemed to know she had guests.

After turning her head queerly for a long moment, the old woman spoke. "The ouiji board."

"The what?"

"Spirit board, witch board...it goes by many names." She held up one withered hand to forestall questioning. "The blood...it is not enough. I must know." It sounded to Lacey like the psychic was more interested than she was at this point. The door's bell rang as Sparks entered.

"We done here yet? They won't take all night to find us." Lacey waved him off with a combination of two hands, one compressing the wound on the other. The old woman was watching the pointer on her board, but she hadn't invited anyone else to join her. Already it was sliding back and forth.

"What gives?" Sparks asked, but then Lacey bade him to look more closely. As they followed it, the indicator made patterns, distinct patterns...runes. First one, then another. Lacey and Sparks looked at each other. Thirteen different runes, followed by a circle, a circle, and again the circle. "Kandris? Does she know about Kandris?" The table began to seep red, as though Lacey's blood had crawled from under it. Faster and faster the old woman went, and Sparks pulled Lacey from her chair. The board smoked, the circular pattern began to char and burn, and the copper smell of blood mixed with the wood. The old woman seemed unable to stop, to turn away.

"Is it coming?" Lacey demanded of her host. The watery eyes rolled back into the psychic's head. "Is it coming?" she growled again.

"No," the old woman whimpered. "It is already here."

Gear Up

This chapter features some fun tools for your pulp venue. There are magic items, some adventuring gear suited to the genre, and weird science gizmos to baffle and delight the brains of the outfit.

Note that the stats on these items are easily changed, if the GM likes. Movie serials never went out of their way to explain the technology or anything else, so if you want to add a pair of rocket guns to your aircraft or you decide the magic item the party seeks can also send mental warnings to its rightful owner, go ahead. Remember, most of these things are pretty powerful (as plot devices are wont to be), and except

for some of the less impressive items they're unquantifiable. The costs offered are just numbers...you can't buy a Nebulon-3000 Atomic Pulse Antenna at the local hardware shack any more than you can haggle for the Holy Grail, so if you don't like the figures here switch them to suit or simply eliminate them altogether.

Magic Items

"This voodoo staff," said N'Longa, putting it in the Englishman's hand. "Where your guns and long knife fail, this save you. When you want me, lay this on your breast, fold your hand on it and sleep. I come to you in your dreams."

-- Robert E. Howard, *The Hills of the Dead*

The pulps used magic more than the movie serials did, though any form of generic mysticism or voodoo might make an appearance and vaguely explain away someone's powers or define a tribe as mysterious. In particular, where the serials favored weird science, the pulps concentrated on surprising and sometimes ghastly devices saturated with power. Not all magic items in these media were intrinsically evil, but neither were they to be trifled with. They should always be depicted as commanding some sort of respect from witnesses, and have an impenetrable aura about them.

A magic item, like most weird science devices, should be a MacGuffin, something that drives the plot. Gathering powerful items such as these shouldn't be the focus of the story unless you're getting them for the museum back home or for study by the government's "top men." Characters are supposed to quest for them for the benefit of mankind (or at least to keep safe the small group of people on whom the current storyline focuses), and they may get to use them once or twice in the course of events, most likely during the climax of the story. Unless it fits in precisely with someone's overall image or can be made part of their signature power, don't let your PCs wander about with a backpack full of these artifacts. They can change the course of the campaign, if not history as a whole, and all but the most common among them are too important to be reduced to another piece of kit.

Some characteristic items follow, and can provide inspiration to a GM who would like to include more. For additional ideas, adventure seeds are provided with each entry.

The Eye of Bashira

The Eye is a translucent blue gemstone; it is usually attached to a string or cord and hung about the user's neck for easier access. Peering through it gives the viewer the ability to see all the things in the immediate field of vision as they truly are. The viewer's vision is not extended beyond its normal limits, but his sight cannot be stymied by darkness, fog, or other obstructions (magically generated or otherwise). Invisible beings are now visible, as are those hidden by illusions, shapeshifting, and other mystic deceptions.

The Eye is not a unique item, though how many of these were crafted by the cultists of Bashira is unknown. At least one intrepid craftsman forged a set of spectacles from two of the gemstones, but that item has been lost to the ages.

There may be other Eyes, perhaps in other colors signifying different abilities, but these are the ones most familiar to those in the know. The GM can choose to allow even a "regular" artifact to have additional powers (mages through the centuries may have lost the knowledge of what these things are and what else they can do, and they may not have lost such information accidentally), or let the owner get away with a function not considered here if it's clever enough.

The Eye of Bashira: Detect magic, detect secret doors, detect traps and snares, true seeing; CL 6; moderate Divination; Craft Wonderous Item; Price

42 *Type:* Wonderous Item; *Caster Level:* 6th; *Purchase DC:* 33; *Weight:* negligible.

Adventure Seeds

The Mines of Bashira: Rumor has it someone has discovered the Mines of Bashira, a whole valley in Africa dotted with holes in the earth, each adit promising stores of Eyes. Some say it represents gems sufficient to equip an army, one from which no secret could be withheld, from whom no enemy position is safe. And could so heavy a concentration of these treasures together offer even wilder powers? Just holding the valley could make a man a king.

Eyes of Reality: A mage named Hovehrt has sent his minions out on a quest to uncover or steal more gems. Across the globe those who possess these devices are being slain and their goods returned to this madman. A superhero who used an Eye was eliminated, but not before he was able to crawl to the party with a warning of the treachery. Taking up the hunt, the team finds that Hovehrt has arranged one Eye before another in a very particular manner, and it's like magnifying reality. He adds gems to his device and grows more insane still as the secrets of the universe seem to be peeled away before his very eyes.

Khormil's Wish-stone

This is a powerful magic item, but a dangerous one. It looks like a plain, smooth river rock with a brownish discoloration on one side. This is the indelible blood stain from the child whose sacrifice gave the stone its power. Part of the ritual involved striking a dreaming child in the head with it and leaving the rock embedded there for several days during the performance of various rituals. (This happened eons ago, and whether Khormil was the wizard who performed the awful ceremony or the child who was killed is not known.)

The stone is a one-way teleporter – using it sends the person away but leaves the stone behind to fall to the ground. To activate the device one need but touch it while thinking of another location. It has no known range limits in its ability to transport; there are dozens of desiccated corpses on the moon because of this item. It only activates when in contact with skin, so carrying it about requires only gloves or even a simple sack. Because it is so easy to accidentally activate the magic of Khormil's Wish-stone, it is frequently lost for years and even centuries.

Type: Wonderous Item; *Caster Level:* 7th; *Purchase DC:* 48; *Weight:* negligible.

Adventure Seeds

Under Siege: The PCs are in a small kingdom that finds itself under siege by assailants who appear, one after the other, from within a chamber somewhere deep inside the capital city's royal halls. The local wise man tells them the tale of the wish-stone and local rumors he has heard of late. He deduces this must be the agent of these new arrivals, and since the intruders come from so far within (where precisely no one knows – the bad guys have taken control of the

innermost parts of the castle), they or their leader must have intimate knowledge or even pictures of these secretive locales. That limits the suspect pool to only a few men. The militia can only hold out for so long, giving the characters finite time to track down all the people on the wise man's list and finding who is pushing a small army into their midst.

Little Girl Lost: A hapless child used the stone, and now finds herself atop a mountain that looms over her town. Her distraught mother is able to point the heroes in the right direction (her daughter has often spoken dreamily of going up the slope and seeing what she can see). Since the stone works only one way, the characters have a choice: use the stone to follow her with the proper climbing gear (and hope they don't accidentally think of Outer Mongolia or something at the last moment), or find a method by which to accurately transport the stone to her position (she's almost certainly thinking of home at this point).

Looking for Khormil: Someone wants to unlock the secrets of the stone for themselves, but the only way to do so is to uncover the truth behind Khormil's identity. Since they cannot simply think about his unknown location, they begin tracking some of the clues down – family names, regions where the stone was rumored to have been used, the river where stones of this mineral type might have been formed and shaped. They can use the stone to send people familiar with those locations to get more information. As they find what they need, their investigations turn over other uncomfortable mysteries, and the entire operation becomes more dangerous and less predictable. And what happens if they find someone who knows what things look like on the other side of the Kandris Seal?

The Skull of Morghet

This vile item can be used to resurrect and control any corpse. The Skull of Morghet is inverted so it resembles a cup, and a piece of the corpse to be animated is placed inside with an ounce of liquid. The spell to activate it is written around the rim of the skull's base in finely chiseled characters (the gamemaster must decide in what language the runes are written – it may be they are blissfully unreadable in this campaign, at least not without serious research or an obliging expert on the subject). The resulting brew must then be drunk, and the GM is well in his rights to demand a roll not to retch, whether performing the ceremony or just witnessing it. The corpse in question arises and obeys the performer's commands. The whole rite must be done by a single person or it will not work. Although the commands are technically given mentally, most people find themselves yelling their instructions as they gesticulate dramatically. The zombie possesses none of the powers it held in life, and recalls none of its skills.

Another use of the device (by a new user or the same one) destroys the previous creature; it simply falls limp and resumes decaying from whatever condition it held before the ritual. The monster thus created does not attempt to consume brains like some popular notions (though it can be ordered

to do so), nor does it infect other beings with its bite, but it is every bit as exceedingly stupid as you might expect. Without commands, it stands motionless.

Use of this item by a PC is a sure way to end up with a permanent taint upon his soul.

Type: Wondrous Item; *Caster Level:* 4th; *Purchase DC:* 36; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Adventure Seeds

Gang Warfare: A voodoo priest wants to frighten his enemies into submission, so he kills his opponent's right-hand man and raises him using the skull. The other man isn't cowed so easily by half, and steals the skull to raise the shaman's brother. A gang war breaks out, but this time the weapons are magical. Baffled heroes try to step in, but with the Keepers and their servants taking an interest in this veritable explosion of mystic mayhem, can even they keep things on an even keel before the entire city gets sucked into chaos?

Bad Medicine: Eager to prove himself, a young intern tries to use the skull to raise a patient who's only on life support, possibly brain-dead. This loophole costs everyone dearly. The hospital is overrun by imps, the skein of the dimensional walls begins to break down, and the horrible half-thing that stalks out of the coma ward, neither alive nor dead, is trying to find its relatives...for what reason? Hopefully the heroes can prevent anyone from having to find out. Everywhere the creature goes, people around it are going mad, becoming sick, or falling into comas themselves, depending on their general health and outlook. Can the good guys find a way to bring the thing to heel without succumbing themselves? And will there be any respect for the undead, the poor person whose body is suffering these indignities?

The Gloves of Vishnu

When worn, the gloves give the user an extra set of arms. No one but the wearer can see these limbs, though the improvement to the person's manual dexterity is obvious (to an observer, the complex illusion thus generated makes execution of the abilities seem normal). Any two-handed operation can be given over to the new arms and they will work tirelessly to perform the task so long as the user is conscious. They have the same stats as the character's regular appendages, and this includes spells that boost strength, mechanical augmentation, and so on. The user feels no disorientation while using the arms, though for 1d6 days after removing the gloves he'll continue trying to pick things up with the phantom limbs. The gamemaster should come up with ways in which this might affect his performance during that time: in combat, while handling explosives, shaking hands...

The gloves are silk with golden thread woven through the fabric, and tiny jewels line the cuffs. The gems are ornamental and worth little when removed from the gloves, and the

actual magic spell is concentrated in the weave.

Type: Wondrous Item; *Caster Level:* 3rd; *Purchase DC:* 34; *Weight:* 2 lbs.

Adventure Seeds

God Complex: A old doctor puts the arms to good use in surgery, and his career takes a sudden boost. Although he's doing better, he's coming to depend on the arms more and more, and his underlying skills are still atrophying. Though there's no disorientation while using the gloves, the confusion that results from removing them is taking its toll on his mind. His God complex may get the better of him, turning him into a sort of low-rent supervillain, or he may lose his license after all and be forced to work underground as a mob doctor. If that happens, the mob knows the value of such a man, and if they find out his skills are improved with the gloves, it may spur them to delve deeper into the mysteries of magic items in hopes of improving their general lot.

Glove Hunt: The heroes must track down the Gloves of Vishnu at the request of a member of the council. He has need of them to complete a difficult ritual. A recent death in the Thaumaturgia membership, however, left the departed's estate to his daughter, and she unknowingly sold the necessary items to another man, a criminal who recognized the usefulness of the gloves. Thus begins a quest to track down one crook after another who fell into possession of the lot. The buyer was a gambler who did well making physical bets with the gloves, but he lost them to a safe-cracker who made good use of them, but a pickpocket took them from him...the team may have to put the whole of the underworld behind bars before they get the equipment back.

Beppi's Makeup Kit

This kit contains stage makeup and accessories (wigs, moustaches, false noses, and so on) and applicators for same. When these are applied, the wearer actually appears to be the person they wanted to be. Although they can appear as a specific person, look scarred or otherwise deformed, and even switch sexes, it is a facial effect only. The body cannot be altered and the person can't take the form of any being that falls outside the human norm, GM's call. For example, the gamemaster may decide that while red eyes are unusual they are not inhuman, but he may draw the line at scales. The kit should not be capable of recreating demons, aliens, and the like unless he enjoys the irony of allowing the characters to duplicate the simplistic (and very human) "special" effects of movies from that time period. Although the person appears exactly as the subject they wish to duplicate, the gear does not help with the voice or mannerisms. Familiarity with the person (and skill at such deceptions) is necessary if they want to sound or act like them.

The makeup can only be removed by the special cleaning formula in the kit, or by use of magic that dispels such effects. There are supplies sufficient for 10 transformations, though these materials regenerate when a new owner assumes control of the kit. In the bottom of the box, beneath the oils, makeup, and wigs is a small brass plate with the initials L.C.

engraved on it.

Type: Wondrous Item; *Caster Level:* 3rd; *Purchase DC:* 26; *Weight:* 5 lbs.

Adventure Seed

Mob Magic: A young man, distraught after losing his father to mob violence, disguises himself as a pair of high-ranking members of the two biggest rival gangs in town. He surprises and beats up one man in an alleyway outside a casino, then does the same to a member of the other gang on the other side of town when the target exits a restaurant. The hostilities that erupt after his little charade draw in the good guys, who not only want to stop any more fights from spilling blood into the streets but to teach the boy that his actions have consequences. He's likely to learn that the hard way, though, when the two gangs realize they're both reacting to impossible occurrences – they know where their members were. Realizing they've been had, they hear from their sources about the kid the heroes are trying to help. They know who the author of their pain is, and they intend to do more than scare the fellow. Perhaps further clever uses of the kit could help end the violence, or at least keep the son safe long enough for the team to wrap up the criminals.

The Scarves of Bathsheba

There are seven of these beautiful scarves, and they can be worn around the body to form a concealing garment. If the wearer dances and removes these scarves one by one, all watchers become entranced and at the end of the performance must obey one command for the dancer.

Type: Wondrous Item; *Caster Level:* 20th; *Purchase DC:* 31; *Weight:* negligible.

Adventure Seed

Dangerous Dance: A young floozy working for a disreputable establishment is given the scarves by a friend who tells her all about the enchantment, as it was told to her by the shopkeeper who sold the garments to her. They both think it's a joke, but after performing the dance at her sleazy nightclub, the drunken woman impulsively tells the audience to beat up her tormentor. She's referring to her abusive boyfriend, but the spell interprets things a little differently. The saleswoman at the store was hoping to cause some trouble by letting the scarves loose in the underworld, and now the spectators at the dance go after the shop owner. That's not the bad part – the merchant is in no danger because she's a servant of the Keepers of the Broken Circle, and can take very good care of herself, thank you very much. But when the audience members start dropping dead around town, the panicked dancer has to plead with the heroes to help her undo the damage she's unwittingly sent rampaging through the town.

Zoltara's Elixir

This potion is formulated from mundane ingredients but under rigorous magical conditions. It is an oral tradition passed at the death of a teacher to the greatest of his students. The odorless, magical liquid cures any one disease. If the drinker has multiple ills it cures only the most detrimental, and can only affect that condition one time in that patient. For example, if the patient is cured of typhoid and is later reinfected, the elixir will not cure it again. It is up to the gamemaster to decide if varying strains of a single disease are to be considered separate for the purpose of this limitation. The potion can be used multiple times by a single patient so long as it cures something different each time. Old age and natural causes are not considered diseases in this context; Zoltara's Elixir does nothing for either. It does not remove chaos taint, though at the referee's discretion it may temporarily prevent damage or death from one of its more devastating effects.

Type: Potion; *Caster Level:* 3rd; *Purchase DC:* 16; *Weight:* –.

Adventure Seeds:

Ransom: A long-standing villain contracts a terminal illness and kidnaps a mage he believes knows the secret of Zoltara's Elixir. Unbeknownst to him, the magician's mentor has not yet died, nor has he passed on the secret of the potion. When he realizes this, the villain blackmails the elder mage: the apprentice for the cure. The wizard asks the player characters for their assistance, and everyone realizes this is a prime opportunity to capture the villain at long last. Posing as members of the mage's coven, the heroes enter the lion's den in hopes of saving the young spell caster and ending the bad guy's predations once and for all.

The Price of Power: The heroes go through hell and high water to get the potion in order to save a friend of theirs. After the elixir is administered, however, the victim loses one of his powers. Did the patient know his ability was the side effect of a disease? Is having the power worth suffering the disease? Could one create an army of super-powered people in this way, or was it only this one person's specific physical makeup that permitted such a result? If the former, some villain may attempt to infect his entire following; if the latter, the bad guys may target the heroes' friend in order to isolate the right factors in his body that allowed him these gifts. And regardless, can anyone ever make enough of Zoltara's Elixir to cure all the potential carriers, or do the investigators have to find some alternative treatment that keeps the world from being overrun by superbeings?

The Door in the Museum

This powerful magic item is hanging in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and no one seems to know about its true nature. It is an oil painting of a New York brownstone. If

the viewer concentrates on the doorway in the illustration, it seems to shimmer and eventually open. They get the sensation they are being drawn into the painting, falling through the portal. With their next action they may travel to any location depicted in a piece of art placed within 30 feet of *The Door*. This effect may not be used to travel through time and the drawing has to be of a real location. For example, if you placed a sketch of the Washington Monument in the potted plant near the painting, then concentrated on *The Door*, you would appear in front of the monument a moment later. Getting back is your own problem.

Although time travel is not possible, so long as the picture is of a real place it does not matter when the image was created. If the location shown no longer exists (say, a contemporary picture of the Colossus of Rhodes), the traveler can still be transported to the site as it exists today. The artist must have been to the location personally and produced the picture on site or from memory. This also works with photos.

Type: Wondrous Item; *Caster Level:* 16th; *Purchase DC:* 32; *Weight:* 15 lbs.

Adventure Seeds:

Pictures From Home: A Free Ranger (see Chapter Five) enters the world beyond the Kandris Seal and, using one of the new Polaroid cameras, takes a few instant snapshots of the other side. Devoted servants of the Keepers of the Broken Circle find out about this and track down the travelers to get the pictures from them. With the photos in hand they can use *The Door* to move effortlessly to their masters' prison and set plans in motion to release them. That is, unless the heroes step in at some point during the execution of this scheme to foil them.

Revenge: A disgraced former member of the Thaumaturgia wants some payback, and paints the inner sanctum of one of the houses where he once worked. He plans to go to the museum the night of the yearly council meeting with a bomb. If he can gain access to the enchanted painting, he can enter the house and, with one fell swoop, eliminate the entire leadership of the Thaumaturgia, leaving them embroiled in chaos as their enemies make good use of the disruption.

Gear

This isn't so much a list of average equipment like ropes, backpacks, and guns; it's genre-suitable stuff that should appeal to pulp heroes. If it's too fanciful, you can probably find it listed under Weird Science (below).

Secret Decoder Ring

Zowie. One of the benefits of being a member of a superhero troupe is the nifty ring. This device allows heroes to translate secret messages from other members. The notes are usually left at dead drops and other standardized locations, but they can also be transmitted or even spoken between allies (it's simply a less secure method).

The ring automatically allows the members to read each other's messages – translation of an agreed-upon code is just a question of time – but nothing keeps an individual from sending what amounts to a riddle or word puzzle. The ring also allows a bonus to translate other ciphers, though the GM may determine that a code the ring wasn't designed for is beyond its capabilities to assist with.

The ring also serves as a symbol of one's membership in whatever club, group, or team hands them out, and grants access to any safe houses or bases they may have.

The ring offers a +2 bonus to any attempt to break a code or cipher.

Size: Fine; *Weight:* negligible; *Purchase DC:* 10; *Restriction:* While not technically restricted, the rings are not freely available without membership in the appropriate team.

Adventure Seeds

Ring Troubles: After a fight, a young member of the Junior Rangers (see Chapter Five) finds one of the heroes has lost his decoder ring. He intends to return it, but he can't help himself. He decodes a message he overhears on the radio one night, and becomes the target of villains who want to know more about their enemies' plans. They assume the kid must be working with an older good guy, and they use the boy to bait a trap for him and his teammates.

Alternately the heroes could be trying to lure the villains in. They might "accidentally" lose one of the group's rings, one that actually gives false information, and they set a trap of their own for when their foes show up. But the villain that shows up turns out to be a shapeshifter of some sort, one who thought using the ring might give him some idea just how far the party has gotten trying to decode some of those cryptic runes they've discovered of late. The protagonists now have more problems on their plate than they had anticipated, and not all of them from this plane of existence.

Mark of the Hero Ring

Some rings are symbols of a character's standing in a community or tribe, their mystic background, or their awesome power. Those who see the ring and understand its significance are cowed by the realization they're in the presence of someone who represents a line of heroes (or villains) or a long tradition of upholding one set of virtues (or vices). Displaying the ring often bolsters one's reputation or earns the wearer a little respect.

Sometimes the ring has a more practical use such as opening a particular lock, activating certain powerful devices, or leaving the person's mark. In this example, punching someone's bare skin with the ring stamps an indelible mark into the flesh – permanent proof that that person ran across the ring bearer and, in all likelihood, came out on the short end of the exchange.

Size: Fine; *Weight:* negligible; *Purchase DC:* 20 (but see

Restriction); *Restriction:* None, though the ring is unique, forged by the user (or whoever held that hero's mantle previously).

Adventure Seeds:

Runes: Villains with runic rings are stalking important victims from the ranks of high society. They attack from the shadows, some dressed as heroes, and land a punch on their victims. The heroes are so busy trying to clear their name of any involvement with the crimes they don't realize the targets are now all marked with various glyphs. Are they being singled out for some deadlier assault? Are they the chosen sacrifices in some horrible ritual? Can those marks be used to violate them in some subtle, terrible way? Perhaps there's a pattern to them, if only the heroes notice in time to do something about it.

Marked For Life: The protagonist finds the mark of his ring on a young man – so young he couldn't possibly have known the hero's father, and the superhero knows he's never confronted this kid. He's just a teenager, and he wouldn't have tried to scar someone for life at so tender a time when he still had the opportunity to turn things around for himself. So where did the mark come from? Is someone else pretending to be that hero? If the boy's father was a criminal and he had the mark, the fact that the mark has transferred to his offspring simply through virtue of being born suggests there might be a mystical significance to the whole thing. Was the boy born to be next in line? Or have the mysterious Keepers been tinkering with humans again? The boy may even have been born through some dark magic, though whether this makes him evil by default or just puts him in the unenviable position of having to choose between good and evil is something the good guys have to work out.

Poison Ring

Worn almost exclusively by villains, this ring has a hidden catch on it. When activated, a small pin pops out of the center, coated with poison. Puncturing an enemy's skin delivers the toxin, the effects of which may vary. The dose can be delivered with a successful punch, though the ring can be rotated around the finger so the pin is better concealed and is instead inserted with a slap (good for those cowardly villains).

Heroes may take such a device as well, but their poison of choice is invariably something less malign – a soporific, or at worst a hallucinogen.

Size: Fine; *Weight:* negligible; *Purchase DC:* 20; *Restriction:* None, though the toxin chosen requires at least a license.

Adventure Seed

Snake Oil: While it is impossible to create a chaos-taint solution, Keeper agents are trying to find ways to draw people to the dark art of magic. The streets are seeing a flood of chemicals from psychedelic drugs to healing potions. The hope is that their ready availability will tempt young people and others to try them, and they in turn will become fascinated by the possibilities offered by "alternative

perceptions.” The whole operation is seen as a little odd and funny, and is being met with derision by some of the more influential teens. Villains are administering some of their substances to those kids – ball players, lettermen, prom queens – through poison rings, and meeting with some mounting success in using those surreptitious tactics as a sort of clandestine gateway drug.

Rocket Pack

Another defining image of the serials is the airborne guy with the flying personal gear. The GM may prefer to change the actual mechanism – a rocket easily becomes a pair of wings, or a glider, or even a pack charged with “minus” energy – but the point is the hero nimbly takes to the stratosphere without benefit of a plane in his highly maneuverable harness.

Size: Medium; Weight: 40 lbs.; Purchase DC: 38; Restriction: Restricted.

Adventure Seed

Rocket Rum Running: The mob has gotten a hold of a jet pack and are using it to ferry liquor in from Canada with almost no chance of detection. The flying hero may not be able to intercept the other guy in the air, but if he can find their base on the other side of the border, he and the Mounties may be able to seal off that end of the supply line.

Dart Gun

Plenty of tribes can be seen using these in the movies; this one isn’t breath-powered, though, and is used to toss deadly ammunition at the villain’s foes. It’s typically hidden in a sleeve or some sort of sheath so it looks ordinary until the user needs it to elude capture when at a disadvantage. They could be inside overlong hairpins, attached like a watch to the wrist, or pulled from a cane or cigar tube. Depending on how much damage the person seeks to do, they may coat the dart with a toxin of undetermined lethality.

Size: Tiny; Weight: 1 lb.; Purchase DC: 8; Restriction: Licensed, though the toxin chosen may require something higher.

Weird Science

*“Not what teacher said to do
Makin’ dreams come true
Living tissue, warm flesh*

*Weird Science.”
-- Oingo Boingo, Weird Science*

If you want to jumpstart a plot in the world of the pulps, nothing does it faster, better, or with more period-appropriate panache than weird science. Weighed down with names like the “nuclear reactive chamber” or the “static lens array” or

the “Fullerton magnetic actuator,” these endless violations of the known laws of physics have caused more trouble and launched more escapades than just about anything else in the genre. The villains want it, or wish to complete theirs, and the heroes try to stop them. The ultimate MacGuffin, it can do just about anything the gamemaster wants it to.

Of course, he ought to know what it actually does. It’s okay to have an ozone-vectored strobe ray, but someone’s gonna by-golly use the thing by the last chapter, and it should be a lot of fun to watch. It doesn’t matter how queer the effect is, given the bizarre things the stuff in the movies did, but the GM should also make sure it’s not going to ruin the campaign. If it’s around, the heroes will want to know why they can’t use it on their next adventure, or why it’s not the solution to the problem at hand. There are several options available.

It Costs Too Much

It might be the power requirements, it might be a rare resource, or it might be an unobtainable element (hence the popular cliché “unobtainium”). Regardless, you can’t just crank it up of an evening without seriously inconveniencing people at best or damaging them at worst. Perhaps when it powers up, Cincinnati powers down. The government might only have so much tedium-209 in its strategic stores (that’s why you had to stop Albert Sinclair from stealing it in Chapter Eight: Doom on the Open Seas, remember?). And if it’s an abomination that feeds off the fear of humans, no decent hero would dare use such a horror.

No One Knows How to Work It

Again, that’s the reason for kidnapping all those research scientists. If one guy could write an instruction manual for the thing, not only would anyone be able to work it, they could build more. No, the one person who knew of its inner workings perished heroically to save his daughter (oh, and Poughkeepsie) from the savage effects of his hated creation. If the villain made it, he’d probably be willing to tell you how it worked...for a reduction in his sentence. No? Didn’t think so.

The Government Has It

And they don’t like to share. Even back in the days when government might play the good guys in a pulp story, they didn’t just hand out keys to the federal warehouse. Besides, you’d never find it in all those boxes, and they already have “top men” working on it, and what fun is a game spent delving into the last adventure’s secret weapon when there’s a new one to toy with this time around? It might not even be the government, but someone has the device, and if ever it is to benefit mankind it has to be studied uninterrupted. It’s going to take years, after all. How can Dr. Lauder find out

how it works if you're checking it out of the motor pool just to solve your own problems?

It's Making a Comeback

If everyone really got a kick out of the device, by all means bring it back for a rematch. Just like favored villains, nothing in the world of the pulps is ever truly lost. Particularly if the game spans several years or even into later decades, it can create an added sense of continuity for the heroes to hear about the resurgence of some piece of weird science technology.

It might be better this time to reverse its use. If it was the bad guy's weapon the first go-round, the American government has launched it in this story, and enemy agents will sabotage it if they cannot steal it for themselves. Better that than letting their opponents have it. Perhaps it's all part of the space race – we need to get our space station into orbit before the foreign powers do, otherwise theirs will surely prevent us from ever achieving that position and will rain down death from above into the bargain. Besides, if the Fourth Reich has been resurrected, doesn't it make appealing narrative sense for them to revivify the same German technology we all quarreled over the first time?

It Blew Up

It did this in the last chapter, and while pieces of it remained and were collected for study, setting the self-destruct (they all have a self-destruct, don't they?) was the only way to take out General Garrote. Maybe there's another one, but that's another quest, so stop living in the past. If the device wasn't a total loss, it still has non-functioning parts that prevent you from getting any use out of it. Beg the referee real nice, and maybe he'll throw you a bone and let you use a part of it. That part might be a big chunk the size of a jet engine, and you may have to tow it around on a small flatbed, but if it does the job and keeps the action lively, it makes a nice compromise. Just bring that part back in better shape than you did the whole apparatus.

All Right, Let Them Have It

Like the magic items in this chapter (see above), no one in the party is expected to keep the machine after the adventure concludes. Make sure there's a place for the device in your game when all is said and done, even if it's just as a museum relic that no one can quite figure out how to reactivate. On the other hand, if you always held a special dislike for shows that conveniently forget the world-spanking machine from two months ago and would like to treat things a little more organically in your setting, you can do that too. Perhaps, like "It Blew Up," you can let the team use part of the machine. That may mean downgrading the overall effect of an entire

weapon ("You can use the #3 power source, one focusing tube, and the connecting cable"), or just letting the gadgeteers in the party play with something really special when designing their next device and see what they come up with.

The whole thing could be used, but at that point it might just be a special effect. For example, suppose the team stole the Demon Bat's Night Glide from him. This enormous flying battleship was going to cruise the globe to establish world dominance until the heroes stopped him in his tracks. You can't just let the party take command of the thing and have them swoop in on a bank robbery. It's overkill and it's no fun. But to make your world live and breathe, it could become the new base of operations. Why not? It can be home to at least a hundred men, doesn't have to land but once a month, and defends itself. It's not much different from having a base on the ground, but it is mobile. It's not so fast that it can respond to every piffling call for help from the team, so they can't depend on it that way. And when the villains attack the new HQ (and they will – they always do, and they at least know their way around this one if they helped build it), the cliffhangers may become more exciting. If someone throws you out the window at your old offices, you have to get your suit dry-cleaned. If they throw you out here, you can't even get buried in that suit.

There are hidden dangers no one knows about. If the party plays with the bull, they're going to get the electro-pneumatic horns. Was the self-destruct deactivated? Did they even know there was one? The government may have left it operational so they could keep the machine out of the enemies' hands in a pinch (at least the good guys have a legitimate use for the self-destruct button). Are there secret warrens, passages, tubes, codes for opening the doors? If it's a weapon, does the villain have a tracking device secreted away on it so he can reclaim it? Can he activate it from afar? Maybe not, but a whole adventure could be spun around the former owner collecting the things he needs to wreak havoc with his old device. Soon his remote will be finished, soon...

The team may not know how to use the device, and the gamemaster should ride that horse hard. While most skills in a pulp setting have broad applications, he should be merciless in making players roll against skills to even find the "on" button, never mind making the Omnitron detect uranium like it was designed to do. Don't deliberately hose your players as punishment (if that's how you feel about it, you shouldn't let them have the fancy new toy to begin with), but make it clear that this ain't easy, and it's certainly no replacement for good old-fashioned roleplaying, so they must work for their successes.

- A sonic emitter, the tone of which can be adjusted to corrode metal at great distances
- A pair of boots that allow the wearer to fly through the air
- Goggles that permit vision to penetrate through solid steel
- A harmless gas that can render an entire city block unconscious with a single small application
- Communicators that give the speaker control over one or more types of animals
- Injections that turn the user into some sort of humanoid

- beast possessed of great strength
 - A mineral that can be heated into a gaseous form; all who breathe it lose their recent memories

Invisibility Ray

Turning invisible was awfully popular back in the day, sometimes when it made no sense given the setting or context. The whole idea behind the villain's plot might be to achieve this objective, though then it wouldn't happen until the last chapter or two (it saved the budget and gave the kids something to look forward to). Usually it was a standing ability that saw use once each week. The power could be concentrated in a formula or potion, but it could also be an injection, or, as the entry name suggests, a ray beam. There was usually a drawback – it might only last while the untrustworthy machine was on – and that led to the bad guy finding himself in dire straights when the ray wore off. Was the hero really going to uncover the villain only seven installments into the adventure? Yeah, right.
Size: Huge; *Weight:* 1 ton.; *Purchase DC:* 41; *Restriction:* Military (if it's in the hands of the good guys).

Adventure Seed: The heroes discover the device and use it to render themselves invisible. Now they have the run of the villain's base, though they don't know for how long. Their foe may have defenses in place that make it hard for the good guys to give the bad guy a taste of his own medicine, in which case they'll discover a vital clue about the operation just before being captured. Can they get their valuable information back to the proper authorities in time?

Nebulon-3000 Atomic Pulse Antennae

This powerful weapon emits a cohesive microwave beam that punches through the thickest, densest metals known to earth science. It was discovered accidentally by the research teams at the Earth Radio League's Little Europe station in Antarctica – attempts to boost the signals did horrific damage to the landscape and quite nearly flooded the base. While its value as a weapon is thus far a secret held only by the operators and certain members of the government, the base personnel have had to use it a couple of times for defense, and so the genie is out of the bottle. Sooner or later, the wrong people will hear of the redoubtable nature of this seemingly innocuous installation and want to know more.

Damage: 20d12; *Critical:* 20; *Damage Type:* Microwave atomic pulse energy; *Range Increment:* 500 yards; *Rate of Fire:* 1; *Magazine:* 1 with a three-full-round recharge; *Size:* Huge; *Weight:* 1 ton.; *Purchase DC:* 41; *Restriction:* Military (if it's in the hands of the good guys).

Adventure Seed: The array isn't portable, which means it's no use against the villain's fleet of improved super planes – unless the heroes find a way to lure the aircraft down to the installation where they would be sitting ducks. But how to do that without revealing the existence of the device or the base?

Winged Battle Station

Some villains had the advantage of height – not towering over their foes but flying over them in their massive aircraft. Able to carry dozens of men, this thing was intended to take over the world by dint of its overwhelming capabilities and unstoppable air superiority. Armies of men couldn't stop it, but the subtlety of a small team of people was usually enough.

Crew: 100; *Passengers:* 12; *Cargo:* 5 tons; *Initiative:* -4; *Maneuver:* -4; *Top Speed:* 500 (50); *Defense:* 6; *Hardness:* 5; *Hit Points:* 40; *Size:* Gargantuan; *Purchase DC:* 47; *Restriction:* Military.

Adventure Seed: An important component is dislodged from the craft, and it lands on a mountain slope in the Adirondacks. The heroes make a run to grab the thing in hopes of uncovering some useful secrets. The villains return to claim their property – or to destroy it and those who have it. It might be unstable, in which case a daring antagonist might offer a deal: Give him clear access to pick up the lost engine, and he can get it before it wipes out Detroit.

Chapter Five

Organizations

Billy Samples stared at his hand. He had these men right where he wanted them. Three aces, two kings. The other two fellows, Stu and Sherman, fidgeted here and there. Billy had to wonder if their “tells” were always so obvious. He guessed not.

“Full house,” Billy said brightly, laying down the hand. He reached for the pot, which consisted of lots of coins, some scrip, a pocket watch, and a fancy gold crucifix. Several meaty hands, all of them scarred in one fashion or another, stopped him. “Problem, gents?” The saloon had gone deadly silent.

“You been winnin’ an awful lot tonight, Mr. Samples,” said Stu. His lower lip was thicker than a ham, and it stuck out like he was always spoiling for a fight – which, to be fair, he was. And as for the accusation that Billy was winning a lot – again, to be fair, he was. Billy smiled.

“That’s why I’m here, guys. Not the winning. The location. The doc...” the young gun looked around but the white-haired old man was nowhere to be found. Probably in the outhouse, Billy figured. “The doc could explain it better than me. See, this hand, it’s the result of convergence.” The other gamblers stared at him with dull eyes. “Yeah, I only learnt that word this afternoon my own self. The statistics...” Dull eyes. “...statistically...well, the odds shouldn’t be in my corner.” Dull, glazing eyes. “I’m lousy at this game most nights. But milk’s going sour, and there’s those lights in the sky...” Dull, glazed eyes turned to the large window. “...and...dang, I wish the doc was here. It all means somethin’s comin’, see? And it’s going to

arrive...”

The shadows beyond the window swirled a bit with some new shape, and that form splintered the portal, showering everyone with glass shards. Billy’s gun was out, and in rapid succession expelled six shots. Half a dozen pieces of the faceless thing popped and blew green ichor over the tables. It moaned with what passed for its mouth, and Billy threw a knife into it so hard it flipped back out the way it came.

Billy stepped outside to examine the remains. His gun was reloaded, but the fight – and apparently the life – was gone from the thing. Its fur didn’t even shiver when he kicked it. His gun leaped back to his hand when a voice whispered beside him. “What did I miss?”

“Dang, Doc, you skeert the life outta me.”

“And what scared it out of him?” The Doc got closer and drew a breath. “Oh, my...is that...? What is that?”

“I’m a-feared I shot your theory full’a holes, Doc.” He holstered his pistol. “You’re gonna have to tell me more about this ‘gate’ you said was comin’. Is it...just a sec, Doc.” Billy reentered the saloon. No one had moved an inch. “Sorry, forgot my hat,” he said, tucking it onto his head.

“And...and yer winnin’s...?” Stu said uncertainly. But Billy smiled, shook his head, and rejoined the doctor in the cool night air. Stu looked at the pile of money, and snatched the crucifix off the top of the stack.

Organizations

Some of the groups found in the core Kandris Seal book are still around in this time period – in fact, most of them have been in existence quite a while in one form or another. It’s possible not all of them survived to this point, and some may not yet have even gotten organized. This chapter deals with allies and enemies and organizations on both sides of the war. As presented, they should satisfy some of the iconic niches in the standard serial thriller – every movie series has “a science institute” that examines the strange new technology the bad guys use, for example, and there are several “government agencies” that employ the heroes, usually in a narrow context demanded by the plot. If the villain is attacking cities with bomb-laden suicide ships, they may call out the Coast Guard but they might also invent the “Seaboard Defense Service.” You can change these by altering the membership, the function, or even just the name if that’s all it takes to make it fit your world. Use the ones that suit you or satisfy the matinee lover in you, and discard the rest.

Pulps are like a revolving door for heroes and villains. You

kill off the insidious Dr. Bat, and the guy comes back three chapters later. Think you’ve offed Captain Crandall? It takes more than a falling stack of lumber to crush him to death. The same can happen to groups. If the Dragon Hunters are wiped out in a massacre, they might rise again as a different team with a different name but a similar mission statement, or they could just retain the name and improve their methods. This could happen a couple of times over the years, so if you’d like to make some changes to the groups in the core book, this is a good way (and an ideal period) to alter them as you please and then switch them back again in time for your modern Kandris game.

Since the heyday of the pulps stretched, by different definitions, anywhere from the Great War to the Kennedy administration, the timelines offered in the following write-ups are deliberately left vague where possible. This allows you to insert the beginnings and ends of the various plots and events wherever they’ll best serve your campaign. For example, if you prefer to think of Sir John Bastille (see “Gentleman John’s Safari Club,” below) as an older but vigorous figure instead of a young and impetuous man, assume there were a few extra years between his move to Africa and his assumption of Farraday’s position.

Allies

The groups listed below are identifiably friendly to the cause of good and the values of America (and yes, that includes the Canadian group – we’re all on the same team). These are the people most likely to be called upon should something go wrong. They also look favorably on the Thaumaturgia, though both sides of that equation may have reservations about the work done by the other. Still, the council is on great terms with the authorities, so the rivalry between belief and science...continues to be a rivalry.

Air Command

The government has to take the fight to the skies. Too many opponents look to air power as their ticket to putting the country on the defensive and softening them up for conquest or blackmail. To this end, they created Air Command. The finest pilots the war was able to produce have been drafted or otherwise enticed to fill the ranks of this elite squadron. With at least a small presence at the airbases of every major city in America, and a few strips available to them for landing at bases in allied nations, these brave fighting men and women have quick response time and a fluid combat style that keeps America’s enemies on their toes.

Each pilot is assigned his own aircraft, and it’s up to him to hire his own crew and to maintain the vehicle so it’s ready at a moment’s notice. In times of dire need, there may be more pilots than airplanes, in which case pilots double up two to a plane. If only one of the pilots is on duty, he’s solely responsible for the aircraft, and he’s expected to keep it as ready for the other man’s shift as he is for his own. If both are on duty, they both occupy the machine, one behind the other in the cockpit, and work together to navigate, intercept enemies, and effect combat maneuvers.

The pilots are skilled enough that they can pull up beside an unsuspecting craft and keep still long enough for the secondary officer to jump to the other craft, though it leaves the ground crews pulling their hair out and the senior officers screaming into the microphone. Air Command is working on individual flying devices and has met with some success – they have three working prototypes of slightly differing design – but these are only for the elite of the elite, and until they’re made available to more soldiers, maverick stunts like wing walking will probably continue.

A GM may want to institute titular prefix and suffix augmentations to any ranking system that the Air Command pilots have instituted. For example:

# of Combat Missions	Prefix Title
0 – 5	Rookie
6 – 10	Competent
11 – 20	Seasoned
21 – +	Veteran

# of Kills	Suffix Title
0 – 5	Beginner
6 – 10	Star
11 – 20	Elite
21 – +	Ace*

*The pilot in the “Ace” category with the most kills is the “Ace of Aces.”

Junior Rangers

Dutch’s henchman got out of the black coupe and began to walk down the sidewalk. From the shadows of a nearby fire-escape came a loud “meow” and then echoing down the street he heard in succession a dog’s bark, a bicycle bell, and finally a macaw. He stopped, considered chasing down the alley after these punk kids, remembered what happened to “Icepick” O’Casey, and decided to just walk back to the car and leave. There would be no surprising Devin’s team today, not with those pesky brats around.

To boost their effectiveness in times of war, the Canadian government has established the Junior Rangers. These young men, graduates of scouting classes, are taught survival techniques and how to live off the land. Their primary purpose is to provide support staff for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other northern officials and organizations. Not only do they do light filing and clerical work, they are assigned monitoring duties at remote outposts for month-long stretches. They are given strict instructions never to engage a suspected criminal themselves but to wait for the proper authorities, though all too often the over eager scouts get themselves in a jam even if they only follow the malefactor and do not engage. More commendations for good work have gone to members of the Junior Rangers than to any other civilian authority in Canada.

A listening post is a small cabin with the basic necessities – a first aid kit, a flare gun, a bedroll – and some dried foodstuffs. These are usually kept well stocked, but they assign the rangers to them because they know these scrappy youngsters can take care of themselves if something goes wrong in the short term. In case of an emergency, or if there’s something to report, the shacks contain a small radio transmitter. Each boy is taught radio call signals, Morse code, and all the appropriate contact information so messages can be transmitted to the proper people. The shacks also operate as way-stations, sending messages received from one end of the country to the other if the radio signal isn’t strong enough.

Several different criminal operations have been damaged, abandoned, or closed down in the last few years thanks to the Junior Rangers. Smugglers, jewel thieves, kidnappers, and industrial spies have all fallen prey to a concentrated effort among the kids. There is a special esprit de corps among them, and even after they leave the service some of them have come back to train younger kids or to become full-blown police officials in their own right.

The Crackers

"The thing about this Incan codex is that the wheel itself appears to be only the cipher for a much larger mechanical decoder machine. In your investigation did you see a stone structure, perhaps ten stories tall with a circular indentation in the face of it? Well that would be the computational portion. We need to get that wheel onto the spindle and activate the decoding mechanism to find the true message." Dink smiled after saying this. His grin said more than his explanation.

"You mean..." started Brenda.

"Yes," said Dink. "The pyramid itself is the decoder machine."

Although some get a good laugh out of their name, the Crackers are the best code breakers operating in the world today. Using the latest technology and counting machines, they have set the spy world on its ear by taking apart most any cipher and delivering it to the military or other offices. They have stopped mad bombers, submarines, and even ordinary crooks from carrying out their plans. Located inside rooms at the Empire State Building, the Crackers have charts, graphs, and equipment lying everywhere throughout the workspace. Chalkboards are covered with scribbled writings that themselves could use some translating when viewed by the uninitiated.

Talking with Crackers can be difficult because they tend to use slang, discuss etymology, and like to litter their speech with riddles and codes. While their translation services are invaluable, their company can be tedious. They have been known to insult the less educated of their own team-members using obscure, esoteric vocabulary and sincere tones to obfuscate the insults. Some branch into electronics and mechanical engineering to break codes.

Most of the workers here are graduates from one of the technical colleges, though a few have proven themselves simply by showing an affinity for numbers and patterns that set even the smartest of the graduate students' heads spinning. Each one has a security clearance with the government, and while they seem like a bunch of skinny teacher's assistants the truth is those that tangle with them find them to be wiry, determined fighters.

A new wrinkle has arisen in their work of late – trying to translate strange runes. In increasing batches, the team is getting rubbings of the surfaces of chunks of rock or stone covered in ancient symbols (at least, one assumes they're

ancient since they're found on buried rocks and cave walls). Since these come from around the world, the team is at a loss to explain it before they even begin. Nonetheless, they have brought some language experts on board in hopes of peeling away centuries of mystery. It's one thing to find patterns in the carvings, but quite another to know what's being written when you cannot even identify the language or culture involved.

Barring Institute

Also called Egghead Institute by some wags, this is a small outfit run by Fred Stockton. He and his partners have pooled their money to start the group, which is dedicated to the study, examination, and increased production of highly technological items. They are a sort of catch-all think tank that puts its collective noggins to solving problems. Some projects come to them from outside their laboratories: The government wants a new rocket sled, for example, or an aircraft company wants to increase the gas mileage for its wing.

Much of the time they're simply working on their own

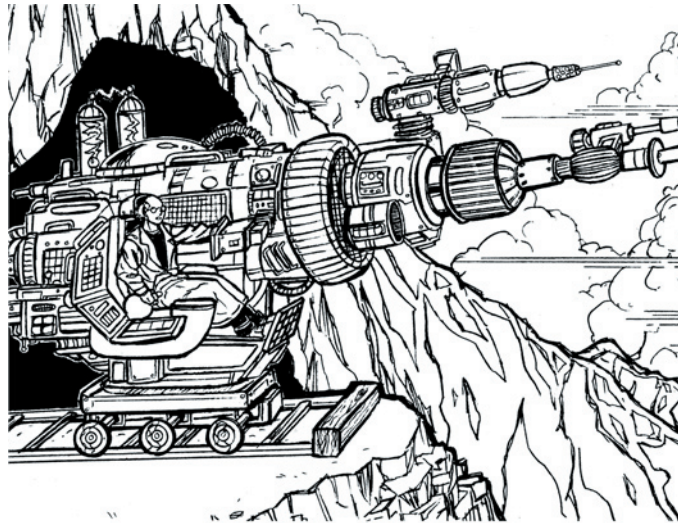
pet projects, pushing the boundaries of science and trying to better the lot of mankind. Still other times, a thorny problem is dropped in their laps by a concerned interest. A strange gadget is left on someone's property or the government captures a bizarre little gizmo during one of its raids on a mobster's hideout, and they want to know what it is, what it does, who it belongs to, and what kind of a threat that sort of thing poses.

Like the Crackers, too much of their workload of late has been the result of

studying the seemingly ageless rocks covered with symbology that keep cropping up across the world. These things keep getting delivered to them and the team had to erect another small, secure warehouse out back for storing some of these enigmas. To add to the woes, they've been getting strange samples of a lot of things: hair fibers, sections of skin, teeth, and jars full of some sort of thick green jelly. It's been a priority assignment from the government, but thus far all of the items delivered to the lab have defied easy classification by any known scientific standard. It is both disturbing and fascinating.

Earth Radio League

Although not as daunting as the SETI array, the Earth Radio League provides a similar service. Originally begun to keep ground and air forces in touch, they have been the start of many a plot. They have received messages from alien



beings, some offering peace, others bent on destruction; they have helped to save damaged spacecraft; and they have intercepted communications from common criminals working on bank jobs or other capers.

The men working on the project are unusually buff individuals for radio technicians, and there always seems to be a fight ready to happen on one of the radio towers that liberally dot the property. Anyone wishing to talk clandestinely with their allies – say, America’s enemies or other saboteurs – usually tries a break-in here first. Weird science also raises its head on the site, too. Radio waves get all kinds of tweaks to help scramble incoming missiles, irradiate clunking robots, or inexplicably sustain damaged aircraft. And if one more technician has to utter the phrase, “They’re jamming our communications,” it may just send the team into fits.

Their biggest array is in Antarctica in a joint-command compound known as Little Europe. Here some two dozen of the world’s greatest technicians operate in freezing conditions monitoring the airwaves for signals from beyond Earth. Here also is a safe, private landing and negotiation location for visitors who make the journey in a spirit of peace. For those that aren’t peaceful, the Nebulon-3000 Atomic Pulse Antennae (see Chapter Four: Tools of the Trade) can broadcast an easily deciphered message of “Be gone,” and the reactor that controls that device also provides power to the highly isolated but well-defended site.

Gentleman John’s Safari Club

Based out of Africa, the Safari Club is a group founded by Sir John Bastille, a British veteran of the Great War who found himself wandering in an alcoholic stupor through the streets of Paris after his discharge from Her Majesty’s service. He felt he had seen too much, killed too many men, and there was no going back and no saving his poor soul. He tried to drink the problems away, but that just made the feverish dreams worse. Determined to take his own life, he climbed the Eiffel Tower one starry night – not all the way, just far enough he was sure the fall would kill him – and saw from his vantage point a lion approaching some late-evening revelers.

The reactions honed during his time in the trenches kicked back in, and although a stomach full of alcohol nearly finished accidentally what he was going to do deliberately, he managed to climb and slide down the structure. He dropped to a truck, then a gift shop, then the ground. When he reached the scene, the screaming had started. The partiers had encountered the great cat, and Bastille had to scream like the drunken fool he was to get its attention. It came for him as the others scattered, and he beat it over the nose with a stick as it tried to fall on top of him. He used that split second distraction to roll out from beneath its descent, and began flailing wildly at it with his legs.

He remembers little between that moment and the point where people were picking him up. Nearby, the lion was being bundled into a net and loaded into a van. He had severe

lacerations and the thanks of a great many people. They offered to buy him a drink. For the first time in 18 months, he refused such an offer. He later learned his heroics had given zoo personnel the time they needed to catch up and corral the animal, and the lacerations were only the result of his climb down off the tower.

Still uncertain what to do, another bit of serendipity found Bastille in the form of an old officer buddy of his. Newspaper reports had made him a minor celebrity, and Colonel Smythe-Farraday invited his chum to see what a real menagerie was like. The younger man found himself in Africa three weeks later, hunting another lion. He discovered he liked the thrill of the hunt – not so much the kill, but the sense of impending danger. He spent a few years working with the older officer before the man died and Bastille found himself the sole beneficiary of Smythe-Farraday’s generosity. In possession of the club, the equipment, the clientele, and the fever for life on the edge of the wild, he now leads the safaris himself and spends his evenings staring out at the clear African horizon.

Bystanders

While not technically enemies with the people listed above, these individuals and organizations are independent operators. Depending on the organization everyone may get along famously or they may be at odds, though sometimes it’s just a philosophical difference that separates the two sides. So far as anyone knows, these people have no truck with any of America’s – or for that matter mankind’s – enemies, nor would they go out of their way to damage relations with other groups. They sometimes run across the villains in this world, and while these groups aren’t a priority target, there’s no love lost among most of them. There have been times when an evil group has tried to eliminate these people, but that usually came when their meddling threatened to disrupt some awful plot.

Free Rangers

The Jade Emperor stared at the man in his brown leather gear. He was the only brown in a circle of black and the Shindo soldiers who surrounded him stood poised with their vicious spears ready to empty the stranger’s blood on the brilliant white marble floor. The Emperor eyed the device the stranger held, and felt the corner of his own face rise up in a smile.

The man in brown looked at the Jade Emperor, then at the black-clad warriors who surrounded him, then to the little machine in his hands, and finally back to the Jade Emperor. “I’m betting this isn’t China-Town, is it?” he said.

Their name does not betray what they do, but then just about any name you could give them wouldn’t do much to encapsulate what they do:

They go spelunking across the dimensions.
Aware of the existence of other planes and worlds, the

team goes looking for places where they think they can break through the barrier to the world on the other side. Once through, they grab ropes and other equipment and go for a jaunt through a portal into nothingness. This is incredibly dangerous, and while the participants know that and have seen all sorts of unpleasant things just out of the corner of their eye, to them it's little more than a dare to stay the night at a haunted house. If they knew the full truth, their blood would run ice cold, but so far no one really knows they're up to this. They also haven't done it very often because the trip is like dehydration and jet lag together...it saps all the energy out of you. If only they knew what else they stood to lose.

They have a device that seems to work thinning out the resistance they sense when making the crossing, but they're at a loss to explain it. One of their members claims to have made it while he slept, but has no conscious recollection of how he did it or what scientific principles are at play in its inner workings. The rest of their gear is fairly standard issue for cavers and climbers, and they find the spots they use based mostly on the gut instinct of the people in the organization...this collective understanding is another mystery with no answers as yet.

Space Wing

Several wealthy individuals have joined together to create the first privately owned fleet of space worthy vehicles. Under the thumb of no one and dedicated purely to seeing a return on their investment, this small cabal has begun sending rockets into the stratosphere, and will soon be landing on the moon and other neighboring bodies.

The government has taken an interest, and Space Wing is happy to accommodate them in any way they can that doesn't interfere with their profit-making schemes. There's plenty of adventure to be had out among the planets, and plenty of money, and the two usually go together. If the feds send an agent up with the investors' surveyor, the two men are bound to find their fortunes – and their enemies – married.

They have two space capsules so far, and two more under construction. The completed ships are prime targets for theft (yes, in the world of movie serials, stealing an entire rocket is a workable scheme), and the ones still being built make good opportunities for sabotage, either to kill the occupants when they take off or to prevent competition when the villains put the stolen capsules to their own ends.

The company also has its own version of ground control; the possibility of conflicts in air traffic never seems to be a problem in the movies, where heroes take to the air singly and in groups whenever the devil they feel like it. Taking control of this building is another popular pastime, though there are guards and gates trying to keep the staff safe.

GMs should remember to maintain some sensibilities about the group in keeping with the times. This is the pulps, and the government is no more evil or domineering or double-handed than the profits being made by these backers is a bad thing. It can still be a source of tension if the two groups want to do the same thing for different reasons, and the representative the company sends to the gold mines of Venus may be one of those men willing to cripple every other

facet of the mission if he's convinced some planetary native is holding out the secret mineral deposits that will make him a big score with the moneymen back home.

Another issue is that in pulp fiction, space travel is easy – space navigation is hard. If your adventurers find themselves on a stolen spacecraft, they may be able to fly it but the pesky navigation controls make all the planets look kind of the same. As empty as real space is, you're much more likely to end up on the wrong planet than stuck out in a featureless vacuum. But the wrong planets generally are inhabited by the wrong kinds of life. Common citizens of local (and generally unknown) planets include: dinosaurs, intelligent apes, evil dictators, amazons, and insect people. And don't forget, once your heroes make it off the surface they've shown the people of that planet that Earth exists. Expect a reciprocal visitor when appropriate.

The Renaissance Society

At heart, this group is really just a gathering of people, mostly rich, who enjoy the finer things in life. Their biggest joy, however, comes from art. They have their own private galleries, usually in their home, and they host galas to assemble and admire whatever new discoveries they've made in the art world. Some have unwittingly gotten artifacts or maps valuable to the servants of the Keepers, and they've become the victims of increasing violence and repeated break-ins. The heroes could be called in as security, and a member of the Thaumaturgia would be anxious to see what's hanging on their walls.

Enemies

The villains have their organizations as well, of course, though not all of them are in operation at one time. Once a hero smashes a criminal group, they can be temporarily removed from the roster. Then again, there's bound to be another association waiting in the wings to take over that enterprise.

Riddle Masters

About as comic bookish as the pulps get, the Riddle Masters are a group of odd individuals who take great delight in puzzles of all sorts. No longer content to do the Sunday crossword, they have decided they need far greater challenges. They seek out ciphers wherever they can find them, sometimes stealing them from government agencies that are trying to figure out an enemy code. This wouldn't be so awful if the guys simply offered their services to the authorities, but they're too selfish for that, and their interference prevents the feds from getting their work done.

Worse, the different members often arrange contests among their number. One person must solve one mystery, or several, or they trade the duties off like a round robin event. The catch? They do this on a citywide scale, stopping traffic,

defacing skyscrapers, and causing mayhem (one time the contest dealt with determining the order in which manhole covers were being blown off the street and into the air with explosives). Police are exasperated, but they're torn between going after more destructive threats and keeping the peace from the exceedingly obstructive Masters.

And now the threat has become worse: This team has discovered the joy of transcribing and interpreting the mysterious demon symbology that's started showing up everywhere. At best, this means they break in and steal the codes from whoever has them; at worst, they may actually succeed in figuring some of the work out, and there's no telling just what will crawl up out of those results.

The New Reich

Evil is a hearty breed of enemy, and when it finds a form it likes it makes use of it. Neo-Nazis are another popular genre feature, and they're represented here by the New Reich, Gunnar Schwartz's reconstituted Nazi Republic (see Oberstkälterache in Chapter Six).

The organization operates in secret from isolated locations in the European countryside, though it has brought its brand of terror to foreign shores. Advocating the principles of the Nazis isn't going to mean much if they cannot consolidate their power, but since the threat of retaliation is too great they have to grow through clandestine manipulation. As they gain in resources, they purchase things they need – weapons, buildings, printing materials – and store them in anticipation of having a safe haven from which to spread their propaganda.

If the GM prefers, he may decide to give Oberstkälterache and his soldiers a small piece of land from the outset – perhaps even an island nation – from which to launch their plans of conquest. Visitors to the country (which probably isn't recognized as such by the rest of the world, save those parties who see value in cultivating a relationship with its leader) find it has buildings, monuments, a functioning government, and ports. Much of the operation may be automated or there could be a subjugated population forced to do the new dictator's bidding. If this option isn't used, then they simply buy safe houses to hide their boss and their operation amounts to simple leaflet distribution. They've waited 15 years, they can bide their time a while longer...

Crime Lords

Crime lords are like the mafia, only with pizzazz (that's pih-zaz', not "pizzas"). Sharply dressed, they don't do

Dictators and Their Methods

Dictators lead their countries under iron-handed regimes. Typically, the sovereignty of nations prevents interaction between heroes of one land and villainous troops from the evil autocracy, depending on who employs the good guys and who has diplomatic immunity. However, sometimes tyrants invade countries (those guys never play by the rules) and this is always preceded by littering the cities with foreign-accented strangers who collect minerals, photograph buildings, and kidnap scientists and their beautiful daughters. A fight between agents is always more interesting than trying to put the spotlight on a single combat between the good guys and bad guys while a whole conflict rages about them at the front.

anything without careful deliberation. Not anyone can join – they want to make sure you're a level-headed man with a criminal tendency. They cannot afford to get caught, so thick-brained thugs with no initiative who are quick on the trigger are, if they're ever used, chum who get thrown to the police while the real schemes happen on the other side of town. Indeed, it is rare that someone who seeks membership gets it...the lords prefer to monitor the activities of other crooks and, if they can't find out much, it probably means they're careful enough to be offered an invite. Nothing these people do should take less than two weeks to plan and probably longer to execute. If it's shorter than that, it's because they've been forced to improvise after someone interfered with their plots. Fortunately for that person they're not liable to suffer retribution because revenge is a distraction, a foible to which the Crime Lords don't allow themselves to fall prey.

Bert and Bernie Breaker are not part of this gang, but there's a lot of mutual respect between the two sides because of their like sensibilities.

Mole People

All right, they don't have to be "mole" people, but the Earth has been scientifically proven hollow, and there are people down there with a culture very different from ours. And they have dinosaurs. And the gravity must be weird down there because the people walk around the interior of a hollow sphere, when gravity ought to make them fall off into the glowing energy orb at the center of the planet. Sometimes the sentient or otherwise dominant races are mind-controlled by flying bat-like things that wrap around their heads, the eyes of the poor victim peering out from beneath the wings folded over their face. These zombie-like drones perform whatever actions the mind-lords will them to until their psychic energy is completely drained, at which time the bats feed them to the Thylor beasts in the pits of Rotangia. Mole people might just be refugees trying to get away from the bat-things when they find their way up through a sewer beneath Chicago or Manhattan and chaos ensues.

Chapter Six

"...But This Time, the Advantage is Mine": Individuals

You may have seen my ads, "Boots Malone, Private Dick." They're in all the rags, beneath the escort services and coffee stains. "Help is just a phone call away," they say. Well, I wish that were true now. Got a case not two days ago, guy says his wife may have been stepping out on him. I go to look into it and find it's perfectly true.

Which isn't unusual; when I do one of these jobs, it often turns out to be God's truth. The woman's got the morals and reserve of a coyote caught in a bear trap, the marriage is falling apart like wet pressboard, and my photos swing the judge's decision in their favor. How do I live with myself? Because it's all a matter of timing – the husband's been sowing wild oats, too, but he hired me before she got herself her own gumshoe.

Anyway, if you think I'm a bad seed (and I'd say half the city hates me already), I won't have to live with myself much longer, not if these characters have anything to say about it. The "other man" here turned out to be an assistant district attorney. Mrs. Wells, she's got it into her head that her hubby's a monster – no, a real monster – with tentacles or furry hands or something. She was working to out him as some sort of freak, and I was the sap who lead Wells right to the two of them. Chalk up another win for the good guys.

Anyway, long story short: Lawyer's house – no, mansion, and my apartment and office both would fit in his john – is broken into, study's a wreck, safe is cracked, and both he and she are staining the Persian rugs, only this guy couldn't have used a gun like civilized killers. Their intestines are all over the

hardwood, those that aren't stuck to my shoes. Makes chasing him down tough when you're sliding down corridors like a surfer at Blood Beach. The lights go out and I'm slamming into furniture, but I know I gotta catch him before this whole mess is laid at...well, before the other half of the city hates me, too. I shot some panicked pics in the confusion, but no guarantee they'll come out.

Just to complete the narrative, I get outside and sure enough, there's no cold wind blowing because it can't get through the solid sheets of rain. But at least now you're all caught up, and with one last jump, so am I. My client and I tumble to the gravel drive. "Gonna have to charge this jacket to my expense account, Mr. Wells."

I hate being laughed at, but this guy's cackle is like some bad Borscht-Belt comedian with his throat on fire. My ears feel like they're bleeding. "Your account's about to close, Mr. Malone." He stands up, but my gun is already at attention and keeps him from getting into his fancy car (the trunk of which? Also bigger than my apartment).

"You, you and your 'associates,'" I tell him. I waggle the gun in the general direction of the second-floor study's window, above. "You're all sick." He turns around slowly, snickering, and I can tell he wants me to get the full effect. He's gonna be horrible, I figure, with a snake's unhinged jaw or something ghoulish like that, but it's far uglier.

"Sick?" he asks, his voice awfully familiar. He's wearing my face. "You're the one who just murdered two people."

Heroes and Villains

Some of the major players in the Pulp Kandris setting are described below. They aren't the only ones, and the iconic personalities in the core Kandris Seal book can still be used, but these were designed with the pulp and serial genres in mind. Pick and choose the ones you like, or combine them with existing NPCs. You may also mine this chapter for ideas to apply to other characters. For example, if you like the Magister Mamba idea but would rather give him a more mystical aura, take some of his background text and superimpose it over one of the demons or servants from the

core book. Now the Mamba character is another layer of deception perpetuated by the Keepers to fool the heroes into thinking they're dealing with just another costumed loon – an underestimation that costs them in the long run.

The history for these characters has been left spotty in places, and for good reason. First, a few open-ended years glossed over in the background are fertile soil for your own take on the person's past. You can have your villain get up to all sorts of nasty tricks in the intervening time. You may choose to tell the "Secret Tales of..." some of the heroes presented. These characters have an origin and a current status, but you can flesh out the trials and tribulations they suffered during the formative years when they built up their reputations or respective organizations.

Second, since the era of Pulp Kandris lasted at least three decades, you as GM have great leeway when to set your game. Feel free to fudge the dates or events below so they serve the

dramatic needs of your story better. Albert Sinclair's father (see below) made his money on the Great War, but perhaps you'd like your game to feature neo-Nazis looking to create a Fourth Reich from the ruins of the third. Just assume papa Sinclair made his money during World War II, or by selling weapons to both sides during the Japanese occupation of China, and you can bump his son up to the 1950s as a supplier of your main villains.

A variety of times and places have been mentioned in these backgrounds, in hopes of highlighting some of the world events from this period. There are some oblique and some not-so-subtle cross-references to named characters in these entries, to give them a more colorful and realistic part to play in a living game world, but those people can be switched as well. Make your players' characters the arch-foes of the Golden Hand, or have them figure into the history of the Breaker Brothers if it starts connecting the dots in clever ways. Your players play the stars of the show, after all, and there's no reason they shouldn't enjoy the notoriety that comes with the position.

Some of the characters simply match up well – Lady Weise with Albert Sinclair, Kid Lasso and the Breaker Brothers – but again, you're free to associate them (or not) however the needs of the story are best served.

Bert and Bernie Breaker: The Breaker Brothers

BERT BREAKER

TOUGH5: CR 5, OR 7 IF HE'S WITH HIS BROTHER; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D10+15; HP 55; INIT +1; SPD 30; DEF: 14; (FLATFOOTED: 13 TOUCH: 14); ATK +4 MELEE, +4 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: HIS BROTHER; OCCUPATION: CRIMINAL; SV FORT +6, REF +2, WILL +2; REP +0; STR 13, DEX 13, CON 17, INT 12, WIS 12, CHA 11.

TALENTS: REMAIN CONSCIOUS, ROBUST, SECOND WIND

FEATS: BRAWL, COMBAT REFLEXES, CONFIDENT, LOW PROFILE, STREETFIGHTING, SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY

SKILLS: BLUFF +4, CLIMB +3, DRIVE +3, ESCAPE ARTIST +2, GAMBLE +2, GATHER INFORMATION +1, HIDE +2, INTIMIDATE +6, JUMP +2, LISTEN +2, MOVE SILENTLY +2, SENSE MOTIVE +2, SPOT +2

BERNIE BREAKER

TOUGH5: CR 5, OR 7 IF HE'S WITH HIS BROTHER; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D10+15; HP 60; INIT +1; SPD 30; DEF: 14; (FLATFOOTED: 13 TOUCH: 14); ATK +5 MELEE, +3 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: HIS BROTHER; OCCUPATION: CRIMINAL; SV FORT +6, REF +2, WILL +1; REP +0; STR 14, DEX 13, CON 17, INT 11, WIS 10, CHA 13.

TALENTS: REMAIN CONSCIOUS, ROBUST, SECOND WIND

FEATS: ATHLETIC, BRAWL, IMPROVED BRAWL, LOW PROFILE, PERSONAL FIREARMS PROFICIENCY, SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY 2

SKILLS: DRIVE +3, GATHER INFORMATION +3, INTIMIDATE +3, JUMP +4, KNOWLEDGE (BASEBALL) +4, SENSE MOTIVE +2, SPOT +2

The Breaker Brothers are a piece of work – or perhaps a pair of pieces. Unlike many in the criminal underworld, they did not come from hard times or a difficult upbringing...they were raised in a middle-class neighborhood outside New York City. Not even a particularly violent pair, the boys were nonetheless fascinated by gangsters in films and in newsreels, and when the kids got together to play cops and robbers, Bert and Bernie were always the robbers. They were awfully good at it, too.

The violent side of their personality didn't come out until they were out of school, though they had kept up with crime literature through the years. They went to New York one summer to look into college, and instead found themselves caught up in a street brawl between two rival gangs. Every punch the brothers threw was in self defense, but when the dust cleared the gang that was still holding the field thought the two young men had thrown in with their team (they just happened to have attacked only one side). They made the brothers an offer, and Bert and Bernie Breaker had their first criminal contact.

They maintained the fiction of going to school for the sake of their father...their mother passed away midway through their second "year." The Breakers did well, but their gangs didn't seem to fare as well. The brothers seemed to know just enough about life on the other side of the law not to get caught. Police raids, stool pigeons, dragnets – no matter what came their way the two men were always one step ahead, by accident or design, and to this day neither has so much as been questioned let alone picked up, booked, or charged.

Not everyone in the underworld trusts the pair – no one, they figure, could be that lucky that often unless they were undermining their own operations for their personal benefit. But the Breaker reputation is one of getting the job done, and they have a steady stream of work. They usually hire themselves out as muscle, but are often put in charge of the rest of the knee breakers hired for a job. They call the shots, and Bert and Bernie have the strength of both body and will to back it up. As a new breed of hero shows itself on the streets, the Breakers' unmarred winning streak looks to be coming to an end soon. Still, the anonymity isn't why they do the work.

Bert and Bernie come off almost like twins. They think alike, act as one, and finish each other's sentences, but this is a familiarity born of shared interests over the years.

Using the Breaker Brothers

Every game needs some high-level thugs, and Bert and Bernie fit the bill. They may be found in the employ of mobsters, aliens, even cultists – anyone who wages a war against authority and needs some thick-necked goons to engage all the do-gooders that sort of thing tends to pull out of the woodwork. They don't ask a lot of questions, and they don't really care who they're working for. They'll return week after week until the last couple of chapters, at which point their fates are decided.

Bert is actually two years older, and though the men look like each other, anyone who gets to know them sees the mild differences in their personalities. Bert is a bit more introspective, slow to anger even in the face of rank stupidity, and a big baseball fan. Bernie is the more physical of the two, has more luck with the ladies, and loves cars. Both men love their father, who was unable to attend their "graduation" due to an ailment at the time, and they take great pains never to let anyone know about their relationship with him. In part it's because the old fellow would represent a liability should a rival wish reprisals; mostly it's because they think it would kill him to know the truth about his boys. So long as they can keep him in the dark and continue to lead the life of which they always dreamed, they're happy.

Aside from being a pretty fortunate pair thus far, the Breakers have no strange and unusual abilities to fall back on. They're great brawlers, and they prefer the physicality of a knuckleduster to pulling a gun, but they'll do that if it seems prudent. They haven't a code of honor about it or anything, after all. Since they're usually put in charge of whoever else is in on the caper, though, they tend to be the last ones to engage in a fight. They let the other guys go first, not because they're that devilishly pragmatic but because that's how the troops are given their marching orders. If they see their team getting hammered badly, they have no qualms about removing themselves in the confusion. They aren't proud or boastful, but they are tough and intimidating.

The Breakers wear brown pinstriped suits with stylishly matched fedoras. Neither man habitually carries a gun, but they will if they're entering a dangerous situation. (And they can always borrow one from the minions with them.) Their shoes are only as fancy as they need to be while remaining practical (i.e., you can fight or run in them). Their faces aren't rough from fighting, they've just always had rugged, carved features. Their light brown hair is kept short, their faces shaved, and their gaze is low and inscrutable.

Quote: "I'm Bert..." "I'm Bernie..." "...and we're the Breakers." (Unbelievable violence follows.)

The Golden Hand

SMART5: CR 5; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D6+5; HP 31; INIT +1; SPD 30; DEF: 13; (FLATFOOTED: 12 TOUCH: 13); ATK +2 MELEE, +3 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: NONE; OCCUPATION: ADVENTURER; SV FORT +2, REF +2, WILL +5; REP +2; STR 11, DEX 13, CON 13, INT 18, WIS 15, CHA 12.

TALENTS: EXPLOIT WEAKNESS, PLAN, SAVANT (KNOWLEDGE:)

FEATS: COMBAT MARTIAL ARTS, COMBAT EXPERTISE, IMPROVED TRIP, SIGNATURE POWER (G'NARL, THE GOLDEN HAND: THE DEMON FUSED ONTO LONG HUC'S ARM IS IMBUED WITH MYSTIC ENERGY, IMPROVES HIS MELEE ATTACKS, AND MAY FIRE BOLTS OF ELDRITCH POWER), SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY

SKILLS: BALANCE +3, BLUFF +3, CLIMB +2, CONCENTRATION +7, DECIPHER SCRIPT +6, DIPLOMACY +4, DISGUISE +7, GATHER INFORMATION +4, HIDE +3, INTIMIDATE +5, INVESTIGATE +7, JUMP +2, KNOWLEDGE (OCCULTISM) +9, LISTEN +4, MOVE SILENTLY +3, READ/WRITE LANGUAGE (ENGLISH) +2, RESEARCH +8, RIDE +3, SEARCH +7, SENSE MOTIVE +4, SPEAK LANGUAGE (ENGLISH) +2, SPOT +3, SWIM +1, TUMBLE +3

The name Long Huc hasn't been lost to history yet, but someday it will be. That's the day that Long's dreams of power and conquest are realized, and he no longer has need of such a mundane identity and forgettable past.

Born in 1801 in Vietnam, the tall, lanky Long Huc was the son of a fisherman's wife. His "father" had died years before he was born, and when he was old enough to understand the discrepancy he questioned his mother. Reluctant to ask at first, she decided it would be better for the boy to find out from her than from the neighbors who only whispered what they knew. She broke down and admitted she had been taken by a local warlord, who had gone on to become the emperor's right-hand man.

Long's reaction was surprising...he said and did nothing. His mother worried what this might mean, and with good reason. The young man was biding his time, and when he came of age he became a courier at the imperial palace. Working his way into the ranks, he took a career detour to study with the court wizard. He learned of many things, and his studies grew to include extracurricular subjects like life and death magic. The wizard was shocked at his pupil's willingness to delve into such forbidden subjects, but Long killed him before he could tell anyone. Making the death look accidental, Long was the logical replacement for the elder wizard. Now in a position to influence events, he eliminated the imperial family with another "accident," ensuring his real father would ascend to the throne.

Once the new leader's position and power were cemented, Long approached him. Revealing his secret at long last, he waited to see what his sire's response would be. The emperor waved one hand and dismissed the whole matter, claiming that he had been with many women over the years; that none of them would have publicly confessed their preference for a powerful man such as he over their own spouses; and

Using the Golden Hand

A serial needs a mysterious super criminal and the world of the Kandris Seal demands magic; the Golden Hand straddles that fence well. His crimes usually involve the discovery or theft of items of supernatural power, though he is not above taking something of more conventional use like an experimental bomb or standard ammo stores (once he realizes his dream of conquest, his armies need to be able to fight on the traditional level).

Any devices the Thaumaturgia finds are of interest to him; anything they learn, the same. While he does not involve himself in the ongoing war between the council and the Keepers, Long is familiar with those powers from his studies (the GM can decide whether G'narl is the result of a deal made with one of the Thirteen). If his powers are not the result of oaths sworn to those beyond the Seal, they would love to coax him onto their side. He is also an ideal villain if the campaign centers around plots in Asia, since he and his agents are to be found there seeking more artifacts.

There was a time when Long would infiltrate other operations like a common spy. He dislikes performing these duties himself, but he's not above it either, especially if he has to rebuild some sort of power base after suffering a defeat in a previous adventure.

that even had he been with this young man's mother it was a matter for the gods. Long replied that he could not agree more, forced the court to present itself, and made a public spectacle of killing the sovereign with a brutal spell he had researched for this very purpose.

Having seen what this mage was capable of, the people quickly acquiesced to his demands, the first and most obvious being his own ascension to his father's position. Long Huc was a cold, cruel man, and it shone through in his leadership. Using his magic he warded the borders, forced an oath from his court staff, and created several incidents of mayhem throughout the kingdom to put the people on edge. At any moment, they now knew, their monarch might, on a mere whim, call upon his powers to callously wipe out an entire village.

He called at last for his mother, to have her join him at the court. She did so, but was horrified to learn the events of the last few weeks were his doing. She barely recognized the retiring young boy who never betrayed his emotions. For one full year he ruled over the populace with an iron fist, but rumors of a revolution began to stir. Long tortured and mercilessly executed dozens of suspected traitors among the people and even on his own rolls, but could not uncover specifics of the plot. Then his mother struck.

She had drugged his food, and Long Huc awoke to find himself in the hands of his enemies. He struggled, but his captors held his hands and kept his tongue still; drugged, magic seemed almost impossible. "With those hands," the cabal told him, "you stole the kingdom from another. You took the lives of your countrymen. You will take no more." Long broke free and swept away his attackers, but it was to be the last spell he would ever cast with that hand. The leader threw his axe with an unlikely precision, and it sliced the sorcerer's right hand clean off. Screaming, he disappeared into the night.

Though they searched, no one ever found Long Huc. He retreated to a cavern he knew of, a bolt hole he had supplied for emergencies during hunting trips with the emperor. Here he made a deal with a dark force, one he knew would not, if the price offered were right, concern itself that he had no hand with which to summon the arts. Pleading with it, he asked to survive the night, to be able to inflict pain and revenge on those who had wronged him, and to have what was taken from him restored.

Even dark gods have a sense of humor.

The pain coursing up his right arm was excruciating, and he passed out. He awoke the next morning to find himself cold and wet but alive – and his right hand returned, after a fashion. A golden appendage, one that looked like a fine sculpture, fit seamlessly where his own flesh had been sundered. It moved just as his old hand had, and he could tell it pulsed with power. He laughed uneasily, uncertain what to make of it, and tried to work his will. The spell, which froze the cavern like a mountain slope, worked at least as well as such magic ever had. He commented as such, and the hand introduced itself as G'narl.

His otherworldly benefactor had sent to Long a minor demonic servant, one that attached itself and took the form of his right hand. Knowing this was to be his reward, the failed leader left his home country. If he wanted it, he would have to

take it back himself. But now the would-be monarch wanted more. He would no longer be satisfied with only one corner of the world.

Using his magic power over life and death, he placed himself into a trance in the cold of the cave, to awaken a century later. The world had forgotten Long Huc – literally, for he found upon waking his name had been stricken from the royal records altogether, as court wizard or emperor. He decided that was the way he wanted it. He would give up the name completely as well, once he was ruler of Earth.

Long Huc is a determined man, as any criminal mastermind needs to be. He seeks out power in many forms, but feels most comfortable with the ways of magic. He has decided to bring the planet under his sway, and increases his knowledge and mystic arsenal with that end in mind.

When he confronted his father, Long was not sure he was going to kill the man for what he did to Long's mother. He only remembers his fury at the emperor's detached dismissal. He has always wondered if he was giving the man a chance to come clean with his crimes or if it was just a cruel game, the result of which was a foregone conclusion. In much the same way, he would be curious to find out what became of his mother after his rapid deposition – her name was removed from any records along with his own – but he doesn't know if he would take joy or suffer sorrow should her life ultimately have come to some unfortunate end.

He can be unpredictable in his moods, alternating between quiet contemplation of the most significant hardships and ruthless reprisal for the thinnest slight. He can often be found talking to his hand, giving the uninitiated the impression he's not all there.

As much a master of the dark arts as anyone is likely to be in a Pulp Kandris game, Long nevertheless has a fairly standard set of attacks he uses in combat. This only comes into play if his various servants are unable to handle any threats – he's a good mastermind and doesn't get his hands – hand? – dirty until the last chapter. If he truly needs to impress others, he sends his detached hand to kill the offender. It's bizarre, but truly unsettling.

The hand itself, a minor demon called G'narl, is mostly a special effect. If the gamemaster wishes him to take a personal, uhm...hand...in things, he can work up stats that make him a separate character. As it is, he does pretty much whatever is asked of him, though the GM may also decide the demon and Long have a somewhat more confrontational relationship. The hand was, after all, thrust upon the mage by way of a cruel jest, albeit one probably designed to make him a more powerful force for evil. If for whatever reason Long is defeated permanently...well, then it's not very pulp. But if he is removed, or the referee wants to set up a battle for control of G'narl between Long and a potential new host, or the villain falls out of favor, the hand will simply disappear to some other dimension, world, or temple. It won't hang about to carry on a fight by itself.

Still tall and lanky, Long has an unimpressive musculature but remains trim and stands above most of his countrymen. His most striking feature is his right hand, which shows as a rich golden metal. He doesn't hide it unless he wishes to remain incognito. He dresses in colorful, flowing robes embroidered with Asian characters to impress people, but if

he has reason to believe he must take action personally he'll be in baggy pants and a loose-fitting tunic.

Quote: "I believe it is the custom in the West to...shake hands."

Magister Mamba

SMART5: CR 5; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D6+5; HP 33; INIT +3; SPD 30; DEF: 15; (FLATFOOTED: 12 TOUCH: 15); ATK +2 MELEE, +5 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: NONE; OCCUPATION: ACADEMIC; SV FORT +2, REF +4, WILL +4; REP +2; STR 10, DEX 16, CON 12, INT 16, WIS 13, CHA 12.

TALENTS: EXPLOIT WEAKNESS, LINGUIST, TRICK

FEATS: COMBAT EXPERTISE, IMPROVED DISARM, LIGHTNING REFLEXES, SIGNATURE POWER (SERPENT AVATAR: MAGISTER MAMBA CAN CONTROL SNAKES AND OTHER CRAWLIES, MIMIC THEIR NATURAL ATTACKS, AND DRAW UPON NATURAL ABILITIES LIKE CHAMELEON COLOR-CHANGING AND SIMPLE BODY REGENERATION) SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY

SKILLS: BALANCE +7, CLIMB +4, DECIPHER SCRIPT +6, DIPLOMACY +8, ESCAPE ARTIST +6, HANDLE ANIMAL +5, HIDE +4, INTIMIDATE +3, INVESTIGATE +5, JUMP +2, MOVE SILENTLY +6, READ/WRITE LANGUAGE (ENGLISH) +2, READ/WRITE LANGUAGE (FRENCH) +2, RESEARCH +4, SEARCH +6, SPEAK LANGUAGE (ENGLISH) +2, SPEAK LANGUAGE (FRENCH) +2, SPOT +3, SURVIVAL +3, SWIM +2, TUMBLE +6

Dinoc Thouh narrowly avoided a life of law-abiding normalcy. Brought to America by his mother at age five, he grew up in the home of the Tikreti ambassador to the United States, Charles Ufe. His mother started as a cleaning woman and became head of the household staff. With kind letters from Ufe, Thouh was able to get into Cambridge where he excelled at diplomacy, international relations, and economics.

Using Magister Mambo

If you need a mastermind who's at home in the jungle, Mamba is your snake-man. He often acts on enemy shores, though his nation is not fully recognized and he cannot get diplomatic immunity for himself (yes, he would take it if a country offered it, just to amuse himself). He is not technically the leader of Takreti, but the people who make the day-to-day decisions are careful to feel a situation out and make sure it's not something for which they would suffer reprisals. Violence is at an all-time low here because internal problems prevent anyone from making a power grab – no one's really sure they want to be in charge until things change.

This leaves Magister Mamba to make a lot of plans based on stealth and guile. He knows no one will move on him right now, but until he cements his power he's going to play it safe. His crimes may seem petty – land fraud, for example, or securing mines (though he's more interested in finding caches of magic items or snake breeds that lend greater understanding of his new powers). But he has ambition, and left unchecked by the player characters they will see and hear of the spread of his influence in every newspaper.

He became an aide with the League of Nations, and was favored as Ufe's replacement as ambassador.

Then came the attack. The building was sealed off by forces unknown, and the entire security force for the League was transformed into snake-headed things. They began to savage those who remained human, and Thouh saw Ufe slaughtered before his eyes. He might have been the next victim, but it was then that a team of heroes broke into the facility and put a stop to things.

The young diplomat was devastated. He wanted revenge more than anything else, but the organizers of the attack, he was told, were a group of delusional rebels whose leadership has escaped to the home country, his country. They believed they were called to this service by creatures from another dimension, and had found succor among some of the natives in Tikreti. Thouh was determined to find them.

His mother begged him not to go, telling him the country was not as it had been when they were there. The years had seen several tin-pot dictators come and go, and chaos could break out at any moment. He felt his skills were more than equal to the task, though, and he left to shine light in dark places in the Caribbean.

He was right at first – getting through the frontlines was no problem. In fact, he got the feeling he was being let through. He suspected a trap, but that was the first thing about which he would be proven wrong. The deeper he and his small entourage went in search of the rebels, the less accommodating the world within Takreti would become. He lost his entire team trying to find the evildoers, and he couldn't even identify the circumstances – they simply disappeared one by one. By the time he came upon the heart of the country, he was alone...and more determined than ever.

The leader was a man named Ge'hohm, and as near as Thouh could tell he kept his followers in line through their fear of cheap parlor tricks involving snakes. He seemed to be expecting his Americanized counterpart, though this wasn't a trap. The rebels simply had the guards and other authorities cowed with their theatrics. It was clear Ge'hohm didn't know who to expect, though he was expecting somebody, and seemed a bit surprised to find it was his target's heir apparent. Thouh confronted the man in a cavern beset by lava flows from a chamber below. All the rage and anger he had been experiencing came to the surface, and was vented all in one moment. Forgetting his training as a man of reason, he slew Ge'hohm, throwing his body to the pit.

Exiting the cave he was surrounded by snakes...the "parlor tricks" were anything but, and the real baptism of fire was about to begin. Thouh fought, but succumbed to the surprisingly aggressive creatures. He lost consciousness in the jungle, a canopy of stars above his punctured and bleeding body, barely visible through thick, swollen lids.

When he awoke, he knew he had a new purpose. Diplomacy had done nothing for Ufe in a violent world, and now Thouh had the power and resources to avoid all the mistakes his mentor had made. He was Magister Mamba, and the small island nation of Takreti would not be so tiny much longer.

Although his outlook has changed, Mamba maintains the slow and steady attitude, the surefootedness, that

characterized his brief diplomatic career. He does not act rashly, though he is capable of decisive action if confronted by enemies or other unknown quantities. He seeks to bring the whole of Central America under his thumb through his mystic abilities, ultimately obviating the need for negotiation. When he has done that, he may turn his hungry eyes to the outside world, starting with those western countries that failed to protect his mentor at the League of Nations. He can be quite charming and off-putting, and always invites his heroic guests to dinner before disposing of them in one of Takreti's many hostile environments. He is intelligent and can speak with great enthusiasm and knowledge on a wide variety of worldly issues.

Mamba is quick and agile, and has a sting all his own. He attempts to soften up heroes who get in too close with Coiled Fury, a rapid, flurried series of attacks delivered at incredible speed, though this takes a lot out of him. Those who survive he takes on one on one, from the fastest to the slowest if possible. He doesn't mind doing his own fighting, and years of reserved behavior seem to have given him stores of energy and the willingness to execute swift and sadistic maneuvers on opponents. Diplomacy is almost never one of his weapons. He doesn't volunteer to wade into a fight if his followers can do it for him, but he's anxious to bloody his knuckles if he thinks it will prove a point about strength through violence.

Thouh dresses more like a snake-based supervillain than a tribal or island leader. He passes on ceremonial robes and traditional forms of dress and goes straight for the tight-fitting snake-head headdress, scaly armor, and clawed gloves. His tall, thin form seems flexible and elusive, and his movements are rapid. His skin is darker than most, making the way his lithe body seems to sink into his costume that much more disturbing. His eyes are brown, with a piercing but patient gaze, and his scars seem to be fleeting affectations: One moment they're there, the next they aren't.

Quote: "Do not mistake slithering on one's belly for submissiveness. The lower one is willing to crawl, the higher he may ascend."

Oberstkälterache

STRONG5: CR 5; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D8+15; HP 55; INIT +1; SPD 30; DEF: 14; (FLATFOOTED: 11 TOUCH: 14); ATK +9 MELEE, +6 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: THE REICH (IN ITS CURRENT INCARNATION); OCCUPATION: MILITARY; SV FORT +6, REF +2, WILL +1; REP +1; STR 18, DEX 13, CON 17, INT 10, WIS 10, CHA 12.

TALENTS: MELEE SMASH, IMPROVED MELEE SMASH, ADVANCED MELEE SMASH

FEATS: CLEAVE, COMBAT REFLEXES, PERSONAL FIREARMS PROFICIENCY, POWER ATTACK, SIGNATURE POWER (ARCANE GAUNTLET: THE METAL SHEATH PERMANENTLY FUSED OVER SCHWARTZ'S ARM HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH EXPENDED ARTIFACTS; IT IMPROVES HIS MELEE ATTACKS, CAUSES MASSIVE DAMAGE, CRACKS WALLS, AND CAN DROP OPPONENTS WITH AN EARTHQUAKE-LIKE WAVE), SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY

SKILLS: BLUFF +3, CLIMB +6, GATHER INFORMATION +4, HIDE +3, INTIMIDATE +5, JUMP +5, READ/WRITE LANGUAGE (ENGLISH) +1, SPEAK LANGUAGE (ENGLISH) +2

World War II can't help but be fresh in everyone's minds, but some take the loss to the German side more personally than others. Gunnar Schwartz is one of those who isn't happy with the outcome, and he's determined to see history rewritten.

Being a soldier was the only thing open to Schwartz, and the only way to make money for his mother and sister. When Hitler began to turn the German economy around, he was all too happy to throw his support behind the new chancellor. At 18, the steady pay (in a stable currency) was the only thing he was concerned with. As he heard der Fuhrer's speeches, he began to think this man really was the only thing standing between him and the financial ruin of his small family. After losing his father to a boating accident he never felt secure about a home life, and the idea that banks being controlled by Jews could destroy what protections they now had infuriated him. He took up the racist rallying cries and by age 23 he was not only gung-ho about removing the threat posed by the Jewish community to his homeland, he was a strident supporter of Hitler and the whole party line.

His enthusiasm didn't bring him added security, however, or great opportunities. He worked harder than anyone else he knew to make the German war machine work. He himself was more like an automaton than a man, feverishly doing the bidding of anyone who needed help with propaganda, training, or terrorism. In spite of these "virtues," however, he labored in obscurity. Knowing the difficulties Hitler had gone through before he achieved greatness kept him going. If only he could make himself known to the leader personally.

But as the war progressed, he wasn't even called upon to fight. The occasional sweep to collect fugitives for the ghettos was the only violent experience he received. As the Allied soldiers drew closer to Berlin, though, Hitler called for complete mechanization and demanded the service of every man, woman, and child...and that had to include Schwartz. Suddenly a personal guard to the man he had so long admired, he was torn. How do you offer yourself, all that you are, to help a person whose greatest ambition lay in ruins? The opportunity he sought presented itself to the young soldier without him even having to look.

It was a last-ditch operation, a final stab at turning the Allies back and reestablishing some form of defensive perimeter from which retaliations could be planned. The process involved a metal appendage suffused with arcane energies from the many occult items Hitler had obtained during his tenure. It would be attached to a subject and give him great strength and powers even the doctors felt they could not anticipate. That subject would be Gunnar Schwartz.

He gleefully accepted the call over the protests of some who declared the project madness. He practically forced the scientists into the bunker's medical bay, and probably would have chopped his own left arm off if they had not sedated him. The smile and nod he received from Adolf Hitler as his vision became clouded was what Schwartz had wanted all his adult life.

When he awoke he had none of the pain he had expected, and for a moment panicked thinking some other voice had prevailed while he was under the anesthetic and the operation had not been completed. Getting up, he crushed the gurney with his enormous new left arm. The crash

Using Oberstkälterache

No one quite knows what the arm is, where it came from, and what went into its creation, and that includes Oberstkälterache. The scientists who worked on it might have some idea, but in the confusion at the war's end there's no telling if they're even still alive (those that weren't still in the bunker). It looks like a mechanical arm, but it glows with odd energy when it's in use. The owner assumes what he was told is what happened – that the appendage was the result of arcane experimentation – but it's hard to say for sure. There are no obvious magical devices on the arm, no old runes carved into its surface or anything noteworthy like that, but it does show up as magic to all tests. "All tests" here means the heroes who have been in close proximity enough to check, because the German powerhouse wouldn't stand still for such scrutiny. He doesn't care what the story is behind the arm per se, but he would be interested in finding out if it possesses other qualities unknown to him. Since America collected several German scientists after the war, Oberstkälterache may not limit his predations to Europe, and heroes could face him on their own shores.

The Thaumaturgia would like to find out more about the mysterious arm as well, and might arrange to have a look at it before the heroes turn him over to more Earthly authorities. For all anyone knows it could be channeling evil forces, poisoning his mind further, helping the Keepers on their side of the dimensional barrier, or allowing the spread of negative magical energy across the planet. Removing the arm would be an attractive alternative if they knew it wouldn't kill the man, but no one yet has the knowledge needed to make that call. Unless someone takes leave of their moral code, Oberstkälterache may retain it for some time to come.

For the referee seeking to set his game during the war, Oberstkälterache still makes a good Nazi *ubermensch*. His motivations differ a bit (he hasn't suffered the loss at the end of the war) but he'll still believe in fighting to maintain Nazi supremacy; and his powers may be lessened (his body hasn't adjusted to the arm yet) though still formidable. If you want to put him in the middle of the hostilities, he may have had time to get used to his new situation, and if he's battling during the last days of the war, he'll at least have the motivation to protect the Reich's crumbling infrastructure.

Oberstkälterache is one of those characters whose background could be a sensitive point to some players, so GMs should be careful about whether to use him and how he's presented if he is. Then again, there are few things more universally entertaining than playing the heroes fighting the Nazis.

brought several people in from the hallway, and it was clear the argument was ongoing. Schwartz listened as some called this whole fiasco a sin in the eyes of God. He caught Hitler's glance, and the resignation, the tired look upon his face, the despair, was more than he could bear. He killed the offender with a single, bloody blow, and solemnly intoned, "Der Fuhrer is your god."

Before anyone could object the bunker was rocked by enemy fire. Schwartz looked to the man for his orders, for the command to go and kill every Allied soldier for the glory of the Homeland. Hitler's advisors whisked him away without comment. He tried to follow but found his bulky new form somewhat harder to maneuver with than he was used to. By the time he reached the other end of the installation, he was in yet another heated argument with his inner circle. The conversation ended with the leader raising a gun to his head and shooting himself before Schwartz could choke out an interjection. Schwartz saw his dream die in that moment as well, but had no time to mourn because the entire ceiling collapsed on top of the assemblage.

Time passed, but Schwartz only became dimly aware of it later. Noise, vibration, warmth, and the sense that he could rise. He saw concrete and asphalt fall away as he stood – things had changed here, but he still knew a petrol station when he saw one. The same stars sat overhead, but the landscape had changed. He moved off into the night, only mildly hungry, tired, and sore. He walked off to the countryside, and the newspapers were brimming for the next several months with reports of livestock being killed, stores of food being pilfered, and dim shapes being spotted in the darkness. Gunnar Schwartz was learning to use his "newfound" powers.

As he grew in power, others as disaffected as he flocked to his cause. Those with a more presentable public face became his operatives, providing him with housing and whatever he needed to organize his New Reich. Germans once more felt the oppressive crush of tyranny...but Oberstkälterache wouldn't stop until the whole of Europe felt it.

Oberstkälterache is an overbearing fellow who still hasn't learned the meaning of subtlety. His arm gives him all his powers, and he doesn't miss his own arm one bit, but it hasn't made him much smarter. He's been known to kill his own men if he suspected they were just immature poseurs seeking acceptance who only pretended to embrace the Nazi philosophy.

Schwartz blames the world for his loss. Just as he felt things were truly coming together, everything ended precipitously under a downpour of masonry. The timing itself was among the greatest of insults – he never even got a chance to try stopping the Allies and saving his world with his burgeoning abilities. Every time he attempts to form something solid and dependable in his life it gets taken away, often in the most ironic and infuriating way possible. He is determined now to create a Reich of his own in memory of his beloved Fuhrer, and since he will be in charge he knows it cannot be stolen.

Another of the things that drive him is the mystery of his absence. It seems clear the arm would have allowed him to survive and escape the collapse of the bunker, so why was he buried and asleep in the meantime? His assumption is the arm needed time to adjust and assimilate to his body, but it hasn't happened since then (and he has certainly suffered damage enough that a rest period was necessary), so any lead that helps him understand his "momentary" weakness is one he'll pursue.

The first thing Oberstkälterache does is to show off his power. He targets whoever he thinks is the most powerful member of the team and beats them with his arm as

mercilessly as he can. After a few rounds of that (depending on how well the opponent withstands the onslaught), he'll start showing off his other abilities. His minions have strict orders never to intervene on his behalf...Schwartz is too proud to accept help from another.

When he first received the device, Schwartz looked almost laughable. Supplanting his left arm, it would affect his hibernating body over the years and increase his musculature so that it took a more homogenous appearance, but the arm is still slightly larger and a sleeve baggy enough to conceal it would be conspicuous in and of itself. His hair has receded a bit, but he has a trim and unusually youthful face. His officer's hat sits low over his eyes, giving his shadowed features a grim look. Typically dressed in a full officer's uniform to go with the military rank he adopted for himself, he speaks – barks, really – in a thickly accented voice.

Quote: "Nein, this is no longer the Fatherland...it is my land."

Albert Sinclair

SMART5: CR 5; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D6; HP 22; INIT +0; SPD 30; DEF: 12; (FLATFOOTED: 12 TOUCH: 12); ATK +2 MELEE, +2 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: HIS COMPANY; OCCUPATION: ENTREPRENEUR; SV FORT +1, REF +1, WILL +5; REP +3; STR 10, DEX 11, CON 11, INT 17, WIS 15, CHA 14.

TALENTS: SAVANT, PLAN, TRICK

FEATS: BUILDER, IRON WILL, METICULOUS, SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY, VEHICLE EXPERT

SKILLS: BLUFF +7, DECIPHER SCRIPT +5, DEMOLITIONS +5, DIPLOMACY +6, DISABLE DEVICE +6, DRIVE +5, GAMBLE +4, GATHER INFORMATION +4, INTIMIDATE +5, INVESTIGATE +7, JUMP +1, KNOWLEDGE (NEW TECHNOLOGIES) +7, LISTEN +4, PILOT +2, READ/WRITE LANGUAGE (FRENCH) +4, REPAIR +8, RESEARCH +8, SEARCH +7, SENSE MOTIVE +5, SPEAK LANGUAGE (FRENCH) +4, SPOT +4, SWIM +2

Some people are born into money, some people make their own money, and some people take other people's money. Albert Sinclair fits all three categories. His father was a war profiteer during the Great War, and the son later did the same only he didn't wait for a big war. Small brushfires suited him just fine, and sometimes he didn't even go overseas to find that kind of violence.

Money does funny things to people, and to Sinclair it made him greedier, which isn't funny so much as unbelievable. The Great Depression to him was but a bump in the road – he courted underworld elements and showed them how to make money. Prohibition made a lot of cash for gangsters, but Sinclair neatly avoided both competition for a share of that market and violent rivalries by diversifying to other projects. With his thumbs in everyone's pies, he knew which government contracts had the best prospects for success and where each one was in the development cycle.

Anything that neared completion was a target for the financier's fancy. A man of few morals, he might steal one project and sell it to a foreign power, and he might destroy utterly another project with some deft act of sabotage. By the time the criminals in his city started getting wise and trying

Using Albert Sinclair

If you want something slightly more challenging for your players than another mobster, Albert Sinclair is a wily opponent. He plans things out months, even years in advance. He has several operations going at once. He makes sure he's the only one who sees the whole chessboard. No one even knows rumors about the man when the campaign begins, so getting to him will take a lot of investigation. You can tie plots back to Sinclair from several adventures ago, his tendrils run so deep. And while he isn't currently locked into anything having to do with the Keepers of the Broken Circle, he can't stay this powerful and not run into them sooner or later. When he does, he may start an entirely new branch of operations just to gain an advantage from them...only this time his foes will have tools that may reveal the investor to them.

to wrest this other market from him, forcing him to steal on their behalf, he was already prepared. He held back a few choice items and used mobsters as guinea pigs. He wiped out anyone who knew who he was, and let his muscle take care of their lieutenants. In this way Sinclair has maintained his anonymity and left few people, if any, who can link these traitorous acts back to him.

Prohibition eventually came to a close, which left all those heroes who were used to curtailing booze-related gangster activities free to look for other targets, and the money man's profits started to suffer for it. Instead of laying low, he stepped up operations, gathering more tools and weapons that would be the match of the toughest crime fighters on the block. How it all turns out is a chapter yet to be written.

Sinclair is a smooth fellow, not given to panic easily. He does fear exposure and jail, but he didn't get this far in the business world by running scared, and he'll tell you outright he thinks of high finance as a much more frightening place to fight one's battles (that's why he cheats). He takes great care not to allow others to know with whom they are dealing. Only the highest placed men in his organization speak with him "directly," and even that is on speakers, phones, and dead drops. He won't hesitate to cut loose anyone he feels is a liability, but at the same time he has an odd sense of loyalty. He won't kill or even fire someone for a few failures, especially those that don't leave him open to public disgrace. He understands his people have to learn like anyone else, and the occasional loss may make them a better cat's paw down the road.

His biggest power is money, so if a bribe doesn't work Sinclair has to make other arrangements. He tries to keep would-be heroes at bay by layering on more and more flunkies, and stacking up contingency plans like they were going out of style (better to have so many things going on he's never found instead of actually confronting people). If he has no minions to use as cannon fodder, he stuck with one of three options: fleeing (and he has secret passages waiting for him); brawling (which he's not terribly good at when compared to pulp heroes); or pulling out one of the big experimental guns he keeps in his various homes as a precaution.

With a pencil-thin mustache and slicked hair, Albert Sinclair is one of the most dashing figures in the world of Pulp Kandris. His suits are expensive and impeccable. His thin nose and thinner lips make it seem like his face is actively trying not to be noticed or recognized. In social circles, he's the desire of every woman and the envy of every man, but his business occupies him constantly and so he never dallies with such trivialities. He spends half his time at the court house, in Washington, at his many plants or factories, and in the various halls of power; and the other half is consumed by maintaining a series of plots and schemes so Machiavellian they would make your head spin.

Quote: "Come on, just because they call you hero doesn't mean you don't have a price."

The Banner

STRONG5: CR 5; **MEDIUM HUMAN;** HD 5D8+15; HP 55; **INIT** +2; **SPD** 30; **DEF:** 15; (**FLATFOOTED:** 13 **TOUCH:** 15); **ATK** +9 **MELEE**, +7 **RANGED**; **ALLEGIANCE:** THE UNITED STATES; **OCCUPATION:** LAW ENFORCEMENT; **SV FORT** +6, **REF** +3, **WILL** +1; **REP** +1; **STR** 18, **DEX** 15, **CON** 16, **INT** 12, **WIS** 10, **CHA** 14.

TALENTS: EXTREME EFFORT, IMPROVED EXTREME EFFORT, ADVANCED EXTREME EFFORT

FEATS: COMBAT MARTIAL ARTS, DEFENSIVE MARTIAL ARTS, IMPROVED COMBAT MARTIAL ARTS, POWER ATTACK, SIGNATURE POWER (IDEALIZED HERO: A NEAR-PERFECT SPECIMEN, THE BANNER CAN FLY, POSSESSES GREAT STRENGTH, RESISTS MOST DAMAGE, AGES UNNOTICEABLY, AND IS IN FLAWLESS HEALTH), SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY

SKILLS: GATHER INFORMATION +4, INTIMIDATE +4, INVESTIGATE +5, KNOWLEDGE (UNITED STATES) +5, LISTEN +2, MOVE SILENTLY +4, SEARCH +3, SENSE MOTIVE +1, SPOT +1, TREAT INJURY +1

John Smith sounds like a dull name, but it's the only one young John ever knew. He was found one day wandering the deck of a ship coming into the harbor to Ellis Island, and his hard-luck case garnered national attention for weeks. Who were his parents? What became of them, and how was the family separated? No one knew; they didn't even know his nationality. The boat was out of Italy but carried people of several different countries, and John spoke only English (insofar as a three-year-old boy with reserved manners spoke at all). There was no record of the boy embarking, alone or with others, and no one aboard could recall when they first met him.

His upbringing wasn't too bad. He had some money donated by concerned Americans who read his story in the papers, and this was held in trust by the nuns at the orphanage until he was of age. (He attempted to get the sisters to give his money to the more needy, but they were legally obligated to keep it for him.) The day he left the orphanage he enlisted in the army, and there received the rank of captain before a mortar took his left leg in battle. He returned to the States and worked in whatever capacity he could for them until one day the offices were gassed by unknown agents. He helped several people from the building and was trying to assist even more when the fumes finally overtook him.

He awoke to find himself in a veterans' hospital, being stared at by incredulous doctors. His leg had grown back during his weeklong coma, and they were unable to penetrate his skin with a hypodermic needle. Further tests showed he was incredibly strong, quite agile, and extremely tough. What were thought to be acrobatic leaps turned out to be the ability to fly for very short distances. The government was on the point of offering him work as one of their agents, but he beat them to it by leaving the hospital and visiting their offices so he could volunteer.

Since then he has been America's not-so-secret weapon. His identity is technically classified, though few pains are taken outside the military structure to keep it under wraps (too many people had been involved in the case to that point), and a "loose lips sink ships" policy among the people who know or have met him has done more to maintain his low profile than any deliberate deceit. He doesn't really lead a life outside the operations he does for the United States, though the government maintains everything his "other identity" could need (a private apartment in the city, a driver's license, an address) should the Banner ever decide he needs some kind of break.

He has a lot of autonomy in his work. He acts more like a policeman and less like a soldier, investigating the crimes and intrusions that come to his attention, but the government need only ask and he'll drop other things and come to the rescue. His loose mandate has worked out pretty well for both sides so far (and not well at all for several foreign operatives), so he generates a lot of his own "work."

The Banner's motives are easy enough to understand: He believes in upholding the laws of the United States of

Using The Banner

Every game set in the good old U.S. of A. needs a standard bearer, and for the world of Pulp Kandris that someone is the Banner. He's a masked hero in the grand tradition, with honest American values and a never-say-die attitude. Anyone playing this character should waste no opportunity to tout the usual virtues – honesty, integrity, patriotism – and if the someone playing him is the gamemaster he can use the man as a symbol as much as a person. He's already a legend to most. Seeing him show up to a fight gives the bad guys fits and the heroes their second breath. Use him to show there is light when all is dark. Just make sure the Banner isn't just there to embarrass the team. Have him show up when the party is at its lowest ebb. He fights the enemy and now he's on the defensive as his strength wanes; that's when the heroes, having gotten their second breath, can come to his aid.

Although the Keepers of the Broken Circle are not the Banner's standard fare in a dustup, to him anything that threatens the sanctity of this world is a peril that needs dealing with. If the heroes need help on a case, or a fresh voice, arrange a meeting with the great man. Use him to impart clues or hints ("If it was me I'd evacuate personnel, let these fiends invade an empty installation, and counterattack their unoccupied stronghold") or just words of encouragement.

America, and in using those values as his guiding light when visiting overseas or dealing with any kind of trouble. He's larger than life, and leaves a big impression on anyone who meets him, good or bad. He never retreats unless it's to think of a new approach to a problem (and he doesn't even do that if he can keep busy removing victims from the path of that difficulty). He would rather be killed in the line of duty than fail his friends, his countrymen, or his nation.

With his straightforward superpowers, the Banner gives his foes the benefit of the doubt. He's no fool, but he gives evildoers the chance to surrender to him (and they often accede – hey, he's the Banner, for crying out loud) and only then wades into a fight. Even so he'll try to convince people of the error of their ways while bantering in battle. He takes on whoever he thinks is the greatest threat present in a hand-to-hand fight, then works his way down. He won't go to town with his superpowers on anyone who can't withstand them (not that he tells them that – one reason why so many give up rather than face him), and he will not kill.

An American flag across his barrel chest, the Banner commands all the attention in the room. He stands tall and proud in his colors and always seems to be posing (and where is that wind coming from, blowing through his short hair?). His domino mask is brief and striped with red, white, and blue as well, though its value as per keeping his identity a secret is debatable. He's the most unassuming fellow, though, and only shows pride when speaking of his adopted country. He's an old army man who can't stop telling war stories, except a) unlike your Uncle Barry you want to hear what he says (he spins a great tale, and he's not dull), and b) many of his involve inspiring notes about the bravery of non-super bystanders or "ordinary" heroics by the rank and file soldiery. He's always delighted to give credit where credit is due, and speaks with terrific gusto about the contributions of others even when the story should be almost entirely about him.

Quote: "If you think you're going to get away with this, you don't know what we mean by 'the American way.'"

Kid Lasso

FAST5: CR 5; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D8+5; HP 38; INIT +3; SPD 35; DEF: 18; (FLATFOOTED: 15 TOUCH: 18); ATK +4 MELEE, +6 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: GENTEEL FOLKS; OCCUPATION: CELEBRITY; SV FORT +2, REF +6, WILL +2; REP +2; STR 13, DEX 17, CON 12, INT 13, WIS 12, CHA 14.

TALENTS: EVASION, UNCANNY DODGE 1, INCREASED SPEED

FEATS: AGILE RIPOSTE, DODGE, MOBILITY, SIGNATURE POWER (TRICK ROPER: KID LASSO CAN MAKE HIS LARIAT PERFORM TO HIS SPECIFICATIONS, ENTANGLING OPPONENTS, SNATCHING WEAPONS, TRIPPING FUGITIVES, AND GRASPING OUTCROPPINGS TO ALLOW CLIMBING, ALL WITH PRETERNATURAL SKILL), SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY

SKILLS: BALANCE +5, BLUFF +4, CLIMB +3, ESCAPE ARTIST +5, GAMBLE +2, HANDLE ANIMAL +3, HIDE +4, JUMP +2, LISTEN +2, MOVE SILENTLY +5, PERFORM +7, RIDE +6, SLEIGHT OF HAND +6, SPOT +2, SWIM +2, TUMBLE +7

James Ridenhour came from a showbiz family, and although he didn't enter the spotlight with the rest of his clan until he was five, he had been using a lariat from the

age of two. Skilled in a way that impressed even his parents, he became the finest roper the circuit had ever seen, taking down cattle and looping his noose around everything from basketballs to flaming brands held by the showgirls. He did it all under the name "Kid Lasso."

When he was 16, James was the only one physically untouched by a fire at their circus. His family survived, but each was either burned terribly or crippled in some way, and the overall cost to the operation meant it had to be disbanded. The family retired, leaving the young performer to find something else for himself. Opportunity presented itself in the form of a bank robbery.

An invasion of the local credit union that was supposed to take five minutes took only three. James' lasso was off his hip, in his hand, and around its targets in a flash. Guns were pulled from their grips and even their holsters, legs were yanked, and throats were choked. When the police arrived, the three men were hogtied together at uncomfortable angles and Mr. Ridenhour had a new job working security for the bank.

Within the next few years he went from the bank to a factory where he foiled what he thought was just another robbery. The impressed authorities who showed up for that turned out not to be locals but federal agents, and they also wanted to hire James' services. He became a government operative in their employ, and his opponents are now now saboteurs and spies.

James is a down-to-Earth "Aw, shucks" kind of fellow who doesn't weather compliments well. He'd just like to do what he trained to do and enjoy it as best he can without assaults on his modesty. He does believe in old fashioned law and order – not to the point that he'll actually string someone up, but he likes to think there are white hats and black hats. He won't abandon anyone in real need, and while he doesn't look for trouble he's not shy about finishing it. He calls people "ma'am," "sir," or "pardner," according to their gender and his relationship with them.

Kid Lasso has an almost preternatural control over his lasso. Any rope will do, actually, and he does make fancy use of electrical cords, garden hoses, and anything else that comes to hand, but he prefers "Old Hemp," the lasso he's had since he was a child. If his opponents are ordinary people, he'll try to disarm them first (if they have weapons); pin them second;

Using Kid Lasso

The gamemaster can run a game with cowboy heroes or one set in the Old West proper and Kid Lasso fits in just fine with minimal alteration. He's not the toughest hero on the block, but he's determined as few are. Demonic entities are well outside his experience, but if they threaten the women and children they'll find he gets over that quickly. He's more likely to be found where the plains stretch wide, so setting an adventure there is a better way to get him involved in the action, but he's got nothing against city folk. He can be quite amusing playing the part of tourist in a big town, and his skills have practical applications anywhere. He could be drawn to a location of someone suggests they have information about the accident that closed his circus.

and disable them last. If they're superpowered foes and he has friends around better equipped to deal with them than he is, he'll concentrate almost exclusively on harassing enemies to make things easier on his allies – snatching weapons, dragging someone's feet out from under them, and tying them up. Only if he sees the clear need coupled with a solidly possible opportunity does he try to finish them off in advance of another's aid. If he's alone, he'll use delaying tactics to keep them busy until his friends arrive, or make a desperate attempt to stop the offenders himself if no assistance is forthcoming and retreat means leaving innocents to their fates. Like his lasso, his firearm is used more for trick shots, he certainly won't kill someone with either.

Unless someone is getting buried or married, James Ridenhour wears stereotypical cowboy duds. The actual colors or styles may vary – he doesn't have a costume per se – but they always speak to an appreciation of the ways of the West. A standard look might be a button-up shirt with a kerchief or bola necktie (depending on the period), a leather vest, denim pants, leather gloves and boots, and a six-shooter at his side. If he wants to affect an air of mystery he may wear a domino mask or pull a bandana over his face. He's a stocky man, blond, with no facial hair and handsome good looks.

Quote: "Ya ought not to be pointin' that pea-shooter in a lady's face, mister. Here, lemme hold it fer ya."

Lady Vanessa Weise

CHARISMATIC5: CR 5; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D6; HP 22; INIT +1; SPD 30; DEF: 13; (FLATFOOTED: 12 TOUCH: 13); ATK +1 MELEE, +3 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: THE DOWNTRODDEN; OCCUPATION: DILETTANTE; SV FORT +3, REF +4, WILL +2; REP +4; STR 9, DEX 12, CON 11, INT 14, WIS 13, CHA 17.

TALENTS: CHARM, FAST-TALK, COORDINATE

FEATS: EDUCATED, FRIGHTFUL DEMEANOR, HEROIC SURGE, SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY, TRUSTWORTHY

SKILLS: BLUFF +6, CLIMB +0, DIPLOMACY +8, DISGUISE +7, DRIVE +2, ESCAPE ARTIST +3, GATHER INFORMATION +9, HIDE +2, INTIMIDATE +6, INVESTIGATE +5, JUMP +0, KNOWLEDGE (BUSINESS) +8, KNOWLEDGE (BUREAUCRACY) +8, LISTEN +3, MOVE SILENTLY +3, PERFORM +6, READ/WRITE LANGUAGE (FRENCH) +2, READ/WRITE LANGUAGE (GERMAN) +2, RESEARCH +3, RIDE +2, SEARCH +4, SENSE MOTIVE +3, SPEAK LANGUAGE (FRENCH) +2, SPEAK LANGUAGE (GERMAN) +2, SPOT +2, SWIM +0, TREAT INJURY +2

From an early age, Vanessa Weise learned to fend for herself. Her parents died in a car crash when she was very young, and though she grew up leading a life of privilege under her uncle's supervision, she did not have access to her mother and father's funds. She only found out after college that there was a will giving her complete control of the family fortune when she came of age. Her uncle patronized her at first, to his detriment. When that didn't work out, he tried to work things out legally, having himself named as executor of the estate. When she kept coming after him, he threatened her. At that point he made the dual mistake of not only endangering her but confessing at the wrong moment to his attempts to wrest the money from her, which flew in the face of the will's original intent. To this day she takes great pains to

remind her imprisoned uncle how she beat him soundly. She likes to think of it as a warning to others who underestimate her gender.

She's hardly a feminist, though, and there's not a man or woman in the embrace of high society who doesn't respect – or at least fear – what she's shown herself to be capable of in a clash of personalities. The board room might be another matter, though. She would have more trouble there if she were the sort who sought to increase her holdings every day. She has money and she's not so insecure she feels the need to make a whole lot more. Just in case, though, she has gathered a small group of followers who believe they can make a difference, and most of these people believe her to be a man.

Her little "act tank" as it were (like a think tank but more deeds and less contemplating) is called Grace Industries and is headed by "Mr. Avignon," a wholly fictitious character who meets with her agents periodically. One of several actors hired for the part, she rotates them out and occasionally gets entirely new ones. Anyone who claims to have been at a meeting therefore knows little about what really goes on there. All the information gathered by her agents is done so at her direction, and only those recruits whom she personally vets get to meet her in person.

The organization isn't quite a secret branch of the government or anything; it's a very personal matter for Lady Weise, and most of what they do is gather information to be used later. Only the highest ranking members (for example, any PCs who wish to get involved) get to know the woman herself. Her plans usually involve collecting proof positive of wrongdoing, espionage, treason, or criminal activities, and then handing it over to the police. If there's reason to suspect the police cannot (or will not) handle it, she and her group take things into their own hands. To keep her spirits up, she makes sure to involve herself in dealings both small and large. Her foe may be the head of a company or a drug ring, but she'll just as quickly take on a wife-beater or a slum landlord. All too often she finds that going after the little fry just leads her to additional underhanded scofflaws higher up the criminal food chain anyway.

Few people can make all the connections Lady Weise has worked so hard to establish. She has no problem showing up

Using Lady Weise

Lady Weise can be a unifying force in the lives of player characters. She has the money needed to make things happen, and to fund expeditions or even illicit break-ins. She won't equip the team any more than is necessary for the job at hand so she can keep a low profile (that, plus she's not so narrow-minded that she thinks throwing money at a problem is the solution).

Her business could brush up against the plots of the Keepers or their servants, and while her circle of friends is a highly placed source of information, it can also hide a deadly spy for the other side among its number. She can also be the catalyst for adventures: If something threatens people at the national level, she'll be among the first to know about it, and though it's not terribly politically correct she might be one of the first to be taken hostage by violent factions.

to confront those she has taken down – it's what she lives for, in fact – but seldom can anyone connect her activities in high society, the halls of economic power, Grace Industries, and the personal hand she takes in her crusade.

Unwilling to let her uncle get away with his chicanery, Lady Weise realized there must be hundreds more people, of a lower social station and playing for even lower stakes, who are facing a fight they cannot win alone. She is determined to offer relief to those who cannot find justice for themselves in a world teeming with criminals and supervillains. She keeps her ear to the ground and finds things out from the police radio bands and street folks in order to find new projects for herself. Although not all the people she attempts to help are women, she knows a kinship with them that cuts her deep when she's informed of their hardships at the hands of evil men. With those she cares about, she does not appear nearly as hard...she can in fact be quite charming, disarming, and effeminate, and it's not all an act.

With long, blond platinum hair, a willowy figure, and skin like a pat of butter, Lady Weise is gorgeous and alluring. She tends toward white clothing and her daily outfits, which she exchanges liberally, are usually smart business suits and skirts. Although it's dangerous in her line of work, she thinks nothing of wearing high heels (the thugs never see those coming). At night, she's dressed in something much gayer, though not scandalously so unless there's some sort of society do. Her eyes are a pale blue, and her lips dark red. In short, the notorious men she sets her sights on don't stand a chance.

Like most people in her strata, used to making a living by staying mentally sharp, Weise would rather think her way around a problem than punch her way through it. If good planning and a sharp tongue don't get her out of trouble, she keeps a small pistol in her purse (whether because they underestimate women or it's part of a code of honor, the villains never think to relieve her of her pocketbook). When that's empty, or if the threat doesn't warrant deadly force, she'll use her brass knuckles, limited martial skills, and moxie.

Quote: "You think there's something funny about a woman owning all that stock? Keep threatening the good people living on this block...I'll soon own you, too."

Liberty Lad

SMART5: CR; MEDIUM HUMAN; HD 5D6+5; HP 27; INIT +0; SPD 30; DEF: 12; (FLATFOOTED: 12 TOUCH: 12); ATK +2 MELEE, +2 RANGED; ALLEGIANCE: NONE; OCCUPATION: STUDENT; SV FORT +2, REF +1, WILL +6; REP +2; STR 10, DEX 11, CON 12, INT 16, WIS 16, CHA 13.

TALENTS: SAVANT, LINGUIST, TRICK

FEATS: COMBAT EXPERTISE, METICULOUS, SIGNATURE POWER (MYSTIC ADEPT: LIBERTY LAD CAN PERFORM MAGIC, AND WHILE THE LIMITS HAVEN'T BEEN FULLY EXPLORED, MOST OF HIS DEEDS ARE EITHER TYPICAL STAGE TRICKS (LIKE MAKING SOMEONE DISAPPEAR), BUT WITH A SUPERNATURAL EFFICIENCY; OR "STANDARD" MAGICAL TROPES LIKE ENERGY BLASTS OR ILLUSIONS), SIMPLE WEAPONS PROFICIENCY, STUDIOUS

SKILLS: CONCENTRATION +7, DECIPHER SCRIPT +9, DISGUISE +3, ESCAPE ARTIST +3, GATHER INFORMATION +7, HIDE +3, INVESTIGATE +8, JUMP +2, KNOWLEDGE (MYSTICISM) +9,

LISTEN +5, MOVE SILENTLY +2, RESEARCH +11, SLEIGHT OF HAND +4, SPOT +7, SWIM +2, TREAT INJURY +6, TUMBLE +2

Don't let the moniker fool you. Liberty Lad is no ordinary fighter, no result of a super soldier program hidden in some bunker somewhere. He's a champion for the people all right, but his abilities are all magical.

Lonny Allbright grew up as an all-American youngster, with mom and dad, sis and bro, a well-tended lawn, and a dog named Brat. He attended George Washington Elementary School and in their library found the first of many volumes that would change his life. It was a book on magic, and he thought he could learn some prestidigitation to impress his friends. As he delved deeper and deeper into the tome, he began to see there was information between the lines, hidden in the margins, secreted into the wording. This was, he found, no ordinary book. It was a text of true magic hidden in plain sight, waiting for the right person to come along and identify its riddles.

Since it looked like he was the right person, Lonny kept at it. He impressed his friends, all right...a few card tricks, a disappearing quarter, and finally, healing their dog's wounded leg. Terrified, the children retreated home and told their parents what had happened. Nothing more was said of it, of course – what could be said? – but the community looked at Lonny Allbright in a new way, a distant, fearful way. His parents, not wishing him to grow up ostracized, sent him away to boarding school. They loved him, and didn't let him forget it for a moment: letters from home, phone calls, trips home for every birthday, holiday, and spare weekend, they layered it all on. But they still didn't understand what was happening to him any more than he did, and so this was his early childhood.

Using Liberty Lad

Depending on how much the gamemaster wants to see of the kid in his campaign, Liberty Lad is either still in school but trying desperately to use his powers to finish up early so he can fully devote himself to the pursuit of his destiny; or he's just graduated and trying to make a name for himself in both the mystic and superhero worlds.

Lonny has told no one how he first started on his path, but Caldwell seemed to know instinctively. The Thaumaturgia would still like to initiate him (or at least study him – he's one of the most powerful young spell casters they've ever met), so they or one of their members shows up periodically to renew the invitation or quietly feel out information. (On many occasions they've sent someone who was obviously trained in the arts but did not present themselves as a council colleague.) The Keepers and their ilk have done the same. If the GM likes, he can explore the possibility that the library book was a plant by either side, though if the demons are responsible they'll most likely discover their plan has backfired. The boy isn't tainted, and if there was anything evil about the book his honest, gentle nature has quashed its effects on his magic use handily. Getting him involved in magical activities isn't difficult, and using him to engage others in such an adventure works as well.

School, however, was where young master Allbright met Caldwell, an elderly professor who, it turned out, was no stranger to magic and spell casting. He took the boy under his wing and saw to it his schedule always had time for Lonny to indulge in his more esoteric studies as well as those prescribed by the school. Lonny gained in power and ability, and finally had to make use of it one night when the school was terrorized by a wraith. Fearful of again being turned out by those who misunderstood his powers, he donned a pillowcase and did battle with the creature, beating it soundly. This time the reaction was different...he received applause from those who witnessed his actions.

The school tried to hush it up but no threats could silence the children from gabbing excitedly. Two days later, Lonny received a visit from the Thaumaturgia and, after taking some counsel from Caldwell who left things up to the boy, decided against joining. They weren't pleased with his decision (they seemed to think a boy his age would do whatever he was told), but left the invitation open. Lonny, meanwhile, had had enough of the stares of suspicious onlookers, and realized so long as he wore the mask he was a man of mystery whose deeds spoke louder than his words or his humble image. As a mage, he was an affront to a superstitious people in a puritanical age...

...but as Liberty Lad, a costumed hero and walking advertisement for the fighting American spirit, he was hailed as a hero, pure and simple. He now fights crime wherever it rears its ugly head, but he specializes in uncovering otherworldly plots by the Keepers of the Broken Circle and those like them who put magic to dark purposes.

Liberty Lad is as eager and chipper as any 14-year-old kid, but he can be deadly serious when confronting his enemies. His enthusiasm is as infectious as his determination is surprising. Adults who work or fight alongside him sometimes find themselves forgetting he's just a teenager. He can be sunny and good-humored one moment and studiously contemplative the next. Since Lonny knows what it's like to be socially cast out, he dislikes intensely any instance in which he feels someone isn't being given the benefit of the doubt – including a suspect not yet convicted of a crime – but he doesn't let his personal hang-ups get the better of him. He prefers to deal with abuses of the supernatural sort since not only is that his milieu, it offers the potential to learn something more about the spirit world, but he doesn't ignore any malfeasance.

Villains always underestimate him. Some of them do it because they can't imagine a boy his age presents any kind of threat, some (opposing mages) don't realize the rumors of his mystic strength are not tall tales, and others think he's "just" a superpowered hero when in fact he derives his abilities from far more bizarre sources. If there's a supernatural threat, he goes after that first with mystic blasts and other attacks. If the counterattack is powerful, he tries to minimize the damage or improve his defenses and then renew his onslaught, hopefully joined by teammates. If these aren't options, he'll use diversionary tactics, illusions and the like, to confuse or incapacitate his foes until he can think of something new. If he's facing more mundane opposition he'll use the element of surprise to his advantage, intimidating enemies with the creepy stunts he can perform. He's a tough kid, but he's still a

kid, and he's been known to flee a battle that went against him (only to regroup or plan anew, but he's neither a coward nor a fool).

Lonny has tussled, straw-blond hair, blue eyes, and freckles. He wears a full mask, but nothing can disguise the fact that he's 14. He has traditional American symbols across his baggy clothing – eagles, stars and stripes, and so on – but anyone who looks closer may find there is an unexpected level of complexity to it all. Like the book of spells he found as a boy, he has designed an outfit with hidden meanings and deeper symbolism.

Quote: "I wouldn't say it's destiny, no, but I still feel myself drawn to the malt shop for an ice cream sundae."

Chapter Seven

Brimming with Bad Guys: The Kandris Seal in an Age of Adventure

"What do you like best about Africa, Lydecker, old bean?" Sir Bastille asked.

Ridley Lydecker pulled his headwear down over his forehead, trying to readjust his eyes to the Serengeti's shimmering horizon. Sweat dripped down his face, but not far. The heat made sure it evaporated before too long. "When I complain about the heat," the American replied, waving his hand across his own field of vision. "No one's there to tell me it's the humidity."

His English companion laughed. "Didn't think you'd find yourself back in Africa ever again either, did you?"

Lydecker doffed his hat. "Never thought I'd be wearing an honest-to-gosh pith helmet, but here we are." He fell silent a moment. "So is this what hunting is all about? Hours spent staring at nothing until you think you're seeing things? Then what, we fire randomly at phantoms?"

"There's a lot of that, yes," Bastille replied, absently polishing the barrel of his gun without benefit of a cloth. "But there's also booze..."

"Lots of booze," the other man nodded, remembering last night.

"...but mostly camaraderie," his host finished with a laugh. "I've found peace out here, and I'm optimistic I could help others find it, too. After the war, well...we all could use a spot of that."

"Amen, brother," Lydecker said, and the two men clinked their canteens together like wine glasses. "Thank you." The Englishman said nothing, but smiled and nodded.

Lying on his belly, Lydecker was the first to notice the ground's rumbles, but experience caught Sir Bastille up quickly. "Some sort of stampede?" the American inquired, but there was no response. It was as if the great hunter beside him

was sniffing the air.

"That's no stampede. It doesn't feel right. There's no dust cloud, no sign that..." Both men dropped their gaze as one to look at the ground beneath them. Lydecker was once again a soldier, and the two of them were once more on the battlefield, jumping up onto a rock and staring as the dirt shook like the skin of a pudding.

A crevasse, only a tiny sliver of an opening at first, split the ground where they had been moments ago, and most of their camping supplies were drawn down into it. They still had their weapons, and waited to see what their target was. There was movement, and a thick, gangly appendage came up and stared at them with a single baleful eye. A small slit drooped from under the sensor, and expanded to show it was filled with teeth. It hissed once, and exploded in a green cloud of paste as the hunters fired their weapons.

"What was that?" Lydecker demanded in a hiss, but his friend shook his head to indicate it was outside his experience.

"Dead, that's all I know."

"Now that is what I call optimism," he breathed back.

The ground exploded fully, much as the eye had done, but the air was filled with dirt clods and bits of forgotten root systems. They shielded their eyes against the spray, and at the center saw a bulky, shapeless form with several more eyestalks and a gargantuan mouth of its own, full of teeth the size of logs. The two men turned and began to run back to the jeep. "Think we can out-race the beast?" the Englishman called.

"Hey, I'm just wondering if there's room to put its head up on the wall back at your club," Lydecker yelled, diving into the backseat through the open frame.

"Now who's the optimist?" Bastille asked. "What makes you think it doesn't have a wall of its own?"

Another Time, Another Place

To give you some idea of what's waiting for the party out there, this chapter goes over some of the major landmarks and meaningful milestones. The gazetteer describes the

hotspots where anyone can find action without really trying, and the timeline tries to put it all in some kind of perspective. The GM should feel free to alter events to suit his game. You might want to keep the big stuff right where it is – it would be hard to skirt around World War II – but you can downplay anything that doesn't fit with your plans or even change some of the reasons behind it. Secret history is good for that. For example, various battles during the war could have been won or lost because the servants of the Keepers of the Broken Circle had a hand in things.

For more information about the time period, check the Bibliography for some fine references.

Gazetteer

There's plenty of world to see and even more in need of mapping. Who knows what dangers abound in the unlit corners? Your heroes are about to find out. This section gives you a thumbnail sketch of some places where your talents can find the most usage. It's hardly complete – nothing this size could hope to be – but it's an excellent starting point.

China

While the western world was paralyzed by the Great War, China was trying to realize its newly formed Republic, but the national government was successful only in name. The interior of the country was Balkanized, and power lay in the hands of local warlords. Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Kuomintang, finally brought the country under a single rule in 1928, though a civil war with the communist supporters continued on and off through 1949. Breaking off hostilities just long enough to join against Japanese aggression in World War II, the communists finally forced the national government to the island of Taiwan in 1949. The People's Republic of China now controlled the mainland.

Adventure Seeds: If he's willing to set his campaign that far back, the individual "states" operated by the Chinese warlords are fertile ground for making the heroes dance. They may want something from within the mountains, like rare minerals or long-forgotten artifacts from some mystical war, in which case they'll probably have to sneak in to get it. If caught, the warlords might ask the team to perform some small service for them – a service that invariably puts them at odds with the leader (or leaders) next door. This might be as simple as reconnaissance or as morally reprehensible as assassinating a neighboring rival. Can the PCs perform this service? What will it cost them ethically? And can they do it without their "host" finding out their real purpose here? Because if it's discovered they're after some source of eldritch power, the warlord isn't going to let them keep it.

As tough as the warlords can be, they're usually petty dictators in a localized area. Once the civil war starts, there's a good chance you'll get caught in the crossfire no matter where you go. Anyone could be a spy for either side, and occidentals draw a lot of attention. Both blocs may be as well-versed as the party in the ways of magical warfare, so

when the heroes try to sneak a 300-year-old mage out of the country to help stop a demon from ravaging shipping lanes, no one's letting them leave without a fight.

By the time the Communist Party has pushed Chiang Kai-shek off the mainland, westerners had better be able to prove their worth to the People's Republic. Unless you're a merchant looking to open trade with the government (and not someone

trying to poison the minds of the populace with capitalist values), your very presence here could be deemed a threat to the nation. It might be necessary for the team to get permissions from the government to work inside the system, in which case adventures fall into the realm of espionage: They act as businessmen or relief workers of some description while searching for the newest gate the Watcher has warned of.

Given the rich vein of mysticism in Chinese culture and history, a referee willing to set his entire game in the Celestial Empire will have no problem finding new ways for the Broken Circle to cause trouble for the world – they'll just be starting those woes from less familiar territory.

Australia

Although far removed from much of the world stage, Australia did participate in many of its ups and downs. Australian soldiers saw action in both World Wars; in between those, Sir Douglas Mawson had time and proximity enough to map out a large chunk of Antarctica (and lay claim to some of it for his government), and the country suffered like many others from the worldwide effects of the Great Depression. In 1942, the Statute of Westminster began the slow process of divesting Australian interests from those of its sovereign, the United Kingdom. (Laws are passed and documents signed, but not until the 1980s did the country finally formalize the separation it had so long practiced.)

Adventure Seeds: Unlike many other undeveloped nations, hostilities the

adventurers may suffer in Australia come less from native tribes and violent rebel actions and more from the land itself. Most of the continent is a desert, though there are areas ranging from temperate to tropical, and those areas that aren't contain a host of wildlife and living conditions not meant for the faint of heart. Crocodiles, sharks, and venomous snakes, jellyfish, frogs, and spiders (among others) are found almost everywhere. Those who venture there must know survival skills, lest they die of thirst, hunger, or exposure. Just getting from point A to point B should present difficulties for the party.

The Dreamtime, an Aboriginal concept, is perfectly suited to a Kandris Seal game. The natives believe that the past,

The Map is not the Territory

Don't confuse the fictional world with the real world. We know things weren't that rosy, even in the black-and-white 1940s and 50s, shot through as they were with post-war depressions and racial struggles. But it's the heights to which people aspired that should count here, the idealized version that sticks in the minds of the public when they look back fondly. Heroes are one of the things that represented those ideals, and exploring those beliefs is the important thing for most good games. On the other hand, some may be offended at what they perceive as a whitewash. If you prefer to take a more realistic view of history there are issues that make great adventure fodder, but the players and the gamemaster should agree whether they want the sanitized version or to see events through a politically correct lens. What's presented below is the mom, baseball, and apple pie take on things.

present, and future all exist at once in the Dreaming, and some believe that heroes in the distant past created the world by traveling through it and imbuing certain sites with mystic power and significance. Any one of these locations would be an ideal destination for members of the Thaumaturgia. If demons were to try to open a gate on this continent, they would certainly make the attempt from a known source of magic. Australia is so large and sparsely inhabited, a GM could establish a campaign here centered on trekking to those out of the way places where Keepers might work their evil. A central headquarters would be invaluable for fast responses to the Watcher's warnings, and cut down on travel time that could spell disaster. The characters could hardly be expected to put down a potential gate closing every week, but they might serve as "maintenance crews," making irregular checks on meaningful sites to keep them clear of outside influences. They could also keep relations with the Aboriginal tribes open so the good guys have someone to count on when the chips are down. Evil cults are bound to spring up, and the heroes cannot possibly keep tabs on all of them by themselves.

North America

America tried to stay out of European politics as long as it could, but finally succumbed to the pressure of international chaos and joined the Great War in 1917. After that it backed off once again, trying to isolate itself and enjoying increasing prosperity throughout the 20s. The pendulum swung the other way in 1929 when the Great Depression took hold – one of the catalysts of the popularity of the pulp genre. Franklin Delano Roosevelt did what he could to revive the nation's economy with his New Deal in 1932, but it took the military production of World War II to rev up the country's finances starting in 1941. After the war the country found itself one of two major players in world events, and in the 1950s the United States saw a duel between the dismal prospects of the Cold War and another increase in affluence at home.

Canada answered the call to World War I when its parent nation Great Britain declared war, but like Australia, the Statute of Westminster signaled the beginning of the end of such tightly married fortunes. The country sought appeasement for Hitler, but the invasion of Poland made it clear there was another war to be fought. Supplying several nations throughout the hostilities, Canada found itself in possession of one of the largest war machines in the world by the conflict's end. By the 1950s, Canada was entering the Nuclear Age, securing its energy resources with the establishment of atomic power plants and oil pipelines, and

creating the Pinetree Line Radar System.

Adventure Seeds: Most of the pulps were set, at least initially, in the United States; those that weren't had a distinctly American sensibility. This makes a game set in this time period easier on the gamemaster. Although an industrialized nation, there are still plenty of old movie tropes available for exploitation.

The American West saw more cars and trucks during this period, but it was still lightly populated. Anyone – or anything – that wanted to initiate a plot against mankind could find plenty of nooks and crannies throughout the Midwest and California in which to skulk. Cowboys might know what electricity is now, but the spirit of the frontier was still alive and kicking on the underdeveloped plains and prairies, and horses could get to many places a car couldn't. Once the villain had a plot, it was usually directed at a city on the east or west coast. Trains are low-profile ways to ferry your bad guys and their schemes from one no-horse town to the next, so the shipment on any given car is an adventure waiting for a hero. Midwesterners don't tend to ask a lot of questions and extend a lot of privacy to others, so if you need secrecy or a foreboding sense that all is not right in a small town, you're well within your dramatic rights to assume them. If you need magical hooks to cover the campaign in Kandris-flavored material, don't forget there are several strange historical footnotes that can be expanded into full-blown adventures. The disappearance of the Anasazi, the loss of the Donner Party, stolen Confederate gold, and the lost colony of Roanoke offer coast-to-coast enigmas that, seen through the lens of demonic intent, take on an aura of menace.

Almost any pulp or serial set in the States dealt at least partly with attacks on shipping and national defense. Whether it was a cattle herder or a masked avenger, their opposite number was probably trying to cripple the country, and they didn't even wait until wartime to do it. The introduction of the Seal may suggest why that is in your game. Disrupting lines of communication and commerce are a good start; follow that up



with setting off big events in a valley (dinosaurs optional) and the demons' gate may be open once again. Is it just a land grab by a powerful baron seeking the goldmine thereon, or are there minerals and other substances down there that make it a particularly tasty morsel for his fiendish masters? The St. Louis Arch wasn't started until the 1960s, but the planning began as far back as 1947. What intrigues went into that construction? Who was the invisible hand behind it all? And what purpose was it all meant to serve before America's heroes turned it from an evil plot to a testament to human

endeavor?

For heroes, one need look no further than the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Themselves the subject of a few pulpish sagas, these brave officers patrol the Canadian wilderness to keep the provinces safe. That's the romantic take on things, anyway, and one that gets them into the dark of the forests where wait their primeval foes. Technically, they're the national and federal police force, are not limited to outdoor duties, and are often contracted by provincial and even local governments for policing and security, so if the gamemaster wants to bring the action out of the mountains and into towns and cities, that works too.

But much like America's heartland, it's in Canada's vast wilds where we most expect to find our enemies lurking, hidden from public scrutiny, planning to turn it all into a real wasteland. Logging camps, saw mills, nature preserves, isolated military bases, and native camps and towns are pregnant with possibilities for adventure. The sorts of people one finds there – tough-as-nails lumberjacks, wise Indian shamans, independent scouts and townsfolk, wizened old hermits, determined company men – could easily be made into the heroes or villains of your piece.

Do the Keepers see the potential for death in such a lively land? Perhaps they make the mistake of thinking such remote areas mean only a small chance of human intervention, only to find that the wilderness is never lacking for friends. Clearing the trees from an ancient burial ground in preparation for hewing their terrible ancestors from below sets off a chain reaction of calls for assistance. Soon, the Mounties join a medicine man and a pair of logging company surveyors, and the demons and their human lackeys have a fight on their hands...or tentacles.

Mexico

One of the few nations on Earth not to suffer from the Great Depression, Mexico actually gained ground economically during the pulp era (the so-called Mexican Miracle). A new constitution had been ratified in 1917, though acceptance was slow and many farmers continued to be unhappy with the runaround they were given regarding the lands they had been promised. The rest of the populace was eventually pacified by unusually honest government in 1928 and the nationalization of the oil industry in 1938. The country became stronger, but many foreign investors had lost valuable resources (and some, faith in Mexico).

Adventure Seeds: The Mexican landscape is perhaps even less hospitable than the wooded northlands, but if you can film in the deserts of the American Southwest, you can do it in Mexico. While the United States is usually on good terms with its neighbor to the south, there are still criminal elements there, especially in the inaccessible regions (villains love those mountains), and they've also got a disproportionate share of the ancient temples. Perhaps it's not as rife with secret sites as South America, but impressive ziggurats and tombs suggest older magic may exist where the dimensional walls wear thin. That ancient runes all over the country's landscape suggest an early affinity for math and astronomy may foretell great things – great and terrible

things – for them.

Just as gangsters do in America, Mexican banditos may make deals with the “bigger fish” or even hoary, supernatural beings, and they may not be the only ones. What kind of deal might someone have made for wealth or power? Was “El Milagro” the result of governmental manipulation, or was a darker hand pulling the strings from further back? And to what end would all those monies and resources be put? Financing new schemes, or putting Mexico on the edge of a precarious financial bubble that would leave the country defenseless when it pops?

Africa

The gamemaster has to decide which Africa to use in his game – believe it or not, the one seen in old black and white movies, in spite of the racial insensitivity and stereotypes, is rather idealized by comparison. In reality, the coming of European and western powers created new problems for local tribes and governments where once none had existed. Clans went to war, trade was disrupted, and citizens were enslaved in all but name as new boundaries were drawn and enforced by the colonists. When the Cold War began, the emerging, independent countries aligned with one of the superpowers, and the continent started fracturing and the peoples fighting among themselves as never before. The Soviet influence was felt more in the north; as one went south, lands were more likely to be joined with Western Bloc countries.

To see it on the big screen, blacks were extras, natives, and porters, and some even made it to be ship captains or bush pilots, but they were never the heroes. In the pulps, their depiction was more in keeping with cold fact: Blacks were second-class citizens. Unless the players are looking to charge the game with more social issues, GMs might want to treat the locals as they do women in a roleplaying game – equals in a sanitized view of the time.

Adventure Seeds: Countless stories were set in Africa, and with good reason. Few places were more remote, more mysterious, more exotic (though honestly much of this was superstition and prejudice). The White Man had penetrated many regions on Earth, but the heart of this continent held a special place for an American audience fascinated with what might be discovered there. It was usually smugglers, shamans with control of dark powers, and the occasional superhero.

As the “Cradle of Life,” Africa holds a symbolic position in a Kandris Seal game. Here the demons' greatest enemy (on this plane of existence, anyway) rose to prominence on the planet, and the clandestine war was underway. Was the dominance of Man the reason those otherworldly creatures targeted this planet, hoping to gain something from the misery and pain they cause sentient creatures? Did the fears people held about the unknown give psychic energy to new and horrible beings, albeit unconsciously shut away in an equally manufactured alternate reality? Or did both always exist in some form, and only now find themselves blinking at each other across the unimaginable gulf? If this is where Man truly began, does that mean this is also where he might find the final answers he needs to erase his worst fears? And if there is power to destroy the dark powers here, might they

not also find a way to finally be rid of us?

South America

South America shared Africa's fate in many ways between the 1930s and the 1950s. They were undeveloped, with many efforts on the part of the western world to make use of its vast natural resources, and as time went by people penetrated deeper and deeper into the jungles and mountains. Immigration was greater here than on the Dark Continent – the salutary climate gave rise to many resorts, hotels, and vacation spots – and the native population treated somewhat better, paralleling the history white men have had with various people of color. America propped up or supported several despots over the years there, and when the Cold War began countries once more chose sides depending on which superpower offered the better deal.

Adventure Seeds: Whites do not suffer as much from the “fish out of water” syndrome in South America as they do in Africa. The land is physically closer, easier to navigate in many places, and populated by people with whom America has long held relations in one form or another. It holds many of the same perils, though. Wherever there's poverty, there's bound to be a criminal element ready to take advantage of the unsuspecting, and perhaps willing to throw in with greater evils to better their lot.

To that end, it's worth asking the question: Who sponsors the explorations into the continent's interior? Several expeditions have been made to trace the Amazon, but there always seems to be a little further to go, or one more tributary to explore. Do the financiers behind these forays know what lies that way? Do they do the bidding of someone else, someone with a vested interest in uncovering things long since lost to the jungle's advance?

Deforestation in places like Brazil have caused a lot of environmental concern in modern times, but the process was underway at least as far back as the 1960s. What happened before that to convince people to clear lumber wholesale? It has kept the economy afloat in many cases, but there could easily be a darker purpose there. If someone's not clearing the land to get to something that lies beneath it, it may be part of a long-term plot to change the world's climate. At this point in history, the Keepers of the Broken Circle may be the only ones with any way of knowing the devastating effect such processes could have on the Earth in the long term, but if someone had the right new tool, some wizard process, like those found in the hero's arsenal...

The Soviet Union

Asia is home to a mind-boggling number of languages, small countries, dialects, and factions during this period. The most pervasive influence, however, is the Soviet Union. The result of a civil war between those seeking democracy after the fall of Nicholas II and Lenin's socialist revolutionaries, the

now-communist government took over almost every aspect of daily life. Josef Stalin took power in the 1920s, and ruled through fear, regular purges, and the promise of increased prosperity through widespread industrialization.

A series of Five Year Plans were enacted to drag the country kicking and screaming into the modern age, but too often these spelled disaster for the lowest rungs of society. There were revolts, but all were brutally put down as famine stalked the land. Nonetheless, this single-minded determination produced the desired result: a strong economy and a powerful military. These gave Stalin the strength to pursue diplomacy with the West, but when his dealings with Germany went south on him he threw his lot in with the Allies. Stalin died after the war, having knitted his country back together, but the loss of his overbearing personality left a power vacuum that was never quite filled by his successors. In 1957, Russia launched Sputnik, the first manmade object to enter orbit around the Earth, and thus realized in part some of the fanciful ideas that pulp writers and serial movies had so long fantasized about.

Adventure Seeds: The Soviet Union wasn't typically the setting of many of the stories of the day, but it did provide countless villains for our heroes. Such adversaries weren't always obvious about their national allegiances, and the studios certainly wouldn't have inserted their allies as bad guys into any wartime films. International communism was long considered a threat, however, and the antagonist might be characterized as an agent of an ill-defined “foreign power.”

Outside offering a stable of hissable villains, the country had a series of inhospitable climates and a lot of gulags. Work camps were scattered throughout Siberia, an area no one would have traveled to without being forced to do so by their government, and people were generally treated as nothing more than tools of the state. If the powers on the other side of the gate wanted to learn more about human beings, the cold, desolate expanses of the Soviet Union offered all the seclusion one could desire. What secret experiments were being tried and tested? Who were the victims, and were the successes worse off than the failures? Could the demons' representatives on Earth have tried to imbue their subjects with mystic augmentations? What lay at the bottom of the pits the work camps dug? And the Tunguska blast of 1908 – did that bring a piece of rock from space that the right scientist could fashion into a weapon against humanity's enemies? Or was that the opening salvo in a savage stream of attacks, created by foes whose exile to the dimensional abyss forces them to strike at mankind through indirect means?

Japan

Japan supported the Allies during the Great War, and following that conflict continued to build up its military. It worked to expand its holdings in the Pacific in the 20s, and it was this audacity that garnered so much outrage from the members of the League of Nations. They left under a cloud of disapproval, but found an ally in Germany, whose star was also on the rise by the mid-1930s. They opened hostilities against China, but by the early 40s they had need of new oil resources to replace those they had lost to economic

sanctions by the United States and other countries that found Japan's actions distasteful. Their resistance was whittled away during World War II until finally the detonation of two atomic bombs ended the Pacific conflict. With American assistance, they began to rebuild and became a member of the United Nations and eventually an economic powerhouse.

Adventure Seeds: The gamemaster should take care not to allow the Japanese in his game to become cheap jokes or easy targets. They spent much of the period under consideration as enemies – perhaps not with outright hostilities, but certainly with a nationalistic view of things that did not allow for interference by foreigners. Considered primitive, they were utilized as villains in the early days because it was so easy to cast them in a disparaging or condescending light.

But enemies they often were, and they have their own brand of mysticism that can be quite effective if the romantic view of their abilities is played up over the stereotypical one. They may be in charge of international secret societies, with strange rites used to call the faithful and unknown means of securing the assistance of dark beings. Plastic surgery to allow a Japanese man to pass as a white man was a standard gimmick in many war-era thrillers, and when they secured a place for themselves in the States they created a web of intrigue and associates that allowed them to move about without hindrance in American society. Surely the strange cargo they bring across the borders through their extensive transportation network can't mean anything good for the cause of liberty.

They had eyes everywhere, watching for weaknesses in the war machine. Odd forms of mesmerism would make their unfortunate victims unwitting pawns in a larger game; those under their influence would gladly open the right door at the right time or pass industrial secrets to their contacts. Would it really be such a stretch to get them to bring a series of large eggs into the complex, one at a time, in their lunch sack? Or to switch one truck laden with experimental chemicals with another containing a mind-altering gas? They could gain access to water supplies and farms, and of course the biggest prize of them all awaited them in the desert...

...the atomic bomb. The plans were MacGuffin enough for most adventures, but sooner or later someone was going

to secure the real deal and hold a whole nation hostage. If America's enemies don't get their hands on one, they'll be only too willing to employ it themselves – but in that manmade, hellish inferno, it may be that the Kandris Seal itself has finally met its match, and then mankind will need a whole lot more Watchers.

Europe

As the world moves from one all-encompassing war to another, they'll find Germany and Italy at the forefront of the fascist movement. Along with Japan these countries form the Axis powers, and challenge their neighbors here and elsewhere.

England

Once the most powerful nation on Earth, England suffered greatly from participating in the World Wars. This eventually led to the dismantling or surrender of many of its colonial

efforts, but during the pulp era it was still a vibrant part of both world politics and the literature of the time. Most pulps and serials were, by default, centered on America, but the British were always there to be a strong ally or a helpful source of aid and information. Then again, an English accent lent authority to many a dashing villain, too.

It's hard to mention any country in Europe without making mention of the Second World War, falling as it does neatly into the center of the pulp era, but there are several truly inspiring stories about the conflict and the English reactions to it. The evacuation of Dunkirk is uplifting, and the Blitz, though it hammered the city of London mercilessly, allowed Londoners to show their grit. Eventually the island nation, along with its American allies, was able to take the fight to Germany, and later rebuild its cities.

Adventure Seeds: The veddy proper British are welcome mainstays in the pulps. They're just as good as Americans with a left jab and an uppercut, and they do it all with style and those marvelous accents.

The evacuation of Dunkirk after the Germans pushed the French and English to the French coast in 1940 entailed a fleet of ships from several allied nations (and not a few civilian vessels) taking anyone they could carry to relative



safety across the English Channel. No doubt soldiers “in the know” about the Broken Circle took with them whatever items or information they could lay their hands on. The aerial bombardment of the area, ostensibly to kill the trapped troops, may have been a smokescreen for some powers to look for those soldiers carrying forbidden magical devices. An entire adventure set a year or two later, perhaps during preparations for Operation: Sealion, could revolve around the heroes trying to figure out what the deaths of several men had in common. Each had been transporting a piece of lore the demons want, and now they’ve come to collect it.

The Blitz, also a testament to British resolve, drove many citizens into the London Underground. With nothing to do but wait out the assault from German planes, someone could have had time to find old tombs or catacombs in these structures. Then again, something may have had time to find them. Now the heroes aren’t just trying to save their own skins from the Blitz, they’re trying to keep a mystically imbued serial killer from claiming another victim on the next night of the raids. And what if the Germans got wind of a secret source of power dating back to the time of the druids? The bombings could be an attempt to dislodge it so it’s easier to find and take it once Sealion hits the coast, or they could be Germany’s best bet to bury the secret, keeping them from finding and using it in the war effort. Finally, for a twist, what if a small cadre of well-meaning and illuminated German airmen know there’s something chaos-tainted there, but cannot convince their superiors of it (or do not wish to tempt their power-mad commanders)? Rather than see it come to light, they subtly manipulate the bombing runs to attack the evil, hoping to kill as few British as possible while saving the rest of humanity.

Germany

Germany’s story was surprisingly like so many others around the globe. They were coming into this period off a revolution, communists were at odds with the Nazi party, and the Great Depression was bearing down hard on everyone. Germany was especially hard hit since it had been saddled with the blame for the last war and reparations were killing their economy. Spurred on by public opinion and downward-spiraling social conditions, the government appointed Adolf Hitler chancellor of Germany. Hitler geared up for war, saving his country’s economy, but began annexing nearby lands, putting Germany at odds with its neighbors. Finally, the invasion of Poland sparked the Second World War.

When the dust cleared, Germany had been split into different zones for all its invaders. The Soviet Union kept its half of the country behind an enormous wall while its erstwhile allies joined theirs together. West Germany started bringing its economy back up to speed, and the Cold War had begun.

Adventure Seeds: If ever there was a perfect fit for the villain of the piece, it was the Nazis. Sprinkled liberally throughout the genre, it’s hard to find someone less sympathetic for audiences to boo. Hitler’s quest for strange and occult objects was, if not entirely historically accurate, at least too inviting for fiction writers not to pick up on. And

what of this secret history? Did Hitler last as long as he did because he sided with the forces of evil? Would the Keepers have been as quick to make a deal with someone not as unbalanced as “der Fuehrer”? As insightful as he was, maybe Hitler had something that actually kept the creatures at bay – or bent them to his will. What became of such items when Berlin fell? Were they hidden beneath rubble and bulldozed under, or did someone else take them and spirit them away, to be used anew when the finder divines the purpose of their discovery? Worse yet to consider...could Hitler or one of his closest advisors actually be one of these foul things, working to release the rest of his brethren? So many of the inner circle were executed or took their own lives. Where does that leave the disembodied specter that once inhabited their body?

Italy

With all of Europe still reeling from war and economic depression, it was easy for the people to see a fascist dictator as the solution to all their problems. Mussolini didn’t enter into his reign with a heavy hand, but to solidify his power he eventually enacted policies that left him the unquestioned leader of the Italian people. Even other national figures didn’t quite see him for what he was becoming, and he held his position far earlier than Hitler.

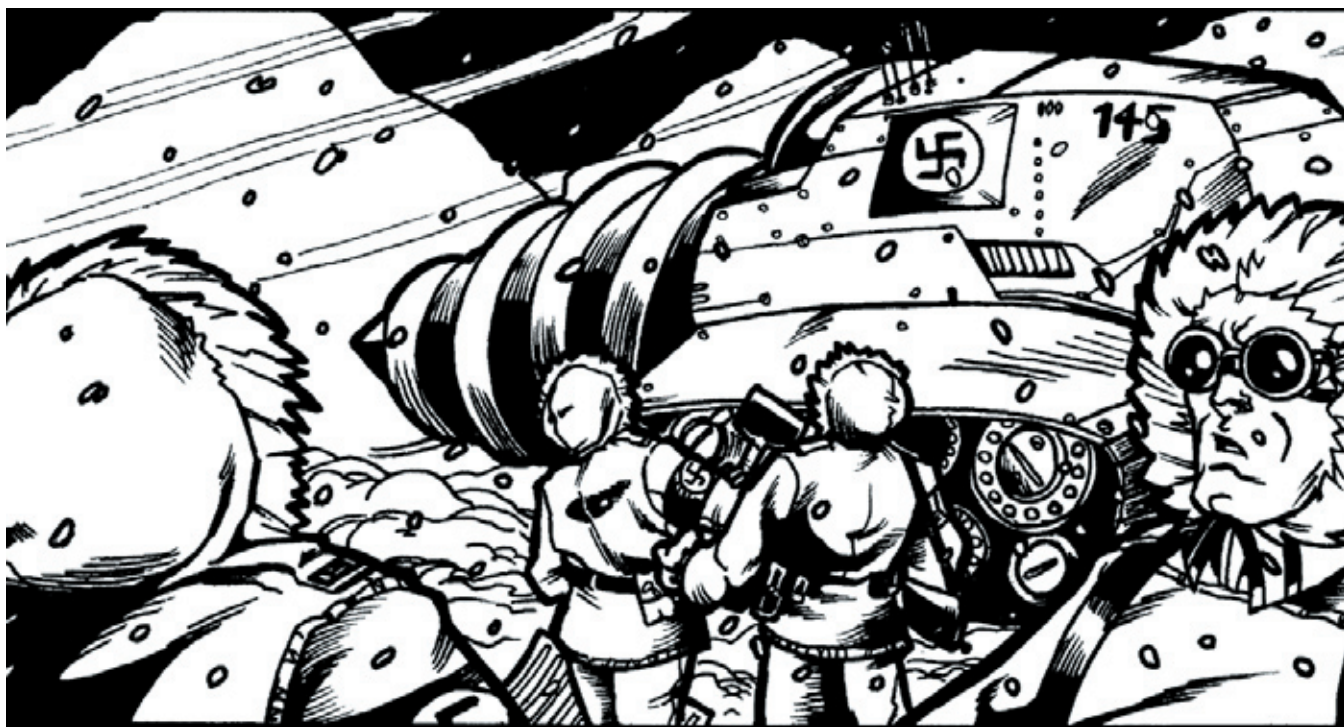
Italy annexed some neighboring lands in much the same way Hitler did, but Mussolini was a poor imitation of and of limited use to the German leader. In 1943 Italy suffered the first of several invasions, and became the destabilized scene of much warfare. It finally fell when the people revolted, and was later made a republic. Like many other European countries, it benefited greatly from the Marshall Plan in the postwar period.

Adventure Seeds: Italy has always been the site of much art and culture, and on a long enough timeline those both would have seen the influence of the powers of evil. Attempts to steal valuable artifacts would have been made easier in the chaos of war, but so would attempts to remove the memory of their existence. These fabulous pieces could be conduits for all manner of foul spells, or may harbor the spirits of minor demons and imps.

Multiple invasions during the last few years of the war could be the result of rising and falling fortunes on both sides of the mystic struggle, or it could simply be a way for mankind’s enemies to obliterate all trace of uncovered temples, revealed runes, and failed rites. Then again, humans could effect the same devastation in hopes of preventing their species from having to deal with some arcane, mind-altering horror. This might then pave the way for the Marshall Plan to pursue its noble work, solidifying humanity’s resolve against future evils no matter their origin.

The Poles

Some of the most precarious environments in the world are to be found literally at the ends of the Earth. The two poles may not hold the same fascination for men as the unexplored hearts of jungles or mountain plateaus, but they represent an irresistible challenge for explorers nonetheless.



The South Pole

Antarctica was believed to exist long before anyone actually laid eyes on it. It was finally spotted in the early 19th century, but exploration didn't begin in earnest until the early 20th century. By the time of the pulps, Admiral Richard Byrd was leading air expeditions over the continent and establishing overland transport. In 1956, the first aircraft was landed.

Adventure Seeds: The heroes could be the spearhead of a military effort to establish a base camp at the South Pole, or they could be here at the behest of the Thaumaturgia. It's a good hiding place for anything that doesn't care for living in the public eye, and the team may find prehistoric evidence of the Keepers. Worse, suppose the early indicators are that the continent has actually expanded a few inches, and the pace seems to be accelerating? A snow demon could live at the pole, and as it senses humans drawing closer, it has begun to lower temperatures worldwide – soon the whole planet could be caught in the icy grip of a powerful beast that seeks to turn it into its own vast habitat.

The North Pole

Unlike Antarctica, there is no land mass at the Arctic, and the “pole” is usually used simply as a reference point for scholars, scientists, astronomers, and so on. This point on the map was reached by both ship and plane during the pulp era, and so still represents an effort by men to reach thitherto unexplored waters. The area remains an open question even today, with no one certain how to adjudicate the surrounding waters.

Adventure Seeds: Okay, maybe not the best setting for an adventure, but if the gamemaster wishes to use this region as a site for a story, he has a few options. The action could take place aboard a ship headed for the pole. It may be part of a

scientific expedition, or the PCs might be the adventurous sorts of daredevils who simple want to do (or go) what (or where) no one else has done (or gone) before. GMs should play up the remoteness, the utter helplessness should things go wrong. Even if someone hears a radio broadcast for help, their ship may be unsuited or ill-equipped to take on a rescue mission in such a perilous and unfamiliar place. Throw in a trio of mages posing as hands aboard the craft so they can reach yet another iconic marker of mystic power, and you've got a party. There could be enormous beasts lurking beneath the waves here, or perhaps there's an underwater city that finds itself in its own civil war, with half the people hoping to call up old ones using ancient rites.

Fictional Locations

Not every adventure took place in the real world – sometimes it was a little more fanciful than that. The GM is encouraged to come up with his own view of some or all of the locations mentioned here, and to populate those places with societies, creatures, and beings all his own.

Outer Space

Every kid who ever read an Edgar Rice Burroughs tale wanted to slip the surly bonds of Earth and punch the face of a Martian. Though most of the serials took place on terra firma, this was mostly because of budgetary constrictions. It was cheaper to have the aliens come to you rather than vice versa. But occasionally someone got to go into space, and when they did there were two popular destinations.

The Moon

Our closest neighbor, the moon just made good sense. People figured we could at least make it that far. But what would we find when we arrived there? Movies suggested a race of people bent on taking over the Earth, softening us up first with some dropped weapons or special rays. It could be that our arrival is a stab at colonization, though such expeditions are invariably misunderstood by the people who already live there. It could be populated by a people far simpler and more primitive than ourselves, in which case there's bound to be a lot of dancing by men and women wearing very little, and intrigued by the idea of closer relations with the Earthmen. The campaign could involve repeated trips back and forth between the two bodies to make reports, get reinforcements or new instructions, or restock the supplies. On the other hand, it could be that the team has crash-landed here and has to wait (read: survive long enough) for rescue; the group has to rebuild their damaged ship; or the crew is made of sterner stuff and intends to solve these problems armed with pistols and a stiff upper lip. The second option makes the PCs work for their successes, since there won't be any relief coming.

As the object of many a nightly Earthbound worship service, there must be something magical about the place, but Man probably didn't think he'd find out about that magical something by stepping on its head. The demons might have gone to the moon for solitude or to regroup after losing an ancient war to some forgotten civilization, or they may have originated somewhere out in the stars and the moon was the first spot the came across. Our bold intrusions have now awakened them.

Adventure Seeds: America isn't the only nation that wants to get in on the action on the moon. Several other countries may want to colonize it, too, and an early form of space race is on. For an even stranger setup (and this is in no way out of keeping with the writing of the time), a group of gangsters could want the moon, or part of it, for a secret base from which to run guns or booze. All they need is the financing for the rocket, or a secret mastermind who knows how to secure illicit funding. No matter who gets there first, they have to contend with a covert installation already in place, a sort of mystic orrery that keeps track not only of the planetary movements but of the movements of various magically empowered people and things on Earth. Securing this device for humanity gives the Thaumaturgia a fighting chance at uncovering some of the more elusive enemy positions and plots.

Mars

Has any planet ever had it out for us more than the denizens of the Red Planet? Whatever we did to them must have been pretty harsh, because they've had a mad on for us since time immemorial. Innumerable beings have descended upon us from the fourth planet, most out to inflict harm, but if you don't want to wait around...

Where the moon is a rocky landscape covered with sharp, craggy cliffs, Mars is depicted more as a red and dusty desert,

with tall but gently sloping mountains that nevertheless could have been fashioned from a fever dream as easily as wind-drifted sand. The choice of whether to set one's campaign on the moon or Mars is really mostly a matter of choice (both were filmed somewhere that looks suspiciously like the California Desert). Our ideas of what these places must look like were often colored by the fiction of the time, and movies just borrowed from that. But where the moon is presented as quiet and enigmatic, Mars seems to seethe just beneath the surface with a barely contained heat. Something used to live here, and it may even now just be sleeping.

Adventure Seeds: The Martians are a martial people, to be sure, but that's because they've learned not to trust. Their civilization is far older than our own, and left to themselves they might well have taken over the whole solar system by now. Unfortunately, while Man was still learning to hit one rock against another rock, the rich Martian culture caught the attention of the Keepers. Anxious for victims, they took over Mars, enslaving its people and making them build up a military for later use. Then they waited for Earth to show the right stuff, at which point the demons had a new plaything. The Martians' greatest accomplishment, sadly for them, is an enormous ray they have been building under the strict guidance of the elder beasts. When completed (about 12 chapters from now), the demons will train the machine on Earth and anything evil that bathes in its invisible light will increase its strength one hundredfold. The people of Mars make every attempt to kill the intruders, though the good guys can count on a few hardy souls who still know what it means to fight. If they pull off some sabotage on the device, the demons can be ousted or placed once more beyond the Seal, and diplomatic channels between the Red Planet and Earth can begin.

Looking Inward

Some threats are right under your feet (or beneath your boat's hull). The Keepers and their masters have been around for centuries, and they and other cultures may be slumbering in the least explored areas on Earth.

Underwater

Whether it's the lost continent of Atlantis or your girlfriend's scientist-father's whacky theory, you can bet humans are only masters of their domain on land. Someone or something else rules the ocean's floor, and they may no longer be satisfied with their living arrangements. Seeing the continents as their rightful due (and to be fair, they probably had a land-bound society at some point in the past), they muster their forces and attack port cities.

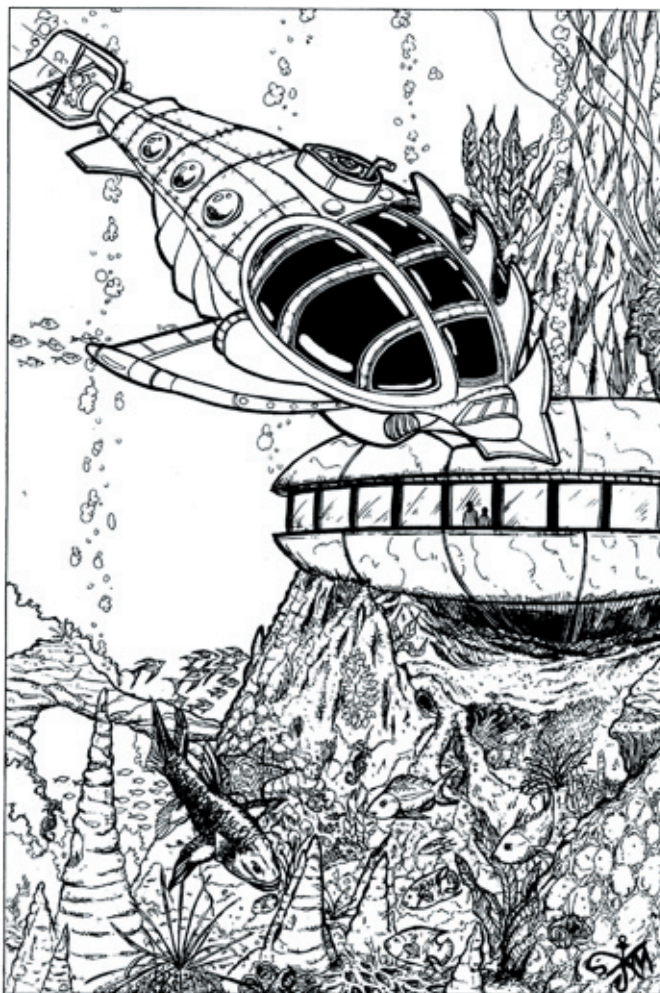
Adventure Seeds: Not only are there ancient tablets that speak of this lost land (dad's crazy theories had to start somewhere, right?), those stone runes may also mention the evil that drove the people of the sunken world to hide there. If humanity is truly lucky, collecting a complete set of these tablets tells how to destroy the hated beings once and for all.

Underground

People are used to digging down and finding something they didn't expect, but occasionally something meets them halfway. Every pulp author worth his meager paycheck knocked out an underground kingdom story at some point. These "mole men" as they're usually called aren't used to the bright light of day (sunlight can often blind them), but that doesn't stop them from trying to take over the surface world. Their arrival is heralded by the whine of a drill mounted atop an armored tank of some sort, allowing them to disrupt our lives and security by destroying train tracks and sinking trucks. Their caverns are well-lit despite their enormous size, and they instinctively know which tunnels lead to wherever it is they want to go.

Uncovering something from the other world will probably happen when a mole man takes a wrong turn or crashes into a wall after a fight. It may also be that a human commandeers one such vehicle as part of his heroic duty, but his unfamiliarity with the controls takes him into a hidden chamber and through the protective rune that kept it there. (If you'd like to absolve your heroes from that kind of embarrassment, the sniveling and untrustworthy lackey who keeps demanding to know where the diamonds are is the one who takes the driller, and of course he's going to crash it – he's a self-serving B-list actor.)

Adventure Seeds: Precious stones abound within the Earth, and some, especially if they've spent a geological epoch or two bathing in baleful energies, can be arranged so precisely they'll collapse tunnels, hollow out the area under entire cities, or perhaps even flood the entire surface world with magma. Humanity is given a choice: Become the slaves of the demonic race and allow the Kandris Seal to open, or face complete and utter destruction. Can the party turn this device against their enemies in time? Use it to bury them once more? Or, armed with what they've seen of the crystals in action, can the scientists in the party come up with a counter-theory about how to reverse the effect, or even alter it to something humans can use against the monsters?



Lost Worlds

The dinosaurs are never truly extinct in a pulp setting. They're always out there, munching on bushes on a forsaken plateau hidden deep in a jungle. What brings man there – curiosity, a plane crash, a dizzying network of tunnels – is less important than how he gets out again, and what he has to do while he's there. Lost tribes often accompany these creatures,

though with demonic influence there may be other reasons why the lizard population remains extant.

Oh, and if the existence of the lost world is too inconvenient for the game, there was never a plateau that couldn't be made to crumble under the force of a massive volcanic eruption.

Adventure Seeds: Having been around as long as some of the horrors behind the Seal, perhaps dinosaurs and demons are two "species" that took different evolutionary paths. The great lizards may possess some genetic markers that make them useful to someone outside the scientific curiosity provided by their very existence – what could be gleaned from dissecting critters that once shared the planet with imps and other monsters? The Keepers of the Broken Circle may have once used the animals as mounts or cannon fodder in early conflicts. Could scientific research turn them against their former

masters? This assumes the characters are okay with the ethics of making a poor dumb animal do their bidding instead of the will of their previous tormentors.

Timeline

For the sake of convenience, this timeline of events only covers the years between 1930 (okay, 1928) and 1960, the heyday of the pulps, movie serials, and radio dramas. The world of *The Kandris Seal* extends beyond these limits, of course, so GMs are encouraged to establish what happened before this period as a lead-in to the adventures they have planned. Deciding what comes after isn't as important – the players are going to help you write that – but you can jot a few notes down about the 1960s if you want to steer your plots a little bit.

A complete timeline is impossible, and a number of things are omitted or glossed over. What is here are some of the truly notable events, people, and inventions. Scattered within, some hints (read: blunt suggestions) at adventure hooks. The GM doesn't have to use these, but they should show how history can be appropriated for use as a backdrop to the games.

1928

Herbert Hoover elected president.

1929

The Great Depression starts when the bottom drops out of the wildly successful stock market. A boon for cheap entertainment only, it paralyzes the United States (and the rest of the world) for years. That same year sees the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, in which members of "Bugs" Moran's gang are gunned down in a Chicago garage; Alphonse "Scarface" Capone is almost certainly behind it, and heroes have their hands full trying to maintain order, help the police with damage control, and reining in the violence before an all-out mob war explodes into the streets. They have help in print (and soon radio) from Gibson's *The Shadow* (the actual date of his debut is the subject of some debate).

1930

The first transatlantic opera is broadcast from Europe in New York via shortwave radio. Dashiell Hammett's noir classic *The Maltese Falcon*, one of the iconic private detective novels, is published and inspires several insightful men and women to hang out their shingles as professional gumshoes. All speak in clipped, witty phrases. Pluto, only theoretical at first, is identified as the ninth planet in the solar system. No word as to how soon we can expect attacks.

1931

Heavy water, later useful in the development of the atomic energy program, is developed, and the origins of certain superheroes are underway in a flash. The first nonstop flight over the Pacific Ocean is completed; only later flights would

have the leisure to search for hidden underwater fortresses and temples from a bygone age. Al Capone is indicted, not for his many notable crimes as a gangster but for income tax evasion. He later is released from prison to live his final days mentally incapacitated by, and dying of, syphilis. Heroes throughout Chicago nod appreciatively and take notes as they begin to see alternative methods to bringing down their foes.

1932

Franklin Delano Roosevelt is elected president. The Lindbergh baby is kidnapped, and vigilantes everywhere mourn the loss. Realizing they cannot be everywhere at once, they vow to redouble their efforts in service to those who cannot fight for themselves. The neutron is discovered, and several personalities on both sides of the law begin a race to take the name for their own purposes.



1933

In America, the Great Depression looms large. The president asks congress for New Deal powers to manage the situation more fluidly. Projects like the Tennessee Valley Act get underway, and a few rangers cut their crime-fighting teeth on defending the projects from anarchists. Prohibition is also repealed, lightening the burden on those heroes trying to keep the power of mob bosses and their cronies in check, though it will be decades before the last "dry" state gives up that coveted status.

The first all-original aircraft carrier, the USS Ranger, is christened, ushering in new ways for the flyboys to get up in the air.

Across the Atlantic Hitler comes to power, installed as the new German chancellor by political rivals who are trying to curb the power he and his followers are building among many important supporters. Some elements of society are rightfully suspicious of the man's motives, but cannot move against him on their misgivings alone. Suffice to say, Hitler's new position was the birth not only of a villain but some great heroes as well.

1934

Mobster John Dillinger is shot dead in Chicago, a feat some were beginning to think was impossible for the incredibly resilient gangster. Whether he possessed

superpowers or was blessed – or cursed – by some darker art is a matter for historians to debate. In a similar vein, Dashiell Hammett's mystery *The Thin Man* featuring fictional detectives Nick and Nora Charles is published. It is his last novel.

1935

A massive project is begun to bring electrical power to many non-urban areas. Most locations at this point have their own stations or generators, or are hooked into the grids of other, better funded communities nearby. This system is expected to meet the power needs of outlying areas better, and to provide more stable coverage for small towns. This grants something of a boon to potential evildoers who will have this resource available to them in their most isolated bases, but imaginative heroes will find uses for the system as well.

1936

Germany, attempting to subtly annex lands in Europe, takes the Rhineland peaceably. This does not sate its desires, though, and der Fuhrer continues to cast hungry eyes further afield as wary heroes shift uncomfortably in their chairs. Italy follows its example, taking over Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa. In Spain, a civil war breaks out. As the situation deteriorates in Europe, adventurers begin making plans as well should the worst occur. In America, the population is already beginning to split over the Spanish violence; some are gun-shy after the Great War, while others do not wish to see the United States wait as long as it did then before stepping in and trying to make a difference. One mixed blessing out of that side of the Pond: The Hindenburg makes the first transatlantic zeppelin flight. Such events won't end as well the following year.

The first serial adventure of Flash Gordon plays at movie houses.

1937

Germany begins to rearm in unabashed defiance of the agreements held over from the last war; indeed, Hitler is congratulated for showing such progress in the reconstitution of his country. Japan and China continue their hostilities as well, though on the world stage their misadventures are of less interest to occidental authorities. They do garner western attention when a United States gunboat in the Celestial Empire is sunk by Japanese airplanes, and the apology they receive for the incident is only a temporary balm.

Almost a year to the day the Hindenburg, landing at the same field where last it moored when completing its historic flight, explodes into flames. An embargo on American helium to Germany forced the flight crews there to use highly flammable hydrogen gas, and in mere moments the entire vehicle was ablaze, killing three dozen people including one crewman on the ground. Theories abound as to what caused the accident. Some have suggested lightning, others a spark within the ship's own inner workings, and still others

sabotage. This last isn't something anyone wants to accept – especially if it signals the beginning of a series of plots by some secret mastermind – but the whole matter will pale in comparison with German issues a mere two years down the road.

Radio continues to rise in popularity as a medium for entertainment, and America hears the first program broadcast across the entire nation. That same year, the United States also carries and hears the first worldwide radio broadcast. In San Francisco the Golden Gate Bridge is completed and opened to traffic, and almost immediately west-coast heroes have to worry about threats to destroy it.

1938

Germany's hunger is unabated. Hitler annexes Austria and the Sudetenland, including some forts that could conceivably threaten his new holdings along the border.

In more inspiring events from the American home front, pilot and financier Howard Hughes manages to circumnavigate the globe in just under four days in his airplane. In somewhat related news, the Civil Aeronautics Authority is established and placed in charge of all issues related to air travel, including but not limited to: licenses and planes available, the dispensation of cargo, and the travels of aircraft.

America pays the price for radio's newfound power and influence in the daily lives of its citizens. One day before Halloween, Orson Wells and his players in the Mercury Theatre stage an audio production of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*. Instead of using England as the backdrop, however, the aliens in this drama arrive in the small town of Grover's Mill, New Jersey. So realistic is the script, and so powerful the medium (and so sly Wells' prank) that listeners don't realize the whole thing is a radio show. People take to the streets in a panic.

An early version of radar is produced, a technology that will aid Britain during the gathering storm and provide many a hero with the basis for a new set of powers. Sadly the system is still emerging, else it might have been able to detect whether anything strange really did come down out of the skies during the alarming events of Mr. Wells' broadcast...

1939

The hostilities in Europe begin in earnest with Hitler's invasion of Poland. Those who attempted to appease him see this only gets them so far, and Britain declares it will honor its agreements with the blindsided nation. Although they have not yet joined the fray, America suffers another blow to its people and its neutrality when several citizens are lost on the sub *Athenia*, sunk by enemy forces. Acts like this and the Japanese attack the previous year have some people (and some heroes in their guise as playboys) demanding action from their government, but still no one is willing to break isolation for the sake of Europe's troubles. Oddly, the Neutrality Act does allow the sale of weapons to foreign powers, adding up to a great deal of ambiguity in the minds of many as to how the whole situation is going to be handled,

if it's handled at all outside a lot of profit for a few wealthy industrialists and other entrepreneurs.

The atom is split this year, in several substances in fact, keeping up further developments on the nuclear program. FM radio is also discovered this year, though AM continues to enjoy great popularity and most of the technical efforts are geared toward improving that format. Pan American Airlines begins regular transatlantic passenger service, giving heroes access to adventures on shores father away and offering villains rapid forms of escape or avenues to sabotage (sometimes blowing up the plane itself is useful).

1940

With a firm stranglehold on much of Europe, the emboldened Hitler begins bombing runs over London. He hopes to shatter the spirits of the populace and soften the military up enough that Operation: Sealion would allow his troops to take over the island nation. People take to the underground, to bunkers, and to the countryside, to escape as the Battle of Britain is waged, with radar and a handful of pulp-styled adventurers two of the few advantages the English have against the aerial invaders.

Though not yet part of the war America institutes a draft, the first one created during a time of peace; a series of bureaus are also created that would serve in a time of war should the unthinkable happen. Superman premieres on the radio, inspiring a whole new generation of would-be superheroes.

1941

Becoming more ambitious, Hitler invades Russia with whom it had maintained a delicate peace. Hitler must now fight a two-front war, but he underestimates Stalin and the eastern offensive misses its crucial window. Troops and tanks are bogged down in the mud and unable to progress to Stalingrad.

America is unfortunately drawn inexorably into the war now as the Japanese, looking for new lands for bases and sources of fuel, take over several islands in the Pacific Ocean. To prevent American retaliation or resistance they stage a daring raid on the port at Pearl Harbor, sinking ships and killing thousands. America immediately calls for war with Japan, and begin tooling up their plants to make weapons. America also loses other ships to submarine aggression, and the Kearny suffers damage near Iceland. Germany and Italy declare war on the United States, and the war is in full bloom. Heroes everywhere, in uniform and out, begin pulling on gloves and masks and getting ready to do their part to hold up the American end.

1942

America finds itself spreading out across the globe to take the fight to the enemy. Not only does it begin the lengthy push to retrieve islands in the South Pacific, it arrives in North Africa to help the British. The Allies send the first V-mail, a secret form of communication that uses

the microfiche process, and test their first jet airplanes. More ominous and daunting still is the Argonne Project – scientists create the first sustained reaction, putting them one step closer to an atom bomb. With the proliferation and perfection of these new forms of technology, and more on the horizon, costumed avengers have their hands full keeping the secrets from the Allies' enemies, delivering vital components, and protecting the scientists responsible.

1943

Fighting does not end throughout the country, but Italy does surrender to the Allies. Several armies and interests take a part in the fighting, but in spite of Mussolini's liberation by a team of commandoes, the nation's practical participation in the war is over. North Africa similarly ceases to be a going concern. At this point in the war, both sides have and use radar on their ships.

1944

Germany hasn't exhausted its stores of experimental weaponry. Suffering some setbacks in their efforts, heroes behind enemy lines disable several important locations but are unable to stop Hitler's forces from employing the random but deadly V-1 and V-2 rockets. Berlin is bombed, and Allied troops land on the beaches at Normandy. Paris is liberated this same year, in part through the work of gentleman adventurers in league with Gallic soldiers and rebels; the thrill seekers came to France after the Great War to live a bohemian lifestyle, and wouldn't let the place fall too far beneath Nazi oppression without a fight. One of the oddest casualties of the war is band leader Glenn Miller, whose plane disappears during a flight over the English Channel. His whereabouts are unknown, but could be the result of a plot by the Keepers of the Broken Circle.

As it becomes clear the fight is winding down for the Axis, America starts taking a few chances, releasing wartime strictures gradually. Heroes continue to help patrol against acts of sabotage and espionage throughout the West and Southwest, though others are needed to watch over the institutions of the East as important documents like the Declaration of Independence are brought out of storage and placed back on display in their usual locations. As far as prosecuting a war is concerned the documents aren't the most compelling targets, but their loss could dishearten the populace and weaken their resolve should the fighting flare up anew.

1945

A new era of superhero origins is ushered in during the Trinity test, when the first nuclear test results in a successful nuclear explosion. President Truman assumes the reins of power when Roosevelt dies in office, finally succumbing to a lifetime of illnesses, and he makes the decision to drop the weapon on Japan. The war ultimately concludes with Berlin in shambles and two atomic weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The United Nations is in its infancy. The

Allies hold a conference in Yalta to discuss postwar plans for rebuilding, and several heroes deflect numerous plots to eliminate the participants.

In New York City an airplane crashes into the Empire State Building, highlighting for some urban superheroes the potential dangers of taking to the air in the Big Apple.

1946

The Atomic Energy Commission is established now that the genie is out of the bottle. They oversee the further development of nuclear weapons, and monitor the flow of fissionable materials. Allied power Russia alarms its fellows with its plans for expansion.

ENIAC, a room-sized computer is created, and for the first time there exists the chance that artificial intelligence will develop. Hermann Joseph Muller gets the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine. He recognizes the rise of mutations from radioactive emissions, and superheroes across the globe hope they will finally get answers about their special "gifts."

1947

Although the war is over and the long process of recovery is going strong, things aren't as rosy on American soil. A series of explosions rocks the port of Texas City, Texas. A ship fire gets out of control, and the resulting detonation spreads across the city, taking out other ships, fuel supplies, and most of the structures. In fact, the town practically ceases to exist in just three days. New York City is buried under more than two feet of snow in a blizzard that kills dozens throughout New England's coast.

Magazine sales are through the roof, with several magazines breaking the one-million sales mark. Mickey Spillaine writes *I, the Jury*, keeping the plight of the gumshoe in the public spotlight. Pan American Airlines is first again, this time creating the first regular passenger air service that circles the entire globe. Chuck Yeager breaks the sound barrier in an aircraft. New schemes arise from these developments, but magazines wouldn't sell as well if there weren't heroes with a thrilling tale to be told, so few of those machinations meet with success.

1948

Communists become a bugaboo in the halls of American lawmaking. Across the Pond, the Allies split in an obvious way when the Soviets attempt to block traffic in and out of Berlin. America, with the help of some stealthy heroes and secret agents, airlifts and smuggles supplies into the city.

The Polaroid camera is invented, offering photographers a chance to get some of those elusive good guys on film and check their findings almost immediately.

1949

Russia reveals it has nuclear weapons, and the arena

in which heroes must fight espionage and criminal masterminds expands exponentially. The United States removes almost all the forces they had remaining in Korea after the war, but they will be forced to return sooner than they think.

Work begins on the United Nations Building in New York City on a tract of land donated by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. With the millions of dollars involved in the purchase, the sensitive principle participants, and the delicious target it all presents, it's a small miracle the edifice ever gets finished in the face of mounting threats from daring villains.

The Lucky Lady II, an Air Force craft refueling in the air, makes the first non-stop circumnavigation of the globe. Carbon dating is discovered, and the implications for dinosaurs on lost plateaus and the classification of several old runes and magic devices held by the Thaumaturgia and the Keepers of the Broken Circle are incalculable.



1950

The United States reluctantly returns in force to Korea, but this time the war is inside the borders. Truman gives consent for the development of the hydrogen bomb and L. Ron Hubbard writes *Dianetics*, offering two more origin stories to pulp writers.

1951

The United Nations building officially opens, and without incident, most of the dire plots having been dealt with during its construction.

UNIVAC is built by some of the team that originally created ENIAC; they believe the advances made in science since then will limit the potential for the machines gaining self-awareness, but the increased technology makes this more likely, not less.

Idahoans are the first to receive electricity from an atomic-powered generator station. Never much of a hotspot, Idaho now keeps heroes busy.

1952

Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected president. America suffers its first wave of Unidentified Flying Object sightings, but by no means the last. The aliens are no longer making clandestine forays into Earth's airspace, though the reasons for their boldness are unknown.

Teams set a new record, crossing the Atlantic Ocean in only three and a half days, making it somewhat harder for those things that lurk below to catch up with them.

1953

Senator Joseph McCarthy claims he has proof of Soviets in positions of power subverting the American Dream with their unsavory presence. Most of the people he identifies as communists have long since made their sympathies known. Streetwise detectives and spies shake their heads, not sure whether this makes their attempts to keep the United States safe from its most enigmatic enemies – the real enemies – easier or harder.

The Rosenbergs are put to death for selling nuclear secrets, creating an uproar, and thus begin decades of second-guesses.

America also creates jet-propelled guided missiles, and fires the first atomic energy shell. Villains everywhere begin rubbing their hands together in evil delight.

1954

One of the programs Eisenhower asks for is the creation of a complete highway infrastructure within America's borders. There is no truth to the rumor that one mile in five was to be built perfectly straight to allow planes to land in time of war. That doesn't stop masterminds from attempting to make money off the scheme at one extreme, however, and followers of the Keepers of the Broken Circle from trying to "guide" the government's efforts to match the roads to ley lines at the other.

Eisenhower also asks permission to share secrets from America's atomic energy research with those allies the country trusts, and publicly announces the hydrogen explosion generated in 1952. The first atomic sub is commissioned; it will be christened the Nautilus and may represent the first chance the world gets to uncover Atlantis

or other underwater civilizations. The first supersonic bomber is also commissioned, making destruction of enemy targets a whole lot faster.

Comic books and pulp magazines come under fire from family groups, churches, and even elected officials. They are looked upon as violent, graphic, and overly suggestive.

1955

Comic book sales exceed one billion (that's billion with a "B"), and laws concerning what age groups can actually buy books containing certain disreputable scenes are passed in New York City.

1956

It's a banner year for adventurers, at least so far as scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements are concerned. Funding for the interstate highway system comes through in the form of the Federal-Aid Highway Act. For the first time a helicopter traverses the entire continental United States. Americans and British are connected with transatlantic phone cables, and another hero-creating device, the transistor, is honored with the Nobel Prize for Physics.

On the other hand, Columbia Pictures, the last holdout in week-to-week thrillers, presents their final movie serial.

1957

Americans are horrified to find the Soviets have launched Sputnik, the first manmade satellite, into orbit. Not only does it portend severe changes in technology, Man's reach for space, and political maneuvering, it's also another concern for spies and the beginning of a boon for paranoid fanatics and conspiracy theorists. John Glenn does manage to hold up the American end with a new speed record – he crosses the continent in three hours and change.

Less wholesome is the first underground nuclear detonation at Las Vegas, Nevada. Good news for humans who don't need any more radioactive fallout drifting through the atmosphere; bad news for the mole people living beneath our feet. Anxious to take out their frustrations on those responsible, there is a spike in attacks from various subterranean peoples and acts of sabotage on the surface.

Jack Soble gets seven years in prison for having spied for the Soviets and passing national secrets to them. Mob gang "Murder, Inc." is damaged when the leader, Umberto "Albert" Anastasia is executed in a barber's chair. Once again heroes and private dicks on the mean streets find their plates full trying to keep the violence from spilling over into the innocent neighboring communities.

1958

The Van Allen Belt, a field surrounding the Earth that prevents the planet from being cooked by the sun and cosmic radiation, is discovered by the various devices sent into space in the last couple of years. No one can explain the strange

stirrings, the almost deliberate movement of various particles in that field, shifting as though following some unnamable pattern.

NASA is established to deal with the new Space Race in which America finds itself embroiled. It isn't long before enemy super spies try to infiltrate its ranks and glean what they can about their scientific investigations.

The transatlantic record, once a question of days, is now performed in hours. The trip takes the new record holders only a little more than five hours.

1959

For once a rocket finds a peaceful use. An Atlas missile is shot into the air, and President Eisenhower's voice is transmitted from that device back to the ground, where it is recorded and rebroadcasted. Between this and the satellite coverage, villains are finding there are ways to affect the entire Earth, methods that can be performed from almost anywhere on Earth if you have the right codes and ciphers.

The orbital miracles don't stop there. Monkeys are successfully launched into the stratosphere, and one or more of them may have undergone an "origin." The final fate of the monkeys is unknown. They were thought to be mere lab animals who would not return, but NASA did not take into account the efforts of super-intelligent apes in hidden cities deep in the most isolated areas on Earth. Some reports have them rescuing the creatures through methods unknown.

Humans continue to travel better too; Pan American Airlines offers passenger service to travel anywhere on the globe (separate from the "round-the-world" trips they began in 1947). Another presidential speech is delivered, but this time the radio signal is reflected off the moon and transmitted worldwide.

The USS George Washington is commissioned; it will be the first to both carry and fire nuclear weapons.

1960

John F. Kennedy is elected president.

Another stage of the Cold War starts when Francis Gary Powers, flying a super secret U-2 spy plane, is shot down over Russia. America admits Powers was part of a spying program using the device.

Radio and television both take hits from the Payola and Quiz Show scandals. Heroic adventures take a backseat to the news.

America fires a missile a record 9,000 miles, from Florida to the end of Africa. An early warning satellite is launched in hopes of anticipating missile launches from enemy silos. This time, a phone call is reflected from the moon. And whatever innocence the pulps once had continues its marked drop in a newer and more cynical landscape.

Chapter Eight

Thrills! Chills! Adventure!

Creating Adventures

The wind hummed quietly across the slip as Bentley checked the gas in the little boat's tank. "Are we really going to cross the channel in this tiny thing?" asked Sandra, poking the stern with one high-heeled toe. "I mean, the waves seem awfully choppy." She couldn't see the land on the other side, and for a moment she found herself considering the absurd notion that it was no longer there.

"That's why the Coast Guard is here to keep you safe, ma'am." He saluted. "Biggs Bentley, at your service." Sandra smiled in spite of herself. Bentley had been the only good thing to happen since Alvin Lafferty had invited the lot of them to dinner at his imposing retreat. This island had been nothing but a deathtrap this week, with Lafferty in that ridiculous skull-faced getup attempting to kill off his guests one by one, and she was determined not to be the next victim.

"Okay, hero, don't let me keep you." She continued to watch the stars disappear behind a sheet of even darker clouds, and the waves began to lap with a bit more hunger at the dock's pylons. What did Alvin want? He'd been making eyes at her all weekend, but all his conversation was about her father's shipping business.

A scuffling noise in the darkness behind them jolted them both to attention. In a moment, Bentley was by her side, holding her arm. She smiled, pulling a small pistol from her purse. Between the two of them, Sandra and the officer had killed a dozen thugs on their host's payroll. "Easy there, hero. I wouldn't want you to get hurt." Bentley smiled back grimly,

and the two peered into the nothingness. Sandra's gun arm went rigid for a moment, then relaxed as Billy and Rex slipped from the curtain of shadow. Rex yipped excitedly.

"Billy! Thank heavens you're safe. When we saw you fall...well, good heavens, what is it with the men on this island trying to get themselves shot?" She hugged him and petted Rex.

"What is it with the women trying to shoot the men on this island?" Bentley asked, returning to his preparations.

Another noise, less subtle, and Alvin Lafferty swept clumsily into the half-light, falling to the ground at their feet. Sandra's gun arm did not waver this time. "Lafferty," she hissed. "You I will shoot."

"Help me," he begged, throwing panicked glances over his shoulder.

"s'matter, Alvin? Forget to sign the paychecks?" But she sounded uncertain as steady scuffles came from beyond. There was a flare of light, and a torch sprang to life. It lit up a circle of the rough, stony beach, and at the center was the skull-faced figure surrounded by several men. Sandra saw that they were all hollow-eyed caricatures of the creeps she and Bentley had killed – their clothes were stained with blood, but still they swayed forward slowly. Zombies. She looked uncertainly at her weapon.

"Alvin does not give the orders here," a voice said from beyond the unreadable skeletal mask. "That is reserved for the Rictus."

Putting it All Together

Chapter Two told you what you'll find in a pulp story and how to turn the Kandris Seal setting into a Pulp Kandris campaign using theme, mood, and setting. This chapter will reveal how to pace the adventures so they feel like you're living a life on-screen for 10 minutes at a time. It starts with a fully outlined game, chapter by chapter, showing you how to plan for a whole series, then adds elements that should make the adventure run smooth – or at least as smooth as things ever go for the heroes.

Serial Chapters Outline

The chapter format used by the old movie serials is a great way to establish some pacing for your Pulp Kandris game. While you can't recreate the theater experience exactly using a roleplaying game, you can get awfully close. This section presents some toips on how to create such a ladder of adventure seeds, as well as outlining one potential serialized storyline. This can be used as a template for later games (and incidentally, that was often the way the more formulaic storylines were created for the movies).

Serials usually ran between 10 and 15 chapters, one per week at small movie houses, and they were designed to bring

the kids back for each new showing. Every installment ended in a cliffhanger to maximize tension and anticipation.

Each week's episode began with a quick recap of what all the major players in the drama were up to. Take a moment after each session (or just before the next) to write a few lines down – it was rarely longer than that in the theater – and read, as imposingly as your narrative skills allow, “When Last We Left Our Story...” It charges up the players and gets them into the mood.

This outline goes chapter by chapter through a sample pulp adventure. The bits of advice scattered throughout don't need to happen in this order, and not all of them have to occur at all. They're just popular themes that run through many such stories, and most are bound to come up at some point, if not here then in the next exciting installment. They should help you skip over or at least anticipate some of the trickier conflicts or clichés you and your players might butt heads over. If everyone knows a bit about what to expect, it won't chafe as much when the issue arises.

After each chapter title (yes, they were really this goofy – and often worse) comes some advice on progressing the story. There should be one major goal but many ways for players to achieve it, so if they cunningly skip something, bravo. An example of some of these ideas or the story threads that probably ought to crop up about then are listed as examples. Finally, a possible cliffhanger is provided to keep your friends on the edge of their seats until the next session.

Chapter 1: The Villain Strikes!

Introductions all around. In the first chapter, we're treated to the villain's first crime, often the sort of thing that establishes for the heroes that he's here, he's serious, he has the resources to carry out his plans, and everyone had better get out of his way. Sometimes the bad guys weren't so overt, especially if their scheme involved some degree of subtlety, and the heroes or some law enforcement official stumbles onto the first hints of the plot. If it's a land grab, for example, the villain isn't going to tip his hand – not to the home team, anyway. The audience knows what's going on because the mastermind does a little exposition about how wonderful his plan is and how the heroes don't stand a chance against his power or are just too stupid to match wits with him.

So to get things rolling, there may be a break-in at the local planning office where some thug is trying to plunder information for the boss about who owns which parcels of land. A security guard gets shot or rendered unconscious, or someone at the scene positively identifies the retreating minion as well-known bank robber Stubbs Harding – something happens to alert the authorities about some facet of the organization.

If you're a supervillain or an invading alien force, or you just have a truckload of power, you won't be as gentle. The chapter starts with you blowing up a power plant, or destroying a busy bridge, or wiping out some military troops. Again, this may or may not be obvious. Depending on how the antagonists intend to pursue the larger operation, they

may triumphantly commandeer the airwaves and tell folks, “People of Earth, we are the lizard people of Kotos. You have seen a small sample of what we can do. Your puny weapons cannot match our might. Your government has one week to hand over control of your government or we will destroy one city a day until you surrender.” On the other hand, they may not be interested in a peaceful handover. If the lizard people intend to raise the oceans and flood all the land so they have a climate that suits them, the destruction may just be part of dismantling mankind's works to clear the way. They don't need humans to surrender because they'll all drown anyway. Only when the heroes start to be a thorn in their side do the lizard people arrange to eliminate those threats first.

In a standard Kandris Seal game, the Keepers of the Broken Circle maintain a fairly low profile – their cause is best served by waging a secret war against humans and only allowing enough information about their existence to leak out to dishearten those who might otherwise fight. That approach still works in the pulps and is best served if the Keepers mix the two methods – don't tell the public what you're up to, but confront the heroes more directly. This maintains the cinematic flavor while keeping up the necessary aura of mystery surrounding the society.

The gimmicks, if any, should also be highlighted here. There's no need to turn the spotlight on the heroes since it's an ongoing campaign and you ought to know who's who. If it's the first adventure, give everyone a chance to show off their powers, abilities, or other signature features. The villains may need to be singled out, however. If they hover over the city in an enormous airship, give it a chance to fly by or blow something up. If the agents of the demons have been given some swank new abilities, let them try it out on a bank job – or the protagonists. Once that's done, the serial is underway. See chapter two at this theater next week, kids.

Example: A group of gangsters working for the Keepers are out to steal a new fuel additive that allows their airwing, the Black Bomber, to remain aloft seemingly indefinitely, which would give them control of the skies. Working for a mysterious man who calls himself the Manipulator, They arrive at a warehouse downtown and begin to unload a shipment. The heroes catch wind of a police report, and ride to the rescue. A fight ensues and the fuel additive is saved, but the thugs get away.

Cliffhanger: In order to delay pursuit, the criminals send the truck they were going to use to effect their escape careening toward a series of fuel pods....

Chapter 2: On the Trail of the Manipulator

Now that the troupe has the villains' number, they can begin uncovering the plot. Sometimes the next step is obvious – the bad guys left clues, or the target of their last caper at least gave some hint of the direction in which their scheme was heading. Other times the characters have to

puzzle it out themselves. If the crooks made a clean getaway, the GM should at least have some information on the sorts of people with whom the party is dealing. They almost certainly have a record...what's their M.O.? Surely the mastermind picked them for their skill set and not their rugged good looks. Having a few hints or obvious pointers, at least at the beginning of a story arc, is a good idea because the PCs are coming in cold and probably have little to go on.

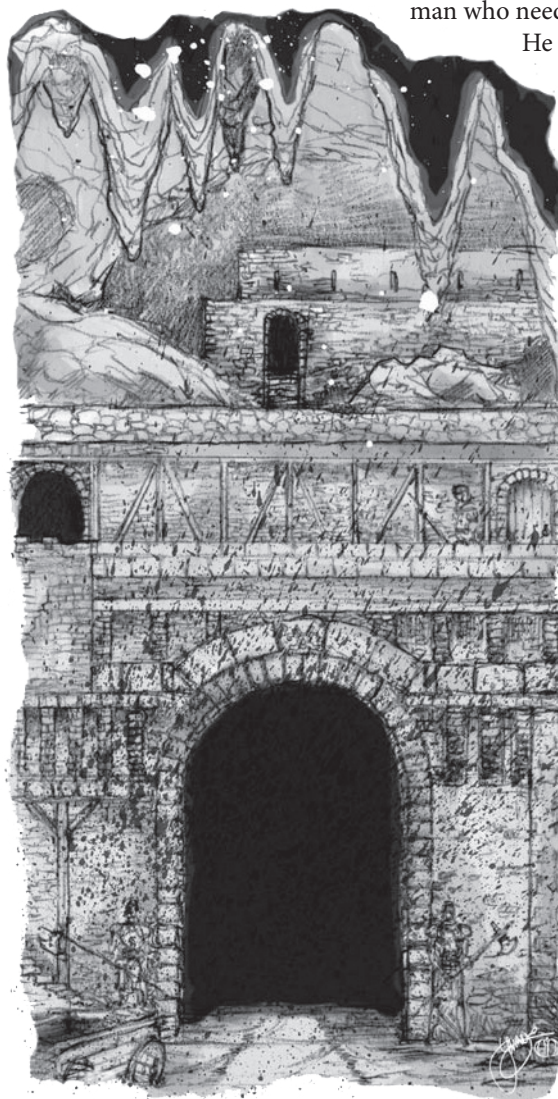
Example: Since the henchmen made a swift exit, the heroes ponder what their next move ought to be. Looking into their enemies' backgrounds, they see that they're thieves who specialize in big-ticket items: farm equipment, machinery, expensive stuff that'll be worth a lot of money but has little security because the owners figure who's going to steal a whole pallet of machine parts? Since the fuel additive has been moved and the police are watching the warehouse district, they decide to go looking for an informant down at the docks where most of their past crimes have been committed.

Once there, the finger man they meet has good news for them: The people they're after were here just a short time ago, headed for Pier 13. Sure enough, the bad guys are picking something up from the delivery offices. Another fight breaks out but, not wanting to allow the staff to come to harm, the team lets them leave the building before offering pursuit. They chase their quarry onto a small ship, but lose them in the bowels.

Cliffhanger: The heroes find the hatches have been locked from the outside, and a loud noise alerts them to a rupture in the hull. Someone has sabotaged the craft, and liquid sloshes over the team's ankles as the cargo area fills with seawater...

Chapter 3: Explosive Action in the Hills

The heroes should get used to just missing the bad guys, though this means the GM has to throw them some pretty tasty bones or the occasional brush with success. Don't continue to fudge things in favor of your hard working minions, because too much of that will leave them feeling used and abused, but on the other side of this equation the players should expect some of that since it is a pulp adventure. Besides, it's mostly the mastermind's right hand



man who needs to get away to maintain the thread.

He can hire all kinds of followers of his own to help with the schemes, and the team is welcome to collect as many of those as they like (captured thugs are also good sources of information about where to go next, and they only have to give up so much since they don't know the whole scheme).

The next best thing to grabbing the henchman is making his life miserable. If the gamemaster plays up just how sick and tired he is of the characters, they'll feel a lot better. If they can take some pleasure in saving the other people endangered by his actions, that's also a soothing balm for what might otherwise be thought a failure.

Example: They may not have landed the big fish, but the GM tells the most eagle-eyed member of the party about a mailing label on the boxes just before the fight broke out. They could follow that trail backward to the sender or forward to the villain (he's probably using an alias they can track down). The team uncovers the existence of a cabin in the woods. Sneaking up on it, they peer through the windows and overhear the thugs examining a small crate of dynamite and

discussing the new location of the fuel additive. Rather than let them use those on their next victims, the good guys burst in on the bad guys. The dynamite represents a threat, though, so no one can really let loose.

Cliffhanger: One of the sticks of dynamite lands near the stove heater, and everyone scatters as the fuse begins working its way down.

Chapter 4: Pipeline of Death

Eventually there comes a time when the evil scheme progresses. Again, assuage the heroes hurt egos by giving them something nice. By this point in the narrative the team is close enough to the inner circle that the people they take down know more or have something they can offer, and there's no honor among thieves. Just to complicate matters a little further, there's a chance the minion was deliberately offered up just so they could make some headway appraising the good guys' investigation. A secret listening device, some false information, even a robot NPC with orders to kill or explode upon reaching the headquarters; these all make good

tradeoffs in the ongoing game of cat and mouse.

Example: The authorities are only too happy to share the location of the fuel additive with the heroes, especially since it gives them the drop on the bad guys. The substance cannot be moved in time to prevent the potential for theft altogether (the poor villains deserve a break, too), but the team can pick and choose how to set the trap. The head henchman has his crew try to sneak in disguised as truck drivers, but he knows there's a chance his foes overheard his conversation at the cabin so he's giving up some patsies. He and his more valuable allies sneak in under a fence or through a drainage ditch. The sacrificial lambs are caught, but the big cheese grabs some of the fuel additive and gets away by hitching a ride on a rope ladder dropped down from a peculiar flying rig using no immediately obvious form of technology....

Cliffhanger: Before effecting his getaway, the henchman uses his position atop one of the pipes to turn a valve, sending an unarrested cascade of foul liquid down the tarmac toward the heroes. If the acid doesn't kill them, they may still drown.

Chapter 5: The Hero Strikes Back!

The home team has one of their agents; if not, one of the agents has (or pretends to have) second thoughts about the nature of their vile work, and offers himself up to the authorities. If neither of these provide the party with the necessary "in," offer them something else: someone dear to them (like an NPC's daughter) finds out what they're doing, or their plan finally becomes too big to keep everyone else out of the loop. Perhaps an average whistle blower at the same plant where dark deeds are carried out in the tunnels below sees too much and tries to run for help. Suddenly there's a leak in need of plugging.

Example: One of the thugs caught in the last chapter realizes he was set up to take attention away from the real intruders, and he's more than happy to cooperate. He may not know much, but anything you want to give to the characters – their favorite bar, the last place they met, the sequentially numbered bills with which he was paid – he can give them in hopes of it proving useful.

In this case, he did see a little too much. While checking the map for directions to the pipeline station, the driver saw the gangsters were coming from a large airbase in the foothills. Jackpot. That's the easy part, because once there the gang isn't giving up without a struggle.

Cliffhanger: They follow the retreating villains down a long hallway, and the dark tunnel in which they find themselves isn't an access corridor – it's a wind tunnel, and they can only hold on so long before the whirling blades overpower their grip on the support struts.

Chapter 6: Betrayal of Evil

There's another reason not to lament the loss of a potential clue or witness: Once they have some kind of advantage over their foes, the heroes are going to have to protect it. The villains are going to take a stab at denying them their prize now, putting the team on the defensive. If they have a witness, the mastermind sends his followers to kill him or recapture or free him (they'll want to know what he's told them). If it's an item, they'll retrieve or destroy it. If it's a piece of knowledge – say, one of the team sees something they can testify to in court – then they may try to kill the person, but more likely they'll make use of them. Not only might the villains be unconcerned with stacking one more crime onto the pile – they're trying to conquer the Earth, for crying out loud – but if they take the witness prisoner instead of killing them outright, they not only eliminate another link to their plot, they have a hostage they can leverage against their pursuers.

In a Kandris Seal game, a lot of this depends on what level of the conspiracy the hero has pierced. Minions won't do much to a potential victim unless they've already received orders to do so or been given open-ended instructions that allow it. They may leave the person helpless or unconscious, drop them in some sort of deathtrap that lets the thug come up with an alibi (as much to tell his boss as to tell the authorities), or tie them up and carry them back to a lair. If the mastermind gets personally involved, the prospects for survival dip dramatically – they may decide to throw the victim to the wolves (literally), or use them as bait.

But if the Keepers or their ilk are calling the shots, the victim might wish they were dead. The old options are still a possibility, but a whole host of new ones pop up. The person could be made a sacrifice to open the gate, or brainwashed to do the dark ones' bidding, or subjected to some sort of hideous experiment. No one said being a hero was easy.

Example: The witness has probably given up all he knows, but until they're sure the heroes are going to keep an eye on him. The best bet is to keep him in protective custody both to protect him from the Manipulator and to shorten his leash for further questioning. Their enemies easily predict this maneuver, though (police procedure in these cases is not the protagonists' friend) and intercept them at the prison – if you can call smashing a big hole in the wall with some weird, foul-smelling concoction "interception." The snitch is snatched, the heroes race to get through several security checkpoints to save him, and the informant is worried neither side is invested enough in his safety to keep him alive.

Cliffhanger: Another delaying tactic – the villains spring numerous cells open to create a small prison riot that keeps the good guys busy. Knowing their propensity for truth and justice, the smart money is that some of those released have met our heroes before....

Chapter 7: Road to Destruction

The serials were pretty straightforward, so there wasn't much room for improvisation. That won't fly in an RPG – players have to feel they're a part of the plot. Make sure you give them a chance to get their hands dirty tracking down clues or getting information out of people. Never make the plot so linear that there's no need for cleverness on their part. The supernatural elements provided by the Seal make the plots knottier to begin with because the typical motivations – money, greed, revenge – aren't necessarily characteristics of imps and demons. And assuming you can psychologically dissect the mind of a twisted force of nature is a mistake your players only make once. The closer they get to their prey, the harder they should have to labor to unravel the final mysteries.

Example: Perhaps the heroes thought to put a radio device on the snitch before remanding him to police custody, or he makes a panicked phone call to headquarters. Then again, maybe the breakout caused too much damage to be ignored by a careful investigator and discovery of their trail is just inevitable. Regardless, the henchmen's next target is bombs for the airwing. Finding them, the party is a little too late, arriving just in time to see a stolen truck pulling away from the plant. Guards, fearful of striking the cargo with too much gunfire, hold their fire and encourage the pursuers to utilize caution.

Cliffhanger: The truck can't pull away from the heroes' transport fast enough with all their ordnance, so they unload a little. They toss a bomb or two onto the highway, and the explosives bounce toward the trailing vehicle.

Chapter 8: Innocence Lost

Taking PCs hostage is something of a no-no in roleplaying, even in a pulp game where it's a staple of the genre – it irritates the players – but that's why they invented NPCs. Kidnapping loved ones or grabbing people who are too nosy for their own good is an absolute must somewhere in the story, so gamemasters should feel free to give the players' dependents a bit of a workout. Take them hostage, tie them to rockets ready to launch, hold them for ransom or to trade for whatever vital plot device the team has laid its collective hands on...it's all good. Don't flog the horse until it's dead (the adventure is only a dozen chapters long), but it's too valuable a method – and too sacred a cliché – to let it slip by.

That said, keep in mind where the peril comes from. If a chaos-tainted being gets a hold of the NPC, it's a darker scenario than the Saturday morning kiddie fare. Capture may mean being exposed to something far more devilish than some fiendish cackling and a gun held at one's ribs. You still run the risk of alienating your players if they feel their loved ones (and by extension the players themselves) are being abused and tormented, so give them a good chance to get

the victim back or make sure your playing group is willing to excuse that extra layer of psychological warfare.

Example: By the time the party regroups and finds the vehicle used in the theft (the villains have transferred their cargo to another, less conspicuous vehicle), they may have lost any trace of the bad guys. The bad guys are now going to come looking for the heroes, hoping to put a stop to their dogged investigations. They track down some friends and relatives and take them prisoner, then offer the party an ultimatum: Cease working on this case, or you'll never see the people closest to you again. The characters take this call as an opportunity to garner some information about their tormentors – sounds they hear during the phone call, clues about the paper used for the note, hints the loved one may have dropped during the conversation – and go on a rescue mission. They arrive at the villains' hideout just in time to see the airwing lifting off, presumably with the hostage pounding at the porthole. Like the strange air vehicle they saw earlier, there's a greenish aura surrounding the exhaust – in fact, it could be spreading to the rest of the vessel.

Cliffhanger: Armed with the airwing, the villains no longer need to worry about pursuit. Confident their domination of the skies is complete they start cutting off loose ends, and the first step is to toss the victim, sans parachute, out a door on the craft.

Chapter 9: Doom Takes Flight

Characters have to accept there will be losses in the fight between good and evil, and not all of it is personal. Up to now they've been the targets of most of the hostilities, and that's not going to end now. But the villains' plans are much bigger than one group of do-gooders, and they have to spread terror on a larger scale.

If the mastermind didn't offer a long-winded speech in chapter one about how bad things would get for those who oppose him, he makes it now. Certain he's secure in the criminal organization he's created, he'll try to cow the government (or whoever he's got it out for) into surrendering. To make his point, he'll blow up something we like or offer some other vulgar display of power. It may vex the players to think this guy's untouchable, but all the gamemaster is doing at this point is giving them something to fight for. To this end, the referee should be careful to choose some important sounding target that's really just scenery. Don't go after their hideout, an orphanage, or a military base where their allies work...at least, not yet.

Example: The enemy is ready for anything. They have the fuel additive that allows them to stay aloft for days, perhaps even weeks at a time. They have guns and other ordnance with which to terrify the unsuspecting populace, including the bombs they stole from the factory. Can anything stop them now?

To establish their power, they blow something up – a train trestle, a ship at sea, a truck – and begin making demands. The players have no choice at this point. They have to board the ship and take it down from the inside. They must arrange

for some means of flight, and it has to be something fairly accurate.

Cliffhanger: The best means of entry is through one of the weapons tubes, where no one would expect someone to enter. Halfway into the process, though, the villains prepare to attack another target, filling this means of access with a deadly payload. This interruption is good news for the intended target, bad news for the selfless adventurers.

Chapter 10: In the Hands of the Manipulator

The serials weren't exactly a group effort. There may be several people listed in the cast on the side of the angels, but they weren't all active at once. At most you'd see two, maybe three people (some of them might be women or junior rangers who wouldn't figure into any fights), and they were always met by slightly greater odds – enough to make the fight scenes interesting, but not enough to completely overwhelm the heroes. This changes when you're in the villain's lair, of course. He has the upper hand, and the GM should make use of it. This is his chance to laugh, hands on hips, at the puny efforts of the good guys.

But where the movies featured a couple of square-jawed heroes, your average roleplaying game may feature six or more heroes all at once. It's perfectly acceptable for the writers to pile one trouble after another onto the situation to keep the action moving and the protagonist's fate uncertain. If you as gamemaster are juggling six tough action heroes, it's not just acceptable. The situation demands that everything go as wrong as possible. Make them work for their successes, but this doesn't have to be the result of stacking everything against them. What's needed most is teamwork. Give each person something to do. Everyone should have dice to roll, and the outcome of those rolls should have a very real effect on the end of that scene. Give the combat-oriented PCs something to hit, give the mechanics something dangerous to fix, and force the cub reporter to figure out the riddle on the cave wall while everyone else is occupied.

If you're playing a Pulp Kandris Seal game, the character selection should work in your favor. No two people are likely to have the same strengths, so everyone can have their own task to deal with. Two FBI agents will have similar skills and training, but if you have a stuntman, a flying hero, a mage, and a socialite, they'll all have different abilities you can put to the test.

Example: Having narrowly avoided dying in the weapons chamber, the heroes are trapped with their enemies. Some may be loose aboard

the ship, looking for a way to sabotage it, while others are captured. This may be the party's first face-to-face (well, face-to-mask) encounter with the mysterious Manipulator, and the GM should play that for all it's worth. He explains his plot, belittles their abilities, and mocks their current status. It would all be rather grating, but the party is probably too busy working out a plan with their companions (who are lurking in the ventilation system or behind the instrument boards or some such).

Cliffhanger: The Manipulator has the characters he has captured placed in the engine room where the next blast of fuel exhaust will incinerate them.

Chapter 11: Death in the Air

As the end of the story arc nears, the GM should begin to gradually build the action. Increase the danger level, or allow several parallel threats to imperil the party at once. If there are any important figures from previous chapters whose fates are unknown, bring them back so they can be brought to justice. This isn't an absolute must; good fiction always leaves a few loose ends that can return to aggravate the good guys at the most inconvenient time. It allows for one of those "You! But I never suspected..." moments that remind PCs they should clean up their messes more thoroughly. But you want the end to be memorable, and if you plan for the finale an episode or two ahead of time, the players will be impressed by your skill at plotting and pacing.

Anyone who does escape as the noose tightens will make a good villain for the next adventure. Think of it as someone graduating from evil school: the nobody becomes a lackey, the lackey a henchman, and the henchman a mastermind. It's also effective to bring back a former low-level bad guy as, if not a hero, then at least an extra. They may serve as the new informant or even be accepted as a potential ally. So long as they didn't do anything memorably horrible back when, they can rise above their circumstances to be the "lovable rogue" who learned his lesson and now pitches in. Maintaining a consistent stable of NPCs makes the sometimes shallow

world of the pulps a livelier place with a living history.

Example: By now all the characters are probably loose, the captured PCs having eluded death in the engine room. Their numbers are still not sufficient to take the ship from the Manipulator, but they still hope they can sabotage things or throw a monkey wrench into the works. Most of the systems seem to be well guarded or have redundant backups. But if the team could get a signal out to air command, then distract the crew at the right moment so the airwing's considerable weaponry can't be brought to bear upon their rescuers,

The Mastermind

This involves having several small adventures that seem to have (and maybe don't have) anything in common. The GM can gradually reveal there is a plot linking all these events together, suggesting some puppet master is behind the whole thing. It isn't important to have selected him during these minor adventures, but make sure whoever it turns out to be isn't technically unable to have pulled off the planning for some reason. Of course with robots, clones, time-travel, and other techniques anybody can be responsible for anything if the GM works it out.

A Pulp Kandris Seal Laundry List

Players aren't going to stick to the script anyway, so if you want to have something with which to challenge them when they run off the rails, you may wish to maintain a list of standard complications. These may have to be altered a bit to tailor them to the specific environment, but most are applicable in a wide range of circumstances.

- a hero runs out of ammo
- a hero loses his weapon, gadget, or signature power
- reinforcements show up
- collateral damage weakens a section of the building
- a fire starts
- someone trips over a lever and activates a piece of dangerous machinery
- an animal gets loose
- an innocent bystander gets caught in the crossfire
- the hero must save one of the villains from falling
- the hero gets snagged on something and can't escape some peril

Deathtraps aren't as time-critical as disasters you can inflict on the PCs at a moment's notice; you can usually see the end of the session coming. But since you can't always nab the heroes and deposit them into a cell at your leisure, you may have to improvise a clever cliffhanger from current events. It may help to have a list for that, too.

- the walls close in; more generally, something bigger than the heroes may crush them
- the area in which the team stands is sealed (or is deep, like a pit) and
 - fills with water/gas/vicious animals
 - catches fire
 - threatens to explode
- the party is left dangling over something dangerous
- a conveyor belt is pulling the heroes toward a flame/band saw/acid bath
- a sniper targets one of the team
- someone is about to be executed
- a vehicular crash is imminent
- the hero is falling without means of flight

Sometimes there's a bit of overlap between these two sections, and the GM can use that to his advantage. The heroes need not be the ones in danger to create a cliffhanger. For example, an innocent bystander caught between two gun-happy factions is a dangerous snag, but if the villain tosses the victim off a building and leaves them dangling from a flagpole, he can escape while the heroes busy themselves thinking how to reach the suffering spectator.

it might spell the end of the Manipulator's reign of terror.

Cliffhanger: Unable to destroy the incoming aircraft and rocked by their first salvo, the Manipulator abandons the command deck to the party. He and his crew set the self-destruct, damage the rest of the instruments and controls

beyond repair, lock the heroes in, and prepare to parachute out. Meanwhile air command, unaware of the group's predicament (or forced to carry out their orders, lest the ship crashes into a nearby city) is wheeling about for another pass, this one directed at the bridge...

Chapter 12: The Manipulator Unmasked!

It's the last chapter, and it's time to pull out all the stops. Before the session is out, the plot must be foiled, the lackeys rounded up, and the villainous mastermind unmasked. This is the chance to blow whatever's left of the budget and go out with several bangs.

Example: Leaving the smoking remains of the airwing's command center behind them, the heroes cast about desperately for some means of survival. There's nothing left of the rest of the ship. Air command spent their entire payload trying to breach the wing's redoubtable armor plating, but at least they've shifted its flight path from town. The self-destruct should do the rest, so the team can take comfort in knowing no one else will be hurt...and then the ship shifts again.

In the hangar, all the parachutes are gone or smoldering with a green fire. The bodies of several crewmen are scattered about. Some were killed by explosions and rounds from the aircraft, but some have a glowing emerald hole in their chests. Standing amid the ruins of his airwing is the Manipulator. His hands glow green and the ship tilts in time with his hand movements. "You've cost me enough, interlopers," he tells the party. "The self-destruct should have sent this craft plummeting into town, but now I must take a hand. Prepare to die!"

Hopefully the team begins beating the stew out of him, and the villain will be unmasked at last. To their horror, he's not even human. If they don't find a method of killing him (and this corporeal form probably isn't his real body anyway), he will disappear in a swirl of green, hazy mist. The team redirects the wing, makes it to the peculiar air vehicle the minions have been using, and flies to safety. Between the unusual flier and the events they've witnessed, it's clear they have to start learning about their enemies all over again.

Cliffhanger: None, but return to this theater next week for the first chapter in another exciting serial adventure!

Pulp Gaming

You've got your setting, you've sketched out some idea when and where you want events to fall, now make it seem like the magazine tales of the 30s.

Layer On the Hardships

It's never as simple as getting dropped into a pit full of alligators. It's always being dropped into a pit full of alligators because you were captured after you discovered the secret base and had to fight several opponents during a long motorcycle chase.

Those who think adventures are only about the deathtrap are missing the ongoing rhythm of a pulp tale. The heroes are hard-luck cases who can never get anything done the easy way. It's not like you're going to just shoot a swordsman in the gut in the middle of the marketplace. No, the gamemaster has to make the player characters suffer.

For example, the team has arrived at the gates of the isolated Nazi stronghold. They cannot climb in because the cliffs are sheer and unscalable so they've opted to let one of their number try disguising himself as a Nazi officer (don't ask how they got the uniform). They were going to drive straight through the gates on the power of a bluff, but it didn't work. So do they back up and drive away? No.

Fearful of getting shot in the back, they do the unexpected – plow into the snowy courtyard. Nazi scum scatters, so they wheel about to get out the gate. It was slammed shut, so they continue their doughnut. Some Germans regain their bearings and are about to shoot, so they drive into the fortress' entry hall. The wet jeep tires skid on the smooth tiles and the whole crew slams against the fireplace. Weapons fall from the walls, narrowly slicing into the vehicle's metal sides. They back up, the grill of their transport now ablaze. A Nazi drops to the back of the vehicle, and one of the passengers engages him in fisticuffs – the passenger who isn't trying to shoot the sniper on the stairwell.

The unwanted hitcher is impaled on the other end of a two-edged battleaxe, and the sniper taken out with a hatchet extracted from the hood of the jeep and thrown. There are pursuers, but the hero pulls the pin on one of his dead foe's potato mashers and drops the body off the back.

Back out in the courtyard and away from the explosion, the heroes swerve toward the gate. It's locked, so a good guy grabs a shotgun from a soldier too surprised to object. The shells fly, falling onto the burning hood. The passenger riding (ahem) shotgun crawls onto the hood as the driver takes another swing around the yard. Some of the shells pop, and the hero feels the sting of shot. He grabs one of the shells as gargoyles and masonry, loosened by the grenade blast, fall into their path. The shells bounce out of the hero's hands and onto the floorboards, and the jeep takes to the air long enough to begin spewing some unknown liquid onto the

Everything's Better with Lots of Nazis

If there's one group of villains just about anyone can agree on, it's Nazis. Almost anyone else, there's someone out there who finds sympathy for them, but Nazis are a good all-around scapegoat. Most stories can use them (the Nazis were coming to power in the 1930s, they ran wild in the 1940s, and by the 1950s they were hiding out in Paraguay or something trying to regroup and make a bid to return to power). They travel by airship, they're all armed with Lugers, and they all scream "Macht schnell!"

Mind you, while you're not liable to offend a lot of people portraying Nazis as the standing villains, the players may get tired of seeing (and fighting) them and you don't want them to become "just another bad guy." You certainly don't want them thinking that was what the whole of the German people were about throughout the war. Throw too many Nazis into the mix and the heroes will yawn, grab the nearest Tommy gun, and wipe out the whole line of them yet again. That's good (and makes sense) once in a while, but they should have devilish plots and spies to deal with. Don't let the Nazis become an excuse for lazy adventure construction, and you do your playing group no favors by suggesting that level of violence solves every problem. Not that your villains don't have it coming, but even the period heroes let the antagonists hoist themselves by their own petard once in a while rather than blazing away.

Germans.

Turns out it's flammable – ignited by gunfire, the flame heads toward the soldiers as well as the jeep. Another bounce, this one deliberate by the driver off a burning soldier's body, interrupts the spray long enough to stop the advance of the blaze. Another pass at the gate and the lock is shot off just in time to let the jeep blast through. Bullets fly as the Germans pursue. As the vehicle flies down the icy road, the fuel deprived engine sputters, not that the driver can keep control anyway. Germans are right behind them, so they opt to light up what few fumes remained. The flaming wreckage deters the Nazis long enough for our heroes to realize their only way out is down the slick slope...

You're not trying to surprise anyone with the existence of imminent danger; the players know that's around every corner. You're giving them a rapid-fire series of tests they must meet or beat. Sure, something in this game can – and, barring intelligent roleplaying, will – kill them, but with threats coming at them to beat the banshee, they don't know which ones you as gamemaster think of as serious and which ones are just there to make the moment memorable.

To that end, if a character fails a die roll it should not mean immediate death for that person. It should, if the gamemaster is quick enough on his feet, lead to even more dire circumstances. Falling off the eponymous cliff because you blew your skill roll doesn't allow the character to plummet six stories to his death. It may mean he lands on a small ledge, battered and bruised, where he's menaced by an oversized bird of prey that thinks its nest is endangered. A

quick fight with that knocks the hero to a rope bridge where his neck gets caught in a decaying vine. Time for a roll to keep conscious, though the natives have now advanced onto the bridge, which breaks beneath the weight just above the raging river with the piranha. The bird isn't done yet, and...

Even the GM may not know which threats are going to cause the most trouble, and he shouldn't be planning to kill PCs, but things should get worse in each scene before they get better. Some things you thought would be tame will show themselves to be deadly, some seemingly impossible ordeals will be deftly handled by the heroes' quick thinking, and some will be plain annoying. The complex interactions of multiple hazards produces results no one can anticipate, and in that uncertainty players will find a chance to show off.

A Piece of the Action

Just in case it's not obvious by now, and it bears repeating even if it is, events in your campaign should all have that cinematic flair. Don't just have the characters leap from a car to safety, have them jump from one moving vehicle to another, or onto a low-hanging branch just before the jeep goes off the cliff. Never blow up a room when you can blow up a house. Throwing a knife at your enemy is impressive, but throwing it into the muzzle of a gun as he fires it causes real drama.

The action should be over the top. Characters should never walk when they can run, run when they can jump, or jump if they can fly. Fights should take place on top of buildings, not in them, and the structure in question ought to be the Empire State Building if you can manage it. If two sides get into an airship, only one of them is going to make it to their destination. Any vehicle smaller than that isn't for transportation, it's a weapon.

Your settings should be constantly in motion. There are no shady spots, no places where you can sit to catch your breath. Threats are on every side except the corner where the exit is, which lets a hero "escape" to another, deadlier situation. It's not all bad news: An interactive environment gives the good guys options. Tools to be used, ropes for swinging or throttling, vehicles to commandeer, and catwalks and ladders to scale. It's a lot to keep track of, but with a few simple notes about the locations where the action will take place (and some common sense or the willingness to let the heroes get away with an entertaining idea) both the GM and the players can quickly visualize the place and fill in the holes themselves.

Round Robin Gamemastering

You may want to try letting everyone have a shot at the GM's spot, but don't bother switching adventures. Have a set of characters you can get everyone to agree upon (because some of them are going to have to switch). Someone plays referee, establishing a plot, some villains, and a cliffhanger. Next session, a new GM steps into the lead and the old one takes up that person's character. He has to continue the story from that point, and try to make sense of the events established by his predecessor. You may want to let the first GM be the last one as well (a taste of his own medicine, and a reminder not to make things too crazy for his friends).

Pacing

It's a fun setup (and it forms the sample template presented earlier in this chapter), but your stories need not all match a 10-, 12-, or 15-episode pattern. It's a nice storytelling tool, being able to end your Thursday night session with your friends on some diabolic cliffhanger they can spend the week debating, but do they really have the stomach to wait three months for the final chapter? Don't force yourself or your players to become locked into a single dogmatic format. Suppose the group is clever enough to circumvent large pieces of the plot, or make a leap of logic that works out? They might even suggest something you hadn't thought of that would make the story play out with more interest, so steal it and don't tell them it wasn't your plan all along. Reward clever thinking and intuitive game play just as you would in any other setting.

If you really want to try to duplicate some of the things that made going to the theater so compelling for the kids, try playing the game the same way. They got about 10 minutes of movie for every installment, so give your playing group the same thing. Arrange a weekly game night, but be sure you have card or board games or something to run. Put the Pulp Kandris game at the beginning of the evening (when they're fresh and ready) and read a short prepared "Last week, our intrepid heroes were trapped by..." statement. Run the events at a rapid pace, and after 10 minutes (or more...be fair, your game isn't as tightly scripted as a theatrical short), hit them with the cliffhanger.

Think of it as a challenge. You're used to leisurely sessions where players chew the fat and order pizza for at least the first hour. But see what can you accomplish if everyone concentrates; the GM keeps the action moving; your forgo all but the most important die rolls; and just as the players' eyes grow wide, the bat swarm spiraling up the mineshaft to where they dangle from ropes, you tell them to tune in again for the next exciting chapter. Reward them by making the last session a full-length donnybrook with the mastermind.

Isolation

An important tool for making your game seem more like a pulp outing is giving the players and their characters a sense of isolation. This element is touted a lot when engaging in horror roleplaying, but there the GM is trying to put a feeling of foreboding into the atmosphere. In this world, it's a practical consideration used to emulate the realities of the day.

Pulp heroes live in a different age, and it ought to feel like it. If they go on a jungle adventure, they're stepping into unknown territory. If you get into trouble, no one's around to save you because you are the first party to trek this far. The team members aren't called heroes for nothing. They're leading the way, pushing the envelope, and they know that failure probably means death.

Back home, much of the United States west of the Mississippi has already been charted, but that doesn't mean it's convenient. Gas stations may be few and far between; towns (when you can find them) are too small to have everything you need and may have nothing you want; and although it's filled with wondrous sites and colorful people, sections of it can be fairly lawless as such desolate places often are. Medical aid can be just as scarce.

The great equalizer then would be communication. A number of radio services were unavailable or not finalized before the late 1940s – citizens' band, for example. Radios, if available, might not have the power they need to reach the next town or police station (especially if you're inside a mine shaft), and rules or regulations may hamper their casual use. The right equipment may be prohibitively expensive, and some of it might not be mobile...you may have to use it from a specific location. Telephone service was notoriously unreliable, and even if you get a stable line that hasn't been knocked out by a storm or an ape-man attack, you could be stuck using one of the infamous party lines ("Martha, get me Klondike Oh-500"). These are open lines that any antagonist can eavesdrop on.

Living within the city limits isn't much better. Sure, you're surrounded by people, but the isolation takes a different form here. This is the arena of the dark hero, the caped avengers who crawl through the town's underbelly because that's where the crime is. If you're in a city trying to stop underworld figures from pursuing their vices, you may have better or more dependable technology, but it does you little good if you cannot access it. Walkie-talkies are also a product of the 40s, and cell phones are right out. Danger always lurks in back alleys, and the hero might not even know where he is. Cops won't come until they're called (and sometimes not even then), bystanders won't cross the mob, and it's in the nature of the hooded hero to work alone (either that's the brooding fellow's M.O. or no one else has the guts

to join him). The urban landscape makes solitary figures of everyone, even if the next-closest human being is just on the other side of a locked and barred door.

If you set your game in the modern day, you suffer many of the same troubles. Cell phones lose their batteries or their signals, pizzas arrive before the police, and when the cops do arrive, "Nobody saw nothin'." Criminals still run the streets, and dirty deeds can be done through the Internet from half a world away. That's the city. In the country, folks may tend their own business and sections of the West are still underdeveloped. Racial bias is an unfortunate but real obstacle anywhere in the country, and if anything the people of today have become less open, not more.

Space adventures offer the compact communications devices we're used to today, and a whole host of other conveniences. Food comes in pill form, the clothes seem to clean themselves, and the rocket ship is like a home away from home if you don't mind somewhat cramped quarters. Make no mistake, though, the heroes aboard these cruisers are very much away from home, and though the radio strapped to your wrist may keep you in touch, you and your crew are ultimately on your own. Help from Earth Command is, at best, days away. Even your own friends may be unable to negotiate unfamiliar terrain quickly, and conversations with the natives can ensnare you as tightly as any deathtrap.

And if the GM decides to bring it back to horror, the Kandris Seal combines the hairiest elements of a thriller with the already inhospitable solitude of a pulp actioner. The creatures are to be found in the most rarefied climates in the world, hidden from the eyes of humans. The only people about are those who ventured into their lairs. The things working for the Keepers may be primitive monsters from Earth's early prehistory, but they always seem to know which wire to pull, what device to smash, the right building to infest to prevent the good guys from calling for help or gaining reinforcements. They get heroes alone and pick them off or capture them one by one. Even if they do call in the army, those ignorant troops are easily dealt with – the only ones

with any chance of success are the competent agents already in the thick of things.

Sometimes it's a demand placed on the good guys by the environment, and sometimes it's the protagonist's motif, but isolation plays a big part in the pulps. The less help you have, the more exciting the story, and the bigger the victory when you win out in the end.



Atmosphere

Yes, the pulps were a dark place to live, and an even more closeted hunting ground for fighting evil. The serials, by comparison, were pretty light-hearted. Sure, things went bump in the night and crime lay in wait, but it was light family fare, not bleak cathartics for a tortured soul. The best two ways to handle the balance of light and dark is to see what the players want and to use what's appropriate.

If the players all take cowboys or all spacemen or something, they're obviously hoping for a movie serial. If everyone's name is "the dark this" or "the brooding that," you may safely assume they want to stalk the shadowed streets like avenging angels. More likely with a larger group you'll get a mix. If so, you want to mix things up a little. Everyone should have a moment to shine each week, so tell the group, "Your snitch doesn't like the daylight. He's a drunkard and a coward, so he only comes out at night." That's the avenger's cue to saddle up and go scare information out of someone. When the GM says there's going to be a delivery to the bank at noon, that's a hint that the serial heroes should step in, badges flashing. If you want a segment to feel dark, set it at night, but arrange some events during daylight hours, too. That way everyone has a moment in their character's comfort zone. Avoid relentless, soul-crushing darkness as well as pure, apple-pie optimism save where it serves the story.

Don't Obsess on the Details

This isn't another dungeon crawl. Oh, you'll delve into plenty of those, but how long the torch you're carrying burns is only important when drama demands it – say, if you're warding off snakes with it. If the heroes decide they need equipment, just assume they got it so long as it's not an outrageous presumption. For example, if the investigators are going to dive off the coast to search a sunken pirate ship, they should say, "We go get diving equipment." The GM can assume a coastal town does pretty good business selling or renting diving gear. Only if there's reason to assume the team has no money or something should the gear be a problem, and even then it should be an inroad to additional adventure. Maybe the team only washed up on the island's beach this morning and is searching for the mysterious foes who sunk their boat. With no money, the shop owner hears their sob story and offers to help them out – so he and his brother can find out what the PCs are up to. If there's treasure to be had, they may want to steal it. If their plane crashes in the Amazon, they won't have diving equipment unless one of the heroes has, in the gamemaster's estimation, an applicable skill, profession, or excuse.

Some things you should track, like ammunition; that's almost always an open question with severe consequences for an under-equipped party. But in general no one should pick nits about whether they have enough gas or precisely how far four people on foot can travel in a day. Either it can be

done or it can't, and if there are consequences for failure they should make an exciting difference to the story.

Keep Things Moving

"When in doubt, have two guys come through the door with guns."

– Raymond Chandler

Pulp and serial characters are like sharks – if they stop moving, they die. (More accurately they bore their juvenile audience and no one pays to read about them any more.) Not every minute of the evening has to be packed with thrills and a car chase, but a new action sequence should always be just a wrong turn away. If the players are having fun doing whatever they're doing, that's the name of the game. If they're spending an hour making a list of the climbing equipment they'll need, down to the last piton, they're just not getting it. You should already have had a conversation with them about this sort of thing, but if they drag their heels, make sure something nips at them to remind them.

Not Everything Translates

Some of the nuances you're used to seeing in characters in a regular game don't shine through as well, though here is one of those areas where game rules can't duplicate the source material perfectly. Pulps and serials had characters of limited dimensions. They weren't always fully fleshed out. We knew the hero's name was Rocky, he had a jet packs, and his gal's name was Susan. On the other hand, we didn't know he liked Jazz music, his father was an alcoholic, and his favorite team was the Dodgers. These seldom entered the story save for adding a little color, and almost never did we get this level of detail in the movie chapters.

Only the crudest roleplayers don't like having some sort of background; it can be the most entertaining part of character creation for them. Let them flesh out their personalities if they like. You may never use it, but you may also find the group getting bored if the most meaningful relationship they have in the game is with their horses. Unlike the static folks from the genre, PCs need room to grow and develop. Let the hero's father enter the picture. Maybe he was a hero in the same mold as his son from way back, and the old man may still know a trick or two that can help in a pinch. This also sets up all sorts of confrontations – the son may get infuriated saying for the thousandth time, "We don't do it that way, it's against regulations," and the villain may have faced this man before and be delighted that he now gets to kill two generations of despised foes.

Again, fun is where it's at. Anything that adds to the experience is a good thing, and slavish devotion to the ways

of the source material ignores the fact that this is a new and different medium that plays by another set of rules.

In the Editing Room

"Meanwhile at the Cody Institute for Extreme Editing..."

– Tom Servo, *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*

Not all serials were created alike. Some had genuine moments of thrilling action and clever thinking. The hero could expect to use the muscle atop his head as much as those below the neck, and when it was good it was great. Other movies, eh, they were a bit lazier. Theatrical tricks like reusing stock footage could hamper the action – they wanted to reuse the car chase from another flick, so this chapter had to end the same way, with the heroes supposedly dying when the vehicle hit a dynamite-laden bridge. The following week, the same sequence plays – only this time the scene shows the two guys leaping from the car at the last possible moment, and wiping the sweat from their brows with a lax, "Whew, that was too close."

Your players are better than that.

But they don't have your control over the situation, so they're limited in their actions. That's where edits come in. If you want to have a little fun with these endings, give your players an edit at the beginning of the next session. They may get together and talk it over amongst themselves about how they might "edit" last week's action to allow for their survival. The GM should be kind about how effective their solution is (he is trying to kill them, after all), but he is free to dismiss anything that sounds too hokey. If he does this, he has two options, the first being the lame idea of starting this session with the same incredulous hack job as the movies. The second is to again use the heroes' half-hearted explanation to work, but with more consequences for them later in the chapter.

Example: The car is headed for the bridge, but it's been rigged to explode. The players huddle up to talk about the edit (if you're running a decent game, they've probably been talking it up all week). They decide to roll the film back just

Meanwhile, in Cario...

Since he's in charge, the referee ought to be able to use fancy editing techniques, too. He can present brief narrative excerpts showing something from the villain's perspective. It doesn't have to reveal too much, and shouldn't spoil anything for the players, but it can hint at things.

Example: The gamemaster pauses in the action and intones:

"A jungle fortress. Night. Thick ground mist surrounds the bamboo enclosure, and two uniformed Black-Saber guards stand watch in the humid dark. A truck approaches the gate from the overgrown road, and the men can see a half-track with its cargo covered by a tattered canvas.

"One guard readies his machine gun, and the other approaches the driver. They exchange official signals and counter-signals. The soldier with the machine gun says something to the man at the vehicle, who nods and moves to lift the canvas to see inside.

"A clawed hand lashes out and catches his arm, pulling him into the truck like a child's toy. A scream. A loud crack like a bundle of sticks being crushed, then silence.

"The guard with the machine gun shakes his head sadly, then opens the gate wide, giving the truck and its cargo a wide berth as it passes his post into the fortress enclosure."

Now the players are left with a sense of dread, and should they encounter the jungle fortress, or even just a jungle, they won't know what awaits them – except a sense of dramatic irony.

a bit and say the car that was destroyed wasn't their own. Another car came from a side street and barreled in front of them and, since all cars back then tended to look alike anyway (even without the benefit of stock footage), it appears as though they rolled right into the trap. They brake to avoid sideswiping the incoming vehicle and watch in horror as it suffers the fate intended for them.

The GM isn't entirely happy with this as it lacks a bit of heroism, tossing some strangers to the wolves in their stead, but he okays it. Still, he thinks a drawback to even the cosmic scales is in order, so he considers what would be appropriate. The person in the other car could have been an important informant (who's now dead) or a loved one (who's now in the hospital in a coma), or the destroyed car could have held a valuable clue it was bringing to them. He decides since this is only the second session he'll go easy on them. The villains, he muses, believe their opposition to be dead, so they confidently step up the timetable for firing the deadly missile at Los Angeles.

The referee shouldn't outright punish the players with his fiats, but there should be an element of kismet to the whole thing – something nice is balanced by something bad. If the GM isn't comfortable with giving players the power of an edit, rather than becoming disappointed with his group or their uses of them and letting them spoil the game, he should end all his cliffhangers further back before the dirty deed is done. The car is headed for the bridge, the villains can be seen leaning out the back of their truck, and a rolled-up pack of TNT with a fuse falls into their path. Tune in next week...

This, Too, Shall Pass

"Crime was coming back and the Shadow recognized it; therefore he needed a few examples to prove properly that crime did not pay."

-- Maxwell Grant, *Murder by Magic*

No one thought they were making art.

Okay, a few of them did, and some wide-eyed fans, but most thought it was bubblegum for the brain. Few of the artists in the pulp industry ever laid claim to their own work in the genre. The books were expendable, and the people

doing it had goals no loftier than eating and living indoors. Maybe the right film would spawn a sequel.

The GM should take a hint from the disposable nature of the pulps, not by treating it lightly, killing characters out of hand, or round-filing the campaign when the “joke” wears thin. Rather, the heroes were weary men who had seen the worst elements trample the weakest. They had some advantage and their reward for using it for good was probably a bullet-riddled body on a rain-soaked street. The heroes in this game won’t often confront the Thirteen, not directly, and their wars are won on the streets as often as any larger stage. In short, these people aren’t used to the big payoff.

If you want to run pulp, especially if you decide to vary the game between magical and temporal sessions, don’t be afraid to give out smaller rewards for the latter. On the other hand, these are the sorts of rewards you can give out more of, and with less fear they’ll upset the game’s balance. These games mean dumping on your player characters again and again before they achieve real success, and the win usually means “only” saving a street vendor from the gathering dark, but you should reward them along the way, and often. Not with character advancement or fancy new toys, but with the little triumphs that make it worthwhile for even the hardest-nosed streetwise detective or the most aloof master of mysticism.

- The crippled newsie who gets snatched away from the deadly explosion at the last moment smiles at them and tells them they ought to be on the front page of his rag.
- The young lady, a hostage mere moments ago, who is now free to embrace her fiancée – though not before sparing a kiss for the dashing hero.
- The fighting ship sailing proudly into the bay, headed for Europe...a trip it wouldn’t have been able to take if the hero wasn’t standing on shore, waving with one hand, his other on a defunct detonator, and a foot on some grungy gungel’s neck.
- The frightened old man, staring in amazement as his erstwhile tormentors swing gently from ropes tied to a streetlamp, murmuring through their gags as a dark figure disappears into the shadows.
- The “Gee, whiz” of a junior team member who is clearly impressed by the elder hero’s skills with a six-shooter.
- A happily whimpering mutt, pulled at the last moment from a blazing house fire.
- The widow at her husband’s gravesite on Boot Hill, chirping through tears of joy to the headstone about the last-minute intervention of a masked rider whose actions have secured the family’s fortunes.

The rewards aren’t that dissimilar to any other genre, but they mean more to someone who, like his victims, is not used to getting a fair shake.

Chapter Nine

Prepared Adventures

Try as he might, Sammy Spangler's fingers couldn't fly across the typewriter keys fast enough. This new story was dynamite, and by the time he was done, the biggest crook in town would be finished...for now. Sammy had seen him wiggle loose once before, but that just meant more grist for the newspaper's mill. The phone rang.

"Spangler," he said, irritated at the interruption. There was silence. "Look, guy, I gotta deadline to meet. You there or what?"

Laughter. "Mr. Spangler. I thought I'd offer you one more chance not to print your story." Sammy almost dropped the phone. He stared at the wall for a moment. Then he regained his composure.

"Can't stop the presses, Mamba," he said, managing a firm tone. "I escaped your snakes earlier, so I guess now it's my turn to go on the attack. If you got nothing else, I have to finish putting the last nail in your coffin."

The smooth island accent came back, "As you wish. Deadline, you say? Tell me, do they call it that because of what happens if you miss it?" Sammy started to say something clever back, but the banter left him cold. It was awfully calculated. Again he caught himself, but before he could speak he heard a distinct scrape, like corduroy pants against the fabric of his aunt's sofa. He prayed, for once, that it really was just a cockroach.

The waste paper basket shifted and fell, and allowed two and a half feet of snake to slither out. It stared at Sammy; Sammy stared back.

"Goodbye, Mr. Spangler." The reporter was so shocked at

Magister Mamba's voice, having forgotten he was holding the phone, that he dropped the receiver with a loud clatter. That seemed to agitate the thick, black snake.

"What gives? I slipped past one of you back at the restaurant, easily," Sammy murmured as the snake swayed to and fro, glaring at him. Sammy reached for his camera at the other end of the desk, but the snake hissed angrily, and he knew he'd never get to it in time. Instead, he swept his arm in the opposite direction, sending the desk lamp spinning across the room. The snake followed this movement, and the writer pushed back from his desk and snagged the camera.

As he watched, the snake's stubby body began to elongate. Then it thickened again, and repeated the process. It was growing, first in one dimension, then in another. "Oh," said Sammy, as if this answered all the evening's questions. It filled almost one quarter of the room before Sammy got up the nerve to make his move. The flash also filled the now darkened room, and the snake swatted his own head against the far wall trying to get away from it. Sammy switched bulbs and fired again. The snake backed out the door just enough, and Sammy slammed the desk forward against it. The hissing was still audible as the reptile began slapping itself against the jammed door. It pushed the portal open just enough and began, with difficulty, to squeeze back in. Sammy was sure it was bigger.

He backed up to the window, and looked out. Traffic honked quietly far below. The snake was almost ready to curl about his leg. "What I won't do for a story," he said, and stumbled backward.

Betrayal in the Jungle

This is an adventure for a Pulp Kandris Seal game. It's best with a group of about four players, but six works as well and the gamemaster can tone it down so it can be played with just a couple of participants just like the heroes of the screen. If you're going to be a player in the campaign you should stop reading now to preserve some of the mystery.

Character Types

Some player characters work better with this adventure than others, though if you don't mind some cross-pollination you can have most any kind of persona join. Having an explorer helps – there are travel dangers and jungles to penetrate, so his skills are invaluable. Someone who can speak jungle languages would be useful, too, unless the GM just wants to run a cinematic version of the game. In that case, the tribes speak a broken sort of English they learned through their minimal trade efforts with other peoples. At least one mage should come along, since it's a heavily magic-centric story that starts with the Thaumaturgia. Beyond that, scientists whose skills sets are suited to a tropical area or anyone who just throws a good punch will round things out nicely.

Introduction

"What could the Watcher possibly have sent you all the way out here for?" Trevor asked, pulling his arm across his forehead. Sweat was pouring down his face and into his eyes, and there seemed to be no end to it. He looked to Bree, his companion. Actually that wasn't true. It was her trip, and it was her mysterious employers, the Thaumaturgia, who had sent her to the most forsaken nether region on Earth.

"The Watcher does not dispatch us, his agents, lightly," she replied. "He felt something was happening out here, and he felt a stronger connection to the events than usual, so we're going to satisfy his curiosity."

"Curiosity?" Trevor marveled. Before him was a wall of jungle green. Beyond that, more jungle green, and past that... well, if the last three days and thirty miles had been any kind of benchmark, he was going to have to say jungle green again. "Man, imagine if this was something more than idle interest. What if he had an actual task, like to fetch him a drink or something."

"Silence, the both of you," demanded Ivan. Trevor thought about pointing out this was the woman's expedition and he wasn't in charge – that in fact the stooped little fellow in front of him had begged these secret masters to let him come – but thirty miles of actively disliking Ivan was wearing him out. The stubby man was tracing lines in the air, and his voice sounded like a tinny phone call over a bad line from Beijing. "This way." He did not take the lead, but waited for Bree to start forward ahead of him.

Ivan wasn't a pleasant fellow, but he still did them the favor of pointing out they should stop moving forward. In the thick undergrowth of the jungle they had failed to note that the next step was off a greasy green precipice and over to an unknown

fate. The three explorers and their two porters stopped and stared across miles of jungle far below.

"Oh, look," Trevor pointed to the horizon. "It's not the end of the world, but you can see it from here." Bree snickered. Ivan rolled his eyes.

"Here, somewhere down below," Bree said solemnly. "I believe this is what we seek. Who...we seek," she corrected herself.

"Look, if this joker wants to go off on his own, leave the past behind, who are we to say no?" Trevor asked. He had met members of this magical circle, and could understand not wanting to have to get up in the morning to go to work with them. That's one of the reasons Trevor had become an explorer, and his own boss. He had also caught himself before saying, "Who are you to say no?" He was stuck with these people – not that this was such a bad thing in Bree's case – so he might as well get used to speaking in the first person plural.

"He has left nothing behind!" Ivan snapped with uncharacteristic fervor, physically shocking everyone present. Trevor thought he might find himself slipping down the cliff, a surprised look on his face all the way down.

"Let's hear his side of things first, shall we Ivan?" When she spoke that softly, Bree was not to be refused. Trevor found himself wishing she used that voice more often, with him, alone at the bar back at the villa....

"Coming?" Her tone was impatient, and the moment gone.

They pressed through the next stand of trees and found Trevor had made two mistakes in his assessments. The spears leveled at them proved there was more than just more jungle green ahead of them. That, and the end of the world wasn't that far off after all.

The Assignment

Some members of the council have asked the characters (and their associates) to join them at one of their country estates. There they are asked to go in search of a mage thought to have been kidnapped. The heroes are assigned an unpleasant and untrusting fellow to go with them, and they enter the jungles to search for him. What they find is a tribe of natives wielding a strange mixture of magical styles – a hodgepodge that might be able to open a gate to the dreaded other world.

What's Really Going On

Tarvos Gillicuddy has served the Thaumaturgia as a loyal mage for decades, and in that time he has grown quite weary of the standoff the Kandris Seal has made. He wants to force the group's hand, and so has disappeared and choreographed

his sudden exit to look like the work of kidnappers. He traveled to the depths of the jungle to find a tribe he had studied, to use them as pawns in his scheme. He hopes to build up their power to the point they can successfully challenge members of the Broken Circle, thus proving we can do more in the war than simply sit and wait for the next incursion. He does not intend to allow things to go so far as to allow a full flight of demons to cross the threshold into our reality; he wants only to scare and surprise people just enough to light a fire under them and get them to take a proactive stance.

Ivan Paraquat believes the older mage is a traitor, now serving a different master (or worse, several different masters) and has seen to it he accompanies the investigation. He intends to kill Tarvos or bring him to Thaumaturgia justice, whichever turns out to be easier under the circumstances.

Several key members of the tribe are already under Tarvos' uncertain influence when the party arrives, and they must stop his plan before it gets out of control...which it may already be.

The Call

Anyone in the group not working directly for the Thaumaturgia is going to have to tag along as a guest of another member. If the gamemaster wants to lay a framework for making the mystic masters seem even more bewildering and spooky, he could have everyone be summoned, though the non-members would find the experience unsettling. Maybe a small bird leads them there, or they get a cryptic phone call, or a letter with an impressed symbol on it. If you want to get funky, have them receive a mental summons while they sleep.

Members of the Thaumaturgia are used to being summoned by members of the council, but their friends might not be. If this is the first real encounter the rest of the team has had with the group, it should be played out. If everyone has met before, you can breeze over it quickly, spending only as much time as you need to flesh out the briefing and give characters a chance to reacquire themselves (or renew old hostilities).

The council can come across as heavy handed, so let the players play the scene out however they like. Some are going to latch onto the need for action in a crisis, and some will want to know why they're taking orders from a stuffy bunch of aristocrats in an old house.

The meeting takes place at a small mansion, rather like a transplanted Louisiana home, though this one is located wherever is convenient for the GM. A short ride later and they're there.

The Meeting

The magicians among the party will greet their masters. Some they will treat like old friends, while others are probably too standoffish to become so chummy with the lower ranks. After everyone is settled and some light refreshments provided, they get down to business. Read or paraphrase the following:

A middle-aged man stands up and clears his throat. "My friends," he starts, "thank you for coming on such short notice." An equally middle-aged woman seated beside him pulls him down so she can whisper in his ear. "Ah, yes, and distinguished guests. We thank you as well" – he seems uncertain how to proceed for a moment – "and we know we can count upon your discretion regarding not just the thrust of this conversation, but of our little troupe as a whole." Without waiting for agreement, he plunges ahead.

"Over a month ago, one of our most trusted mages, Tarvos Gillicuddy, left to go home for the evening, and has not been heard from since. We hope nothing ill has befallen him...."

...a rough clearing of the throat from another member, hidden somewhere near the back of the room....

"...and we pray for his safe return. That is where you come in. We have attempted magical scryes to locate him, but to no avail. We need to know where he is, whether he's

all right, and with whom he has had contact. Thank you." He sits down and looks expectantly to you as though he anticipates a question being asked.

The player characters can ask whatever questions they like, though they aren't liable to be able to answer much more than they already have. All that is known is:

- he's been gone over a month
- his rooms look as though they were ransacked, though not badly
- someone has taken the time to remove some of the magical traces from the site of his disappearance; nothing important seems to remain
- no, they have not called the police, nor do they intend to; this is Thaumaturgia business

Sometime during the question and answer period, a short, squat man rises from his chair and says, "We all know what happened: Tarvos was a traitor, and he's gone over to the side of chaos." The others quiet him, insisting that he keep such scandalous rumors to himself, but he demands to be made part of the investigation. The counselors relent and tell the group that Ivan Paraquat is joining them. They can argue all they want, but the wizards here have spoken.

When the heroes have all the information they want and Ivan has been attached to the group, they are wished well by the council members and sent on their way. They are again reminded not to speak with anyone about the house or the meeting.

Avenues of Investigation

The most obvious place to begin is the apartment. The door isn't even locked when the party arrives (one of the mages in the group can explain the efficacy of magic wards and spells), and they can let themselves in. The rooms are all in disarray, though not badly mangled. The apartment looks as though it was ransacked by pretty lazy burglars, so it shouldn't be too hard to find anything.

The GM may decide whether the mages in the group would realize something was missing. Tarvos took traveling essentials and a few key spell books with him, and the magically inclined would probably be able to cross reference the books present with the books he was known to have. If the GM wishes to maintain more mystery, the missing books could have been part of Tarvos' personal collection. If he wants to put it forth as a clue, then the party can see the missing volumes deal with some subtle forms of magic – harmless on the face of things, but offering terrible consequences to anyone who becomes adept at their use without the proverbial double dose of wisdom.

The most useful clues in the abode are the most mundane: books on the tribes of South America. Tarvos took one or two such volumes and a good bit of his notes with him, but

the rest is sitting on the shelf showing a pretty clear interest in one tribe in particular: the Na'wange.

His friends in magic circles said Tarvos' company was a bit of a strain these days. He wasn't his usual light-hearted self and he seemed obsessed with his work. He would say things like "It's only a question of time," but wouldn't elaborate. Ivan paints everything they hear about the old man in the worst possible terms, and manages to alienate most of the people with whom the party comes in contact. He won't start much in the way of an interrogation, but he won't hesitate to harangue those they question either.

He was diligent in his studies and duties with the Thaumaturgia, but his work was less focused, as though he was pursuing multiple lines of inquiry. In fact he would sometimes work on his pet project as he studied, but since none of that worked its way into his results, it made the rest of his work look unfinished. He made noises about the stagnation of the war with the demons some time ago, but when he found little support for his ideas he stopped trying to enjoin the interest of others, so without proper prodding his acquaintances won't connect those old conversations with his latest situation.

We're Off to See the Wizard

Once the team (hopefully) settles on the idea of the elder mage being lost somewhere in the jungles, they can make arrangements to get there. It's up to them to decide how to make the trip, and the Thaumaturgia will foot the bills for travel and any necessary equipment (within reason). The fastest way is through a series of airplane trips, but if the GM influences the decision he can set up an adventure on the side (maybe Ivan gets airsick – though the rest of the group may not care). The effects of this story don't have much play outside Tarvos' current location, so rather than let the team get restless with an entire session spent trailing the old man, they could have a quick fight with, say, smugglers aboard a ship of some description. It all depends on the GM's pacing and how anxious the players seem.

The specific jungle is a variable the referee is welcome to change to suit his campaign. There are tropical areas in South American and Africa, as well as some thick undergrowth in Central America that would work. It could be in Burma, or...well, whatever is closest, or seems most logical, or puts the team next to the adventure the GM has planned after this one.

But in Africa, you can add pygmies.

Welcome to the Jungle

The real adventure begins once the team is in the jungle. If they don't have an explorer among their number, the heroes

may have to employ guides, either natives or the traditional white man. If he's a white man, he's either a really stable fellow who knows how to swing a punch or an opportunist who's convinced the tribes with whom they're dealing are holding out a small fortune in gold or gems. If the former, he won't accompany the party during the story; the airplane has to crash and he stays behind to fix it while the adventurers do all the investigating. (He fixes it just as the heroes return, hotly pursued by dozens of tribesmen.) If the latter, he'll come with them, making an even bigger horse's rear of himself than Ivan. At the end either he'll be killed trying to shake a native down for information, or the party has to take him out when he turns on them with a gun, demanding to know about the riches (the "real" reason they came all the way out here).

They might just want to walk.

They could also take a small watercraft if the gamemaster has some ideas about attacking them with wildlife from the river or having them fight an odd, ship-to-shore combat with vicious tribes that follow them downstream.

Encounter with Destruction

The trip to this continent was probably a snooze, so the GM should hasten the arrival of the party's challenges. Once they reach their destination the referee is kind of locked into other threats, so the journey there offers the best opportunity for some freeform jungle encounters. These may or may not be tied directly to the main adventure.

Fauna

The heroes can't get where they're going without being attacked by at least one savage beast. Mundane animals provide plenty of challenge – predatory cats, wild pigs, boa constrictors, mountain gorillas – especially if they show up in numbers or the PCs don't want to hurt an innocent animal. If regular animals aren't enough, you can make them cinematically strong. Apes become bigger, far more deadly, and a bit cannier. The boa knows to pin the mage whose inability to use his hands prevents the use of spells. Herds of wild boar act in cooperation to head off escaping PCs.

There may be a really strange menagerie out there – even in a regular pulp game, there could be twisted versions of creatures, like apes with long talons, and this is a Pulp Kandris Seal game. The GM is free to make up critters, perhaps overly vicious species of piranha in the river, as lost evolutionary tracks.

And since Tarvos and his workers have begun altering the magic in this area, it may advance the plot somewhat to have a series of supernaturally mutated beasts roaming the areas outside the city to which they're traveling. Feel free to give your zoo strange superpowers, great strength, or the chaos-tainted template.

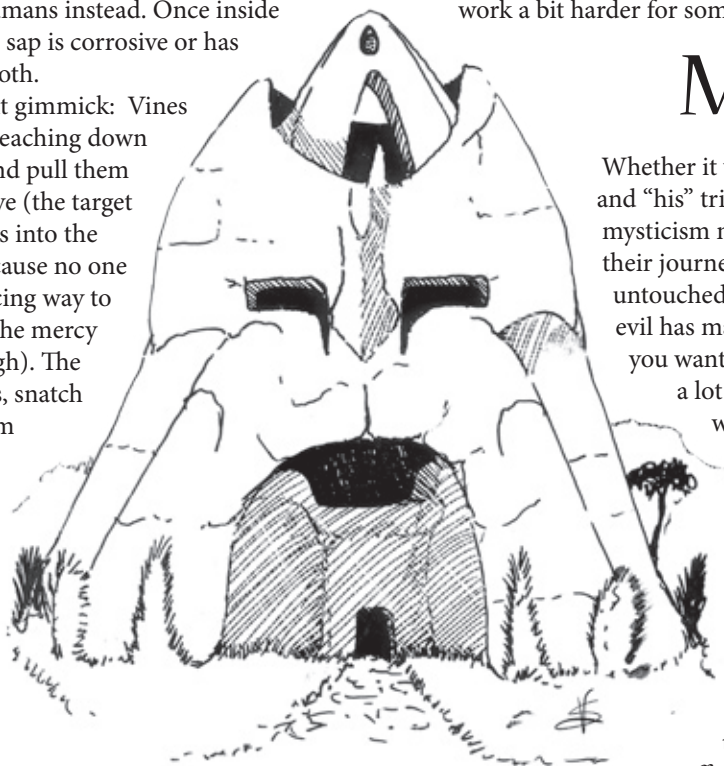
Flora

Plants aren't usually all that threatening unless they're used in a pulp fashion or altered by mad science. There may be some mundane effects from plain-vanilla plants. Irritants can cause a distracting rash, though this isn't usually the sort of thing you want sidelining your brawny protagonists. On the other hand, some plants could have a narcotic influence, making a hero see something that isn't there or altering his perceptions so he attacks an ally mistaken for an enemy.

Going the other way, the second most popular option is the giant Venus flytrap. Wander too close to it and it will grab you with its veggie-toothed maw and begin the long, slow process of devouring you. The sap inside its mouth is usually sweet and enticing to insects, though the scent in a mutated trap might be alluring to humans instead. Once inside the victim may discover the sap is corrosive or has an anesthetizing effect, or both.

But the number one plant gimmick: Vines take on a life of their own, reaching down to grab unaware travelers and pull them to an uncertain fate far above (the target always escapes or disappears into the jungle canopy, probably because no one can come up with a convincing way to make their ultimate fate at the mercy of vines look horrible enough). The vines will bind their victims, snatch useful weapons or tools from them, and strangle them. For obvious reasons a flytrap is the wrong environment for an insect, but they seem to be right at home nestled in with the vines, waiting for them to drop the dead body.

Clearly if you're going to include these last two floral elements, there'd better be some weird science, chaos taint, or cinema magic at work. The GM may wish to reward inventive players whose mage takes plant samples and uses them as components in one of their spells.



The Lost Temple

This isn't meant as a destination or even a full point of interest for the team, just a dangerous one-off encounter, but if the GM finds that it works he's welcome to develop it further for later adventures. It could even prove useful later when trying to pursue a successful conclusion to the session, so if he uses it the gamemaster should take notes about what happens here to keep some continuity.

The idea is that the fastest way across the river valley (or so their guides or instincts tell them) is to use the bridge in this ancient and disused location. The crossing is treacherous, of course, and may even collapse in part or in whole beneath

them. Though time is arguably of the essence when going to retrieve the lost wizard and not so much when coming back in triumph, the GM might not want to let the bridge be completely destroyed in case he wishes to stage an exciting chase back the way the party came. Events at their destination could always go south on them, and failure is possible.

If you want to add this as a chapter (or more) to your jungle adventure, finding and crossing the bridge in the ruins of the city might be one of the cliffhangers. The forgotten metropolis itself may hide some dark secrets with uncovering, and PCs can get dropped into pits filling with river water; locked in underground chambers; or attacked by whatever lives there (another tribe, animals, jungle spirits). Add in some puzzles for solving, some clever mechanisms, maybe a stone labyrinth, and the whole place can come alive for your story. There's nothing wrong with making the party work a bit harder for some victories.

Magic

Whether it was here all along or Tarvos and "his" tribe gave it a jump start, jungle mysticism may waylay the heroes on their journey. Nature spirits abound in untouched glades like these, and hoary evil has many resting places. Unless you want this story arc to become

a lot more complicated than what's presented here, these encounters should remain low-level threats that make the PCs start to sweat before confronting bigger problems. Equipment could be stolen by mischievous or malicious gremlins, or someone could breathe in a mist that has a slow but crippling effect on their limbs.

Don't forget, not all the magic in a Kandris Seal game is evil. Perhaps the good guys must answer to a spirit guardian. They could solve a few riddles to pass a landmark, or it might gain them some favor or other short-term advantage they can use during this or another adventure.

The Forgotten Tribe

The Na'wange live in a village at the base of a mountain. All along the slope are the remains of what is believed to be their ancestral home, a city, complete with temple, now fallen to ruins (yes, another one – pulps are lousy with 'em). The tribal belief is that one should only go there in times of trial, so most stay away unless there's a terrific storm that threatens

the village with winds or overflow from the nearby river. The floors are slanted from gradual sagging, the stones seem to scrape against each other at bad angles, and wherever you go falling pebbles and cracked flagstones suggest the whole thing isn't as stable as it was when it was new. It is deep within these buildings that Tarvos communicates with his agents in the encampment.

When the team finally tracks this place down, they can sneak into the village or simply walk right up and say "Hi." None of the documentation claims them to be traditionally open-minded or warlike, so this is discovery in its purest sense. If they sneak in or position themselves nearby (the ruins are an excellent vantage point, if somewhat dangerous), they can see the people going about their business. Most of it seems normal, but there is a disturbing proliferation of runes and drawings on different surfaces (including some of the ruined buildings at the base of the slope). The mages in the party can identify some of these as chaos-related iconology, but not solely so, and few of them are actually placed or created in such a way as to cause concern. In other words, this doesn't look like it's going to call up anything hideous. Not yet, anyway...

There's not much to be learned here while staring, so sooner or later the group has to look deeper. They have two clear choices: search the ruins, or talk to the tribe.

The Secret of the Temple

Tarvos communicates with his agents through a mystic portal he has set up in a pool of water inside what's left of the city's temple. Users travel here regularly for guidance, trying to avoid the notice of their tribe mates since entering the city is considered somewhat taboo. The old mage has set his operation up to allow him to know when someone enters. He can scry on them and see who it is, adding to his mysterious aura. Tarvos himself has set up a small camp a little ways off in the woods, clear of any beaten trails the tribe may use.

He tutors those who visit him in the ways of subtle magic, his image visible in the surface of the water. Those in his classes he knows leave the village under an excuse about hunting, so he always gives things a little magical push to make sure there is meat or game waiting for them to bolster their story. Some tribal members have become suspicious – why do these men hunt alone? – but the results speak for themselves and so no one has pried into the matter any further.

Tarvos studiously avoids teaching them anything having to do with the ways of chaos-tainted magic, but he doesn't realize that this culture already had ties to the beings beyond the circle long before recorded time. They aren't conscious of the effect such magic had on their culture in the past, but as they are made aware of certain mystic facts and formulae, the remnants, however slight, of chaos magic in the ruins about them have started to make sense. They see what they didn't before, and worse, they know things Tarvos doesn't know they know. As these two bodies of knowledge feed each other, the potential for disaster grows and is about to explode.

The Shaman

Every tribe has a shaman, so where is the medicine man for these people, and why has he not warned them of the old ways?

He's dead.

One of the students, Ka'liik, has been working alone to bring about his magic, and he has summoned something he shouldn't have. The shaman found him practicing in the jungle one night, and chastised the young man for his foolish behavior. The young man grew angry, not knowing why he could not use the old ways, and the thing he summoned borrowed his rage. It lashed out and killed the old man while the younger one watched helplessly. He could not bear to tell anyone what had happened, but as the force grows stronger, Ka'liik understands that it is acting less and less on instinct, as when it did his unconscious bidding with the shaman. He believes another death is imminent (he's right), but he cannot bring himself to tell the tribe of the danger.

This is only the first oversight of many. No matter how carefully the other members of the "class" work to learn, they will eventually bring about similar acts of destruction or worse. The heroes must uncover the secret before things reach the point of no return.

Tarvos has also wondered about the medicine man – he continues monitoring the village from his camp and has not seen him for over a week – but his assumption is that the mage has simply gone on some sort of spiritual retreat or is undergoing his own form of purification rites. Not unusual for a wizard of any culture.

Looking Through the Temple

The PCs can poke about, and they may find the pool. Those with spells can see that magic suffuses the waters, and anyone with tracking skills has plenty of evidence of people coming to the water, bending toward it, kneeling here, and camping out for short periods. The pool can only be activated by Tarvos, from his end of the "connection."

Many more of the chaos runes and symbols can be found on the walls near the pool than in the village (Tarvos isn't really looking at the outlay of the temple as he speaks to his students), and while there are some throughout the dilapidated halls, those are not found in the same profusion as down in the village. The ones near the pool were almost all made by the scholars, but none of the ones in the rest of the ruins were.

If the group finally approaches the tribe by coming down out of the city on the slope, their initial reaction will be one of awe and worship – these must be avatars of the Great Teacher. Sooner or later they're bound to become suspicious, however, and when Tarvos discovers there are other outsiders in the village, he'll mark them as enemies to the Na'wange to keep

his project alive. Remember that if anyone tries to enter the temple without being under cover or somehow mystically obscured, Tarvos' spells alert him and he'll already know about the party. The old man cannot walk into the village as well without compromising his own elevated status in the eyes of the tribe, so the party has some time to make their case, but he knows being patient will pay him big dividends with the clan. To wit...

The Direct Approach

Should the heroes simply walk out of the forest and tramp right up to the tribe, the Nawan'ge's initial reaction is one of surprise and curiosity. They connect the newcomers to the face they have seen in the pool enough to wonder what it's all about without doing something rash, but some of them have seen other tribes before, and perhaps other white men, so arriving without making a grand entrance or coming from the sacred city isn't going to "wow" them.

As the tribe tries to make sense of this, one of the students sneaks away and up into the temple for guidance. This is exactly the response Tarvos needs. He'll tell his followers the new visitors are false gods or a test of some sort and demand the tribe treat them as such. The party can try to fight the hostile group – not terribly heroic, and probably doomed to failure since there are dozens of tribesmen and only a handful of PCs (albeit capable ones). They could also run. They could allow themselves to be captured to continue talking their way out of things.

If the protagonists are at the mercy of the tribe, a few things could happen. They might be thrown to a savage beast. Getting tossed into a sunken pit with a 12-foot ape is par for the course. They could be forced to endure some sort of tests of stamina or willpower, like standing in the freezing waters beneath a waterfall or holding back water as it builds up in a makeshift dam. They could be paired up with the tribe's greatest warriors and forced to fight a series of mortal combats, or just be put to tests of athleticism. Sooner or later the tribe will kill, accept, or have need of them, because things are about to get worse.

The Power Unleashed

The first stage of the breakdown is the reemergence of the strange spirit that killed the shaman. A sickly greenish-brown glow, with a form much like that of a snake, rises up from the ground where the young man stands. It sensed his fear of being discovered again, of having these intruders take away everything he'd worked for, and of having the tribe turn against him for the death of the witch doctor. But it's not actually working for him now. It has gained enough in power and memory to recall its mandate: that of killing humans. The student tries to spit out his story hurriedly, all

the while apologizing, but everyone has bigger problems at the moment.

The snake-thing starts lashing out at people, trying to coil around them or draw the breath from their bodies. If the heroes show they've got more mettle than the rest of these people, the creature targets them for destruction. When the heroes have stopped its rampage, it falls to the ground with an audible, squelchy thump and dissolves back into the ground, killing the vegetation in that spot.

If the party is having too easy a time with the snake, have some of the students try to join in. Their powers utilize some components of chaos, and so the effects are going to be iffy at best. They'll probably make things worse in some way, empowering the snake or calling forth another.

If the villagers still harbored ill will toward the party at this point, this victory erases that. They'll listen to anything the group wants to say now, and may even offer assistance against their missing man if the situation is explained to them. If the party takes them up on that, remind everyone they should leave the half-taught mages at home.

The Lost Sheep

The heroes should decide what's to be done about the missing mage – about finding him in the wilderness, that is. Removing him from the jungles and bringing him back to civilization to answer for his crimes is something he may never get to do, depending on the events of the next chapter. It's clear he's around here somewhere, so it should only be a matter of time before he turns up or gets caught. Tarvos isn't necessarily evil (regardless of what Ivan tells you), just frustrated, but he's caused a lot of damage. Not that this makes a difference to the chaos-intolerant Thaumaturgia, but then not all the principals in this drama work for the council, either. It's also important for the GM to consider how he wants to finish things with Tarvos, in case it leads into another adventure. Don't deliberately block the group from getting some sense of closure here, but if you want to keep the old fellow around for a while, get a sense of what the team is feeling and try to orchestrate your results appropriately.

Playing in character, Tarvos probably comes out of the brush when he sees the damage he's done. Things have not gone according to plan by any stretch, and he's man enough to admit it. On the other hand, years of feeling helpless against the threat may have poisoned his mind, and he may want to retreat into the forest and lose himself, fearing punishment. He might be willing to use his powers to make his extradition difficult, or he may go quietly.

Or he could go out a hero in the next chapter...

The Final Battle

Once you know what your players would like to do about their AWOL quarry you can prepare for the big finish. This is one case where you should let them take care of one problem at the time. You don't want their player characters running about in the woods indefinitely while you're trying to create some sense of tension back at the village concerning the showdown.

One snake-being does not a serial complete; this whole area has been soaking in the remains of some hefty ruins for decades, maybe centuries, and some of them had chaos runes suggesting an otherworldly influence. This is one of those places where you can read a newspaper through the thin veil between this world and the next, and it's been getting jolted around quite a bit the last few weeks. While everyone is recovering from betrayals, reversals of fortune, and a donnybrook with an ethereal snake, cue the tremors. Don't skimp on the color commentary. Make their feet shift, the ground crack, the air shimmer, and the sunlight dim. As they watch, the assembled people see more shapes, colors, and lights rise from the jungle floor and begin swirling around the clearing.

As the shape flits about, it looks at one moment like a jungle cat, at another like a lizard, and a moment after that a hunch-backed human. Its surface is uneven, the colors sickly, and the features unpleasant to behold. Finally it turns to look over the humans and says something in a language no one understands, though everyone is pretty sure it's something about killing every living thing present. The entity intends to eliminate all opposition, then claim the village, where it will begin gnawing away at the dimensional walls to someday free its brethren.

Combating the Entity

Just pummeling this thing works, but it's not the most efficient way of bringing it down. Erasing some of the symbols drawn about the camp has a dramatic effect on it – its existence is partially dependent on being sustained by the magics employed over the last month. But the best thing to be done, if they can manage it, is to bring the mountainside down atop the beastie. It represents the biggest single concentration around of arcane energy (it's worth noting the city itself is not evil, but the symbols drawn there by certain factions in the forgotten past do allow the entity to tap into it as a source), but it was built by the ancient Nawaŋge people for their mutual protection, not to do evil. Even after the experiences the heroes had in the city, this isn't the most obvious solution, so the referee may have to drop hints, or have the entity keep its back to the wall so to speak, or allow some KS rolls. How do you bring down a mountainside?

- Explosives. Admittedly it's possible no one has any form of explosives, but it's a pulp game, so c'mon, people, get with the program.
- Powers. Everyone has some kind of attack form, and some of these might be sufficient to cut enough at the bottom that the top comes sliding down.
- Magic. There should be several mages present, and their combined might could do the job if they cooperate. If they need extra power, well, the tribal students might do more harm than good (and if you feel Ka'llik or Tarvos need to pay for their frailties, this is a good place for them to sacrifice themselves to make up for it). But if the non-magical player characters can

create a diversion, the GM should let the other mages arrange the students in such a way that they can lend their newfound power without resorting to a form of magic that causes them to lose their souls to the taint. Remember, though, if the student mages didn't intervene in the fight with the snake, they won't yet know the terrible effects their underdeveloped skills could have here. A generous GM could tell them, but that wouldn't be very pulp.

- If none of these methods are available, if no one thinks of them, or if they otherwise don't work out, someone can arrange to get behind the creature in hopes of it throwing a punch at them. If they can sidestep the blow deftly enough, the mountain shakes and begins to crumble.

This same trick might work if they lure him to the damaged bridge at the river valley, though the fall into the river means the thing will reincorporate sooner or later to menace people in a later installment.

There is a tearing noise, as though of fabric, but it feels as though the sound will push your ears into your skull. The entity looks up at the hillside behind him, and a rush of rock hurries to fill his mouth. Debris drags a cloud of dust behind it, and it all slams into the creature, pinning it to the ground. It raises a hand and its head as if to protest, and with a crash and a splash, the temple from the top of the city buries the last visible portion of the angry fiend. A tense moment later, a cloud of noxious fumes spread like a thin gown out from under the rubble, and all trace of it fades to nothing.

The hero kisses the girl – or the girl kisses the hero – and everything fades to the credits.

The Further Adventures Of

If the players liked this adventure, this section lists some future storylines the group can pursue, as well as some plot threads that can be used to wrap up loose ends in a neat little package.

Roadmap to Adventure

There are a lot of clues out here about things that have come before. Taken as a whole, these add up to a picture of the region's history (or prehistory). The investigators could piece it all together and see if the picture that results shows anything worth knowing. Where the demons came from and how to combat them? Their weaknesses? Some idea of

their unknowable plan? Such an enterprise could take several adventures, but this could be the whole war in miniature. It would cater to several different player desires all at once. The puzzle solvers could uncover the various landmarks and figure out how they're significant. The fighters could hold off anyone who might want to stop the process (the Keepers of the Broken Circle surely don't want the investigators becoming any smarter than they already are). And the mages would be at the center of any mystic questions, mysteries, or plots. The task, of course, is getting enough challenges to come to the party if they're more or less in one spot. Shut-ins don't see a lot of foot traffic.

Other Tribes

Another part of the puzzle, other groups and cultures were hinted at in the adventure, and if their members can be found they can assist in building up a picture of what the area looked like before. This would entail diplomatic missions to those peoples, proving oneself to the tribes (possibly running dangerous tasks to win their trust or respect), and helping them against attacks by the Keepers and other foes. These tribes have problems of their own, and the right hero could become a unifying figure of great renown.

Botany Lesson

Mages may hear of the plants growing here, and their unusual behavior (to be fair, any kind of "behavior" on the part of a plant is ipso facto unusual). An expedition to seek out and categorize or collect them could result in the creation of several new potions or concoctions. You'd certainly want to get to these before your enemies can cook them up. Sampling them runs the risk of being attacked by them, or by whatever ecology lives in it or nearby, but several serials are based around the search for, or protection of, strange and inventive new substances like this.

Ka'liik

If he didn't die in the final battle, the GM or the PCs have to decide what's to be done with the young man whose actions, at least indirectly, led to the death of the tribal shaman. Since it was unintended and it represents only a little chaos-taint (if any), Ka'liik is exactly the sort of person heroes are meant to save, especially in the sense of rescuing their soul from encroaching darkness.

He could be left to his tribe, to make amends to the families and the clan's sense of security. The team could take him with them and use him as a sidekick, or he could be trained to join the Thaumaturgia. He's young and impressionable, so any decision should be made with one eye on leniency and the other on rehabilitation.

Tarvos

Too many variables exist to say for sure what happens to Tarvos. If the GM wants him to hide in the jungle, he may become a hermit, though that won't stop someone like Ivan from forcibly extracting him. Whether you even can remove him at wand-point demands that someone fight it out with him, and he may not be easy prey. If he comes out, he's probably willing to take his punishment, but again, Ivan isn't the only one who gets a vote. If he goes back, he'll be given the usual Thaumaturgia punishment for betrayal, no matter how well-intentioned his plan was. If the group intervenes on Tarvos' behalf, though, the high members will be much less concerned about the results. If, for example, the heroes don't bring him home from the jungles, they aren't going to send delegation after delegation to fetch him. He'll be removed from the rolls and they may offer simple disciplinary action against the mages charged with his retrieval, but that's the only battle they'll pick.

If the team shows mercy to Ka'liik, it seems only right to offer it to Tarvos. The two can learn a lot from each other. The most poetic outcome is for him to stay behind to tutor the Nawange properly. He can be the new shaman, Ka'liik his apprentice, and the magical world has a new force in training to meet the evil head on when next it shows itself.

Adventure Seeds

The Thaumaturgia finds someone has been collecting the little bits of the Seal that broke off, pieces that are usually used to make weapons for use in service to the cause of good. Like anything else, things tend to fall through the cracks, even for an organization as fastidious as that run by the council. Are former members of this magic assembly trying to profit from their previous association? They may not be part of the "inner circle," so it's possible they don't know the threat posed by having a secret like this loose. What do they intend to do with their scraps? They could make their own weapons, and sell them to agents of foreign governments who think the Thaumaturgia doesn't have their country's best interests at heart (they'd be right – the council is too occupied trying to protect the whole of Earth). If the enemies get hold of these pieces, the sanctity and security of the Seal is weakened.

Bibliography

Many a Tome of Forgotten Lore: Recommended Reading and Viewing

The shadows of the library closed in on all sides, and while they had no substance the man in flowing cape felt them stifle his breathing as though they possessed full weight. He mentally shrugged the encumbering darkness from his thoughts, though that still left the oppressive scent of old books.

The sign on the locked door before him read “Old Manuscript Collection – Authorized Library Personnel Only.” The silent figure smiled. A flick of his wrist and the door swung easily open. “No one tells Lord Fane where he may or may not pass.” His eyes scanned the room, seeing more than the average man could in the streetlamp’s faint glimmer. Signs read “Please see library personnel for assistance” and “Gloves must be worn at all times when handling manuscripts.” Though the book Fane sought was older than any two books in the collection put together, it would not require gloves. That volume, nothing short of the Dragon’s Tooth Dagger could sunder its pages. The tome’s makers had seen to that.

An empty mailing crate with familiar writing on the lid caught his eye. The same box he had seen the book mailed out in. Mailed here, as though these fools could ever know the true value of what they possessed. The crate sat beside the locked safe – another trifle for Fane’s power. He waved his hand with slightly more curve than when he had passed the door, and the safe gaped wide. Fane extracted the book.

“Let’s see your library card, Fane.”

The tall man whirled to see another figure silhouetted against the open window, his cape spread wide. “Black Wind,” he said evenly. “So my tiger didn’t quite finish you off.”

“He never got past the appetizer,” Black Wind said, dropping

from his perch. The cape made it seem as though his body melted into the floor. Fane had long since stopped being impressed by such theatrics. The hero extended his hand. “Give me the book and I’ll see to it you can get into the paddy wagon under your own steam.”

“I hold ultimate power in my hands, and you propose to dictate terms to me?”

“I’m only warning you once, Fane. That book isn’t what you think it is.”

A chill breeze ran from the window through the room. “And you do? You’re a big-fisted thug, Wind.” Fane opened the book, too involved to notice it didn’t make the characteristic crackling noises along the spine. “You’re lucky you have enough willpower to get out of bed in the morning. I, on the other hand....” Fane began reciting from the pages.

“Fane, no!” Black Wind lifted his hand, and the streetlamp glinted off a hint of metal. It was only a small sliver of light, but the metal from which it reflected could not be mistaken: the Dragon’s Tooth Dagger.

Swirls of mist, blacker even than the existing shadows, climbed up the villain’s body as though seeking the summit. “You stole the dagger?” the mage cried. “What...what book...?”

“I switched them,” Black Wind called out, his own eyes widening. “Cut the pages from within the cover and replaced them.”

“With what?!” Fane shrieked, struggling, but the mists finally covered and consumed him. His empty cape fluttered to the ground, and the book landed heavily atop it.

“I...I don’t know...”

Bibliography and Suggested Viewing

"When a book, any sort of book, reaches a certain intensity of artistic performance it becomes literature." -- Raymond Chandler

Few books come from nowhere; most owe a debt to other volumes. Some of these were useful in writing this book, while others served as inspiration or are just too valuable to be ignored. No list of sources could contain everything; pulp magazines have over 70 years of history at this point, movie serials go back even further, and radio is everywhere. But you have to start somewhere and hopefully this list hits all the high points.

A great many of the characters from the beginning of the pulp era have made the switch to other formats, so just because you see Batman in the comics section or the Shadow listed as a magazine character, they're probably elsewhere as well. If Superman can become a stage play, anything's possible.

Movies

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension

A cult favorite, this 1984 adventure combines cartoonish characters, a highly competent scientist, his motley crew of aides, and...well, you'll have to watch yourself to find out that last bit. It's enough to say it's a wild ride, and though it's not the most focused movie it's mercilessly pulp in its technology, its villains, and of course its characters. Sherwood Productions, 20th Century Fox, MGM/UA, others (ah, the perils of copyright).

The Hidden Fortress (Kakushi-toride no san-akunin, 1958)/Star Wars (1977)

Huh?

Yes, a deliberate pairing. George Lucas based much of Star Wars: Episode IV on the Akira Kurosawa movie The Hidden Fortress. Each day, the story goes, Kurosawa and his team would place his heroes in some precarious predicament, and the next day they would have to get them out of it. See how to make cliffhangers without having to kidnap the heroes again. Toho Company Ltd. and 20th Century Fox, respectively.

Indiana Jones Trilogy

This is about as pulp as it gets these days, only you don't have to wait for next week to see how it turns out. Steven Spielberg and George Lucas resurrected the serial adventure with their hat-wearing, bullwhip-wielding, snake-hating protagonist, the "obtainer of rare antiquities." Recommended more than anything on this list short of the original sources. Raiders of the Lost Ark, 1981; Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, 1984; and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, 1989. From Paramount.

King Kong

In case you hadn't head, it's about a giant ape let loose in New York City. As for releases, take your pick: 1933, 1976, 2005, and a smattering of lesser sequels and spin-offs. RKO Radio Pictures, Paramount, and Universal, in that order.

The Maltese Falcon

It defines film noir, but its value also depends in part on the classic depiction of Hammett's private dick Sam Spade as he races various parties for a mysterious statue. N.B.: You're looking for the 1941 version, not 1931 (yes, the 1941 standout is a remake – not that there's something wrong with the earlier piece, but if you want to see Shakespeare done right...). Warner Bros.

Pulp Fiction

Taking the genre as its namesake, this modern adventure story from 1994 has all the elements that go into making a pulp story. The men are tough and careless, the women sexy and manipulative, the violence explosive, and everyone's expendable. It may not be period, but it has great dialogue, larger than life characters, and the excitement never lets up. Miramax.

The Quick and the Dead

Sam Raimi's homage to the spaghetti western is pulp because, as star Gene Hackman points out, everything's larger than life. This isn't really the West, but it ought to be. They play fast and loose with the setting and the compelling story has its own episodic feel. A 1995 release from TriStar.

Silverado

All the clichés of the West wrapped up in one entertaining package (1985). On a double bill with The Quick and the Dead, you'll have everything about the classic frontier story you could ask for. Columbia Pictures.

Stargate

The original movie is an overblown bore, but if it had more action you would call it pulp. A stone ring discovered in the early 1900s finally gives up its secrets in 1994, and whisks soldiers to a far-off planet where the culture of ancient Egypt (including someone claiming to be Ra) holds sway. Natives, rifles, rayguns, and a big ending. Followed by a superior TV

show that's too slick and densely plotted to be pulp. Carolco, MGM.

Movie Serials

The first, the original, the...well, not the only (see Indiana Jones, above), but accept no substitutes. Every studio did them, though some excelled more than others. Republic built a lot of its reputation on them, and on their terrific scale-model sets (to be blown up, natch). Note that these days you're more likely to see TV air the feature-length edit, about one hour and forty minutes. If you watch the full, unedited version, it may take three or four hours to view it all. There are too many to count, but some notable examples:

King of the Rocket Men (Republic, 1949)

Spy Smasher (Republic, 1942)

Superman and Batman; not together, but they both got the treatment (Columbia, 1948 and 1943, respectively) plus a sequel each (yes, even serials had sequels)

Flash Gordon (Universal, 1936 and sequels)

Books

Cowboy Stories

Old West tales technically are contemporary Victorian and steampunk counterparts (for which, see Steampunk Kandris), but too many movie serials are westerns to ignore the subgenre. Check into the works of Louis L'amour, Zane Grey, and Johnston McCulley (creator of Zorro) for inspiration.

Michael Crichton

He does a lot of stories that land squarely in this genre. A few suggestions: Eaters of the Dead (which film-goers will recognize as The Thirteenth Warrior (1999) with Antonio Banderas), Congo, Jurassic Park, The Lost World, and The Great Train Robbery. To a lesser extent, Timeline, Westworld, Runaway, and The Andromeda Strain.

Detectives

Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Mickey Spillaine, and others wrote about the hard-boiled detectives and the mean streets. They're by no mean the only ones, but certainly some of the best known. Erle Stanley Gardner, G.K. Chesterton, and Elmore Leonard are good, too, and if you use any of these name in your search criteria in an index or database, you'll find plenty of others that pop up next to them.

Doc Savage

Lester Dent's ridiculously capable scientist had money, a crew of friends, a gazillion science degrees...one of the early greats.

The Destroyer: Remo Williams

All the books turn out pretty much the same after a while, but Warren Murphy and Richard Sapir's creation is a modern (he started in the 60s) pulp character fighting the villain du jour – communists, terrorists, big-businessmen, Arabs, scientists run amok. A student of the outrageously effective art of Sinanju, the character and his master Chiun have persevered for over 40 years with their ability to lift multiple men in the air, anticipate weapons fire, and even trip a bus. Yes. Trip a bus. The movie is a surprisingly deft adaptation of the books.

Further Adventures

If you can get past the exceedingly quirky writing style Jon Stephen Fink employs here, this 1993 tale of an aging vocal star who's off his nut and looking to stop a criminal in the modern day offers a slight slice of the behind-the-scenes at an on-air radio drama. (The narrative switches between the hero's modern and period stories.) If you want to put some period-specific verisimilitude into your game (or add some self-referential gags), this will help, though don't look for a terribly satisfying story.

Science Fiction

The arena is huge so there's no point trying to expound too much on this subject; it would take another book bigger than this one. If you check into seminal works of sci-fi, there's a fine chance you'll be looking at stuff from this same period, when both were getting off the ground. Look for some of the grand masters (Asimov, Clarke, Gernsback, Heinlein, ad nauseum) and know that those early stories are probably the first time some of those tropes showed up.

Tarzan

King of the Apes, Edgar Rice Burroughs' jungle hero helped establish his pulp world (which included the lost world of Pellucidar, under the Earth's crust). Get your ideas for wilderness adventure from one of the first and foremost of the genre.

Magazines

Amazing Stories

Actually there are plenty of good science fiction magazines from the time period, and more than one helmed by Hugo Gernsback, but this was the granddaddy. Finding original copies of any of these periodicals would cost more than the average gamer could field, but the stories were often gathered in book form and can still be found at libraries and in the occasional reprint.

Look also into Weird Tales, Argosy, and Astounding, and see Science Fiction (above, under Books) for more about the proliferation of sci-fi.

The Shadow

When you talk about pulp, you're talking about the Shadow. The definitive antihero, he started in magazines and the radio, using his power to cloud men's minds to render himself unseen. He swirled around criminals, gunning down the guilty, and has since crossed into every medium. The 1994 movie is only lukewarm, but good for some contemporary visuals.

The Spider

Another noir character in the same vein as The Shadow, the Spider was a pulp hero fought crime with guns, too, but also an air gun and other hidden goodies. With fewer modern iterations he's a little harder to find than the Shadow these days, but he did put out a pair of serials.

Audio

Sadly, while radio was the point of origin for many of the most famous figures in the history of the pulps (including a lot of the ones on this list), it's a dying art form. Occasionally someone does a revival of some sort, or produces or plays something for Halloween or some such, but it's catch as catch can. You can often find audio collections of some of the old radio shows for sale. The Shadow, Quiet Please, Inner Sanctum, and others have all been made available at one time or another for your listening pleasure. If they're not currently in print, they can usually be found in on-line auctions.

Television

Old TV series have started popping up in DVD collections, and can be had for less than a song (some are in the public domain). Some are specific settings, like the TV version of the Rocket Men serial. Others were early anthology series (precursors to The Twilight Zone and such) like One Step Beyond, wherein the story varied from week to week. While an anthology does little to promote an ongoing narrative, these shows do display a simpler view of then-current adventure stories, and is a great source for some incipient weird and supernatural material.

These aside, there are a number of series with consistent settings that can be mined for good ideas.

Tales of the Gold Monkey

Before he brought us JAG and Quantum Leap, Bellisario dipped his toe in the then-faddish Indiana Jones pond with this short-lived but critically acclaimed adventure series about Jake Cutter, a bush pilot whose services are for hire in the era just before World War II. Hostilities haven't begun, but Hitler's star is on the rise and there are already Nazi plots gathering steam.

Alias

Although later seasons lacked focus and descended too deeply into the science-fantasy end of its stories, J.J. Abrams' spy fantasy ended most episodes on a clever cliffhanger. Great for ideas on building up a coherent and ongoing espionage storyline.

24

Like Alias, this gimmicky crowd-pleaser's early seasons were better examples for the pulp-era referee. The hero spends a whole season – 24 episodes – living out a terrorist plot one hour at a time, in real time, and the freshman run kept viewers on the edge of their seats. A good example of episodic work.

Prison Break

Where Alias and 24 left their viewers on a dangerous note at the end of each week, Prison Break manages to do it every commercial break. A man gets himself thrown in jail so he can free his innocent brother from death row – a job you'd think was pretty easy for the guy since he designed the penitentiary. If you need a primer in keeping up suspense and maintaining an exhilarating pace, this is ideal watching.

Batman

The old TV show was campy, but punch it and it bleeds death traps.

Comic Books

Batman

They don't call him the Dark Knight for nothing. His parents were murdered by criminals, so he stalks the night to sweep it free of evil.

Flash Gordon

Some characters just span every medium. Flash Gordon had plenty of comic book iterations, but many are probably out of the collector's reach. More recently (well, 1988) DC Comics did a modern retelling for nine issues, and it was worth the wait. The story was simple and entertaining, the art clean and evocative, and the cliffhangers were a thing of beauty – worth tracking down just for the endings.

The DC Challenge

In 1986, several writers and artists for the comic book company got together for this round-robin (no pun intended) face-off. Everyone wrote an issue of the book, ended it with a cliffhanger, and left it to the next poor sap to get the heroes out of trouble. They also had to develop a plot in pieces as they went.

Superman

His comic book isn't the perfect example of pulp, though there's a lot in the early issues about gangsters and femme fatales. On the other hand he was quick to jump to other formats, including a long and successful series on the radio, and the limits of the technology meant the stories had to be more atmospheric.

On-Line Resources and Historical References

Sometimes the only thing you can count on to provide for your retro-fix is the wistful nostalgia found on an Internet site, and the dry thoroughness of a history book. What follows are a few sites that provide lists of pulp-related materials or authors, or books holding information that can be used to add a little more atmosphere to your game.

Cliffhanger

Alan G. Barbour looks at all the serials from the era. It's mostly a pictorial history, but there are essays on the separate elements that go into each production – the villains, the heroes, the costumes – and he's smarter than to treat the subject as being weightier than it actually is. A great reference to find which serials are worth tracking down and which are just a letdown, and it's a goldmine of all the best clichés.

Pulp Art

This book examines what went into the covers of the pulp magazines, but Robert Lesser has gathered commentaries by experts in the field, art historians, sci-fi fans, and some of the people who lived the business. You can find out a lot about what people really thought about the medium, some of it from letters of the time.

The Timetables of History

Bernard Grun's wonderful work puts all of human history into perspective with timelines and descriptions. You really only need a select few decades, of course, but the rest of the volume covers other areas in case you want to set up a time travel adventure.

What Happened When

A better resource for the Pulp Kandris GM, Gorton Carruth concentrates on American history. Each year is divided into major chunks like what legislation was passed, who won what sporting event, and which disasters took out what property. Again, you need only some of it but it's more focused on the times and places you're liable to deal with.

A Few Pulp Authors

Not the best edited site in the world, but it's a good-sized list of authors from that time period. Use it to get started.
http://www.panix.com/~mfs/pulp_authors.html

The People History

If you and the gamemaster don't know how much a train ticket cost in 1941 or the price of a jug of milk...well, what does that have to do with capturing Dr. Syklops? But if a bit more period realism will put your mind at ease, you can go here for data about the state of things year by year.
<http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/>

Computer Games

Blood

A first-person shooter about a man and his wife who join a cult only to be betrayed – and murdered – by the leader. The antihero rises from his grave (looking for all the world like the Shadow) and goes looking for some payback. It's set a bit early to be strictly pulp, but there are cultists, zombies, Tommy guns akimbo, weird science, period weapons, voodoo, and enough atmosphere to choke a giant ape.

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