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Castle Falkenstein

High Adventure in the Steam Age



By Phil Masters and James L. Cambias

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

WHERE STEAM MEETS MAGIC

Imagine a world very much like 19th-century Earth, but with wizards and swashbuckling heroes . . . and Dragons and Faerie! A world where Kabbalistic magick meets steam-powered technology against the backdrop of imperial intrigue – and the writings of Doyle, Shelley, and Verne are fact. This is the world of **Castle Falkenstein**.

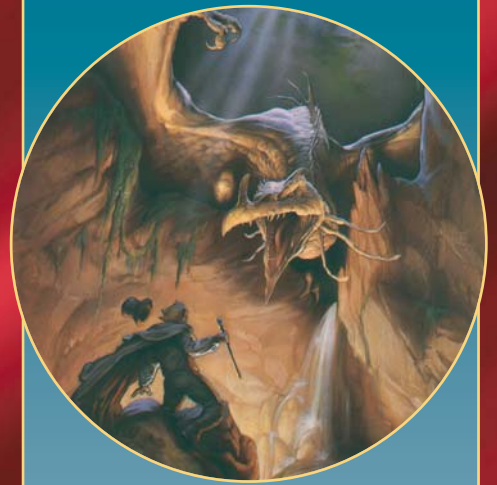
This critically acclaimed RPG setting was originally published by R. Talsorian Games. Now, Steve Jackson Games has adapted **Castle Falkenstein** to the **GURPS** system. **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** includes full rules to convert **Castle Falkenstein** characters into **GURPS** and vice versa. It also includes a complete overview of the state of the world, rules for “steampunk” technology, and **GURPS** descriptions of Auberon of Faerie, Tom Olam, and many other favorite **Castle Falkenstein** characters.

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GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised and *Compendium I: Character Creation* are required to use this book in a **GURPS** campaign. Or **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** can be used as a sourcebook for any roleplaying system.

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GURPS®

Castle Falkenstein™

High Adventure in the Steam Age

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Phil Masters

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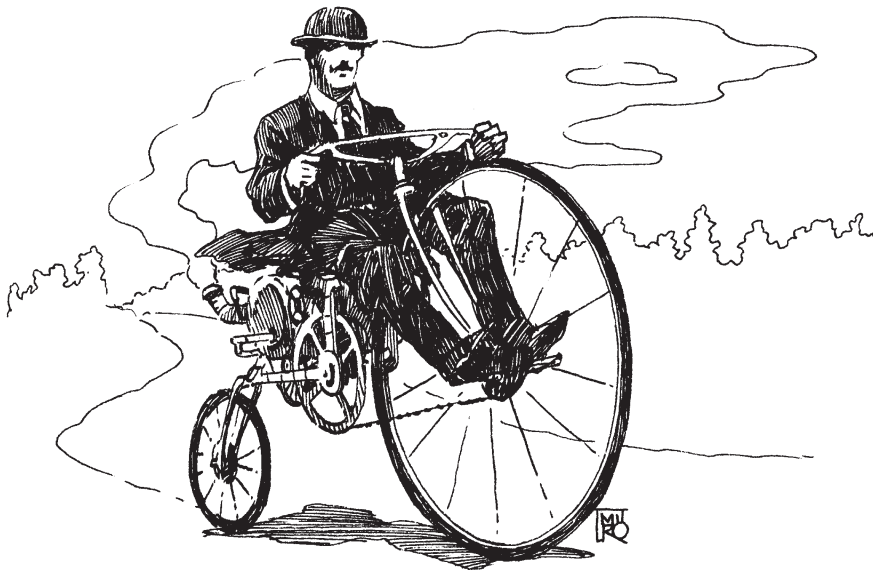
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ABOUT GURPS

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Pyramid (www.sjgames.com/pyramid). Our online magazine includes new rules and articles for **GURPS**. It also covers the hobby's top games – *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Shadowrun*, and many more – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *In Nomine*, *INWO*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre*, and more. And *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online, to see (and comment on) new books before they're released.

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GURPSnet. Much of the online discussion of **GURPS** happens on this e-mail list. To join, send mail to majordomo@io.com with the message "subscribe GURPSnet-L" in the body, or point your World Wide Web browser to gurpsnet.sjgames.com/.

The **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** Web page is at www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/castlefalkenstein/.

PAGE REFERENCES

For the most recent list of abbreviations for **GURPS** titles, visit our Web site at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html. Or see *GURPS Compendium I*, p. 181.

Page references that begin with a B refer to the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised**; e.g., p. B22 refers to page 22 of the **Basic Set**. CI refers to **GURPS Compendium I**, CII to **Compendium II**, M to **Magic, Second Edition**, and UT to **Ultra-Tech, Second Edition, Revised**.

INTRODUCTION

"Then Auberon raised his arms and shouted, 'Now it begins!'

"Blue light shot from his hands, and the entire fortress rocked as if struck by an earthquake . . ."

– Col. Rudolph von Tarlenheim,
describing the reconstruction
of Castle Falkenstein in his *Remembrances*

The world of **Castle Falkenstein** is fantastic.

That is to say, it is a *world* of the fantastic. It may not appear that way at first glance; it seems to be a duplicate of our own world, circa A.D. 1870. Admittedly, something (or someone) has ripped a great gash through northwestern Europe, and the United States has been stymied in its westward expansion by Native American resistance, but even changes of that magnitude seem not to have made huge differences to the general flow of history. Prussian expansion threatens the borders of its neighbors; Britannia rules the waves, where sail is disappearing before steam; Charles Darwin's theories are radically controversial; the American Civil War is a recent, painful memory.

But look closer. Faeries, Trolls, and Dryads live alongside humanity – and these are the uncanny, powerful fairy-folk of myth. Dwarfs labor beneath the mountains, and Dragons ride the winds above. Humans, too, wield magick, while even the science of the age seems fantastical; "steampunk" technology produces Babbage engines, mighty airships, and infernal weapons. Even the people of the age emerge from legend as well as history; Sherlock Holmes begins his long duel of wits with Professor Moriarty, Nemo and Robur assert their power over sea and sky, and a certain Colonel Flashman is ever the hero of the hour. This is a world of swashbuckling swordplay, of heroes and villains, and of melodrama such as our own world only imagines, even in its own Victorian age. Thus, it is a world of adventure.

This setting was first described for roleplayers by Mike Pondsmith in a series of books from R. Talsorian Games, including a rule system specially designed for the setting, over the period 1994–1997. Now, **Castle Falkenstein** returns, adapted for **GURPS**, and hence for players who prefer a more "generic" approach to rules; this version can also make use of the huge range of supplements and extensions available for the **GURPS** system.

So prepare your spells, check that your service pistol is loaded, and fire up your patent steam ornithopter; adventure awaits!

About the Authors

Mr. James Cambias

Born in the Free State of Orleans, James Cambias has wandered far from his home in search of knowledge and adventure. He studied occult history and forbidden science in Chicago, and now resides in the Unseelie-haunted wilds of New England. Having found happiness with his True Love, he devotes his time to literary pursuits.

Mr. Philip Masters

A scholar after his own peculiar fashion, and a gentleman of sorts by the dubious standards of the debased modern age, Philip Masters, *Magister Artium Cantabrigiensis*, is a citizen of Great Britain who has seen some 40 years pass by. Previously employed in the manipulation of computational engines for vulgar commercial purposes, he is today another occupant of that shabby by-way off Grub Street reserved for those who scribble material pertaining to "Adventure Games."

CHAPTER ONE



THE WORLD OF CASTLE FALKENSTEIN

The setting of Castle Falkenstein resembles our own world around 1870 in many ways – while being spectacularly different in others. It is a world where magic works, and where a number of nonhuman, supernatural races and beings are a major, visible part of the scene. Nonetheless, history has followed broadly the same pattern as universes without these features. Given the wild “steampunk” technology and major figures who were fictional in our past, the crucial question is how far events will continue to follow the pattern of other universes, and how far various forces (some consciously aware of the possibilities) can change them – for better or for worse.

✧ SOME HISTORY ✧

“NEW EUROPA” (NAMES AND NAMING)

Terms used in *Castle Falkenstein* games often reflect those used in the accounts written by Tom Olam (see p. 139), which can be quite evocative but also a little confusing. Finding himself adventuring in an area which is mostly like, but sometimes very unlike, Europe in his own world, Olam took to referring to it as “New Europa.” Because this was the starting-point for adventures that took him all across the planet, he sometimes used the words rather loosely, even applying them to the entire setting. However, when he remembered, he preferred to refer to the globe as a whole, and the universe in which it exists, as the “World of Castle Falkenstein.”

This book attempts to follow this precedent as closely as convenient, using “New Europa” to indicate the continent of Europe and possibly some adjacent lands, and also the culture which dominates there: a culture much like that of Victorian Europe in our world, but colored by the presence of Faeries, Dragons, Dwarfs, and magick. (Thus, the United States in the world of Castle Falkenstein is a country which might be said to have a New European culture, albeit with some quirks.) The words “Europe” and “European” are used to indicate the continent and its inhabitants specifically, when geography has to be made very clear. However, as New Europa will be the starting point for most (though by no means all) adventures, and the place of origin of most characters, the term may be used freely, and perhaps loosely, as indicating the setting of the game.

One other name to note is that of the ocean between Europe and America, which New Europeans refer to as the “Atlantean” rather than “Atlantic.” (This may be somehow related to the fact that one or more lands known as “Atlantis” actually existed in this area in the past.) Also, the continent elsewhere known as South America is known to New Europeans as “Antillea.”

According to Auberon of Faerie, history seems to have followed much the same general pattern in each of the several parallel worlds he has visited, although each was at a different point in history when he arrived. (Time appears to progress at radically different rates in different universes.) Unfortunately, Auberon is not the most reliable of witnesses, and for all anyone knows, there may be constraints on what worlds the Faerie folk can visit – but certainly, reports from others of his kind have never been found to contradict Auberon’s accounts to any great extent.

What Has Gone Before

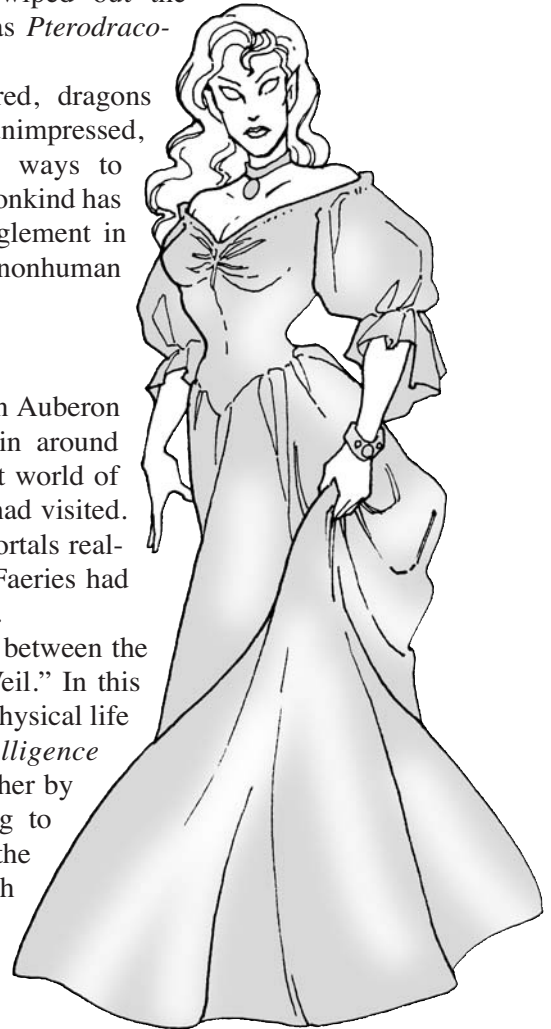
The Falkenstein-world’s continents have much the same shape as our own (barring the addition of one sea – see sidebar, p. 15), and humanity seems to have evolved there much as here. However, the first great divergence goes back millions of years before that, to the age of the dinosaurs, when one branch of the family of *pterosaurs* (flying reptiles) developed a sensitivity to magick. This seems to have started before the race evolved intelligence, which probably appeared as an aid to handling these forces. Over evolutionary time, the pterosaurs used magick to enhance their flying abilities, enabling them to grow to great size in defiance of aerodynamic physics, and then to master shapeshifting and other useful tricks which enabled them to survive the great extinction that wiped out the dinosaurs. The eventual result was *Pterodraconis sapiens* – the Dragon.

When human beings appeared, dragons were slightly amused and mostly unimpressed, but eventually found profitable ways to interact with them. However, dragonkind has tended to stand back from entanglement in human affairs – unlike the next nonhuman race to appear on the scene.

The Faerie Host

It is no great secret that, when Auberon stepped onto the northern Alps in around 12,000 B.C., this was not the first world of solid matter that the Faerie Host had visited. It is perhaps fortunate that few mortals realize quite how much damage the Faeries had done during their previous travels.

Faeries originated in the void between the universes, the so-called “Faerie Veil.” In this featureless realm of pure energy, physical life was an impossibility, but *intelligence* could survive, holding itself together by pure will and eventually learning to shape its surroundings. However, the Faeries had no idea what to do with the vast energies at their disposal, until they somehow found their way into a material universe. There they ran amok.



CHARACTER DIARY EXAMPLE

Phil is creating a new character: Doctor Sigismund Clave, a scientist-anarchist who uses his inventions in the service of liberty everywhere. He begins by writing in Clave's diary.

"I was born in August of 1837 in a tiny Moravian village. My father was a notary, pathetically proud that a cousin of his had married a minor nobleman in Carinthia. My mother was a peasant girl; she died while I was an infant. As a child, my health was delicate and I was bedridden for weeks at a time. During those long periods, I forgot my ills by reading. By the age of ten, I had gone through my father's library, and two years later I had read all the books to be had in the district.

"My father sent me to school in Prague, hoping that I might become a lawyer. But my interest was captured by Science, and I devoted all my time to the study of chemistry, biology, and electricity. After my father cut off my allowance, I supported myself by tutoring other students.

"I might well have gone on to become a professor lecturing to classrooms full of apathetic louts, had it not been for Marta. She lived in the garret of the house where I had my lodgings, and was a vision of loveliness. I was smitten the first time I saw her. She was 19 years old, I was 18, and we were in love.

"There was a mystery about her. Even after half a year I was unable to discover what she did during the day. But as the months passed, I noticed a sadness and a weariness about her, which grew from day to day. One afternoon when I met her for a walk along the river, she collapsed in my arms. I got her home and summoned a doctor, and he told me she was dying of consumption brought on by overwork.

"As she lay dying, she confessed that she had been working days in a factory making matches, then spending her nights doing needlework. Her family was destitute, her father an invalid. She was their sole support, and she had worked herself into the grave.

"When Marta died, I discovered in myself a tremendous hatred of all that had brought about her illness. What good was science if people still lived in misery? I resolved to apply my knowledge to benefit humanity and punish oppressors."

A character's goals should be reflected by appropriate disadvantages and quirks taken during character creation. Professional goals might be reflected by disadvantages like Glory Hound, Fanaticism (or Megalomania), Stubbornness, Workaholic, or perhaps even an Obsession. Romantic goals can be the origin of disadvantages like Dependents, Lecherousness, or Secret. Social goals can create disadvantages like Jealousy, Selfish, Self-Centered, Code of Honor, or Sense of Duty.

Your Diary

Characters in *GURPS Castle Falkenstein* are strongly encouraged to keep diaries. The most fun way to handle it is for the diary to be both a character possession and a real item belonging to the player. A character diary can be as elaborate as a bound journal, as simple as a bunch of looseleaf sheets stapled together, or as high-tech as a word-processing document on the player's laptop.

The diary serves two main purposes. The first is at the start of the character's adventuring career, when the player can use the diary to note the character's background and goals. With some help from the GM, this can also establish connections to the other player characters and important NPCs in the campaign. It is usually best to describe the character's background in the diary before getting down to the nuts and bolts of *GURPS* character generation. The diary lets the player paint the character in broad brushstrokes before filling in the details with skills, advantages, and quirks.

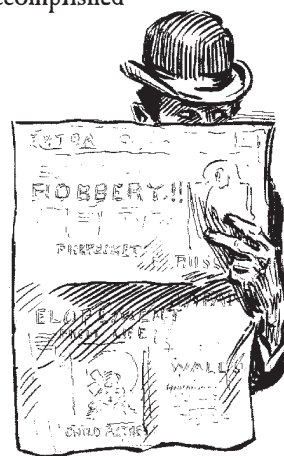
The advantage of writing up the character's background this way is that it gives the player lots of ideas for ways to flesh out and deepen the character. Doctor Clave (from the sidebar) would obviously have scientific skills and perhaps some thief/spy abilities learned as an anarchist. But from the writeup, we know he grew up in a small farming town and so may have some outdoor skills. From his father, he may have learned a little law. Having been sickly as a child, he may suffer from a phobia about disease and infection.

There are two important things to remember about a character's diary, if you decide to keep one. The first is that it is the *character's* diary, not the player's. Things which the character doesn't know can't appear in his or her diary (although players with a bent for creative writing can find ways to imply things which the characters don't actually know).

The second thing to keep in mind is that the diary really exists in the campaign. The player should specify where his character's diary is kept, and if another character comes across it, that player is allowed to read it (only a cad would stoop to such a thing, but some people enjoy playing cads). Non-player characters also have diaries, in which they tend to spell out all their hidden goals or fiendish schemes.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: A WARNING

Let it be known to the public that the person recently presenting himself as HIRAM K. MORTLAKE, alias "Hiram the Mason" or "The Enlightened Master of the Washington Temple," has NO CONNECTION with any extant branch of the Freemasons, on any continent. Furthermore, his supposed supernatural powers have been positively identified as fraudulent, being accomplished by nothing more than the assistance of a mischievous Leprechaun.



MALFUNCTIONS

When devices in the Castle Falkenstein world malfunction, they don't do it in a small way – generally they either keep working or fail catastrophically. Whenever a vehicle fails a HT roll, or an invented weapon gets a Malfunction result on a to-hit roll, use the following table. (Ordinary off-the-shelf weapons use the standard critical failure rules.)

- 3, 4 – The weapon or device goes up in a spectacular explosion. The force of the blast is equal to twice the damage value of the weapon, or 10d, and is centered on the firing chamber or the power source. Those nearby can make a DX roll to dive for cover or get clear of the explosion.
- 5, 6 – Reverse function. The vehicle starts running in reverse, the device does the opposite of its normal function, or the weapon backfires doing normal damage to the user.
- 7, 8 – The item catches on fire. In the case of a vehicle this means occupants must hold their breaths long enough to get out or be overcome by smoke. A gun on fire does damage equal to one shot each round until the user can toss it away; beam weapons or other devices do 1d per round to anyone at the control panel or inside the device.
- 9, 10 – The weapon or device makes a weird noise and belches out a cloud of smoke, but then works normally again.
- 11, 12 – Failure is imminent; unless the user makes a successful skill roll to operate the device or weapon, next round it will fail completely.
- 13, 14 – The machine works normally for one turn, but in the process destroys itself so that it cannot be used again.
- 15, 16 – The item starts shaking and giving off smoke as it tears itself apart inside. Weapon users or passengers in a vehicle are blackened but unhurt, but the machine is a total loss and cannot be fixed.
- 17, 18 – The device goes out of control! Weapons or other devices begin firing wildly until all ammunition or power is expended; vehicles take off at top speed in a random direction. The operators can attempt a skill roll each turn to bring it back under control.

Magickal Technology

The most fascinating new technology in New Europa is Engine Magick. Developed from drawings in a recently rediscovered work by Leonardo da Vinci, Engine Magick is the art of building machines which can themselves cast spells. (Dwarfs, in particular, are very excited about the idea that they might be able to use magick again by means of machinery.) Engine Magick is a tightly guarded secret of the Second Compact; only a handful of people know anything about how it works.

Each Sorcerous Automaton can cast one spell, and draws Thaumic Energy in a steady and controlled manner. There is no chance of Wild Magic or harmonics when an Automaton is operating. They can be designed to keep casting one spell over and over, to keep the spell in effect continuously, or to cast it only once, depending on the wishes of the designer. The Automaton can keep running as long as it has power. Note that Sorcerous Automata must have a source of mechanical power; they cannot use Magick as an energy source. They are usually powered by steam, compressed air, clockwork, or electric batteries. It is important to note that the power supply operates the spell-casting machinery; it does not power the spell directly. Sorcerous Automata can (and do) unleash tremendous amounts of energy, well beyond what their power plants can supply.

Sorcerous Automata have one unique advantage over living spellcasters: Because they themselves are only machines, the relationship to the target doesn't have any effect. Automata affect all targets equally, even those with Magic Resistance (an effect which both fascinates and alarms the Dwarfs).

The range and power of a Sorcerous Automaton depends on the size of the device. The following table gives some idea of size, range, and power.

Size	Range	Effect	Power Required
Tiny (10 lbs., 1 cf)	50 feet	small objects/12 square ft.	1 kW
Small (50 lbs., 4 cf)	900 feet	medium objects/30 sf	5 kW
Medium (200 lbs., 16 cf)	9,000 feet	large objects/60 sf	20 kW
Large (1,000 lbs., 80 cf)	50 miles	huge objects	100 kW
Huge (10 tons, 2,000 cf)	500 miles	whole city blocks	2,000 kW
Immense (1,000 tons, 100,000 cf)	5,000 miles	whole cities	200,000 kW

Creating a Sorcerous Automaton requires both a Gadgeteer and a sorcerer. The Gadgeteer must have access to the secret of Engine Magick and the sorcerer must know the spell the device is to cast. Creating the machine is a straightforward process of invention as described on page CI121. Sorcerous Automata are Amazing gadgets, and their TL is the basic TL(5+1) of the *GURPS Castle Falkenstein* world. Automata generally cost about \$10,000 per pound.

Depending on the type of spell, the Primary Spell Generator (the heart of the machine) has a particular appearance. For Emotional aspect spells, the device is likely to have spinning concentric circles of metal rings, set with tiny hooks and metal cups. Material spells usually involve complex gears and jointed metal rods moving in complicated patterns. Spiritual spells generally require shiny metal globes, odd pendulums, and balance beams swinging back and forth. And Elemental spell generators tend to have jointed metal parts with knobs that clack together, ratcheting up a long screw.

Engine Magick is mostly limited to the construction of plot devices, goals, or prizes rather than tools. Adventurers are unlikely to be in on the secret of building Sorcerous Automata, so fantastic spellcasting machines are probably going to be the property of NPCs. In the course of an adventure, characters may try to steal them, sabotage them, recover them, or destroy them, but they should remain firmly under the control of the Game Master.

≡ TONE AND STYLE ≡

Although *Castle Falkenstein* is a setting designed for fantastic adventures and heroic action, some variations in tone and style are possible. Campaigns might emphasize intrigue, social struggle, or suspense instead. Depending on the preferences of the players and the GM, you can combine styles to suit the adventures you want to create.

MAKING IT EXCITING

Castle Falkenstein games should emphasize adventure and excitement. GMs looking for ways to pump some adrenaline into their gaming sessions may consider the following tips:

Surprise Them

In action films, the heroes have to cope with a non-stop series of perils and threats. A good game can have the same feel if the GM keeps piling on the dangers: The characters escape the castle but are pursued by Cossacks. They lose the Cossacks in a forest but disturb a pack of werewolves. They cross a frozen river to get away from the werewolves but the ice breaks just as the Cossacks catch up again. And so on. It's best if the dangers get worse each time, so the heroes are constantly leaping from the frying pan to the fire.

Skip the Boring Parts

If the intrepid adventurers have just dispatched the maniac lurking beneath the Paris Opera, it really isn't necessary to play out the police debriefing afterward. Just say, "After your wounds are tended and the police have asked their questions, you stagger home to bed. But next morning . . ." And they're off again.

Make Snap Decisions

In *GURPS*, resolving combat or tricky stunts sometimes requires a lot of die rolling. If the action grinds to a halt while you look up two or three different tables, the players may lose interest. So don't. If you just say that the penalty for firing a pocket Gatling gun while swinging through a window is -4, then that's what it is. Roll the dice and keep moving. (Of course, it helps if you're familiar with the rules and have a good idea of what kind of modifiers are appropriate, but don't sweat it if you don't.)

Swashbuckling Adventure

Above all, the Falkenstein world is exciting. Gentlemen don't settle disputes by hiring lawyers or complaining; they resort to cold steel or pistols at dawn. The fates of nations really are decided by daring spies climbing into remote castles in the dead of night or by desperate fights atop speeding railway trains.

Obviously, a *Castle Falkenstein* campaign should have action, and plenty of it. GMs should be sure to give PCs lots of opportunities to be heroic. Even if the campaign centers on science and invention, or magickal intrigue, there is room for derring-do. Inventions can go awry and spells can backfire, after all.

However, an exciting game doesn't have to be an unending series of brawls; action isn't always the same as violence. There can still be plenty of excitement even if the heroes never strike a blow or fire a shot in anger. Dangling from a runaway dirigible, scaling the face of an ice cliff, or riding a raft down a raging river are all exciting and dangerous, but don't involve conflict.

In an action-oriented campaign, plots are unlikely to be multi-layered. If a noblewoman needs someone to retrieve compromising letters from a horrid blackmailer, the problems faced by the heroes include guards, locked gates, and deathtraps. They can probably assume the noblewoman is real and the blackmailer is truly vile. The emphasis is on action rather than on discoveries or character interplay. Pacing and maintaining the excitement are the GM's chief tasks. (See the sidebar for suggestions.)

Glittering Intrigue

The flip side of action is intrigue. Sometimes a chance remark overheard or a secret "accidentally" revealed can be as effective as a gunfight. New Europa is full of conspiracies, plots, and secrets. Players who enjoy roleplaying and devising their own plots and counterplots can have a ball as they match wits with Evil Masterminds, the Iron Chancellor, or the Unseelie. Intrigues can range from personal to international in scope, and can be as lighthearted as a romance or as deadly serious as The Adversary's attempts to destroy humanity. Often, what seems at first glance to be a minor plot turns out to be part of a much bigger, more sinister operation.

Since intrigues and conspiracies are, by definition, secret, getting adventurers involved can be tricky. If the heroes are operatives for some police or intelligence agency, their superiors can hand them a few patchy clues ("men died to get these papers out of Constantinople") and send them off. For other characters, however, a little creativity may be required.

One effective ploy is the Beautiful Girl In Danger. She appears on one's doorstep in the dead of night, or begs for help in a railway compartment, or simply bumps into a PC while fleeing a band of sinister assailants. No gentleman worthy of the name would hesitate to help a damsel in distress. (Turnabout is fair play, of course: what adventuress could possibly refuse to help a gentleman in distress, especially if he's charming and handsome?)

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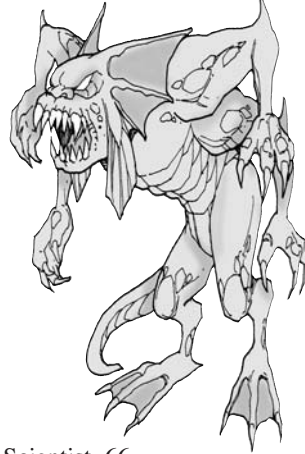
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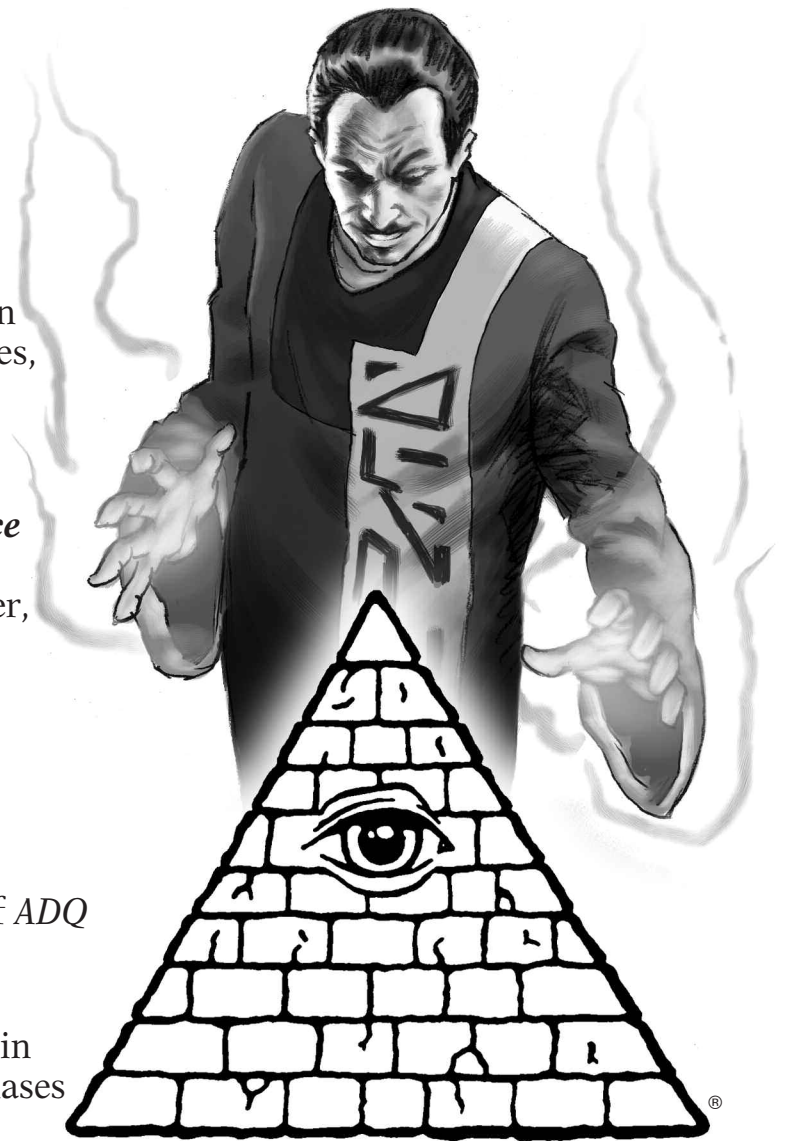
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