


# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/75 January '15

## HERO'S JACKPOT



### JUST REWARDS

by Sean Punch

**A FAMILIAR PATH**  
by Christopher R. Rice

**STEALING MAGIC**  
by J. Edward Tremlett

**REWARDING COLONEL OMSFORD**  
by David L. Pulver

**DRINKABLE, WEARABLE,  
IMPOSSIBLE POINTS**  
by Steven Marsh

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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*Interviewer: Can you destroy the Earth?  
The Tick: Egad, I hope not! That's where  
I keep all my stuff!*

– *The Tick* #1.7

## ARTICLE COLORS

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

- Pale Blue:* In This Issue
- Brown:* In Every Issue (humor, editorial, etc.)
- Green:* Columnist
- Dark Blue:* **GURPS** Features
- Purple:* Systemless Features

**COVER ART**  
Jim Zubkavich

# IN THIS ISSUE

A haunted spaceship. The boon of a god. A dragon who sits on your shoulder and answers your cell phone. All of these would be awesome bonuses that would make a hero proud. This month's *Pyramid* looks at rewards, which can serve as either a wish list for adventurers to drool over, or a selection of new and different prizes to bestow upon imperiled protagonists.

**GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** heroes expect loot; it's best not to disappoint them! That line's mastermind, Sean Punch, ensures that heroes get their *Just Rewards*, with a meaty assortment of new and different bonus abilities for crypt-crawlers. Don't settle for gold when you can become a saint of the city, gain the power of mingled trollblood, or have a psychic awakening!

Practitioners of the arcane arts revealed in **GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic** often find themselves treading strange and mysterious roads. Sometimes you need the help that can come when you take *A Familiar Path*. With these rules, you'll summon, create, and control your own preternatural companion to help you with your mystic arts . . . or whatever else needs doing.

Renowned **GURPS** author David Pulver has run a staggering number of varied and interesting campaigns. Thus, this month's Eidetic Memory looks at the topic of heroic rewards through the lens of the possibilities and troubles that arose while *Rewarding Colonial Omsford*. Discover how this space-opera hero acquired a new **GURPS Spaceships** vessel, unusual weapons, unique opportunities, and more – all with **GURPS** stats you can crib for *your* campaign!

When you're a thief in a magical world, you can always use an edge – including an advantage that can only be gained by *Stealing Magic*. Whether drinking the Twin Potions of Returning, donning the Coward's Cloak, or using the Fluid of Free Passage, this assortment of systemless magical gear will augment any sticky-fingered rogue.

Rewards are good, but sometimes you want to bend reality to your will. That's no problem . . . *if* you have *Drinkable, Wearable, Impossible Points*. These suggestions start with a basic premise, then tweak it for various genres. Find out how to bring the possibilities of **GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys** to any campaign without permanently altering the long-term status quo of the setting.

This issue also includes a Random Thought Table that lets you reward heroes with a whole new genre. Whether your heroes are in the past, present, or future, let's face it: with this issue of *Pyramid*, you've just hit the jackpot!

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## LOOT, I AM YOUR FATHER . . .

The notion of player rewards is one that's near and dear to Your Humble Editor's heart. In fact, one of my earliest writing projects after becoming Your Humble Editor nearly 15 years ago was a meaty contribution to 2002's award-winning *Gamemastering Secrets, Second Edition*. My section was all about awarding, controlling, and rethinking treasure.

## PLAYERS WELCOME!

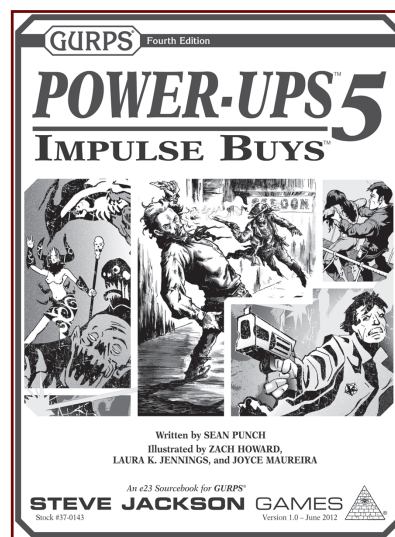
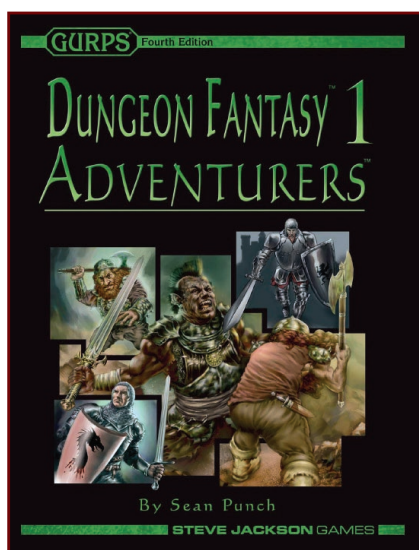
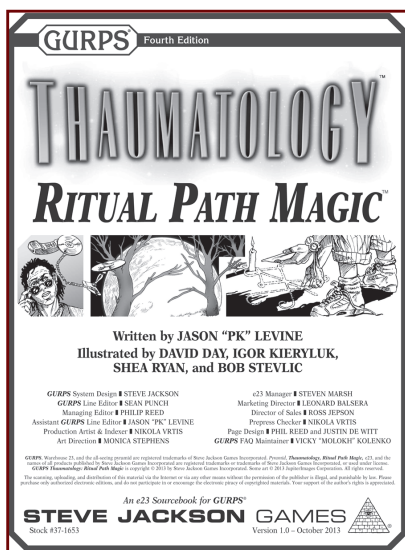
This issue is perhaps the first installment of *Pyramid* Volume 3 that's been designed with an eye toward being a "goodie list" for players. By its nature, many supplements tend to be GM-oriented; after all, they're the ones who have to come up with the threats, challenges, and adventures. However, we know that players love poring over this stuff, so we wanted to make an issue that could serve as both inspiration for Game Masters and a wish list of items for gamers to buy, hint at wanting to their GM, or aspire toward.

## SCIENCE FANTASY CLIFFHANGER HORROR . . .

This issue is also somewhat rare for being devoted to a wide array of genres. We've had issues that have focused on a number of genres before (the various *Alternate GURPS* issues spring to mind), but this might be the first where we've gone out of our way to make sure that a wide array of genres and setting types are represented. In a way, this approach is a throwback to older eras of *Pyramid* (and other classic gaming magazines), with numerous possible topics in each issue.

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Since we *have* mixed things up a bit this month – we're curious: What did you think? Do you like our player-targeted schemes? Should we do more cross-genre issues? Let us know privately what you thought about whether you hit the jackpot, at [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com). Alternatively, you can share your thoughts with other treasure-seekers at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



Additional Material: Sean Punch

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# JUST REWARDS

## BY SEAN PUNCH

A standard premise of hack 'n' slash fantasy gaming is that the heroes will develop in play. And by "develop," most players mean "improve." That's definitely true in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, where improvement takes two forms:

1. *Character points*. These buy permanent increases in innate capabilities: attributes, advantages, skills, spells, etc.

2. *Gear*. Some loot is intrinsically useful; e.g., magical weapons and armor, potions and scrolls, and fancy jewels that make wonderful power items. The rest – second-rate goods, not-so-fancy jewels, tacky objets d'art that only bluebloods could love, heaps of coins, etc. – can be exchanged for better equipment. A delver who improves his loadout grows more powerful without spending a point: weapons that boost damage output are almost as good as ST, armor with high DR is often superior to natural DR (nastiness like contact poison stays *outside*), high-capacity power items are essentially limited Energy Reserves, and so on.

Players are *expected* to have their characters' best interests at heart, never spending a precious point if mere gold would do, and always seeking the best possible deals. Such "munchkinism" is part of hack 'n' slash fantasy because much of the excitement comes from escalating stakes. With 250 points and \$1,000 to spend, *Dungeon Fantasy* delvers hardly start at rock bottom – but the "zero to hero" arc is a big part of the fun!

If the arc is too steep, though, the adventurers may become demigods the GM cannot challenge without dangers so overpowered that the game teeters perpetually on a knife-edge between "cakewalk" and "total party kill." If the delvers don't die, they'll soon end up retired because either the players get bored or the GM gives up. Thus, it's important to make character improvement gradual enough that players and GM alike have time to adapt to the growing power level, keeping the game fun for all.

For gear, this is simple. The GM has complete control over what treasures are found on adventures and what goods are sold in town. Occasional errors in judgment are easily remedied: troublesome items can be broken, stolen, dropped down chasms, cursed, eaten by monsters, confiscated by the King, and so on. These are measures of last resort, to be sure, but *legitimate* ones. Someone who wants prized possessions to become permanent abilities should "insure" them by spending points on Signature Gear – an option included on almost every template and reiterated in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 11: Power-Ups*. Failure to do so means accepting the risks.

Character points are trickier. The GM *does* control how many points are awarded. The players *are* normally limited to spending those on the traits and power-ups for their heroes' templates. Yet much comes down to player discretion . . . and all too often, that means not-so-discreetly trying to "game the game" via legitimate purchases.

Fortunately, this puzzle admits a straightforward solution: Awarding specific, fitting abilities instead of discretionary character points. That still increases point totals, but in a way the GM can control, exactly as with gear. A fixed  $n$ -point trait differs little from an artifact that gives a particular boost that would cost  $n$  points to buy innately, but neither option is "Here's  $n$  points to spend on whatever fits your profession." The GM can hand out a mixture of these rewards to ensure that growth is *constant* but not *uncontrolled*.

To make this attractive to the players rather than a source of friction, it's crucial to link fixed rewards to the heroes' actions: Tell everyone *up front* what they're getting into, on behalf of whom, and for what potential gains. If they're hoping for better archery abilities, they might select the outdoor adventure involving elves. If they smell profit in being made honorary dwarves, choosing to tackle the Menace of the Mines would be a better bet. And if divine favor is appealing, temples are always seeking champions. See *Special Snowflakes* (p. 5) and *Black Sheep* (p. 12) for additional advice.

As for the specific abilities, *anything* is possible. Below are numerous examples, each with notes on point value, origins, and in-game effects. Many come in levels, with more or more-impressive achievements bringing larger rewards. This list is inspirational, not canonical – the GM is encouraged to be creative!

## MUNDANE BOONS

The simplest rewards are those bestowed by community leaders, rulers, guilds, the wealthy, and so on. These mostly fall into the realms of influence and material gain.

### *Claim to Hospitality*

Variable

A mission undertaken for a business, organization (guild, temple, etc.), conspiracy, or polity may lead that group to be disposed to help the hero. This is particularly true if the patron values secrecy and prefers to avoid ostentation. Give such a reward a better name than "Claim to Hospitality"; e.g., "Favor of the Wizards' Guild" or "Agent of the Secret Hand."

*Benefits:* Once per week *in town*, you may roll 3d against effective skill 14 to contact members of the group you helped. Success means they cover your expenses for the week; critical failure indicates you must serve them free of charge for the week (you're free to refuse, but that costs you this reward!). You may also request small favors, each of which calls for a reaction roll at +3, scoring at least a Good reaction. For further details, see *Power-Ups*, p. 16.

**Traits:** Claim to Hospitality [Varies]. This is worth 1 point for a specific establishment in a particular town; 5 points for a group spanning a kingdom; or 10 points for a vast conspiracy, religion, etc. found everywhere but on other planes of existence.

## Hero

5 points/level

The *most obvious* reward for heroism is recognition as a true hero! This isn't the *most common* outcome, however. "Heroism" in service to dark or selfish causes is unlikely to make many friends. This benefit accrues mainly to adventurers who defend the innocent, rescue the weak, and expect no compensation.

**Benefits:** You get +1 per level (maximum four levels) to reactions from almost everyone. For details, see *Power-Ups*, p. 16.

**Traits:** Reputation (Everyone; All the time) [5/level]. The GM can scale this to a single kingdom (×1/2) or town (×1/3), but if a hero earns enough Reputations that a single, global one would be cheaper, merge them into full-fledged Hero.

## Items of Power

Variable

A classic reward for heroic deeds is an artifact befitting a hero. This might differ from party member to party member – the wealthy and powerful often imagine that they're the perfect judges of who needs what, giving bows to scouts, wands to wizards, etc. even if these aren't especially needed.

**Benefits:** You get a unique or hard-to-come-by item that's chosen specially for you. The GM decides what this is, but will match the size of the reward to the scope of the action that earned it, and at least *try* to ensure that each delver in the group is (more-or-less) equally rewarded.

**Traits:** Unusual Background (Artifact) [Varies]; see *Power-Ups*, p. 6. The GM might give out Signature Gear instead, if it would make sense for the item to enjoy "plot protection"; such goods often have strange origins (temples, the Wizards' Guild, ancient vending machines of power, etc.).

## Let Me Adjust That For You

1 point/item

A minor-but-useful reward offered by smiths, tinkers, gnomes, and other lovers of craftsmanship is to fine-tune a delver's gear to work better. Such people most often wish to thank adventurers for assistance with procuring parts or artifacts.

**Benefits:** Your new friend takes one or more of your tools, tool kits, or weapons into his shop, bangs on them, and makes them better-suited to you. You gain +1 to effective skill when using them. The bigger the favor, the more gear gets modified.

**Traits:** Equipment Bond [1/item] or Weapon Bond [1/weapon].

## Riches

Variable

Money is *by far* the most common reward for ordinary services of all kinds. It's also the standard "consolation prize" for delvers who can't for some reason accept *Thanks of a Race* (pp. 6-9) or *Rewards from the Gods* (pp. 9-12).

**Benefits:** You gain not just a pile of money but also the connections to legitimize it, giving you a leg up for future business dealings. Each level improves Wealth by a step, to a maximum of Very Wealthy, *and* pays cash equal to the difference in starting funds between your new and former levels. Thus, "haves" get paid more than "have-nots" – that's par for the course in *Dungeon Fantasy* worlds.

**Traits:** Wealth increases by a level. The price is the difference in point cost. Those who are Very Wealthy *do not* become Filthy Rich – the truly powerful see delvers as just plain filthy, and would never elevate them that high – but *do* get their coffers filled to the tune of \$20,000. At the GM's option, a Very Wealthy adventurer may bargain for special training instead; since most Wealth levels are worth 10 points, that's the limit (e.g., 10 points of Magery, if the Wizards' Guild is involved).

## SPECIAL SNOWFLAKES

Some players are happy only with unspent points. They would sooner receive 1 point to spend however they want than 2, 3, or more points in predetermined traits. The diplomatic solution suggests itself: Let them exchange points in preset rewards for discretionary points at ratio of 2:1, 3:1, or worse! This means some delvers will fall behind in points, but that's the price of being a special snowflake – and since strategic spending typically boosts core competencies in a way that plot-oriented rewards don't, such heroes won't lag in actual *effectiveness*.

The GM sets the exchange rate, but 2:1 is usually fair. Save stingier ratios for rewards so generally useful that rejecting them amounts to arguing its own sake. For instance, an Extra Life – worth 25 points – is an *astounding* boon for any delver, and the GM would be within his rights to offer "An Extra Life or 10 points" or even "An Extra Life or 5 points."

Not all rewards are so negotiable – especially when a *deity* is doing the giving. A truly ineffable force would bestow the ability regardless. A temperamental one might turn whimsical or decide to teach a lesson, setting the "exchange rate" by tacking on disadvantages; e.g., turning down a god's free Extra Life for 5 points might mean 25 discretionary points *plus* Social Stigma (Excommunicated) [-10] and Unluckiness [-10] . . . which is, after all, a 5-point gain. Severe offense could mean no compensation or *just* disadvantages! Demons are particularly prone to such behavior.

All this assumes the *player* disputes the reward. If it's genuinely inappropriate for the *character*, see *Black Sheep* (p. 12) instead.

## THANKS OF A RACE

An *entire race* might end up indebted to a hero for a great service. Rewards given by more-or-less ordinary mortal species tend to be comparable to *Mundane Boons* (pp. 4-5); those from supernatural beings can be extraordinary! Where a reward resembles one of the race's innate abilities and a higher level makes no sense, members of the race are likely to be rewarded with social benefits instead.

The following examples are associated with races described in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level*.

### Blue (Green) Tongue

7 or 14 points

Nymphs (*The Next Level*, p. 9) of the tree- or river-bound kind might reward heroes who save their homes by having their wizards cast an enchantment on their saviors. The catch? To merit such favor, the adventurers must face a threat that's beyond the powers of spellcasters who can casually grant permanent magical abilities . . .

**Benefits:** You gain the ability to speak while, to, and from underwater (Blue Tongue) or the capacity to speak with plants (Green Tongue), depending on the nymphs. Being kind, the nymphs might agree to grant the missing capability if you already have the one they initially offer. These gifts work only where there's mana.

**Traits:** Speak Underwater (Interface Crossing, +50%; Mana Sensitive, -10%) [7] or Speak with Plants (Mana Sensitive, -10%) [14].

### Brotherhood of Ghouls

1 point

Corpse-eaters (*The Next Level*, pp. 5-6) rely on secrecy for survival, but occasionally they're discovered . . . usually with disastrous consequences. An adventurer who looks past his prejudices to *help* a colony of corpse-eaters may be rewarded with an invisible supernatural mark.

**Benefits:** You gain the race's unique perk, becoming inoffensive to ghouls.

**Traits:** Brotherhood of Ghouls [1].

### Cool Blood

3 points

Lizard men (*The Next Level*, p. 15) may honor heroes who save their desert or swamp homes from monstrous incursions and magical menaces. The most interesting reward is a sweaty day-long ritual that transforms the recipient.

**Benefits:** A day drinking strange, bitter brew in a sweltering lizard-man sweat lodge has left you more heat-tolerant. Add 3xHT degrees to the "hot" end of your temperature comfort zone. Lizard men cannot "stack" this reward with racial Temperature Tolerance; instead, they undergo similar rituals that grant them their racial power-ups (*Power-Ups*, p. 42), 3 points at a time.

**Traits:** Temperature Tolerance 3 [3].

### Dragon Sigil

1, 3, 5, or 6 points

Few civilized races trust reptilians, so dragon-blooded (*The Next Level*, p. 15) need go-betweens for "polite" missions. Success at these can earn an introduction to dragons, who may award Items of Power (p. 5), Riches (p. 5), or occasionally a mystical mark visible only to dragonkind.

**Benefits:** You bear a sigil that leads true dragons who see you to react at +1 per level. Dragon-blooded effectively start with three levels of this reward, while four levels is the maximum for anyone.

**Traits:** Reputation +1 (Dragons; All the time) [1], +2 [3], +3 [5], or +4 [6].

### Dwarven Riches

Variable

Dwarves (*The Next Level*, p. 6) reward nearly all service with *stuff*. The heroics they deem worthy of recompense inevitably involve seriously scary monsters in dangerously deep tunnels.

**Benefits:** You gain shopping privileges (the race's unique perk: 10% off the price of dwarven gear); Items of Power (p. 5), almost always weapons or armor; and/or Riches (p. 5), backed by dwarven gold deposited with the right people. The exact mix can vary and is often negotiable, but its point value invariably tracks the risks faced to earn it.

**Traits:** Any combination of Dwarven Gear [1], Unusual Background (Artifact) [Varies], or Wealth [Varies].

### Elder Gift

5 points/level

Philosophers among the dark ones (*The Next Level*, p. 6) and elder-spawn (*The Next Level*, p. 12) claim that every mortal has Elder Thing heritage. If you help them enough, they'll prove it by offering you a foul potion that awakens this permanently. This gesture means revealing a secret, so they save it for truly great deeds – the sort involving visiting horrid Elder Thing sites and retrieving unspeakable artifacts.

**Benefits:** You're "awakened" and acquire the special Talent of these races, gaining +1 per level to Alchemy, Hidden Lore, Occultism, and Thaumatology. Members of most races are limited to four levels of this reward – one per favor – and must make a Fright Check at a penalty equal to twice the new level. If you're a dark one or elder-spawn, you can rack up *eight* levels (including racial levels) sans Fright Checks.

**Traits:** Elder Gift [5/level].

### Elven Training

Variable

Elves (*The Next Level*, pp. 6-8) value heroes who save Nature in a big way: defeating an orc army bent on chopping down a forest to construct siege engines, braving the spirit world to locate the missing Spirit of the Mountain, etc. Rewards take the form of shared wisdom.

**Benefits:** Some elves know the secret of awakening magical aptitude; others can offer advanced archery training. If you agree to live among the elves and train for a while after an adventure that merits a special reward, you'll earn from 5 to 20 points (depending on your actions) toward Heroic Archer, Magery, or Weapon Master (Bow). Every 5 points of training takes a mere week . . . and there are no living expenses. However, there *will* be a training montage – elves are cool that way. If this reward doesn't let you afford the advantage you desire, you can save up to acquire it later, but you won't see these "free" points until you can cover the difference with unspent points.

**Traits:** Any of Heroic Archer [20], Magery 0 [5], +1 or +2 to Magery [10 or 20], or Weapon Master (Bow) [20]. In the interest of niche protection, scouts may *always* opt for an equal number of points in scout power-ups (**Power-Ups**, pp. 32-33), while non-scouts *do not* gain access to these. Similarly, wizards may improve Magery up to 6, or take an equal number of points in wizard power-ups (**Power-Ups**, pp. 36-37), but non-wizards are limited to Magery 2 and cannot acquire wizard power-ups.

## Fauned Memories

3, 6, 10, or 13 points

Thankful fauns (**The Next Level**, p. 8) may put their musical talents to work for their new pal. Saving a piece of wilderness is the classic way to earn such gratitude. Throwing a legendary party – one with food, drink, and music dangerously obtained – is an offbeat possibility.

**Benefits:** Your name is lauded by the fauns, who spread it far and wide – both in conventional song that bards of all races will eventually adopt and on the wings of birds. Each level (maximum four levels) grants a general +1 to reactions; this is similar to the Hero power-up (**Power-Ups**, p. 16), but recognized by everyone *other than* underground denizens.

**Traits:** Reputation +1 (Everyone who doesn't live in a hole) [3], +2 [6], +3 [10], or +4 [13].

## Hero Ink

1, 4, 5, or 8 points

Goblin-kin (**The Next Level**, pp. 10-11) respect fighting and destruction. "Heroes" who serve goblin-kind well in this capacity – and this often involves affronts against *other* races – may be given tattoos normally reserved for gobs, hobs, and orcs.

**Benefits:** Goblin-kin who see your tattoos will react at +1 per level. Anybody might earn two levels; full-blood goblins, hobgoblins, and orcs can have up to four. At the first or second level, this ink *also* gives you -1 to Disguise and Shadowing, and +1 to others' attempts to identify you; at the third or fourth level, double these drawbacks.

**Traits:** Reputation +1 (All goblin-kin; All the time) [2], +2 [5], +3 [7], or +4 [10]. Also add Distinctive Features 1 [-1] at the first or second level, Distinctive Features 2 [-2] at the third or fourth.

## WHERE ARE THE HALF-SPIRITS?

The half-spirit "races" are catchall categories for remarkable *individuals*. Such beings lack extensive societies and repositories of cultural wisdom to leverage for rewards. Services for them are *personal* and repaid with treasure; see *Items of Power* (p. 5) and *Riches* (p. 5). Where a half-spirit represents an associated higher power, the GM should choose something suitable from *Rewards from the Gods* (pp. 9-12):

**Celestials** (**The Next Level**, p. 12): A god of any sphere might be Good, but constructive and life-affirming rewards are most fitting. Consider Healing Hands (p. 10), Look of Love (p. 11), Righteous Repair (p. 11), Savior of the Harvest (p. 11), and Sunlit Soul (pp. 11-12).

**Infernals** (**The Next Level**, pp. 12-13): Any kind of deity might be Evil, too – but rewards tied to stealth and bloodshed fit best, notably Debt of Death (p. 10), Fear Not the Night (p. 10), Holy Haste (pp. 10-11), Master of the Hunt (p. 11), and War-Bringer (p. 12).

**Infused** (**The Next Level**, p. 13): Fair-Weather Friend (p. 10) suits air-infused; Faith Moves Mountains (p. 10), earth-infused; Burning Faith (pp. 9-10) or Sunlit Soul (pp. 11-12), fire-infused; and Sea Servant (p. 11), water-Infused. Where bestowed by greater elemental spirits rather than true gods, replace Divine, -10% with Mana Sensitive, -10%.

Elder-Spawn (**The Next Level**, p. 12) are an exception. These creepy beings grant Elder Gift (p. 6).

## Lucky Bastard

Variable

Despite their famous crankiness, leprechauns (**The Next Level**, p. 9) *do* thank saviors of green glens and similarly wholesome heroes. Contrary to myth, they *do not* give away Charms or pots of gold; rather, they bestow a magical blessing.

**Benefits:** Each level makes you one step luckier. If you have Ridiculous Luck – say, you're a leprechaun yourself – you enjoy lucky breaks (Serendipity) instead. These gifts work only in areas with mana. And if you're Cursed, you're out of luck . . . leprechauns can be little jerks.

**Traits:** To price this, find the difference in point cost between the new and old levels of luckiness – Unluckiness [-10], nothing [0], Luck [15], Extraordinary Luck [30], or Ridiculous Luck [60] – and apply -10% for Mana Sensitive. At Ridiculous Luck, add levels of Serendipity (Mana Sensitive, -10%) [13.5]. In all cases, round final cost *up*. Not everyone gets the same number of points, and Cursed delvers get nothing.

## Made Man

10 or 15 points

Ordinary halflings (**The Next Level**, p. 14) are too small and provincial to offer much more than food and tobacco. Adventuring-grade ones dominate the criminal underworld.

Doing them a favor – almost always an illegal favor – can get you in *tight*.

**Benefits:** Word is out that Not-So-Big (But Oh-So-Scary) Al will whack anyone who messes with you. In all civilized towns, treat critical failure while shopping or selling on the black market as mere failure – and failure at shoplifting, cheating, or picking pockets results in no consequences worse than no gains. Getting caught at these crimes, or even betraying a quest sponsor, won't trigger *Scum and Villainy* (**GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons**, p. 4). You still can't offend the King by debasing coin, waylaying people on the roads between towns, etc.

**Traits:** Legal Immunity [10]. This is mutually exclusive with Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5], so this reward *also* eliminates that disadvantage for those who have it, for a net 15-point gain.

## Mingled Trollblood

3 points

Trolls (**The Next Level**, p. 16) don't have an organized society. However, doing a big favor for an individual troll – not always a *nice* favor, but sometimes nothing worse than killing everything in a dungeon and releasing a troll imprisoned there – can earn the rare opportunity to be gashed open and mingle blood, which is mostly beneficial. Trolls do not reward fellow trolls.

**Benefits:** Troll blood stays with you forever because it constantly regenerates inside you! The upside is that you heal 1 HP per hour – even HP inflicted by fire or acid. The downside is that you suffer 50% more injury from fire.

**Traits:** Regeneration (Regular) [25] and Vulnerability (Fire ×1.5) [-22]. This is a lower-than-usual level of Vulnerability to a Common danger; use -7, -15, or -30 points for 1.5× injury from Rare, Occasional, or Very Common threats, respectively. A troll PC *can* give this reward! He must sacrifice 3 unspent points to a *willing* recipient.

## Pixilated

Variable

Pixies (**The Next Level**, p. 9) often need help with troubles that are resistant to magic and beyond the physical capabilities of 5"- to 6"-tall beings – menaces like ogre hordes. The classic reward is a sprinkling of pixie dust (yes, that exists).

**Benefits:** Once per day, you can shrink to pixie size. Your gear does *not* scale down, but your Move, HP, DR, etc. do (see *Shrinking*, p. B85); thus, use is best avoided where combat is likely. This gift works only where there's mana.

**Traits:** Shrinking 6 (Limited Use, 1/day, -40%; Mana Sensitive, -10%) [15] for SM 0 folk – but Shrinking 7 [18] for SM +1 ogres and barbarians, Shrinking 5 [13] for SM -1 gnomes, Shrinking 4 [10] for SM -2 halflings, and Shrinking 2 [5] for SM -4 leprechauns.

## Queen-Scent

1 point

Coleopterans (**The Next Level**, p. 5) are neither bright nor good with outsiders, but saving a whole hive might earn a minor reward: being sprayed with a queen's lingering pheromone signature. This isn't easily removed (never accidentally, and even deliberate attempts are at -10), but only social insects can smell it.

**Benefits:** Members of *social* insect species weaker than coleopterans (any such race whose template costs less than 75 points) remain neutral toward you if you stay out of their way. You can walk through their lair and they'll *ignore* you as long as you aren't hostile. They'll shove you aside if you get in the way, or attack you if you do anything actively unfriendly: injure them, vandalize their home, steal from them, etc.

**Traits:** Brotherhood (Low-powered social insect races) [1].

*I proclaim you, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, a Knight of the Round Table. By custom, you are entitled now to ask one boon, which I will grant if it be in my power.*

– King Arthur, *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot* #1.1

## Rocks

1 point

Do a favor for gargoyles (**The Next Level**, p. 9) and they'll say, "You Rock!" Since these creatures are dimwitted and socially maladjusted, they think lots of people Rock. This easy-to-earn title (get a gargoyle chieftain admitted to a fancy inn and it's yours) is appropriately irrelevant.

**Benefits:** Gargoyles – a relatively rare and most insignificant race – like you. You get +1 to reactions from them. There are no higher levels; gargoyles can barely count. They can *fly*, though, so word spreads quickly.

**Traits:** Reputation +1 (Gargoyles; All the time) [1].

## Scratch of Honor

5 points

Pleasing the cat-folk (**The Next Level**, p. 5) might earn ritual scarification that even primitive felines recognize. Cat-folk save this honor for heroes who do deeds their kind have trouble with: organizing the race against adversity ("herding cats"), solving serious problems involving ocean journeys or underwater menaces, and so on.



*Benefits:* Any feline who sees your scarred face will accord you respect. Nonsapient ones will warn you of their intentions (roll vs. IQ to *interpret* this) and respond to your Influence skills. Sapient ones will react to you at +2. This mark gives you -1 to Disguise and Shadowing, and +1 to others' attempts to identify you.

**Traits:** Animal Empathy (Specialized, Felines, -60%; Vision-Based, -20%) [1]; Distinctive Features [-1]; and Reputation +2 (All sapient felines; All the time) [5].

## Widgets

4 points/level

Gnomes (*The Next Level*, p. 10) are generous to benefactors. They greatly appreciate assistance with whatever technological wonder they're currently perfecting.

*Benefits:* The gnomes shower you with small gifts and tailor your clothing, armor, etc. to have pockets, loops, and hooks to carry it all. The result is one Gizmo per level (no upper limit) on top of any Gizmos your profession allows. Record these separately as "Widgets." If you're ever permanently relieved of all gear, you lose Widgets until you can reconnect with the gnomes (who invented the lifetime warranty).

**Traits:** Gizmos (Can Be Stolen, -20%) [4/level]. Can Be Stolen is normally worth -10% if you must be forcefully stripped, but there's an extra -10% because while Widgets aren't strictly Breakable, anything that destroys your whole load-out – e.g., immersion in acid – suspends the advantage.

## Wilderness Peace

2, 5, 7, or 10 points

Though wildmen (*The Next Level*, p. 16) are neither brilliant nor socially advanced, they *do* have a society and *will* reward those who defend it – or their wilderness habitat – by bestowing a shamanic blessing of sorts.

*Benefits:* Tribal elders stand you in good stead with their spirit guardians, who in turn put in a good word for you with nature spirits everywhere. Add +1 per level (maximum four levels) to the reactions of entities that would qualify as "nature spirits." At the GM's discretion, this may sometimes affect rolls for the *consequences* of such spirits' indirect actions (e.g., rolls to check whether wild animals attack), where these don't depend on reactions.

**Traits:** Reputation +1 (Nature spirits; All the time) [2], +2 [5], +3 [7], or +4 [10]. The GM might also allow a *fifth* level, which adds Spirit Empathy (Specialized, Nature Spirits, -50%) [5], for a total of 15 points.

*If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.*

– Henry David Thoreau

## Wun Fre Beetin'

5 points

Minotaurs (*The Next Level*, p. 14) and ogres (*The Next Level*, pp. 14-15) are – to be brutally honest – socially marginal dim-bulbs that often need help, typically with matters involving towns, magic, or thinking. Being near-outcast idiots, they can really offer only one reward . . .

*Benefits:* Enough minotaurs or ogres have pledged to help you, *once*, that if you shout enough – or blow the horn the minotaurs gave you, or bang the ogre drum – there's a 9 or less chance that 1d+5 goons will show up to help you fight a battle. Except on a 3 or a 4, they'll then forget your name and leave, and you'll lose this trait until you earn it anew. The GM should build these helpful thugs on 50% of the delver's points: 40 points for the racial template, the rest in attributes (anything but IQ) and combat skills.

**Traits:** Allies (1d+5 minotaur or ogre thugs; 50% of PC's points; 9 or less; Summonable, +100%) [24] as a Favor [5]. These are *not* supernaturally summoned per se, but as the Power of Plot brings them to where you are, even in the dungeon or on another plane of existence, they're *effectively* conjurations and cost extra for the accessibility. If the GM finds this silly, he can remove Summonable, yielding a 3-point Favor that works only where these creatures live.

## REWARDS FROM THE GODS

Doing favors for temples is a time-honored way to earn the thanks of gods! Many of these rewards are modified with Divine, -10%. For most delvers, this means the ability is sensitive to sanctity (like clerical spells), and can be temporarily or permanently withheld for religious transgressions. For clerics and holy warriors, it's the just the standard Holy modifier; for druids, it's identical to Druidic; and for shamans, it's the same as Shamanic Gift.

The examples below are associated with general classes of deities found in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 7: Clerics*. Any god might grant Destiny (p. 12), too.

### Burning Faith

3 or 5 points

A fire god (*Clerics*, pp. 16-17) counts you as a favorite. This doesn't *have* to involve arson; it might have something to do with reigniting holy fires or braving a fiery test of faith.

*Benefits:* You burn with faith! This has no effect on temperature comfort zone, but your ardor keeps you warm in cold places and makes hot ones seem homey. The first level adds +3 to HT rolls against heat or cold; the second level, +8.

This *does* include resistance vs. such supernatural effects as Burning Death and Frostbite spells.

**Traits:** Resistant to Heat/Cold (+3) (Divine, -10%) [3] or Resistant to Heat/Cold (+8) (Divine, -10%) [5].

## Debt of Death

25 points/level

You did a favor for a death god (**Clerics**, pp. 13-14). This often involves things best left unmentioned, like killing people who've cheated Death. Don't get cocky.

**Benefits:** You'll return from death – however “permanent” – once per level. You turn up naked at the nearest allied temple. Your *gear's* fate depends on how and where you died, so too bad if you were killed by Elder Things or an acid pit. This holy reward can't be revoked: death gods play for keeps, for better or for worse.

**Traits:** Extra Life [25/level].

*Never to be cast away are  
the gifts of the gods, magnificent,  
which they give of their own  
will, no man could have them for  
wanting them.*

– Homer, *Iliad*

## Fair-Weather Friend

9 points/level

A storm god (**Clerics**, pp. 27-28) goes easy on you out of recognition for your service. Such deeds most often take the form of violent, direct action on behalf of the temple.

**Benefits:** The wind is at your back! Each level (maximum seven levels) means one day per week with ideal weather for your endeavors. If a dice roll is involved – against Weather Sense for *Getting There Quickly* (**Dungeons**, p. 5), on a table, etc. – just skip it and choose the best possible outcome. Random weather disasters (cold snaps, tornados, and so on) won't strike that day, either. These benefits extend to traveling companions; thus, a group with seven or more levels among them always enjoys flawless weather. However, there's *no effect* in areas where the weather is either supernaturally warped or unrelated to winds, rains, and temperatures (as on weird planes of existence).

**Traits:** Serendipity (Accessibility, Only where there's natural weather, -10%; Aspected, Weather, -20%; Divine, -10%; Game Time, +0%) [9/level]. The GM may interpret the Accessibility as Environmental, -5% (requires recognizable weather) combined with Supernatural Countermeasures, -5% (cannot override unnatural curses).

## Faith Moves Mountains

5 points/level

An earth god (**Clerics**, pp. 14-15) is indebted to you. A classic way to earn such favor is to aid faithful, respectful miners or to end the operations of faithless, destructive ones.

**Benefits:** You're shielded against cave-ins, earthquakes, falling stalactites, mudslides, and so on. Each level grants DR 5 vs. such rocky threats, and there's no maximum level. This has no effect on Earth spells, boulders hurled by giants, and so on – it's protection against the *earth itself* harming you.

**Traits:** Damage Resistance 5 (Divine, -10%; Limited, Natural disasters involving falling earth or stone, -80%) [5].

## Fear Not the Night

4 points/level

You've impressed a god of night (**Clerics**, pp. 23-25). There are as many ways to do so as there are night gods; a *heroic* example is taking personal risks to exonerate the cult of an essentially benevolent deity from charges of deception and dark works.

**Benefits:** The night protects you with a cloak of darkness. Each level (maximum four levels) gives you – including your eyes and your gear – an additional DR 1 *at night*. This benefit is suspended in artificial light (spells, torches, etc.) bright enough to eliminate all darkness penalties to Vision.

**Traits:** Damage Resistance 1 (Accessibility, Only at night, -20%; Divine, -10%; Force Field, +20%; Mundane Countermeasures, Artificial light, -10%) [4/level].

## Healing Hands

9 points/level

You did well by a god of healing (**Clerics**, pp. 20-21). You found time to *heal* lots of people or one cosmically significant figure – directly or by fetching them to safety – at serious risk and cost (simply casting Great Healing doesn't count!).

**Benefits:** You enjoy supernatural guidance at mundane healing (direct healing powers are still “clerics only”). Each award gives a level of Healer. Clerics, druids, and shamans can have four *extra* levels, beyond usual limits; e.g., a cleric could get Healer 10! Others are limited to four levels. Any recipient may buy Diagnosis, Esoteric Medicine (Holy or Druidic), First Aid, Pharmacy (Herbal), Surgery, and Veterinary, even when such skills aren't on their template.

**Traits:** Healer (Divine, -10%) [9/level].

## Holy Haste

3 points/level

Doing dirty work – or even something honest – for a god of messengers and rogues (**Clerics**, pp. 22-23) can pay off. Running a gantlet to deliver a message, or “procuring” something the temple needs, is a good start.

**Benefits:** You become much faster at *noncombat* running, gaining +1 per level to Basic Move, with no upper limit. This aids cross-country travel and evading pursuit; when fleeing combat, it kicks in the turn *after* your sprint bonus does.

**Traits:** Basic Move (Accessibility, Only while running long-distance or fleeing pursuit, -30%; Divine, -10%) [3/level].

## Look of Love

### Variable

A favor for a god of love or fertility (**Clerics**, pp. 18-20) is tricky to fit into *Dungeon Fantasy*. If you battle adversity to unite the right people in True Love – say, helping the Princess rescue the Prince from demons in a kingdom where royalty enjoy Divine Right – there might be something in it for you.

**Benefits:** You gain a radiance that affects anybody likely to be influenced by looks. Each level improves Appearance by a step, to a maximum of Transcendent.

**Traits:** Appearance increases by one level. To price this, find the difference in point cost between the new and old levels, apply -10% for Divine, and round *up*. This is worth 4 points in most cases, 8 points for those who are Hideous or Attractive, but keep track of the modifier – it matters for multiple levels!

## Master of the Hunt

### 5 points/level

You impressed a god of the hunt (**Clerics**, pp. 17-18). Possibilities include protecting hunting grounds and dealing with disrespectful people or monsters who needlessly slay game.

**Benefits:** When actively hunting an opponent – tracking elusive quarry, chasing him, setting traps for him, etc. – you roll at +1 per level (maximum three levels) for all relevant tasks. You get the same bonus to hide your tracks *from him*, evade pursuit, or spot *his* traps when the tables are turned. This applies only against the most dangerous rival you're currently pursuing/pursued by, and never affects combat rolls.

**Traits:** Higher Purpose (The Hunt) [5/level].

*I grant **one** boon, mortal. And it will be given to you as it is given to everyone – when the time comes.*  
– Anubis, **Gargoyles** #2.31

## Righteous Repair

### 22 points

Your acts benefited an artificer god (**Clerics**, pp. 9-10). Perhaps you retrieved some holy gizmo from a dungeon, or secured materials or parts for the deity's priests.

**Benefits:** Your gear may break, but it *gets better*. Each piece of damaged equipment regains one HP per 12 hours you wear or carry it without interruption; lost DR heals at the same rate. Destroyed – though not *disintegrated* – items reassemble in days equal to their original HP. Corrosion, dents, and scrapes too small to inflict HP vanish instantly.

**Traits:** Affliction 1 (Accessibility, Only on gear, -20%; Advantage, Slow Regeneration, +100%; Aura, +80%; Divine, -10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%) [22].

## Saint of the City

### 5 points/level

You did something to please a city god (**Clerics**, pp. 11-12). Defending the associated city is always good, but perhaps you cleaned out the dungeon in its sewers or expelled an evil cult.

**Benefits:** In that specific city, your efforts are blessed while you uphold the standards that earned this reward. You enjoy +1 per level (maximum three levels) to *any* roll you make there that doesn't involve betrayal, crime, vandalism, etc. against the place or its residents.

**Traits:** Higher Purpose (Honest work within the city) [5/level].

## Savior of the Harvest

### 1 point/level

You've done a great deed for an agricultural god (**Clerics**, pp. 8-9); e.g., dealing with monsters that were tearing up cropland or dungeon effluent that was poisoning it.

**Benefits:** Wherever plants grow – outdoors, anywhere but on solid ice or rock – you'll "luck into" food regularly. Each level (maximum four levels) means you find about five meals per week without pausing to forage, cutting ration use by 25% on the road. Meals must still be prepared and consumed.

**Traits:** Gizmos (Accessibility, Only for food, -50%; Divine, -10%; Environmental, In arable land, -20%; Game Time, +0%) [1/level].

## Sea Servant

### 9 points/level

A sea god (**Clerics**, pp. 25-27) has your back after you took perilous ocean journey on behalf of the temple, defeated Squid Cult efforts to open an undersea vortex to the Elder Things, etc.

**Benefits:** The god lends you assistance at nautical matters. Each award grants a level of Seafarer (**Power-Ups**, p. 19). Barbarians and scouts can have four *extra* levels, or as many as *eight*; everyone else is limited to four. Recipients may also buy any of Boating, Fishing, Knot-Tying, Navigation, Seamanship, Survival (Island/Beach), Swimming, Thrown Weapon (Harpoon), and Weather Sense that aren't on their template.

**Traits:** Seafarer (Divine, -10%) [9/level].

## Sunlit Soul

### 6 points/level

You've assisted the efforts of a sun god (**Clerics**, pp. 28-29); e.g., you wiped out a stronghold of creatures of the night, or brought light to a place cursed with darkness.

**Benefits:** You glow from within with spiritual sunlight. This has no effect on most beings, but genuine creatures of darkness – entities supernaturally susceptible to light's cleansing power – suffer 1d of burning damage per level (maximum four levels) upon touching or being touched by you. The victim's DR *does* protect; Insubstantiality doesn't.

**Traits:** Burning Attack (Accessibility, Only on opponents with disadvantages such as Dread, Vulnerability, or Weakness toward light, -40%; Affects Insubstantial, +20%; Aura, +80%; Divine, -10%; Melee Attack, -30%) [6/level]. This is Always On in the sense that it always attacks suitable targets on contact, but as it doesn't cause a glow that compromises Stealth or social skills, there's no discount.

## BLACK SHEEP

There are times when a reward suits the player just fine but not the character. Perhaps the delver already has the highest or only level of that trait. Maybe the hero has taken *and lived up to* a moral code that makes the boon inappropriate; e.g., a Vow of poverty when the prize is unabashedly material. The adventurer might even belong to a faction that opposes the party's benefactor – heck, his companions may barely tolerate him! – and there's no way that patron would give him anything but a kick in the pants. Such cases differ from *Special Snowflakes* (p. 5), and require the GM to take other approaches:

1. *A different reward of equal value.* If friendly nature spirits give everybody Animal Empathy, the delver who already has it might gain Animal Friend 1. If the King grants Wealth, the martial artist whose Wealth (Dead Broke) represents conscious asceticism might give it all away and gain a Reputation. If the God o' Good refuses to reward Blackheart the Evil, a demon might see the value of an infiltrator in a group of goodie-goodies and tempt Blackheart with power.

2. *Points.* If no alternative suggests itself, through no fault of the player, don't be mean – fork over the points. Justify this with whatever excuse is necessary. For instance, while the other heroes are attending state dinners in their honor and signing the paperwork that goes with Wealth, the poor martial artist might meditate on minimalism and gain new insight into Karate and Power Blow.

3. *Too bad, so sad.* If someone is an outsider “just because” – because he has no special code but refuses to play nice, because he has a code he routinely ignores, etc. – the GM needn't give any compensation. This is the court of last resort! Use it only if the *player* didn't respect his character's code and/or support the team on the mission that earned the reward.

## War-Bringer

5 points/level

A war god (*Clerics*, pp. 30-31) would like to thank you for your support. This tends to be the predictable kind of thing: starting a much-needed war or ending a needless one.

**Benefits:** You enjoy +1 per level (maximum three levels) to rolls to *provoke conflicts* (whether that's Singing as a taunt or the brazen attack that touches off a fight), *lead from the front* (nearly always Leadership or Tactics), or *avoid impersonal misfortunes of war* (typically defense rolls against wide-area attacks and accidental hits). Except for the last effect, this never affects attacks, defenses, or other combat rolls after violence has begun. The skills used are unimportant – intent is what matters. This reward is liable to be suspended or revoked if honorable combat is an option yet you choose another path!

**Traits:** Higher Purpose (War) [5/level].

## RARE GIFTS

Rewards granted by seers, ancient masters (of magic, martial arts, or saying “Om” a lot), village wise women, etc. often aren't holy in the regular sense, yet aren't mundane, either. Such benefits are almost always earned by questing for moldering scrolls, cracked wooden cups, and other oddities that aren't obviously valuable. Two examples appear below.

### Destiny

5 points/level

A common reward for assisting someone important, powerful, and slightly weird is being “shown one's path.” This brings the hero's life into focus, enabling him to cheat Fate by knowing more about what is destined to succeed or doomed to fail.

**Benefits:** You gain “Destiny Points” to spend on *Buying Success* (p. B347) as if they were character points – ostensibly because this makes it more likely that you'll survive to fulfill your destiny. These refresh at the rate of one per game session, to a maximum of the original Destiny Points.

**Traits:** Destiny [5/level], tweaked to be more compatible with the behavior of *Dungeon Fantasy* heroes.

### Psychic Awakening

10 points

Certain mystics and secret masters might even reach into and transform a delver's mind in return for some great service, awakening hitherto-unrealized potential.

**Benefits:** You gain the option to acquire psionic abilities – either the ones on p. 40 of *The Next Level* or those in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psionics*. These cost points, as usual.

**Traits:** Unusual Background (Psionic) [10]. Those who *already* have psionic abilities may pick up to 10 points of additional ones; unused points are lost.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean “Dr. Kromm” Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every *GURPS* product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of *GURPS Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created *GURPS Powers* (with Phil Masters), *GURPS Martial Arts* (with Peter Dell'Orto), *GURPS Zombies*, and the *GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, and *GURPS Power-Ups* series . . . among other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango.

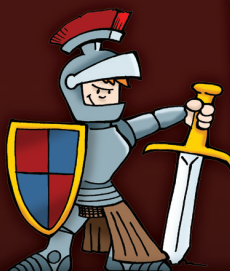
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# A FAMILIAR PATH

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

What better reward can there be for a mage than to get a familiar to help enhance his magic? It might lead to a quest, or require gaining prerequisites. *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* treats having a familiar as a power-up, something that is usually reserved for advanced characters, and other magic systems can take inspiration from that, including *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*. *Ritual Path Magic* touched only briefly on how familiars might be treated in the Ritual Path magic

*The Goldi clearly distinguish between the tutelary spirit (ayami), which chooses the shaman, and the helping spirits (syven), which are subordinate to it and are granted to the shaman by the ayami itself.*

– Mircea Eliade,  
*Shamanism: Archaic  
Techniques of Ecstasy*

system; the ideas presented here seek to expand that further. *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies* is recommended highly for its prebuilt familiars.

## WHAT IS A FAMILIAR?

Traditionally, familiars were spirits a witch summoned to help her with her witchcraft. They also served as conduits to extraplanar powers with which they were said to communicate. More recently (mostly thanks to the influence of video and roleplaying games), a familiar has come to mean a companion that fights alongside or otherwise helps its master.

## WHAT KIND OF FAMILIAR?

Though the suggestions here are aimed at those who use Ritual Path magic in their games, the ideas can be adapted to other magical systems with little effort. The tips might even be one of the ways to make a magical system unique or different. If Symbol Magic users can't have familiars, but Ritual Path magic users can, it's going to create some clear campaign distinctions immediately.

The ideas might even be adapted to simulate other close, near-supernatural bonds such as those twins are thought to share, or the close psychic bonds some psis seem to have with different animals or people. For the latter, Kenneth Peter's *The Edge of Psience* from *Pyramid* #3/29: *Psionics* is worth a read.

# THE FAMILIAR ITSELF

A caster with a familiar should buy an Ally (p. B36) with Special Abilities and a frequency of appearance of Constantly. This allows access to exotic or supernatural traits otherwise off-limits to him, as long as it could be justifiably associated with his familiar's physicality (e.g., on its racial template), its mythology (e.g., ravens have a complex "language"), or its magic-enhancing trait (e.g., Ritual Adept). The bond might also enable both familiar and master to perceive the moods of the other, detect someone pretending to be the other, and so on. Such traits typically are purchased with the Granted by Familiar limitation (see p. 15 for an expanded version of this modifier) or similar modifier.

The GM should determine what abilities are appropriate in his campaign. For example, the master of a raven familiar

might not be allowed to purchase the Flight advantage, but could purchase Language Talent instead.

Most familiars are animals, which thanks to their bond with their master, have IQs far in excess of their native species. However, the GM might permit far stranger familiars (see *Weird Familiars*, p. 18 for more ideas). Spirits, "living" objects, or even *people* all feature in familiar-lore. A particularly new notion is that of a powerful or godlike creature using a human (or other sapient species) as *its* familiar. The GM should determine why this is; one possibility includes sapient creatures can "hold" more magical energy (see *Mana Collector*, p. 16). For example, a dragon who is also a caster might have a *human* for its familiar, not an animal.

The GM must also decide if acquiring more than one familiar is possible, how many and what kinds of traits can be gained from each one, and whether the caster may have multiple versions of the same trait. Optionally, if all familiars in the bond use the same traits, replace “Accessibility, Familiar/Master, -80%” with “Accessibility, Familiars/Master, -60%.”

All of this assumes the player gets to pick his familiar or at least offer input into it. If the GM decides this is not the case, the player should not pay full price for his random ally! The GM might charge up to half the cost of the Ally advantage and the Familiar Master meta-trait, depending on how useful the familiar is, or the GM might provide the familiar as a bonus reward for a particularly challenging quest.

The GM may allow the following ritual to be used to gain a familiar.

## Summon Familiar

*Spell Effects:* Lesser Create Magic + Lesser Sense Mind + Greater Transform Mind.

*Inherent Modifiers:* None.

*Greater Effects:* 0 (x1).

This spell summons a familiar of the caster’s choosing. The actual casting of the spell takes normal time, but the caster must either have a number of unspent character points to cover the cost of the familiar or use the *Slow and Sure Enchanting* rules (*Ritual Path Magic*, pp. 34-45) to acquire them for this purpose.

The spell finds the nearest candidate of the caster’s choice (or any candidate if he didn’t specify) within 100 miles, imbues them with sapience, and forges a mystical bond. Unsuitable candidates include animals who are already familiars, those who are too far away, or those who weigh more than 10 pounds (though the caster may add more energy in the form of Subject Weight if he chooses to acquire a larger familiar). Already-sapient candidates can choose to resist the spell normally – failure means they become the caster’s familiar, but he must apply the Unwilling modifier to his familiar’s Ally trait (p. B36) if they don’t want to be a familiar.

*Typical Casting:* Lesser Create Magic (5) + Lesser Sense Mind (2) + Greater Transform Mind (8) + Range, 100 miles (30). 45 energy (45x1).

## NEW META-TRAITS: FAMILIAR AND FAMILIAR MASTER

The “basic” Familiar and Familiar Master meta-traits appear below:

### Familiar

3 points

Your essence is tied to your master (often a spellcaster, though this isn’t always required). This mental bond takes the form of a special empathic tie. This trait includes Sense of Duty (Master) [-2] and Special Rapport (Master) [5].

### Lenses

*Animal (-25 points):* You are a traditional animal familiar. Remove racial IQ penalties and the Domesticated or Wild Animal meta-traits. To determine the new bonus to Will or Per, use the following method: If Will or Per is 10 or less, then the familiar has no Will or Per modifier, and Will or Per equals IQ. If racial average Will or Per is 11+, subtract 10 from this and give the difference to the familiar as a bonus. In some settings, this lens also includes Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10], reducing the cost to -35 points. This lens gives the following: Bestial [-10]; Speak with Animals (Specialized, familiar’s species, -60%) [10]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

*Long-Lived (Varies):* You will live as long as your master. Remove any traits related to a short lifespan and add Longevity [2]. Add extra levels of Extended Lifespan [2/level] or Unaging [15] as appropriate for a familiar’s particular master.

### Familiar Master

Varies

You have a being (often an animal, but not always) at your beck and call. Not only does your familiar have all the traits and abilities associated with a member of its race, but it also has a special reserve of energy you can tap to fuel your own spells! Treat the mana reserve gained in this way as a part of your own mana reserve in *all* ways. This trait includes Energy Reserve N\* (Mana Reserve; Drains Familiar, -50%) [1.5/level] and Special Rapport (Familiar) [5]; it is *always* accompanied by Ally (Familiar).

\* To determine how much *N* equals, multiply your familiar’s FP by x0.5 (round down). For example, if your familiar had FP 12, then you’d gain an Energy Reserve of 6, which would cost 9 points.

## BONDED ABILITIES

The following abilities do *not* have the Magical limitation because the master/familiar bond is so deep that it draws on the “internal mana” of the pair and is thus not subject to external influence. This isn’t the case for some settings; in such

campaigns, add the Magical limitation and reduce the cost accordingly. This means they do not work in desecrated areas (*Ritual Path Magic*, p. 20) and can be temporarily suppressed or nullified.

## BONDED ABILITIES FOR FAMILIARS

The following abilities are only available to those with the Familiar meta-trait (above).

*Oh, right; you haven't actually met my familiar. Pardon my rudeness. His name is Loioosh, and he's a jhereg. If you don't what a jhereg is, you're probably better off, but I can at least explain that it is a poisonous reptile with two wings, two eyes, two legs, and one form of wit: irritating.*

– Steven Brust, *Tiassa*

### Arcane Boost

78/93 points for levels 1-2

*Prerequisite:* IQ 10+ and a master with Draw Energy (below).

Once per hour you can give your master +3 to *any* Path skill for the sole purposes of gathering ambient energy, as long as he is within two yards of you. This requires you take a Concentrate maneuver and make an IQ+4 roll. Level 2 works the same way, except that you may choose to reduce the Greater effects multiplier of a ritual by one (e.g., ×5 becomes ×4) *instead of* giving him a bonus to gather energy.

*Statistics:* Control 2 (Magic; Accessibility, Master Only, -80%; Cosmic, No die roll required, +100%; Paths Only, -20%; Reliable 4, +20%) [60] + Control 1 (Magic; Accessibility, Master Only, -80%; Cosmic, No die roll required, +100%; Does Not Increase Area, -50%; Paths Only, -20%; Reliable 4, +20%) [18]. Level 2 removes the Paths Only limitation from both [70 + 23]. This trait first appeared on *Pyramid* #3/66: *The Laws of Magic*.

### Mana Collector

10 points/level

*Prerequisite:* IQ 10+.

You can help your master gather energy. To do this, you must be within two yards of him and conscious. You then roll your IQ, just as if you were another caster helping him cast a spell (*Ritual Path Magic*, p. 25), except neither you *nor* he takes -1 to rolls. Each additional level after the first (up to five) gives +1 to the IQ roll.

*Statistics:* Level 1 is Quick and Focused (Master)\* [1] and nine One Task Wonder (One chosen Path defaults to IQ when gathering energy for master) perks [9]. Further levels are IQ (Accessibility, Only for gathering energy rolls, -50%) [10/level].

\* This perk either allows a caster to ignore the penalties associated with helping to cast a spell for any other caster or removes the penalties entirely for both casters if you specialize in a specific pairing.

## BONDED ABILITIES FOR MASTERS

The following abilities are only available for those with the Familiar Master meta-trait (p. 15). Additionally, some traits have the Granted by Familiar limitation. If the cost of this trait changes (see p. 21), you'll need to adjust the costs of some bonded abilities.

### Conduit

Varies

*Prerequisite:* Deep Bond (p. 17) or Psychic Link (pp. 17-18).

Whenever you benefit from *any* positive supernatural effect (healing spell, temporary attribute bonus, and so on), your familiar is *also* affected. At level 2, you may treat your familiar as a part of your person for *any* spell, power, or ability if that would be beneficial to you.

*Statistics:* Level 1 adds Cosmic, Shared Effects, +50% to Ally (Familiar) [Varies], while level 2 adds Cosmic, Shared Body, +50%.

### Draw Energy

30/60/90 points for levels 1-3

*Prerequisite:* A familiar with Mana Collector (above).

Your familiar allows your mana reserve to replenish faster than normal; you regain 1 point of your reserve automatically every minute. At level 2, you regain 1 point per *second*, and at level 3, you regain *10 points* per second.

*Statistics:* Regeneration (Fast; Energy Reserve Only, +0%; Granted by Familiar, -40%) [30]. Level 2 makes Regeneration Very Fast [60]. Level 3 increases Regeneration to Extreme [90].

### Efficient Energy Reserve

Varies

The mana reserve your familiar gives you is far more effective than normal, providing an amount equal to its full FP. What's more, your familiar loses only 1 FP per 2 ER you use, instead of a 1:1 ratio.

*Statistics:* Replace Drains Familiar (p. 20) with Drains Familiar, Efficient, 1 FP per 2 ER and double the caster's available ER. For example, if a caster previously had Energy Reserve 6 (Drains Familiar, -50%) [9] and bought this ability, he would now have Energy Reserve 12 (Drains Familiar, 1 FP per 2 ER, -40%) [22], which would make the cost of this trait 13 points.



## Inner Reserves

Varies

*Prerequisite:* Deep Bond (below).

In times of desperation, you can draw deeply on your familiar's innermost reserves. Doing so can be *dangerous* for the familiar! Level 1 allows you to draw on up to half of the familiar's FP as though it were your own, for mundane use (such as running). This means the familiar's FP is reduced when you tap it as a mana reserve *or* as a fatigue reserve. At level 2, you can also draw on up to half its HP as if it were your own; this reduces its HP directly, not its FP, and it must heal normally to become available for your use again.

*Statistics:* Energy Reserve N\* (Mundane; Drains Familiar, -50%) [1.5/level]. Level 2 adds Vitality Reserve N\* (Drains Familiar, -50%) [1/level]. See p. 18 for details on both.

\* N equals half the familiar's FP (or half its HP for the Vitality Reserve), rounded down.

## Shielded Thoughts

10 points

*Prerequisite:* Mind Shield 1+ with the Granted by Familiar limitation.

Your familiar can help you throw off mental intrusion. When you fail a roll against such an ability, make another roll against the better of your own resistance roll or your familiar's roll.

*Statistics:* Compartmentalized Mind 1 (Based on Familiar's or Master's Resistance Roll, +40%; Granted by Familiar, -40%; Mental Separation Only, -80%) [10].

## Steady Magic

5/9/18 points for levels 1-3

Your familiar can help you stabilize your magic when nearby. At level 1, you can reroll any failed Path skill roll twice and take the best of the three rolls. You can do this once per hour. Level 2 allows you to do this once every 30 minutes. Level 3 allows you to do this once every 10 minutes of real time.

*Statistics:* Luck (Accessibility, Failed rolls, -10%; Aspected, Magic, -20%; Granted by Familiar, -40%) [5]. Level 2 replaces Luck with Extraordinary Luck [9]. Level 3 replaces Extraordinary Luck with Ridiculous Luck [18].

## GENERAL BONDED ABILITIES

The following abilities are available to both masters and their familiars (those with either the Familiar Master or the Familiar meta-trait, p. 15).

### Deep Bond

Varies

You and your familiar share an incredibly close bond. While not telepathic in nature (but see *Psychic Link*, below), it nevertheless is profound. If you or your familiar dies, the other must make an immediate HT roll. Success means the

survivor is mortally wounded (p. B423) but conscious. Critical success means he suffers no ill effects. Failure means the one who did not die is reduced to 0 HP.

Additionally, you and your familiar both have problems with thoughts, memories, mental images, and so on "bleeding" over. Whenever an IQ, Will, or Per roll is critically failed, roll 3d; on a 6 or less, the character who failed his roll suffers from a sudden infusion of thoughts, memories, etc. from his partner. Because of the distraction of having such thoughts suddenly pouring into his head, he gains -2 on all skill rolls for the next 2d seconds.

Despite this, sharing memories *does* have some positive benefits. Both master and familiar can "draw" on each other's memories. To do this, concentrate for one minute and roll against your IQ (Eidetic Memory does not help, unless both master and familiar have it). Success means you can access the memories of your familiar/master. Failure means you didn't get anything coherent, but can try again at -2 per roll after the first.

Both master and familiar must purchase this ability. Familiars only pay 8 points for this ability.

*Statistics:* Racial Memory (Active; Accessibility, Familiar/master only, -80%) [8]. In addition, for masters, add Mind Bleed, Mild (-5%) and Sympathy, Resistible (-15%) to Ally (Familiar) [Varies]; see p. 19 for both limitations.

*It is the familiar spirit  
of the place;*

*It judges, presides,  
inspires*

*Everything in its  
empire . . .*

*– Charles Baudelaire*

### Psychic Link

14/29/44/59 points for levels 1-4

You and your familiar share a psychic bond that allows you to hear one another's thoughts. This sending is 10 times faster than what you could normally convey. At level 1, you send simple concepts or emotions, but not speech or images. Level 2 allows you to send actual thoughts. Level 3 enables you to see what he's seeing, smell what he's smelling, hear what he's hearing, etc. You can only concentrate on either your senses or your familiar's. With level 4, you can do both, but all tasks depending on the senses of the viewpoint you are not concentrating on (including attack or defense rolls, Sense rolls, and so on) are at -4.

## WEIRD FAMILIARS

The familiar of folklore was thought not to need food, drink, or even sleep because they were not animals, but spirits. Instead, they only needed the blood of their master to survive, which they drew from one particular spot on the body. This “witches’ mark” or “witches’ teat” was often depicted as a discolored or non-feeling patch of skin. To represent this particular bond, give the caster both Draining (p. B132) and Distinctive Feature (Witches’ Mark) (p. B165). In some stories, the longer a familiar is with its master, the more similar the two become. Represent this with Unnatural or Distinctive Features (pp. B22, B165). Long-term familiars also tend to be more intelligent and possess many of the same skills their master has. Represent this as increased IQ and points in its master’s skills. They also tend to make use of *Complementary Skills* (**GURPS Social Engineering**, p. 21) to help their masters.

This article assumes a caster’s familiar is always around and not summoned. If this *isn’t* the case, add the Summonable enhancement (p. B37) to the caster’s Ally advantage or buy enough levels of Payload (Cosmic, Doesn’t Count against Encumbrance, +50%; Cosmic, Provides Life Support, +150%) [3/level] to create an extradimensional “pocket” for it to be held in.

Although most familiars are animals, stranger versions are possible. For example, a caster who focuses on Path of Undead might have a horde of zombies as his “familiar,” while a “druidic” caster might have a swarm of bees as

his. Treat such familiars normally, but allow the caster to “replenish the ranks” to keep his familiar at full capacity. For familiars without FP scores (such as a sentient AI or a magical sword), buy a number of levels of ER (Mana Reserve, Cannot Use Reserve, -100%) [0.6/level] equal to the caster’s ER (Drain’s Familiar, -50%) and *ignore* the rule of *N* (p. 15) – such familiars often have large reserves their masters can tap.

Depending on the setting, it may be appropriate to allow a human (or other naturally sapient being) to serve as a familiar. If permitted, the caster should replace “Drains Familiar, -50%” on his Energy Reserve with “Drains Familiar, Efficient, 1 FP per 3 ER, -30%.”

The GM may let a *player* design someone who is the familiar of another character (who can also be a PC). First, determine the point total of the character and use it to figure out the Ally’s base cost (refer to the table under *Ally’s Power* on p. B37). Second, apply all modifiers, but ignore the Frequency of Appearance unless the character is the familiar of a NPC. Then subtract the modified cost from the base cost, and add 5; this becomes the value of Unusual Background (Familiar of [Master]). For example, if one player wants to play the familiar of another, and he is equal in point value, then the initial cost is 5 points (an Ally built on 100% of points is worth 5 points). The value is 8 points after applying modifiers, so 8 (modified cost) - 5 (base cost) = 3. Then add 5 to this value, for a final total of 8 points.

No skill roll is involved, provided the other party chooses not to resist. If the partner chooses to resist, make an IQ-1 roll using the *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241).

The ability does not permit interstellar contact (anything more than a light year) or contact across time or parallel worlds. It also cannot reach otherworldly realms, such as Heaven, Hell, the Faerie lands, and so on.

Both master and familiar must purchase this ability.

**Statistics:** Mindlink (Familiar/Master) [5] + Telesend (Accessibility, Familiar/master only, -80%; Burst 10x, +30%; Can tell if sending is successful, +10%; Secure, +20%; Vague, -50%) [9]. Level 2 removes Vague from Telesend [24]. Level 3 adds Mind Reading (Accessibility, Familiar/master only, -80%; Long-Range 1, +50%; Sensory Only, -20%) [15]. Level 4 adds Aware (+50%), borrowed from Clairsentience, to Mind Reading [30].

### Scry Familiar

29/69 points for levels 1-2

**Prerequisite:** Sense Familiar and either Deep Bond (p. 17) or Psychic Link (above).

You can sense your familiar’s location by concentrating for one minute, spending 1 FP, and making an IQ roll (alternatively, roll Path of Magic or Path of Mind, if higher). Success means you’ve displaced your sense of hearing and sight to within 10 yards of your familiar’s current location (which

can be anywhere on the planet). If your familiar moves, so does your viewpoint (no additional roll is needed for this). Failure by 1 means your senses go to somewhere of the GM’s choosing, failure by 2 or more means nothing happens. Critical failure results in the loss of your ability for 1d hours.

You may only use the ability for 1d×5 seconds, after which it ends, and you cannot use it until at least one hour goes by. If using this ability in combat, you can do nothing else. This means you have no active defense while relying on it, though you may immediately end your use of this ability by taking a Concentrate maneuver and another IQ roll.

Level 2 removes the FP cost and allows you to shift focus back and forth between the two locations as a free action at the start of your turn. You function normally at the prioritized location, but are -4 to all rolls related to the other place (e.g., if you are focused on your familiar’s location, you could still defend against a personal attack, but at -4).

This ability may optionally be taken by the familiar allowing it to find its master; use the same rules as above.

**Statistics:** Clairsentience (Accessibility, Familiar/master only, -80%; All-Out, -25%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Fixed Range, -5%; Increased Range, ×2 million, +190%; Maximum Duration, 1d×5 seconds, -75%; No Clairosmia, -3%; No penalty for blind use, +10%; Normal Sight, -20%; Takes Recharge, 1 hour, -30%) [29]. Level 2 removes All-Out and Costs Fatigue, and adds Aware (+50%) [69].

## Sense Familiar

5/9/12/17/19 points for levels 1-5

You can find the location of your familiar with ease. Make a Per roll (you may substitute your Per-based Path of Mind skill, if better) taking into account normal range penalties (p. B550). This takes one second. On a success, the GM tells you the direction, though not the distance, your familiar is. If you can move around, you can attempt to triangulate your familiar's position. As a rule, once you've moved more than half the distance to the target, and made 1d successful rolls, the GM should give you the approximate distance. At level 2,

*Newt spun, making her robe unfurl. "He's my familiar, bought and paid for. I can claim anything of his. Even his life."*

*Al cleared his throat nervously. "That's good to know," he said lightly.*

*"Important safety tip. Rachel, write that down somewhere as lesson number one."*

*– Kim Harrison, **The Outlaw Demon Wails***

this no longer becomes necessary – you automatically know your familiar's exact location. At level 3, you use the *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241) instead of normal range penalties. At level 4, you no longer have to make a Per roll, as long as your roll is 3 or higher with penalties. At level 5, you *always* know where your familiar is (though your rolls to detect it are at a -4); this becomes a passive ability.

*Statistics: Detect (Familiar; Cannot Analyze, -10%) [5]. Further levels add Precise, Nontargeting (+90%) [9], then Long-Range 1 (+50%) [12], then Cosmic, No die roll required (+100%) [17], then Reflexive (+40%) [21].*

# EXISTING TRAITS

Those following traits pertain to familiars or are appropriate for them.

## Ally

see p. B36

Fiction is filled with wizards and mages who've familiars more powerful than they are. To represent this, the GM may allow Allies to be up to 200% of their point total, for 20 points.

## New Special Enhancements

*Special Abilities:* The **Basic Set** suggests this enhancement at the +50% level might allow your familiar to grant you abilities. *The Edge of Psience* (see *Pyramid* #3/29: *Psionics*, p. 21) proposes that Allies with this enhancement be allowed to deliver melee or touch attacks or act as the origination point of ranged abilities. Additionally, fiction is full of examples where "buffing" supernatural abilities affecting the master *also* affect the familiar or the master treats the familiar as "part" of his body; either instance is a version of Cosmic worth +50%.

## New Special Limitations

*Mind Bleed:* Whenever you or your ally critically fail an IQ, Will, Per, or other purely based "mental" attempt, roll 3d. On a 6 or less, the character who failed his rolls suffers from a sudden infusion of thoughts, memories, mental images, etc. pouring into his head. If the effects are mild, last for 2d seconds, and causes -2 on all skills for the duration, this is -5%. If the effects are severe, last for 1d *minutes*, and cause -5 on all skills for the duration, it's -10%. If the effects are crippling,

last for 3d minutes, and you cannot use any skills for the duration, it's -15%. This limitation becomes an *enhancement* for the Dependent disadvantage.

*Sympathy, Resistible:* Being able to *resist* the effects of this limitation with an HT roll drops the value to -15% if the death of one party reduces the other to 0 HP, while the death of one party automatically killing the other becomes -25%. Success at the HT roll means they're still conscious, but they suffer the effects of a Mortal Wound (p. B423). Critical success means you suffer no ill effects. At the GM's option, this limitation can become an *enhancement* for the Dependent disadvantage.

## Damage Resistance

see p. B46

At the GM's discretion, familiars who've been with the same master for a long time might be tougher thanks to their bond. If this is the case, the GM should allow familiars to have up to *twice* the normal DR of their racial template (minimum of DR 2). They should also be permitted to buy off the Flexible or Tough Skin limitations and add the No Signature (+20%) enhancement so their hide looks "normal." Additionally, the GM may allow them to purchase additional levels of Damage Resistance with Magical (-10%) up to whatever level he is comfortable with (one point per five levels of Path of Magic is suggested). Keep in mind that if using the optional rules for the Granted by Familiar limitation (p. 21), this decreases the limitation's value the higher the native DR of the familiar is. The GM may also allow a similar increase in HP, ignoring the usual cap of  $\pm 30\%$ .

## EXAMPLE: SQUIRRELZILLA AND HERB

Herb the Green Sorcerer is particularly fond of nature, and likes squirrels in particular. Deciding to cast *Summon Familiar* (p. 15), he sets his sights on a squirrel. Once cast, a rather large squirrel comes out of the nearby woods and sits at Herb's feet. The bonding is complete. The GM uses the squirrel template (below), but increases IQ to 10; removes Short Lifespan 4 and Wild Animal, and adds the Familiar (Animal; Long-Lived) meta-trait, for a total of 170 points (bringing Squirrelzilla's total cost to 29 points). Herb's player buys Ally (Squirrelzilla; 25% of points; Constantly; Special Abilities, +50%) [6] and Familiar Master (Squirrelzilla) [13], for 19 points total. This gives Herb a constant companion that he can project his spells through (p. 15), and access to an ER (Mana Reserve) of 5 (half his familiar's FP). Later on, Herb's player decides to purchase Vibration Sense (Air), since he adds the Granted by Familiar (-40%) and Magical (-10%) limitations to this trait, it reduces the cost to 5 points – but his familiar must be nearby, and it doesn't work in no-mana zones.

### Squirrel

-141 points

Squirrels are small bushy-tailed rodents that tend to live in trees. Thanks to their ubiquitous appearance in rural, urban, and wilderness areas they make excellent spies and can scramble up trees and other rough surfaces quickly. Most squirrels are between 12" and 18" long (including the tail) and weigh between 1 to 2 lbs.

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST -8 [-80]; DX +2 [24\*]; IQ -6 [-120]; HT +1 [10].

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** HP +2 [4]; Per +2 [10]; Basic Speed +0.50 [10]; SM -4.

**Advantages:** Brachiator [5†]; Catfall [10]; Claws (Blunt) [3]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Clinging (Accessibility, Requires Claw-Holds, -30%) [14]; Double-Jointed [15]; Fur [1]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Parabolic Hearing 1 [4]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Super Climbing 1 [3]; Terrain Adaptation (Uneven) [5]; Vibration Sense (Air; Based on Hearing) [10].

**Disadvantages:** Distractible [-1]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Semi-Upright [-5]; Short Lifespan 4 [-40]; Wild Animal [-30].

**Racial Skills:** Acrobatics (H) DX [2]-12‡; Climbing (A) DX+6 [1]-18¶§; Jumping (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Stealth (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Urban Survival *or* Survival (Woodlands) (A) Per+1 [4]-13.

**Features:** Bushy Tail; Early Maturation 3 (matures at about 3 months).

\* Includes "No Fine Manipulators, -40%" limitation.

† This is less swinging from vine to vine and more jumping from branch to branch.

‡ Includes +1 from Perfect Balance.

¶ Includes +5 from Double-Jointed.

§ Includes +2 from Brachiator.

### Energy Reserve

see *Powers*, p. 119

The GM who doesn't want to use the *Drains Familiar* limitation (below), might consider having the familiar purchase Energy Reserve (Affects Others (Master only, -80%), +10%; Area of Effect, 2 yards +50%) [4.8/level] instead.

Optionally, Energy Reserve (Mundane) may be available. This trait can be used like FP to fuel athletics, martial feats, extra effort, and so on. Moreover, it can even be spent instead of reducing your FP for things like starvation, poison, etc., but you must decide to use it *before* you accept the FP loss. ER lost to special sources (e.g., FP lost from not eating) cannot be regained until the circumstances to restore them are met.

Even more optionally, the following variation of Energy Reserve might be available for certain games.

**Vitality Reserve:** As Energy Reserve is to FP, so Vitality Reserve is to HP. Vitality Reserve can be spent in place of any HP loss, including, but not limited to those lost from injury, disease, poison, radiation, extreme dehydration and starvation; from attacks ignoring DR or that drain HP (such as Leech, *GURPS Powers*, p. 96); to power spells, powers, or abilities; and so on. Lost VR never results in shock, knockdown, unconsciousness, or death. Lost VR regenerate 1 point per day on a successful HT roll regardless of conditions. 2/level.

### New Special Enhancement

**Drains Familiar:** Your ER draws upon the energy of your familiar. In addition to the effects of the Granted by Familiar limitation, every point of ER used drains 1 FP from your familiar (1 HP for a Vitality Reserve). This ER recharges at the same rate your familiar recovers FP; this means your ER does not recover while your familiar is unable to rest! -50%. If this draining is particularly "efficient," with the familiar losing 1 FP per 2 points of ER, this costs -40% instead. If your familiar loses 1 FP per 3 points of ER, this costs -30%. If this draining is more severe, and your familiar loses 2 FP per 1 point of ER, then this costs -60%. If it loses 3 FP per point, then this costs -70%. "Partial" FP count as full FP lost.

### Magic Resistance

see p. B67

In many stories, familiars are resistant to the magic of those who are *not* their master. Furthermore, their resistance seems to stem from their master's mastery of magic. To simulate this, familiars may purchase a number of levels of Magic Resistance (Accessibility, Not against master, -20%; Improved, +150%) [4.6/level] equal to *half* their master's highest Path skill.

Finally, some familiars might be able to do more than just resist magic – they might *eat* it.

## New Special Enhancements

**Spell Absorption:** Whenever a spell is cast on you, you can waive your bonus to resist from Magic Resistance and instead roll your unmodified resistance roll. The caster still gets a penalty equal to your MR. If the spell fails for whatever reason, you gain a number of character points equal to the spell's modified Fatigue Point cost to cast (e.g., reduced by high skill). You can these points to improve traits (anything but skills) temporarily or heal yourself. This functions exactly like Absorption for Damage Resistance (p. B46). +50%.

**Potent Resistance:** Your Magic Resistance is especially powerful. In addition to providing its normal benefits, it also provides a "passive-aggressive" defense that resists up to three effects that normal Magic Resistance doesn't: Missile spells are affected by your Magic Resistance if they are aimed in the hex you're in; magical weapons are affected (e.g., if a sword enchanted with +1 Puissance hits you, you would subtract your MR from the item's Endurance; if it reduced it to below 15, then that item wouldn't gain bonus damage); or information-gathering spells targeting something in your possession. +50% for one, +100% for two, +150% for all three.

## VARIANT MODIFIERS

The following ideas expand the Granted by Familiar limitation.

### Granted by Familiar

see p. B38

The GM who wants more detail on this limitation may use the following guidelines. Astute readers will notice they are similar to the limitations for gadgets.

### Vulnerable

Variable

Your foes can incapacitate your familiar. Once incapacitated, it will cease to grant you its benefits. Add the following elements together to find the final limitation value.

**Durability:** The easier the familiar is to harm, the greater the limitation. Decide on its DR: 2 or less is -20%, 3-5 is -15%, 6-15 is -10%, 16-25 is -5%, and 26 or higher is 0%. An insubstantial familiar gets 0% automatically. If the familiar's abilities cease merely because it's incapacitated (knocked out, mind-controlled, paralyzed, etc., but not killed), add another -5%.

**Curability:** You can normally heal a familiar like any other character. If you cannot, and it requires inconvenient time, effort, or expense to repair (like a golem) or resummon (like a demon who requires a sacrifice), it is worth an additional -15%.

**Visibility:** The familiar's Size Modifier and racial Stealth skill can allow it to hide, thereby avoiding harm while still aiding you. Subtract its Stealth skill from 10 (treating positive numbers as 0), add the difference to Size Modifier, and rate the sum as follows: -9 or less is 0%; -7 or -8 is -5%; -5 or -6 is -10%; -3 or -4 is -15%; -1 or -2 is -20%; and 0 or more -25%. An invisible familiar gets 0% automatically. For instance, a SM -3 house cat with racial Stealth 14 (10 - 14 = -4) would have a sum of -7, and give -5%.

### Can Be Abducted

Variable

Your foes can kidnap your familiar, depriving you of the contact you need to gain benefits from it. The value of the limitation depends on how much contact is required, as the more contact you need, the easier your familiar is to isolate from you:

- *Familiar must be touching you or in earshot or in line of sight or in telepathic contact with you:* -5%.
- *Two of the above conditions apply:* -10%.
- *Three of the above conditions apply:* -15%.
- *All of these conditions apply:* -20%.

### Unique

-25%

You may only take this limitation in conjunction with Vulnerable or Can Be Abducted. Normally, you can replace a dead or kidnapped familiar, although the GM may dock you earned points for abandoning an Ally. If the familiar is Unique, you *cannot* replace it! Character points spent for both Ally and any abilities it grants are lost for good if it's killed or otherwise permanently taken away.

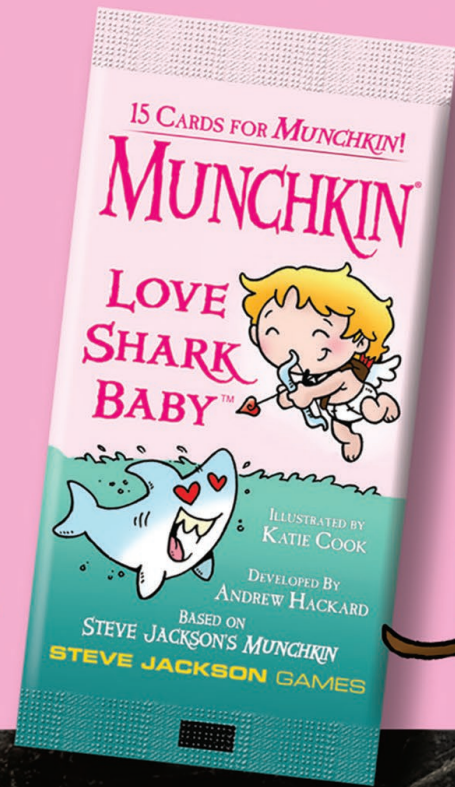
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice's familiar is a raven, it's been coming around for about 15 years, but it's very lazy in its duties to its master – he feeds it anyway. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he dreams of being able to write full-time, or at least eke out a living doing it. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group, Antoni Ten Monrós, and Beth "Archangel" McCoy, the "Sith Editrix," for being most excellent sounding boards, and to Luke Camp for his help with the squirrel template. The familiars as "gadgets" and Vitality Reserve were created by Sean Punch on the Steve Jackson Games forums and has been used here with his permission. Additionally, he'd like to thank the Pyramid Write Club, but the first rule of Pyramid Write Club is "You do not talk about Pyramid Write Club."

*Harry now carried a large cage that held a beautiful snowy owl, fast asleep with her head under her wing.*

*– J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Love means never  
having to say  
you're sorry . . .  
because dead  
monsters won't  
tattle on you.



Technology  
hasn't made us  
any more  
productive. In  
fact, it's made  
slacking off  
easier than it's  
ever been!

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# EIDETIC MEMORY

## REWARDING COLONEL OMSFORD

BY DAVID L. PULVER

In an ongoing campaign, the process of keeping all players engaged is a dynamic balancing act. While some participants may be happy to just have adventures and earn character points, I've found that an important part of keeping everyone excited is the process of carefully tailoring rewards to suit individual players and their characters.

My last space-opera campaign was blessed with a stable group of players over its three-year duration. One of the more active player characters was Colonel Omsford. He started out as a 36-year-old ex-space marine commando, an orphan who had grown up in the Corps and risen through the ranks, a champion pistol shot and swordsman. The Colonel was cashiered after a trumped-up incident engineered by corrupt rivals in the officer corps who resented his commoner background. This dashed his dreams of becoming a general officer, and it forced him to seek his fortune as an ordinary adventurer. His player saw the character as a hero in the making: a leader and patriot, somewhat cynical regarding the human condition due to his experiences, but still a romantic at heart, destined for great things. But Omsford's player was also a power gamer – he wanted his character to have powerful weapons and acquire special advantages. As a result, many of the rewards took the form of additional gear the players found or salvaged.

So, let's look at the rewards Colonel Omsford received in his adventures and what lessons I learned from them in the context of running a *GURPS* campaign . . .

### THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT

At the beginning of the campaign (a TL9-10 interstellar setting), the PCs were working as mercs-for-hire. They wanted to load up on ultra-tech gear, but none of the party had much Wealth to start with, so the first reward was enough cash to let them get better equipment. I'd started the PCs out on a TL9 world, but on my star map had placed a higher-TL, low Control Rating planet a few parsecs away that caught their eye as a good place to shop for the TL10 guns and battlesuits that some party members – such as Omsford – craved. To get the

loot, the party was offered and accepted a corporate contract: neutralize a group of radicalized workers who'd seized control of a mass driver complex and were threatening a very literal form of strike action.

Cue messy firefights in vacuum and a race to destroy the mass driver, with Colonel Omsford living up to his reputation as their leader. Afterward, Omsford's player admitted he liked shooting things, but he was disappointed that he hadn't been able to effectively use his sword skills against high-tech armor. What he *really* wanted was some sort of lightsaber-like energy sword he could use for close-in work.

Now, force swords (TL11<sup>+</sup>) were not something I wanted to add to the game at this stage, but I'd set the adventure up to give the characters a reward, so not letting Omsford's player have what he wanted didn't seem fun. After a bit of thought, I decided that since I had "plasma guns" in the game, "plasma swords" – a sort of downgraded TL10 force sword – could be plausible. I dropped some hints that a fellow who collected unusual weapons was on the same world they were heading for, and Omsford found a way to meet him and spend most of his hard-earned coin on the object of his desire. Everyone was happy (except the bad guys who would soon meet his blade).

*To achieve great  
things, we must live  
as though we were  
never going to die.*

*– Vauvenargues*

## Plasma Sword (TL10<sup>^</sup>)

Plasma swords consist of a plasma generator hilt that ejects hot ionized gas and holds it in blade form. They appear one TL lower than force swords (see *Ultra-Tech*, p. 166) but are otherwise identical with these exceptions.

The plasma blade is not *solid*. It can parry another plasma sword (and optionally, a force sword as well). Like a force sword, it will damage other blades or body parts that it parries or that try to parry it. However, if it fails to break or destroy the object it is parrying, the attack passes through it and does damage.

Plasma swords are available in all force sword weapon types. At TL10, they are 10 times as costly as force swords, and their power cells operate half as long.

*Rewards can be points, gear, or friends.*

## SALVAGE AND MEMORIES

Omsford and company didn't start out with their own starship, but eventually two of the players decided it would be useful to have one and began looking for ways to buy or steal a ship within their limited resources. Inspired by a re-read of Robert Heinlein's *The Rolling Stones*, I worked up a "used spaceship yard" seemingly haunted by some mysterious force. The characters were offered a discount on an old second-hand ship with para-military capabilities if they could solve the mystery and could help repair the ship.

I'd tailored this adventure to grab the interest of the group's ex-Navy space pilot and another PC, a parapsychologist. Omsford was mostly along for the ride, but I figured it would be a good idea to add a sort of "Easter Egg" for him. To this end, I decided that the war-surplus ship in the yard was modified space commando carrier and, by coincidence, one that Colonel Omsford served aboard as a young Marine lieutenant.

By adding this detail, I could get Omsford's player tightly invested in the adventure once he recognized the haunted ship as one of from his character's past. Despite having no parapsychology or engineering skills, he could contribute IQ rolls for flashbacks and knowledge of the interior details. After the PCs dealt with the mystery, he became quite fond of it, even naming the vessel. Reward successful!

## Ivy Serpent (TL10<sup>^</sup>)

The *Serpent*-class Low-Observable Commando Assault Transport (LOCAT) was a starship built in limited numbers by the interstellar navy to support Marine special operations raids. During a post-war round of budget cutting, these vessels

were decommissioned, stripped of classified material and weapons, and sold as surplus to shipping lines and courier services as fast "executive couriers" or "fast packets." Most of the vessels were demilitarized, but some under-the-table dealing allowed certain ships to retain their tactical fit; these were used for merchant-adventurer expeditions in uncharted frontier space. *Ivy Serpent* was one such vessel, and it spent years opening new markets and trading with newly discovered alien races. This lasted until her corporate owners, the Nineveh Phylum, fell on hard times and were acquired by a notorious crime syndicate. The once-proud warcraft and explorer was used as a drug-runner and slave ship until it was eventually run down by a Navy destroyer. Impounded, the battle-scarred craft was auctioned off to a private yard and her injuries slowly repaired, only to spend a few years waiting for the right buyer. Its limited cargo space and high operating costs made it an unattractive purchase for normal merchants . . . but perfect for a group of adventurers!

It has a SM +8 streamlined hull and masses 1,000 tons. It is 75 yards long.

### Front Hull Systems

[1-2]	Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 20).
[3]	Habitat (six cabins).
[4]	Habitat (10 hibernation chambers, two sickbay with automeds, minifac, 2.5 tons cargo).
[5-6]	Defensive ECM.
[core]	Control Room (C8 computer, comm/sensor 7, and four control stations).

### Central Hull Systems

[1]	Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 10).
[2!]	Major Battery (300 MJ UV laser turret).
[3-6]	Hangar Bay (120 tons cargo capacity).

### Rear Hull Systems

[1]	Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 10).
[2-3!]	Stardrive Engines.
[4-5!]	Hot Reactionless Engines (total 2G).
[6]	Engine Room (one workspace).
[Core]	Fusion Reactor (two Power Points).

It has artificial gravity, a chameleon and stealth hull, and hidden weapon batteries. The usual crew carried are four control room crew and one technician.

### Variants

*LOCAT*: This is the original military version, a few unneutered examples of which are still in service, e.g., the *Ivy Serpent*.

*Executive Courier*: This is the demilitarized civilian version. Downgrade the major battery to a secondary battery with just one turret (30 MJ ultraviolet laser) plus 45 tons cargo. Replace both defensive ECM systems with cargo holds (50 tons each).

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
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### PILOTING/TL10 (HIGH-PERFORMANCE SPACECRAFT)

10 <sup>^</sup>	LOCAT	70	-1/5	13	2G/c	1,000	123.7	+8	12ASV*	20/10/10	2×	\$65.9M
10 <sup>^</sup>	Executive Courier	70	-1/5	13	2G/c	1,000	268.7	+8	12ASV*	20/10/10	2×	\$40.5M

\* Plus 18 in suspended animation.

Air speed is 3,500 mph.



## ROMANTIC REWARDS AND REWARDING ROMANCE

On a lost colony struggling under a ruthless dictator who was far more than he seemed, Omsford and another PC managed to assemble local factions into a rebel army. One of the coalition's commanders was Nimue, a talented and beautiful psionic woman. During the action, Omsford expressed some mild interest in her; glad that the players were considering things other than killing bad guys and stealing their stuff, I decided to engineer a situation where Omsford would have a chance to win her affection. Setting things up so they were thrown together alone, they ended up working together to save the day and earning each other's respect. At the end of the adventure, the colonel responded to her advances, and their partnership soon blossomed into romance. Their relationship proved to be the most lasting "reward" of that adventure, and some months later, they were married. Nimue was essentially an Ally (though no points were charged).

Furthermore, as I like to reward good roleplaying and was pleased with the way Omsford's player had opened up new vistas for his character, I decided to add an extra "bonus." Omsford's player had somewhat regretted that his character had never developed psi power (which some other PCs possessed and were using with good effect). In subsequent adventures, I allowed some of Nimue's telepathic abilities to "rub off" on Omsford, explaining that his regular mental rapport with her had activated perk-level latent psi powers in him. Nimue offer to train him to unleash his own psi abilities if he decided to apply himself (that is, spend character points) – something I knew that player was very much in favor of doing.

## SIRIUS: THE LITTLE DRONE THAT WOULDN'T DIE

Sometimes a planned reward turns out differently than you expected. Colonel Omsford followed a trail of rumors across the stars to a precursor archaeological site; I'd left a few TL11<sup>^</sup> gadgets for the party as treasure. However, I was fooled. Instead of taking the shiny toy, Omsford – doubtless thinking of his new family obligations – sold his gadget to a megacorporation. Arguing that even the TL11<sup>^</sup> power cell

alone was priceless, he retained an excellent lawyer and made a good case for cashing out, selling it for few million credits plus some stock options in the company. Fair enough!

Omsford decided to use some of the cash to equip *Ivy Serpent's* hangar bay with a few extra vehicles for scouting. He said he wanted a "recon drone" – something to carry aboard the *Serpent*. It would be about the size of a subcompact car for dangerous survey missions like the recent adventure they'd had in an alien jungle.

Feeling generous, and wanting to playtest our vehicle design rules, I lazily said, "I'm sure the megacorp will be happy to spend some of the money they'd just given you on their tech; if you order from them, I'll give you a 10% discount. Hey, here's the vehicle design rules. You have \$2,200,000 – why don't you build it?" I restricted the weaponry (nothing LC 0) and AI but otherwise said he could pick what he wanted within the limits of TL10 plus commonplace superscience components (contragravity and reactionless thrusters, standard on "grav vehicles" in the setting, and plasma guns).

Design systems are good fun for players who like to exercise their creativity, right? But I underestimated the power gaming-fu of Omsford's player . . .

### "Sirius" Recon Drone (TL10<sup>^</sup>)

This machine is a well-armored triangular robot about the size of a subcompact car: some 9' long and 4' wide. It flies using contragravity and reactionless thruster. Its main purpose is to scout ahead of the party when they explore dangerous wilderness situations like alien planets or giant space arks.

It has a Complexity 7 computer built as a drone for remote piloting via virtual reality with a non-volitional AI (IQ 10, Slave Mentality) as a backup. (See *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, pp. 27-28). It stayed in contact via a very large neutrino communicator with 100,000-mile range. It can talk, while sensors provide Hyperspectral Vision, Telescopic Vision 6, hearing with Acute Hearing 3, Discriminatory Taste and Smell, and detected radio, radar, and ladar signals (as tactical ESM, see *Ultra-Tech*, p. 63).

It floats silently in the air and can hide itself via a multi-spectral chameleon surface (+8 Stealth; see *Ultra-Tech*, p. 99). Armament is a semi-portable fusion gun (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 128) in the nose. It has a single ST 15 robot arm. A one-cubic-foot bay can hold 20 lbs. of samples. Its rechargeable energy bank powers it for six hours operation.

TL	Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Loc.	Stall
10 <sup>^</sup>	Sirius Recon Drone	100	+2/2	11	4/60	8	0.01	+2	0	3,000/1,700*	720	\$2.2M	1A	0

\* Laminate: double vs. shaped-charge warheads.

*Give out the occasional award in the form of specific abilities instead of character points. Social advantages – Patrons, Rank, Reputation, Status, Wealth, etc. – make the best awards, as they often make sense as "rewards" in the game world.*

– *GURPS Basic Set*

Oops!

Unfortunately, I messed up here! The drone was generally fine, except for its *exceedingly* heavy armor, achieved through a quirk of the design rules: with no occupants and a modest weapon and sensor fit, over 75% of mass was devoted to the best TL10 armor Omsford could afford! A ground vehicle this dense and heavy for its size would have moved like a snail; an aircraft would have never gotten off the ground. But thanks to ultra-tech contragravity, it could fly reasonably well and was agile enough.

Over the next few adventures, Omsford's player was rather ingenious in deploying the recon drone for all manner of tactical advantages. Meanwhile, I realized its impregnable armor overshadowed the rest of the player characters (firepower sufficient to challenge it was overkill for everyone else). As I'd given it to the player as a reward, it was a cheap shot to dispose of it too easily or talk him into redesigning it, so I chose to bide my time and wait until I could engineer a situation where the player could use the thing to "save the day" in a suitably dramatic fashion while feeling the sacrifice was his own idea. About a month later, while uncovering the wreck of an ancient buried mile-long starship that resembled one of Fred Saberhagen's Berserkers, the drone was happily expended by the PC to fend off a wave of killer robots. This demonstrated the reciprocal advantage of design rules: anything the PCs can build, the GM can also build, and more of them. The players took the point, and henceforth we chose to avoid robotic arms races.

*A well-timed adventure can creatively get rid of a game-breaking reward.*

## SAD-GOD: THE REWARDS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Omsford, Nimue, and their comrades had a few more adventures as freelance mercs and explorers, but I decided they could use some extra structure. While they were visiting an orbital casino, I set up a "chance encounter" with an injured gambler fleeing from mysterious assailants. Omsford played good Samaritan; the gambler turned out to be an operative of the Special Archaeological Division, a super-secret agency that regulated and researched precursor artifacts. The PCs – who knew a few things about this from previous adventures – decided to get involved. They managed to thwart a deadly conspiracy to use a recovered super weapon to by assassinate a diplomat and start a cataclysmic war. This was a multi-session adventure with a high fatality rate, and it ended up with the interstellar government owing the party big time!

To reward them, I decided on something special. The surviving party members (including Omsford) were offered membership in SAD – the ultra-tech equivalent of Warehouse 23. Because the agency provided sufficient perks, they realized it was a reward rather than an obligation, and they willingly accepted. As usual, I didn't require the PCs to buy the package of advantages that came with membership, though it totaled 35 points.

## Special Archaeological Division – Galactic Operations Directorate (SAD-GOD)

GOD (see *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, p. 5) is an elite black ops division buried within the interstellar government's security and intelligence service (as described, it was inside the Imperial Secret Service). GOD has access to extremely advanced technologies far beyond those known to ordinary citizens. The Special Archaeological Corps is the hidden hand of GOD that helps explain some of those technical advances. The group is an off-the-books "civilian" agency set up to liaison with explorers, scientists, archaeologists, and adventurers, who help track down forbidden superscience precursor artifacts, ensure they don't fall into the wrong hands, and return the items to headquarters so that they can be properly exploited. To this end, its operatives are granted access to some of the technologies that GOD strives to control.

As the campaign was TL10<sup>+</sup>, the agency's High TL advantage gave the party access to and familiarity with the TL11<sup>+</sup> equipment that SAD-GOD chose to issue, with TL12 superscience left for more exotic super experiments and buried treasure.

*SAD-GOD Agent:* Extra Life (Copy, -20%) [20]; Duty (To SAD-GOD, 9 or less, Extremely Hazardous) [-10]; High TL 1 [5]; Legal Enforcement Powers (Interstellar) [15]; Military Rank 1 [5]. 35 points.

The Extra Life was a brainscan (non-destructive upload) SAD-GOD provided to all operatives. As the PCs were field agents, they were usually several parsecs from the nearest office, so SAD-GOD could not send help fast enough to count as a Patron.

SAD-GOD proved to be successful in play. The extra responsibility helped channel the players' tendencies toward power gaming and gave an excuse to send them on more epic adventures, in a mix of interstellar archaeological and spy scenarios. As things took on a James Bond-in-Space tone, I also offered some extra "technical" rewards, this time making sure it was me who was doing the gadget design, although listening to hints of what the player wanted. In this case, it was some covert firepower, so as a reward for completing his third successful mission, I had the agency introduce Omsford to GOD's equivalent of "Q" with the following toy. I explained the advances as having been developed from the precursor power cell he had turned over a year or so before . . .

## PLASMA POLYGUN

A product of GOD labs based on precursor energy bank technology recovered by the party's earlier mission, this pistol was a combination projectile and beam weapon that used the same power source to generate plasma. It could be used in high-energy mode as a weapon or in low-energy mode as ignition for a projectile barrel. The weapon was expensively disguised to resemble a TL6 firearm for use in undercover operations on low-tech worlds. (Omsford's player asked that the gun resemble a Colt M1911 "just to be cool" – a request I complied with even though I thought it was slightly cheesy!)

The gun itself used shape-memory metal and bioplastic systems to enable it to transform into different configurations. It was voice-activated keyed to Omsford's voice print and palm print. This took two seconds, during which it couldn't be used.

## Plasma Polygun Table

Terms and notation are as defined on pp. B268-271.

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
11 <sup>A</sup>	Plasma Polygun	var.	var.	var.	2.5/0.7	var.	var.	var.	var.	var.	\$15,320	1

### GUNS (PISTOL) (DX-4, Most other guns DX-2)

	10mm pistol	4d+2 pi+	2	270/3,000	-	3	20+1(3)	9	-2	3	-	-
	with APHD	4d+2 (5) pi	2	540/6,000								

### BEAM WEAPONS (PISTOL) (DX-4, Other Beam Weapons-2, Guns (Pistol)-4)

	or plasma pistol	7d+2(2) burn ex	4	375/1,100	-	3	40/C(3)	5	-2	2	-	-
	or plasma gauntlet linked	HT-6(2) aff 1d+1 burn	2	20/40	-	1	80/C(3)	5	-1	1	-	-

ST adjusted due to smartgrip. All weapon modes use the same power cell; the gauntlet drains half the power of the plasma pistol. The 10mm pistol 20-round box magazine accepts standard TL9 ETC ammunition; the ETC power requirement is negligible (about 1/20 as much as the plasma gun).

It could perform the following feats.

1. 10mm heavy pistol (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 135) loaded with various ammunition when subtlety was required, or with a few rare magazines of TL11 APHD ammo for heavy combat. The gun had the electrothermal-chemical option *Ultra-Tech*, p. 139).

2. As a plasma pistol (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 127).

3. As a plasma gauntlet, a metallic gauntlet that could fit over the hand that provided DR 20 protection. It could be used as a zap glove (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 165) or take two seconds to heat up to deliver 3d burn damage on a touch (Reach C). Once heated, the gauntlet could also accumulate plasma and throw "ball lightning" that could stun or kill; at -5 to skill, the lightning balls could even be arced 60° around a single corner. Effectively, a hit by one worked like an electrolaser, including the lethal or stun settings (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 159), but with less Accuracy, more damage and a -2 to HT to resist.

The gun's accessories included smartgun electronics and a smartgrip (see *Ultra-Tech*, pp. 152-154).

## ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid science-fiction fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*. Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating *Transhuman Space*, co-authoring the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* anime RPG, and writing countless *GURPS* books, including the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and the *GURPS Spaceships* series.

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# DRINKABLE, WEARABLE, IMPOSSIBLE POINTS

BY STEVEN MARSH

*GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys* greatly expands the idea of using character points as an in-game resource for heroes (and adversaries!) to temporarily tweak the rules to their advantage, modify the world around them, and do the seemingly impossible. As a simple but radical revision of that supplement's core concepts, what if – instead of character points – these abilities are housed within *physical objects*? Such artifacts would be ideal rewards for heroes, and it would open up many adventure and campaign possibilities.

*Presents, believe me, seduce both  
men and gods.*

– Ovid

## THE BASICS

All of the following ideas make these assumptions.

- Instead of using character points (or Destiny Points/Serendipity Points/etc.), the reality-altering abilities are bestowed by physical objects. One object is the equivalent of one character point.

- These physical objects are consumed by the act of using them. They may not disappear in a puff of smoke, but they will be obviously diminished or less than whole once utilized.

- The objects are transferable (although not always easily so); if facing an opponent who has consumable artifacts of his own, enterprising heroes might be able to acquire them. However, this should be *difficult*. By their nature, these objects let the possessor modify reality to a certain degree. Thus, any adversary who is endangered while possessing them will likely burn through them while trying to keep others from getting them. (A bad guy who dies from a mortal blow – while

possessing a Thingamabob that lets him retroactively deflect mortal blows – is dumb.)

- All objects can only be used by the owner/wielder. Only by physically taking possession of someone else's artifact – and doing whatever donning or preparations are necessary – can an outsider tap its effects. (Thus, it is not possible to shake hands with someone wearing a Fortune Ring – p. 28 – and activate it even though you're in physical contact with the ring.)

- If obviously visible, the objects are distinctive for those who know what to look for. Attempts to create forgeries are almost entirely unsuccessful, but a forger's critical success might craft a fake that can pass muster for a fast-talking individual for a brief or limited interaction.

## FANTASY OR MAGIC

No one knows where *Fortune Rings* came from; they seem to predate even the oldest recorded history. However, their effect on reality is obvious. Heroes who should have died have been impossibly spared; villains with impossible plans saw them advance much farther than they should have.

All Fortune Rings look identical, appearing as simple bands of impossibly brilliant golden rings. They can be worn anywhere a ring could be worn (fingers, toes, as an earring, etc.), and they shrink or grow as needed. When used for their reality-altering effects, the rings lose their luster, becoming worthless brittle iron bands. Tapping a Fortune Ring's effect requires the wearer to have physical access to the ring and a physical way to make contact with it: touching a thumb to the ring finger, crinkling the toes, etc. Thus, someone who's unconscious or restrained can't utilize a ring . . . although the magics of a Fortune Ring make it possible to enable someone to retroactively succeed at a roll that would have rendered him incapacitated, so that's a tricky proposition. (Meddling with fate is messy.)

*Only those who attempt the absurd will achieve the impossible. I think it's in my basement . . . let me go upstairs and check.*

– M.C. Escher

## DUNGEON FANTASY

As a genre-appropriate variation, perhaps all *Fortune Rings* are aspected to be aligned with one of two opposing forces – usually Chaos and Order. Those who use too many rings of one aspect are in danger of losing themselves to that primal force, perhaps becoming an NPC servant of that force. (Of course, this doesn't have an affect if the wielder is *already* a servant of Chaos . . .)

If the campaign isn't already using rules that adjudicate when heroes drift to one philosophy or another, then here's a simple system to use with these Fortune Rings: Each use of an aspected ring drifts its user one step closer toward being controlled by that aspect. Using a Fortune Ring of the opposing aspect removes one of those points, until the wielder hits zero points. Thus, someone who uses three Chaos-aspected rings followed by two Order-aspected rings would have 1 point toward Chaos.

It's up to the GM to determine how many points are required to lose oneself to the aspect. Some options include:

- A fixed number of points (3, 5, 7, etc.). The higher the number of points, the less Fortune Ring users need to worry about losing themselves, and the more flexibility they have. A fixed threshold of 2 means that for every Fortune Ring someone uses, the wearer needs to use a Fortune Ring of the opposite aspect; using two of the same Fortune Rings in a row is enough to lose oneself to an aspect.

- A fixed number of points for each aspect. For example, maybe it's harder to become a servant of Order than one of Chaos; if anyone ever accumulates 3 Chaos-aspected points, the person falls into Chaos, but it takes 7 points to become a servant of Order.

- A differing number of points for each person. Perhaps the GM rolls 3d for each PC to generate the threshold before a character falls. Whether this is public or private is up to the GM . . .

Possibly complicating these options are the rarity of each aspect. Perhaps Order-aspected rings are more common than Chaos-aspected ones, giving the forces of good a general edge in the cosmos. However, the relative rarity of Chaos-aspected rings means that it's difficult to remove those Order-aspected points as you start using those rings. Once you start down the light path, forever will it dominate your destiny . . .

## HORROR OR MONSTER HUNTERS

"Horror" and "awesome power-ups with no repercussions" don't really mix. Although it's certainly possible to add one of the other ideas herein to a more frightening world – magic rings and strange extracted

potions (p. 30) are well-suited for some magical monster-hunting settings – here is an idea that can introduce the *Impulse Buys* concepts in a way that's both flavorful and in keeping with the dreadful elements of darker settings.

Looking universally similar but not exact, *Star Tattoos* resemble asymmetrical ugly five-line black star-shaped tattoos, surrounded by an imperfect circle. The tattoos aren't ornate *per se*, but the five lines that compose the star are inordinately wavy; analysis shows that they are in fact incredibly tight sine waves, drawn with a precision and uniformity that doesn't match the irregularity of the rest of the tattoo. (Nothing seems unusual about the circle.) There doesn't seem to be any size maximum for a Star Tattoo – chest-sized models have been reported – but the minimum seems to be about two inches. Star Tattoos cannot cross any other tattoos (Star or otherwise); doing so renders their abilities ineffective.

Star Tattoos can't be created by any normal tattooing process, and most attempts at replicating them through known mystical means are doomed to even superficially get them right. Some arcane rituals or spells are rumored to be able to generate them, although it seems likely that whatever force crafts the Star Tattoo is merely transferring the one-time essence of the arcane medium to the tattoo wearer; thus a scroll with a Star Tattoo ritual can only be used once, its forces being transferred to the skin of the wearer.

However, unused Star Tattoos *can* be acquired from others. Doing so requires stripping off the flesh of the wearer, ensuring the entirety of the circle is retained. The circle of skin is then applied to the desired (if not willing) recipient, where it then bonds with the wearer. The skin of the previous recipient remains with the tattoo, although the flesh becomes a scarred amalgamation of the two skins. If a Star Tattoo is transferred multiple times, it retains *all* the flesh of the previous wearers, becoming more horrific and unsettling as the layers of previous flesh pile up.

When used, the Star Tattoo turns white, as if it had been removed via laser surgery. (Curiously, laser techniques cannot be used to remove a Star Tattoo before or after it's used, although they *can* be cut away.) Use of the Star Tattoo does not require any physical contact by the wearer; it's apparently in close enough contact with the wielder to be used as desired at a moment's notice.

There doesn't seem to be any horrific side effects for using or acquiring a Star Tattoo outside of the gruesome method that many of them are transferred. Still, for many, the presence of black or ashen irregular scarred stars over various body parts is unsettling enough.

### *What Do They Do, Exactly?*

*Impulse Buys* presents a lot of options for what is or isn't possible when spending points. This article doesn't touch on specifics for how these abilities translate over to their respective genres. However, *Impulse Buys* has plenty of advice for which options to choose for each setting (see pp. 20-22). Just make sure the *players* know what the artifacts can do; in a game that used *Impulse Buys* as written, the players would definitely know what their options were. Transferring those abilities to a physical artifact should be no different.

## LIMITED WORLD-ALTERING ABILITIES

By using consumable physical objects in lieu of points, the rules of *Impulse Buys* can be introduced to an existing campaign without dramatically altering its long-term structure; once the fate-altering artifacts run out, the campaign returns to normal.

If everyone enjoys the new rules and options, the group has a couple of options. Maybe the “rare” artifacts are more common – or become easier to create – than previously thought. Or maybe something earth-shattering happens in the campaign, imbuing the heroes intrinsically with the options of *Impulse Buys* . . .

## SUPERS, WEIRD SCIENCE, OR STEAMPUNK

*Impossible Serum* is stored in vials, with enough liquid for about four tablespoons. Each glows with a faint (unusable) luminescence, making it distinctive to those who know what they’re looking for.

Creating this formula requires a hero to spend 75% of his waking time affixed to a device as it cycles his blood, distilling . . . *something*. The science is iffy, but the consensus seems to be that it extracts some kind of hormone, chemical, or essence from the person. By drinking that essence in a time of need, the bearer can tap unfathomable reserves, letting him do the seemingly impossible.

The time needed to remain attached to the machine depends on how many doses are extracted. The first vial can be extracted in a week, the second in another month, and the third in an additional four months. (It’s possible more can be extracted, but no one who has tried to do so has survived

the process.) It seems the essence cannot rejuvenate in a person until it’s imbibed, at which point the clock resets to the threshold for the previous level. In other words, if someone has extracted three vials and drinks one, it would take him four months to generate another; if he drank two, one replacement could be extracted in a month.

The time to use a vial is the same as it takes to drink any potion. Outside of its luminescence, there’s nothing unusual about the liquid, and it can be stored in any way that would be beneficial for the eventual user.

Vials of Impossible Serum normally cannot be shared or transferred between people. However, as an optional tweak, taking a minuscule sip of a dose of serum permits someone who wasn’t the original donor to bond with the liquid. The bonding only works if the transferred formula is of a vintage older than any the drinker currently has extracted or is bonded with. Furthermore, only one new extraction may be bonded per 24 hours. (Thus someone who has not had any extractions could taste and bond with any single vial he acquires, while someone who already has one serum extracted or bonded can only acquire one from someone who has spent a month or more having a second vial extracted, and someone with two serums bonded can only bond with someone who has been subjected to the extraction process for four months.)

In theory, a villain with unlimited henchmen can keep a ready supply of extractions on tap. Nonetheless, even in a best-case scenario, he’s still limited to a maximum of three, which will replenish at a rate of one a day (the fastest he can bond with new potions). This may still prove a sufficient enough edge to provide a significant threat to those meddling heroes . . .

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

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# STEALING MAGIC

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

*"Cloaks of invisibility? Slippers of sneaking? Rings that let you fall 30 stories without dying? Oh, my young friend, what have those rogues at the Boar's Eyeball been telling you?"*

*"Now, don't take me wrong. Of course, you can buy those sorts of things from my shop. I have several of each in fact. I would be a poor vendor of esoteric items if I did not."*

*"But you should know what a competitive field we find ourselves in. So let me ask you this: If you have those things, and everyone else has them, then what good is that? Hmm?"*

*"Excellent. I thought we could come to an understanding, my young friend. So let us leave the others to their ordinary ware, and let no one say that Leofrick the Larcenous didn't offer you a look at the real goods!"*

*"So long as you can pay, of course . . ."*

Some say that thieves are only as good as their tools. That aphorism's up for debate, of course, but no second-story man worth his grappling hooks would deny that having good gear can make the difference between a successful job and a botched one. Given that botching can lead to capture, imprisonment, torture, or death, it's an excellent idea to have the best equipment you can. That goes double for magical items.

With that in mind, presented here are a variety of enchanted things and alchemical preparations that thieves may find quite useful – ones that go beyond sneaking rings and potions of invisibility. They range from common gear that could be easily purchased from the right sort of magical store, to near-legendary items that would most likely only be found in the toughest of dungeons or stolen from powerful rivals. Generic information on what they look like, what they're made from, and any special drawbacks or conditions that may apply to their use are also provided.

## COMMON ITEMS

The following magical items can be acquired at magic shops with some degree of regularity (up to 100% chance in a major city). They are sold at reasonable prices. They also can be commonly found as ordinary treasure, or littering the floors of dungeons – along with the remains of their former owners.

### *Blurring Ring*

As the name suggests, this ring causes the wearer's features to appear fuzzy and indistinct, making it much harder to positively identify him. Thieves often activate these items at the start of a job, and then turn them off once they're done.

The only drawback is that the thieves' vision becomes a little blurry, too. It thus becomes a little harder to read small print, spot traps, and detect other hidden things.

Blurring rings are usually made out of thick copper etched with a mystical symbol, and inlaid with onyx filigrees. To activate the ring, it must be rotated around so that the etched symbol is facing down. The effect lasts a maximum of four hours, but can be turned off early by rotating the ring back. If the ring is damaged, the magic leaves it.

### *Knives of Mercury*

These daggers are made of a peculiar sort of "frozen mercury," which is quite sharp but seems as dull as pounded steel. Moreover, the blades can be reshaped with the whispering of certain, key words, becoming longer, shorter, thinner, or thicker. This plasticity on command makes them very useful tools: They could be daggers in combat; turned into long, thin picks to defeat a locked door; and then reshaped into wide, thick blades to pry open something.

Knives of Mercury are usually sold in pairs for maximum utility. They look like normal daggers, except that the handles are inlaid with hematite bands, which hold the enchantment. If the hematite is chipped or shattered, the knife loses its magic, and its blade liquefies immediately.

### *Cats Eyes*

This pair of bracelets lets their wearer see like a cat does at night, for both good and bad. The good news is that they grant night vision in all but total blackness. The bad news is that almost all sense of color is gone, small details are lost, and the wearer runs the risk of being temporarily blinded by sudden bursts of light – like a watchman's torch, for example.

The bracelets are silver, measuring 2" long and 1/4" thick. They are each inlaid with six greenish-yellow spheres of quartz, spaced equidistant around the middle of each bracelet. Carved patterns of leaping cats dance from stone to stone. If one or both of the bracelets are damaged, or even one of the spheres is *truly* broken, both bands are both rendered useless.

The bracelets can only be activated and deactivated three times in one evening – one for each set of spheres. To use them, the wearer closes his eyes and bangs two of the spheres together. When this is done, the spheres all seem to fracture, with a black, horizontal diamond appearing in each – just like a cat's eye. The wearer then opens his eyes to find he has improved night vision (as described above).

This state of being lasts until the wearer bangs two other, different spheres together, or morning comes. Once deactivated, the spheres return to their plain appearance.

## *Arachne's Gloves*

Many thieves might overlook these useful items, as they seem useless for rough and tumble work. But don't be fooled by these silky, white gloves: While they might seem more suitable for wearing to a royal ball than breaking into the king's treasures, they can take a thief places he might never have imagined – namely, straight up.

These gloves are imbued with the power of the strongest of spiders. When worn, they allow the wearer to find purchase on the smallest of cracks and holds, though they won't work on perfectly smooth surfaces. He can thus free-climb right up a stone wall. He can even go hand over hand on the bottom of a bridge or walkway. So long as the climber doesn't falter, he could go almost anywhere with the gloves. They also fail to work when the climbing surface is wet, so second-floor thieving in the rain is right out. The good news is that these gloves are very hardy and actually repair any damage done to them – except by fire or excessive heat – within a day's time.

The gloves have two drawbacks. The first is that, while they're easy to get into, they take an hour to slide off, which could make certain post-thievery tasks rather inconvenient. The other is that the more the wearer relies on these items, the more he finds himself dreaming of spiders, sometimes awaking in a start after imagining being wrapped up and eaten by swarms of them. Once the gloves have been used, the only way to end the dreams they bring is to give or sell them to someone else – thus passing the visions along – or else burn them.

*A thief believes everybody steals.*

*– Edgar Watson Howe*

## *Bag of Returning*

Thieves are always losing things on the job: throwing knives at targets, scattering caltrops behind them, tossing rocks or coins to confuse guards with strange sounds. It would be nice to not have to repurchase all those tools and weapons every time you go out on a run, wouldn't it?

Thankfully, there is an answer to this problem! This shiny, greenish-purple leather bag is purportedly constructed from the skin of a fantastic creature that skips between the planes like a frog does lily pads. A cord made from the same strangely colored leather ties the bag shut. Anything that's put in the bag and left there, undisturbed, for a day and a night is now bound to the bag. After that point, any items taken from the bag will magically *return* to the bag 12 hours later if the user hasn't put them back in sooner.

As one might suspect, this can be a very handy thing to have. Thieves often keep some money inside it, so as to pay for services and then be reimbursed in half a day.

Care must be exercised with the sack – the leather bag is only good so long as it's in one piece. While the material it's made out of is strong, it can still be pricked and poked by sharp edges. It is thus a good idea to keep throwing knives sheathed, and caltrops or other sharp objects inside a smaller bag. If the bag is pierced, the magic is lost, and everything inside the bag goes away until the sack is properly – that is, *magically* – repaired.

## **RARE ITEMS**

These items are often challenging to find. Even a decent-sized magic shop in a major city might only have a 50% chance of carrying them, and they would probably charge quite a bit for them. Items such as these could also be found while adventuring, but would most likely be discovered only after very difficult or challenging encounters. Fellow thieves who learn that the PCs have them may offer to buy them – or try to steal them.

## *Coward's Cloak*

While the name is somewhat belittling – and misleading – these enchanted clothes are very useful to pickpockets and anyone who has cause to flee mobs, watchmen, or enraged marks. They appear to be a normal set of clothing, but they can, with the turn of a magical brooch, change shape, make, and color within seconds. If the enchantment is used before rounding a handy corner, or ducking into a convenient crowd, its magic is often enough to foil pursuers.

The clothes do not appear special, and they actually aren't. It's the mother-of-pearl brooch that's sold with them that binds them together, and facilitates their conversion. Objects, such as coins or weapons, that are in or under the clothes disappear while the garments are changed, and reappear when the outfit returns to normal. Fancier varieties of the Coward's Cloak come with an actual cloak that's there before the change, and goes away after, or vice versa. Anything inside the cloak when it vanishes stays within the cloak until the outerwear is called back, which makes it a great place to conceal stolen goods, weapons, and other contraband.

The clothes can be damaged, burned, sliced, and repaired without affecting the overall effect. Pieces of the outfit, however, cannot be replaced. The face of the brooch is cleverly made to be turned on a pin, and shows the comely face of a young woman when “up,” and the leering grin of an old hag when “down.” Damaging or breaking the brooch ruins the enchantment, and the clothes begin to tatter and decay. If the cloak is “gone” when it happens, it's gone for good, along with anything that was hidden inside it.

## *Quill of Lies*

Not all theft requires grappling hooks and lockpicks. Some of the best capers in history required only a forged transfer order, an ersatz letter of introduction, or a heart-rending plea for ransom from an abducted prince who never existed. Unfortunately, in these cynical times, many potential marks have become quite inured to such missives, as they've heard too many horror stories about giving your trust – and coins – to a well-dressed stranger with a well-written letter.



To overcome such sensible reticence, flim-flam artists in need of an extra push can use the Quill of Lies. These handsomely florid writing utensils are made from the plume of a peacock hatched at night during a new moon. They are tipped with silver made from coins placed in the pocket of a master thief lying on his deathbed. Anything written by the Quill of Lies will be believed, word for word, by those who read it, no matter how fantastical, and any pleas for help made within it will seem completely genuine. However, it can in no way compel the reader to act on the request – that decision is still his to make.

The pen requires no special ink, and can be used at any time, by anyone. However, there are two dangers. The first is that, once the letter is finished and signed, the author must not read it, either, or he will also believe its words. The second is that, should the paper the letter's written on be damaged in any way (ripped, torn, burned, spilled upon, etc.), then not only will anyone who read it realize that it was a lie, but he feels compelled to severely punish the person who showed him the letter.

### *Fluid of Free Passage*

Jokingly referred to as “liquid lockpicks,” these alchemical preparations are worth double their weight in platinum, and for good reason. When poured into any physical lock – even ones sealed with a uniquely enchanted key or a magical spell – the fluid opens it right up, and keep it unlocked until the liquid dries.

The fluid in the vials looks clear and silvery, with small, bright-green grains nestled at the bottom. It resembles green-tinted quicksilver when properly primed. A vial must be vigorously shaken for at least a full minute, and then *immediately* poured into the lock, lest it curdle into uselessness. Upon a successful application, the lock's mechanisms silently slide open, and no force in the world, magical or otherwise, can lock it again until the liquid evaporates (usually within a day)

While the preparation is usually foolproof, some caveats remain. The user must remember that while it will open the lock, it will *not* disable any physical or magical alarms that are on or around that lock – that's the job of the thief. Also, great care must be taken to not get any of the preparation on bare skin, lest the user find his hands very painfully and messily “unlocked” instead.

### *The Twin Potions of Returning*

The first rule of thievery is to always have an escape route planned. Those who have availed themselves of these potions have that rule well in hand, as this pair of magical drinks can bring a thief back to where he started – for a price.

The potions are stored in otherwise-unassuming stoppered flasks: one liquid is red with green swirls, the other green with red swirls. Before leaving on a job, the user drinks the red potion, the effects of which last for a day and a night. Should he need to escape, the thief drinks the green potion. He then instantly reappears at the exact spot where he drank the red one. Any barriers, manacles, or magical entrapments are ignored by the power of the potions. They'll even get a thief out of the belly of a dragon.

The most immediate drawback is that, if the red potion is drunk, but not the green, the thief must devour a number of

special herbs before the day and night are out or else suffer severe gastric upset. The other issue is that, if the green potion is drunk, the thief reappears with *only* the things he had with him when he drank the red potion. All treasures that were gained up to that point are lost, and go right back where they were found. However, all items lost or discarded during the job are back with the thief, too.

*In order to have  
a change of fortune at  
the last minute you have  
to take your fortune to  
the last minute.*

*– Terry Pratchett,  
Thief of Time*

## **VERY RARE ITEMS**

These items are near-legendary things, celebrated in story and song. Simply having them on your person is likely to see you tagged as a thief by well-informed authorities, and marked by every savvy cutpurse in town for a major robbery.

It out to go without saying that the PCs are *extremely* unlikely to find these things on sale. A shop that did have any of these treasures would not only charge an arm and leg for them, but would only offer them to the most preferred and discerning of clients. They might occasionally be found at an auction among the best-moneyed robbers in town.

Adventuring, then, would be the best way to acquire such things. They would most likely be in the major strongboxes of treasure toward a dungeon's end, or possibly in the hands of one of the final adversaries. The group could steal them from other, better thieves, too, though this will doubtlessly bring vengeance upon them when their victims learn who they are.

### *Rope of the Fakir*

From the long-mysterious Near East comes this interesting innovation on the familiar – a coil of rope that has been magically bound to its owner. In that part of the world, the mystics purportedly use these “living ropes” to perform strange feats of acrobatic skill, or aid them in their ascetic meditations. In other parts of the world, they are often put to less enlightened uses.

The ropes are made from the fibers of a large, carnivorous pitcher plant capable of eating entire cows. The resulting greenish, 1/2”-thick coils periodically twitch and pulse, and sometimes even slither along the floor of their own accord.

*Tallennar . . . It meant thief. Well, that was all right.  
Because a thief really was a lot like a wizard.*

*– Sarah Prineas, **The Magic Thief: Found***

When a coil is magically bound to an owner, the person gains dominion over the rope. Meanwhile, the rope gains a full range of motion, though no capability for independent thought or action. Most owners like to have them coiled around their arm, like a bracer, until needed.

The coils can be verbally or mentally commanded to perform simple tasks, such as “bind that guard” or “find something to tie yourself to on that rooftop.” They can psychically show their masters what they “see” and “hear,” and act as lashing weapons in combat. Ropes can still be cut or burned, of course, but they have the capacity to repair damage on their own.

The only drawback to having such a servant is that it’s quite carnivorous and very hungry. A healthy rope needs to eat something red-blooded at least once a day – maybe more if it gets a good workout. Rats, mice, and other small vermin usually suffice, but they won’t say no to something larger, like a cow, horse, or human being.

Woe be unto the master who forgets to feed his rope. After a time, the hunger will overpower the bond, and the coil will eat itself.

### *Althalos’ Bags of Displacement*

The legendary Robber King of Ysult, Althalos had a reputation for being able to point at a place that he wanted to be – such as the parapet of a high tower – and then suddenly appear where he’d pointed. It just so turns out that there’s some truth to that tale, though not quite as the bards were told.

Althalos’ secret was a pair of small, specially weighted, magical bags. They were spun from ordinary wool, stitched together with common thread, and filled with small, enchanted silver balls and the crushed bones of an adult changeling. They were then tied off with long, black leather cords, so they could be whipped about in the air and tossed with some degree of precision.

In order to use the bags, Althalos would hold one in his off hand, and throw a bag with the other. When the bag landed, and stopped moving, it would switch places with the bag that Althalos was holding, taking him with it. The other bag would then appear at the master thief’s feet, ready for another use.

The Robber King of Ysult is long dead, but copies of his greatest secret are still made occasionally. The bags’ special ability can be used twice per day – once per bag – and they must be recharged at night by lying out under the full moon in an open area, without their owner standing guard over them. Fortunately, not many consider an ordinary pair of pouches to be worth taking.

Anyone who owns this bag earns the instant enmity of the fae folk, who can sense the violated bones of a changeling

within the pouch. Saying that they look upon such things very poorly is quite an understatement, especially considering the legends regarding how Althalos met his end.

### *The Mask of Lady Maerwynn the Covetous*

Many a thief has lamented that he cannot see through walls. Long ago, a well-to-do royal with a taste for stealing her rivals’ jewels from their castles as they slept found a way to deal with this. Unfortunately, her greed eventually got the better of her, but the technique her personal sorcerer perfected lives on in copies of her best-known tool.

The white mask is the sort one might wear to a masquerade. It’s made of the finest porcelain, set with polished jet eyebrows and lips, and teardrops of enchanted sardonyx. The mask is tied on by a red ribbon spun from the hair of a minor demon of greed.

This item must be worn only at night, and then only after being kissed lovingly for some time, in anticipation of the wonderful things the thief hopes to acquire. Once properly primed, wearing the mask makes all walls appear as though they were nothing more than light mist. People and things behind the walls can be seen fairly clearly, provided there’s enough light in their respective rooms to see by, though small details may be muddled due to the “mist.” If a room is unlit, then the mask’s wearer cannot see what’s in there, except by entering.

Cubbyholes and passages concealed behind walls are clearly visible, as are treasures hidden within the walls. Something in front of hollow areas – like strategically placed paintings or coats of arms – will block the view. It does not work on floors or ceilings, and while illusionary walls are easily identified, as they’re still fully visible, the mask won’t show what’s truly behind them.

The mask has a serious downside: the demon-hair ribbon. While the thief is looking through the mask, the mask is looking through the thief, and giving the demon whose hair was used to make the ribbon all it needs to effectively tempt the mask’s wearer. The demon takes every opportunity to quietly whisper to the mask’s wearer – gently persuading him to take more than he really wants, or do more than just steal. If the wearer isn’t careful, he’ll go from simple theft to senseless assault, cold-blooded murder, total slaughter, or other crimes too hideous to name.

This is why Lady Maerwynn, disgraced royal, was sent to her death as something far worse than a thief. This is also why masks like hers tend to be in circulation, rather than given a place of honor in a long-lived and happy master thief’s hoard.

## Rowntree's Wand of Retrieval

Thieves are a secretive and paranoid lot, and there's little wonder as to why. Given that they spend their time getting into others' things, one can understand that they're all too aware that others might spend the time to get into theirs. Worrying about having your own stolen goods stolen by someone else is enough to drive a thief mad sometimes. That's why Sir Charles Rowntree, sorcerer thief, made the Wand of Retrieval.

The wands are usually 6" long and 1.5" thick, and made of alabaster capped with flat gold at both ends. The gold is carved in such a way that the swirling designs sometimes look like eyes, and sometimes not, depending on what angle they're viewed at, and how long one stares. They often feel surprisingly warm, though a wand that's not currently owned by anyone feels smooth and cold.

To bond with the wand, the new owner must sleep with it for an entire week, with the wand clasped in both hands, up by his heart. At the end of that time, he can use either tip of the wand to press down on anything he'd care to – works of art, weapons, jewels, individual coins, and so on – and the wand will take stock of its presence.

Ever after, if someone other than the owner of the wand touches or takes an item that the rod has come into contact with, the baton will get very warm, and be heard to whisper an alarm to its owner. All the owner has to do then is sit with the wand in both hands and concentrate, and the enchanted item will tell him what was touched or taken, when, by whom, and sometimes even why. More importantly, it'll tell him *how* the person took it (always of importance to thieves) and *where* the item is at that moment.

That alone would be extremely useful, but the wand has another function. If the owner holds onto it for a day and a night, thinking of revenge against the person who took the item, he – and anyone within 5" of him at the end of that time – will be teleported to exactly where the item is. This will give an opportunity to retrieve the item, as well as exact the meditated-upon revenge.

However, the wand wants its due. If some measure of pay-back, however large or small, is *not* given to the person who took the items, or at least the person who commissioned the crime, by the wand's owner, then the item releases its bond. The owner will then have to redo the entire process of bonding, and then go back and press the wand to everything in his treasury all over again.

*Everyone needs a little edge  
once in a while – but thieves live  
on the edge, and they love magic.  
A clever thief can find a way to  
use (or misuse) almost any sort  
of enchanted item, but some seem  
made especially for thieves . . .  
indeed, some are!*

– **GURPS Magic Items 2**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

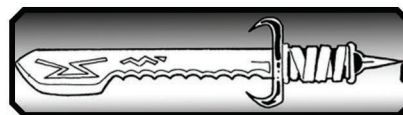
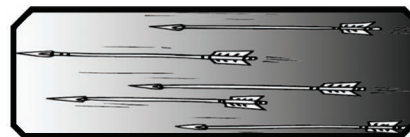
By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid*, has been the editor of *The Wraith Project*, and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.

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# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

## MIX IT UP!

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

When I read *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* as a wee lad, I loved the madcap way it introduced science-fiction elements to the fantasy core of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, challenging the heroes to explore numerous ultra-tech wonders as described through the lens of medieval perception. However, I recall being annoyed because all of the blasters, powered armor, scanners, and the like used power packs; each use of these devices' wonderful abilities drained another charge of the power packs. Once they were depleted, the device was no longer a "blaster" so much as a "lousy metal boomerang."

As a GM – and an adult, and no longer a power-gaming munchkin 11-year-old – I realize this was a genius move. It allowed the GM to introduce fantastic elements into the campaign without worrying that it would permanently unbalance or destroy the flavor of the setting. That's awesome.

I already talked elsewhere herein (pp. 28-30) about an example of giving loot as a way to try a radical rule set without permanently altering the campaign. However, loot is also an amazing way to temporarily introduce new genres or ideas to a game. Here, then, is a look at how you might bring in something different to the heroes, in a tangible form.

## SCIENCE FICTION

Superman comics from the Silver Age used a conceit that enabled them to participate in stories that were clearly science fiction (or science fantasy if you prefer – but in the 1960s, that was a pretty fuzzy distinction): by showing tales of Krypton

... before it blew up, obviously. It accomplished this in myriad ways: Superman would travel through time, project his mind, improve his memory of adventures he had when he was a baby (seriously), or just plain read stories about what Krypton used to be like. So even though science fiction seems like it might be the most disruptive, it's actually fairly easy to keep under control.

### *Bringing It Here*

Any science-fiction equipment can be brought to just about any genre, as exemplified by supers comics, countless older *Might & Magic* computer games, and the aforementioned *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*. As some tips:

- *Don't include instructions.* Figuring out the device is often part of the fun.
- *Limit ammo.* Whether using power packs, physical ammunition, or other consumables, having a limited supply of ammo keeps the newly introduced genre from overpowering the existing setting.
- *Have it look weird.* Science-fiction technology is going to look *odd* to most other genres. Imagine how a modern smart phone with pre-loaded Wikipedia would look to a Victorian hero (it's the size of a pack of cards, it beeps, there are seemingly no buttons, etc.). Having it appear unusual will also help limit it in many genres; walking around in powered armor or with an energy sword is going to draw heads in just about *any* setting.

### *Freedom of Choice*

One aspect that makes heroic rewards a great delivery method for alternate genre elements is that the heroes have the *choice* of whether or not to utilize them. If your fantasy adventurers never use the blaster pistols, or the cliffhanger investigators never activate the Prism of the Rainbow Bridge, then the players have decided to maintain the "integrity" between their characters and the supplemental genre. This is a choice that Indiana Jones has continuously made by not attempting to acquire or use magical artifacts and science-fiction goodies.

### *Bring Them There*

Alternatively, a reward might transport one or more of the heroes to a new science-fiction setting. Examples include a device that takes them to another world (such as the Zeta Beam of Adam Strange from DC Comics, which itself drew inspiration from Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter stories), a communications device that can summon aid or allies from off world, or a method to alter an existing method of transport to enable it to get to alternate locales. A couple of methods can keep options limited.

- *Include a recharge time.* As an alternate to limiting a device's charges (see p. 36), perhaps the item can be used as often as is desired, but it needs time or specific elements/effects/etc. to recharge. This can be especially useful if the heroes want to limit the interrupting genre, but otherwise establish it as an ongoing possibility.

- *Limit the window of accessibility.* If the device can only be used to transport the fantasy heroes to Planet Echs on the Winter solstice, then the GM only needs to worry that the players might activate that option on one campaign day a year.

## FANTASY/MAGIC

Fantasy and magic is one of the easiest elements to add to an existing campaign, especially since so many nonfantasy RPGs can be summed up as "[existing genre] plus magic." Magic can be as subtle or flashy as desired, although it's probably not a good idea to give the heroes the ability to summon a gargantuan dragon in a Western or gritty noir campaign. (Actually, I take that back; that would be *awesome*.)

As many options for magic objects or realms exist as there are human imaginations, but as a few flavorful ones:

- *Magic only works when mundane folks (that is, "not the heroes or villains") can't observe it.* This limits magic weapons to use on Big Bad Guys, magic gates to when the heroes are alone, etc.

- *Magic is oil; the heroes' realm is water.* Especially if the heroes use loot to visit other realms, there's something that keeps the two genres from comingling. For example, maybe the heroes can only enter the Fae Lands from the historical pirate realm if they go completely naked, and they can't bring any tangible loot home. Or perhaps the magic lie-detecting ring can only be worn for a few minutes each day in the hero's noir realm, or else it starts burning the wearer's hand.

- *Shake it up!* In the case of loot that transports heroes from a nonmagical realm to a fantasy one, it can help if the tone is wildly different from what the heroes are used to. Perhaps a scroll in a cinematic cliffhangers world sends the heroes to a darker fantasy world, or an artifact in a grim-and-gritty science-fiction universe transports the heroes to a fairy-tale wonderland. If the originating genre is grim enough, it might prove a temptation to "escape" into the fantastic realm permanently. "I am *not* a merry man . . ."

## CLIFFHANGERS

To add a pulp/cliffhangers-style genre to a campaign, it's necessary to address three points.

*Locale* is the easiest to deal with. Perhaps the heroes get tickets to an interstellar pleasure cruise to Fedora-3. Perhaps cracking this whip transports the wielder and surrounding friends to a less-civilized realm. In a mundane setting of a near-appropriate era – Victorian, Western, Lovecraftian, etc. – it might be as simple as a "mundane" trip to appropriately uncharted realms.

*Focus* is the MacGuffin or plot that makes the genre. This usually takes care of itself if the heroes find themselves in the appropriately aspected locale, but the reward itself might lead more intrinsically to the focus. For example, maybe when the "blank" scroll is brought to Fedora-3, it generates a map that points the heroes to a pulpy locale. The closer they get, the

more the arcane forces the heroes seek interfere with interplanetary communications, limiting or obliterating chances to call for backup, as they approach the ancient abandoned temple . . .

*Rule set* is the game-mechanical portion that lets the heroes do the cliffhanger-themed feats of derring-do. If the reward is the aspect that injects the heroes' campaign with a pulp campaign, then that item might be able to convey the reward as well. For example, maybe the scroll has nanobots that enhance the heroes, enabling them to jump farther, punch harder, and take more damage so long as they're on Fedora-3. Or if the cliffhangers adventure is part of a *Westworld*-style "fake" amusement-park reality, then perhaps the elements that bring the heroes to that destination also enhance and enforce the pulp genre. Or maybe – upon arriving at the destination – the heroes acquire some potions that let them do the impossible (p. 30).

So, to put it together in an example . . .

The super-powered heroes acquire an amulet that – when held – seems to pull them to venturing overseas. The PCs can ignore the call (see p. 36) and stick the amulet in a drawer; however, if they heed the tug to adventure, they discover that their powers get more fickle and faded the closer to the locale they get. As they near their destination – a long-hidden temple on Obsidian Island – they find their inhuman powers no longer work, leaving them only with "pulp" quasi-realistic abilities. As they uncover the mysteries of the temple, they discover a plot that only they can resolve – one that they might have brought closer to fruition by investigating the amulet's beckoning . . .

More info on other genres can be found in many Random Thought Table installments. For more details on adding different genres to a dungeon-fantasy campaign, see "To Conjure the Unknown," from *Pyramid* #3/72: *Alternate Dungeons*. For insight into combining Western elements into other games, see "Little Bits of the West" from *Pyramid* #3/74: *Wild West*.

## THE HORROR . . .

Although not the first choice of a "reward" for most heroes, it's entirely possible to introduce the horror genre to a non-horrific campaign through loot. It's usually tied to another form of reward (say, a magical/fantasy weapon that also threatens to possess the wielder).

If the horrific element is intrinsic to a weapon or gear, that can often serve as the limiting factor keeping the hero from using it all the time. If it's tied to a transport or gateway to a new locale, it can be an enticing challenge for heroes with a pressing need to learn Things Man Was Not Meant To Know; if (say) heroes of the Stargate universe were to acquire a gate address to the Lovecraftian Dreamlands, would they be able to resist the temptation? Of course, the choice is always theirs (see p. 36).

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. For more details on his background, see p. 30.

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