

# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>

Issue 3/92 June '16

# ZOMBIES

**UNLIFE  
SUPPORT**  
by Sean Punch

**THE UNKNOWN HUNGER**  
by J. Edward Tremlett

**THE VIKING DEAD**  
by Graeme Davis

**THE CHURCH OF THE NEW FOCUS**  
by Steven Marsh

**CICERO**  
by Matt Riggsby

**BATTLESUIT ZOMBIES**  
by David L. Pulver

**NOT YOUR AVERAGE  
GRAVE ROBBING**  
by Michael Kreuter

**INDIAN GHOULS**  
by Graeme Davis

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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Whether minor threat or apocalyptic existential danger, zombies make for great gaming. This issue of *Pyramid* is devoted to all aspects of the restless dead.

When the heroes become zombified, it's fair to say they're on *Unlife Support*. **GURPS Zombies** author Sean Punch looks at raising dead PCs as *free-willed* zombies in **GURPS**, with an overarching discussion and three specific examples that draw on magic or science.

You may think you know about zombies, but there's still much to fear from *The Unknown Hunger*. This systemless guide describes two new types of zombies, born of darkness and even Hell itself.

Living Norse warriors are rightly feared, but there's equally much to worry about *The Viking Dead*. **GURPS Vikings** author Graeme Davis examines Norse undead, including **GURPS** stats and insight.

Technology can open up the wonders of space, or unleash upon the world *Battlesuit Zombies*. In this month's Eidetic Memory, **GURPS Spaceships** author David L. Pulver gives a science-fiction twist to a classic trope, with combat suits that become deadly after being infected with a virus. This feature offers ideas on how to use it with **GURPS After the End**, *Transhuman Space*, and more.

If you're looking to change your outlook in real and tangible ways, consider joining *The Church of the New Focus*; it could be the start of a whole new life. *Pyramid* Editor Steven Marsh provides the framework for a place of worship where all is not as it seems, complete with **GURPS** stats for those who progress on its path to enlightenment.

When bodies turn up missing, the heroes will soon realize that this is *Not Your Average Grave Robbing*. This paranormal **GURPS** adventure is well-suited for turn-of-the-20th-century **GURPS Monster Hunters** investigators.

Throughout the world are tales of bodies that refuse to lie still, as witnessed by *Indian Ghouls*. This Appendix Z is a brief overview of zombie-like threats that may be found in the Middle East and India.

This issue also presents a Random Thought Table that gives ideas for how to keep the suspense even when you're clearly holding a **GURPS Zombies** hardcover, plus another peek into the new **Car Wars** universe with a vignette by Matt Riggsby. Whether you're amid modern times, in a fantasy realm, or on a spaceship, this issue of *Pyramid* is so steeped with zombies, you might say it's a *no-brainer*!

## ARTICLE COLORS

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

*Pale Blue:* In This Issue

*Brown:* In Every Issue

*Green:* Columnist

*Dark Blue:* **GURPS** Features

*Purple:* Systemless Features

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## LOOK OUT! IT'S A HORDE OF ZOMBIES! (WELL, ARTICLES ABOUT THEM, ANYWAY . . .)

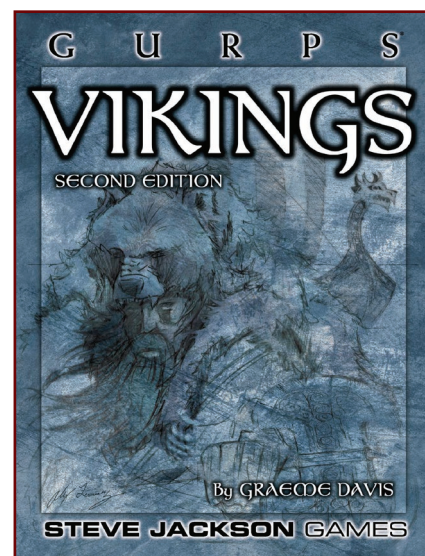
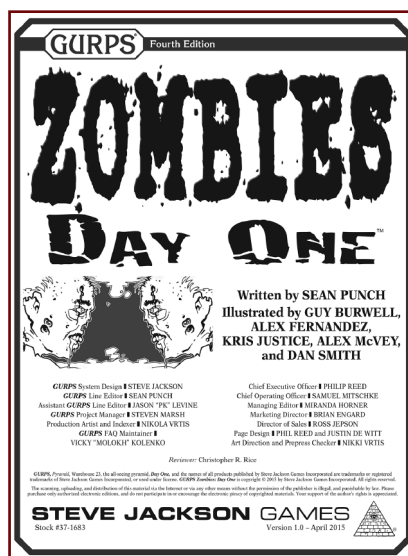
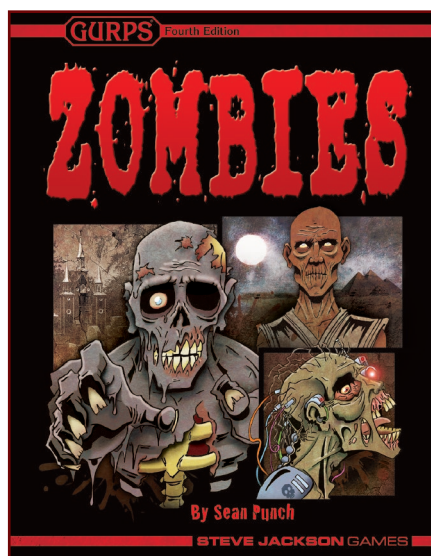
As much as I love comic books, one of the challenges I have with the larger mainstream universes is that there's an "everything and the kitchen sink" approach. These are worlds that include magic, super-science, gods, time travel, reality-altering artifacts, demons, aliens, sapient robots, pocket universes, and much, *much* more. It's certainly understandable – the big publishers need to support dozens of comics a month, for decades – but, as fun as it is, it can also be exhausting at times.

Conversely, there's a certain joy in focusing on One Weird Thing, seeing what you can do with a super-specific topic, or what kind of variations and expansions you can add to that idea. This month's *Pyramid*, devoted to zombies, is one such

example. Although often part of a larger tapestry of fantasy and horror games, zombies work just fine as the sole focus of an adventure or even an entire campaign . . . as witnessed by the ongoing success of television shows, movies, and books where zombies are the only threat.

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So, does this experiment work? Should we have other ultra-focused issues? Would you want to see an issue devoted to werewolves? Or castles? Or bunnies? Or is it too much of a good thing in one issue? For that matter, if you have any specific topics you'd like to see issues about – or any comments about this issue – please let us know! Our all-seeing eyes are reading your mail (at least, if it's sent to [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com)), while the community at large – at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com) – is a great place to talk about the latest issues of *Pyramid* publicly.



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# UNLIFE SUPPORT

BY SEAN PUNCH

**GURPS Zombies** takes the conventional tack that player-character zombies ought to *enter play* in that state (“*Can I Play a Zombie?*”, **Zombies**, p. 38), probably as members of an all-zombie party (*The Zombie Heroes Campaign*, **Zombies**, p. 149, and also *Supers Become Zombies* and *Zombies Become Supers*, **Zombies**, pp. 148-149). That’s because in campaigns in which zombification in the course of an adventure is a potential hazard, it’s customary for heroes so afflicted to become NPCs. But there is an interesting alternative: zombification as “discount resurrection.” That is, slain PCs can return from the dead not due to some horrible infection or curse, but because they genuinely want to – or because their allies arrange it as last-resort medical aid. Such reanimation offers a handy means of preserving and transporting a corpse until complete revivification is possible. On a meta-game level, it provides a colorful way to keep everyone at the gaming table when a character dies. Some people may even relish the notion of wreaking undead vengeance on their killers!

Zombie templates built for this purpose need to walk a narrow line. They should be sufficiently disadvantageous that munchkins don’t aspire to have their characters killed and turned into potent undead. This implies a negative template cost or at most a small positive one, and at any price means including several problems that *adventurers* would find serious and unavoidable. At the same time, such beings have to be free-willed and capable enough that they’re fun to play – particularly if somebody will be roleplaying a zombie during a lengthy quest for genuine resurrection – or nobody is going to exercise the option.

Such templates imply equally novel means of zombification. These methods need to be more refined than the classic Zombie spell or ghoul virus, yet cheaper and easier than full-fledged resurrection, or there will be no takers. And to maintain balance, “cheap and easy” should come with risks or inconveniences. The GM must further build in means of keeping the group’s reanimator from zombifying dead PCs against their players’ wishes . . . or alternatively, ways to ensure that those who dabble in such grave matters feel the full consequences of their actions.

All of this is best illustrated using examples! Below are three takes on “beneficial zombification”: one spontaneous, one magical, and one technological. In all cases, add the zombie template to the character sheet of the formerly dead subject, adjusting traits and point totals as described in *Stacking Templates* (p. B261) and *Nonhuman Zombies* (**Zombies**, p. 106). To help unfortunate souls who lack a copy of **Zombies**, zombie meta-traits have been replaced with their constituent parts.

Finally, remember that Extra Life preempts everything here. A hero who dies with that advantage on tap returns before zombification becomes an issue!

## CAN’T KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN

The simplest option – giving dead heroes a chance to return from the grave through pure strength of will – requires no magic spells, potions, weird science, or other visible “campaign infrastructure,” just a decision that death is sometimes less-than-permanent. In principle, the GM could even switch on this possibility out of the blue, perhaps as a portent of momentous supernatural events. That said, it best suits settings with a strong occult element. It would seem badly out of place in a modern-day action story or a hard science-fiction game!

If it’s possible to return, the GM must first determine whether the player of the dead PC is even interested in roleplaying an entity more akin to a brainy zombie than a living person, much less a high-powered lich, wraith, or vampire. If not, that settles the issue – though nothing keeps the GM from recycling fallen heroes as undead *NPCs*. Adventurers whose special abilities prevent recruitment into the life-challenged legions *must* take the bad with the good and forgo the option of playing a revenant; this is particularly relevant to those with the Covenant of Rest perk (**GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks**, p. 19).

Provided that it suits the player *and* the character, the next step is to make a Will roll for the dead PC. This is similar to the approach described in *Dead Bodies: Zombifying Forces* (**Zombies**, p. 126), but a number of rules change because this isn’t a curse or a plague.

### Details of Death

Some people are more “entitled” than others to return – notably those who die young or are killed, and individuals whose remains are mishandled. Pick *one* option from each of the three categories below. Apply the associated modifiers to Will.

### Circumstances of Death

Natural death or suicide*	-5
Accidental death	-4
Honorable death in combat or duel	-3
Lawful execution	-2
Dishonorable death in combat or duel	-1
Murder or wrongful execution	0

*Zombification as “discount resurrection.”*

## Age at Death†

Under 18	+1
18-49	0
50-69	-1
70-89	-2
Over 90	-3

## Funerary Rites‡

Final Rest spell	Roll fails!
Successful Religious Ritual roll	Penalty equal to margin
Failed Religious Ritual roll	Bonus equal to margin
Rites overlooked	0
Rites ritually, willfully denied	+1

\* The trauma of suicide may boost the odds of coming back as an undead *NPC*, but the choice to end one's life implies a *lack* of will to continue for these purposes.

† Scale these ages for Extended Lifespan or Short Lifespan. People with Unaging have an *indefinite* lifespan remaining, and roll at +3 regardless of chronological age.

‡ Heroes *can* take steps to help their cronies return – but for PCs with disadvantages (Disciplines of Faith, Vows, etc.)

connected to religions that extend last rites and expect the dead to stay dead, this is *bad roleplaying* and grounds for a character-point penalty.

## Personal Traits

If the GM believes that a particular advantage or disadvantage would drive someone to come back from the afterlife or supernaturally facilitate such a return – or just hints at bloody-mindedness – that trait should give +1 to the Will roll per full  $\pm 5$  points of value. Likely candidates include Channeling (+2), Single-Minded (+1), Stubbornness (+1), and almost any form of unrealized Fanaticism or Obsession (+1 per -5 points).

Conversely, if a trait represents weak willpower or a supernatural barrier to returning, it ought to give -1 to the Will roll per full  $\pm 5$  points. Slave Mentality (-8) exemplifies the former, while Mundane Background (-2) epitomizes the latter.

Holy abilities such as Blessed, Higher Purpose, Power Investiture, and True Faith – and related disadvantages such as Disciplines of Faith and Vows – might cut either way.

## Returner

-40 points

A “returner” is a dead person solidified from the spirit realm by sheer will. Its body is *not* that of the deceased – which might be cremated, fed to pigs, etc. – but also not fully immortal. Although it doesn't age, bleed, drink, eat, sicken, or sleep, and is hard to injure (Homogenous), it still has a supernatural reliance on the “Breath of Life,” symbolized by breathable air at pressures and temperatures that can sustain mortals. The uncanny Breath reduces this entity's speech to a death-rattle – and if that weren't horrific enough, its physical form shows graphic signs of death and is quite evidently not alive. Even animals find it terrifying.

The returner's defining characteristic is superhuman drive. Utterly fearless, it cannot be dissuaded from its objectives by mere words. It is closed to new ideas, and pursues its personal goals – which vary, but inevitably return to seeking closure in the events surrounding its death – at the expense of almost everything else, often to its detriment. In the physical sphere, an iron grip mirrors this iron will.

The returner is deeply supernatural. It exists partly in the spirit world and can be affected as a spirit. Its tenuous ties to temporal existence can be shattered by extreme physical trauma (which it cannot repair on its own). The entity depends not only on the Breath of Life but also on whatever occult energy empowered it – and on *avoiding* opposing powers. And should it resolve the issues that caused its return, it will immediately cease to exist.

Unusually, a returner has FP: a reserve of occult energy that allows it to cast spells and so forth. Being the personification of will, the revenant is actually able to spend these FP on extra effort! It *can* lose FP if deprived of the Breath

of Life or attacked with FP-draining effects – though its immunity to metabolic dangers more-or-less limits the latter to supernatural attacks.

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** Will+2 [10].

**Advantages:** Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Absorption, -25%) [15]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Indomitable [15]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Lifting ST 2 (Grip ST, -30%) [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Spirit Empathy (Specialized, Ghosts, -50%) [5]; Unaging\* [15]; Unfazeable [15].

**Disadvantages:** Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Dependency (Specific Kind of External Energy; Common; Constantly)† [-50]; Destiny (Find Closure)\* [-15]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (12) [-5]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Weakness (Opposing External Energy; Occasional; 1d/5 minutes)† [-10].

**Features:** Affected as Spirit‡; Sterile; Taboo Traits (Social Position).

\* Won't age and die naturally, but laid to rest instantly if bodily resurrected or if it completes any quest set for it by the power that returned it to “life.”

† Pick a combo that suits the campaign: Dependency on specialized mana that isn't omnipresent, plus Weakness to a life-aspected kind; Dependency on sanctity of the God of the Dead, plus Weakness to heightened sanctity of the God of Undead Slaying; etc.

‡ Affected by Bind Spirit, Command Spirit, Pentagram, Sense Spirit, and Turn Spirit, but not by Death Vision, Sense Life, Soul Jar, Steal (Attribute), or Steal Energy – and not by spells specifically for affecting zombies.

In most cases, these give penalties according to the above schedule. However, those tied to dark gods of unlife – or deities famed for sending back their servants – might bestow bonuses instead. Covenant of Rest is a special case that outright preempts the Will roll, causing it to fail automatically.

## Laws of the Universe

It can be flavorful to assess modifiers for time and place of death, too. For instance, those who die in supernaturally charged locales (high mana, consecrated to the God of Undeath, in the Haunted Forest, near a hellmouth, etc.) might roll at +1 to +5 or more, while sites with next-to-no occult energies (e.g., low mana) or that are sacred to deities who respect the natural order of life and death might give a penalty of similar size. The same guidelines work for supernaturally significant times of the day or year, phases of the moon, and so on. *GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 246-252, offers a wealth of possible associations. Pay special attention to those tied to the Necromantic college or the Spirit path.

The prudent GM will also take into account the Will and other relevant traits of the PCs in the campaign. If the probability of undead heroes seems too high – or low! – for the planned storyline, modify these rules to bring the odds in line with expectations. For example, if returning is intended to be more faint hope than insurance policy, yet all the PCs are fiendishly strong-willed, the GM might add a further -1 to -10 across the board, or base the roll on Will/2 or a flat 10 *instead* of Will.

## Rolling Them Bones

If the final, modified Will of the deceased is 2 or less, that person cannot rise. If it's 3 or more, roll 3d. Success is required to return as undead; see *The Return* (below).

Those who die with a use of Luck pending (how did *that* happen?) may reroll. Heroes with an unfulfilled Destiny may opt to skip the roll and return automatically. If the GM wants, unused Serendipity might work the same way – especially if certain locations are associated with undead (“How fortunate, you died atop the unmarked grave of Recnam the Reanimator!”).

## The Return

The GM sets the delay between death and reappearance. The most important thing is that it's long enough (traditionally days, certainly no less than several hours) to ensure that revenants can't interfere in the immediate circumstances of their demise. That way, death in combat keeps its tactical sting, and camping out to await the fate of a slain ally – or a mortal enemy! – becomes meaningful to group planning.

As for the zombie template, this should be worth -25 points or worse (possibly *much* worse), or dying and coming back as undead will end up being “cheaper” than paying 25 points for Extra Life . . . which is grossly unfair to players whose PCs have 25 points tied up in a trait that's meaningless until death. The “returner” (p. 5) offers such an example.

## MAGIC OF LAST RESORT

The Resurrection spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 94) demands 300 energy points and a two-hour casting time, making it too slow

and draining for anyone but a godlike spellcaster to attempt in the field. It's also guaranteed to be an expensive service, costing from \$20 to \$33 per energy point, like a magic item, even if monopolies or religious taboos haven't driven up the price. For instance, in a *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* game in which the PCs start with 250 points and \$1,000, the heroes won't be able to afford the energy required to cast the spell – at best, they might be able to accumulate enough treasure to cover the \$15,000 for a “charged scroll” (*Dungeon Fantasy 4: Sages*, p. 15) or to pay a temple a comparable fee . . . in town. At -1 to skill per day between death and casting, however, the trip from isolated dungeon to magical hospital practically guarantees failure.

What if there were another way? Perhaps there is! In fact, maybe there are *two* ways: a spell and an elixir.

## New Spell: Partial Resurrection (VH)

### Regular; Special Resistance

Reanimates a dead body in much the same way as the Zombie spell (*Magic*, p. 151) and attempts to reunite the owner's soul with it. If the subject agrees to return from the dead, the result is a free-willed undead version of that individual – *not* a mindless servant. This entity can talk, fight, and use

equipment, but lacks intrinsic FP with which to power special abilities. If the subject refuses, the spell creates a standard zombie (at a very high FP cost!).

As with true Resurrection, the body must not have reached -10×HP. If it's above that thresh-

old, it can be missing limbs, eyes, etc. – though that means the reanimated subject also lacks those body parts – but the *brain* has to be reasonably intact. Those killed by decapitation or head injuries are beyond the reach of this magic. Even if the cadaver is in good shape, the caster must act quickly; skill is at -1 per full day between death and the beginning of the spell.

Success animates the subject as a “partial” (p. 7), giving full HP and then some, but doing nothing about crippling injuries (which still respond to magic such as Restoration and Regeneration spells). It also *preserves* the corpse, halting the timer on effects that count down from the instant of death. Resurrection can follow at a later date, and suffers only the penalty for the time between death and the casting of Partial Resurrection.

Anyone killed while raised by this spell is *truly* dead. Future attempts at resurrection by any means fail automatically. The same goes for all lesser measures, such as repeated Partial Resurrection and spells for creating undead (Wraith, Zombie, etc.).

This is both a Healing spell and a Necromantic spell.

*Duration:* Permanent, until the subject is resurrected or destroyed.

*Cost:* 36. One try.

*Time to cast:* 1 minute.

*Prerequisites:* Great Healing, Zombie, and *either* Preserve Food or Remove Contagion.

*Notes:* Energy cost is the 16 points for a -25-point zombie template, calculated using *Magical Undead* (*Zombies*, p. 133), plus a 20-point premium for animating a *free-willed* being.

Many traits help or hinder returning as a zombie.

Healers argue that the extra energy actually pays for a built-in Great Healing that repairs the body; necromancers claim that it covers a “reversed” Final Rest effect which fetches a specific soul back from the afterlife. The GM decides which, if either, is true.

## New Elixir: Partial Resurrection

*Alternative Names:* Charon, Miraculous Embalming Fluid.

Administered to the intact body of someone who has died within the preceding hour, this elixir raises the subject from the dead over the course of the next minute. The patient rises as a “partial” (below) that is missing no HP but retains any crippling injuries (which healing magic can repair). This entity is free-willed and possesses whatever knowledge and abilities it had in life, but lacks FP. The preparation also *preserves* the corpse, which is considered to have been dead only for the time elapsed between death and application of the elixir, making true resurrection possible at a later date.

Several conditions are attached! If the subject doesn’t *want* to return, the elixir merely preserves the corpse – a costly waste. A corpse that has reached -10×HP or died of head injury or decapitation is likewise preserved but not revived. Finally, anyone killed while under the influence of this potion is *truly* dead and cannot be resurrected or reanimated by any means.

*Duration:* Permanent.

*Form:* Potion only.

*Cost:* \$6,700/\$11,300.

*Recipe:* \$2,000; 20 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-4.

*Notes:* Recipe cost and time were figured using the guidelines in *Complexity, Cost, and Time (Zombies, pp. 135-136)*. Skill penalty was assigned by looking at the closest medical elixir that takes 20 weeks: *Regeneration (Magic, p. 218)*. Retail price follows *Cost and Availability (Magic, p. 213)*.

## FORBIDDEN SERUM

Not all settings with undead and resurrection have magic and other fantastic concepts. Gothic horror and science-fiction are full of mad scientists who hope to use Science! to restore the dead to life . . . or at least to a reasonable facsimile thereof. **Zombies** favors the view that this generally produces monsters, but the GM might want it to work better than that. Of course, “better” is a relative term.

### Revivification Serum

Revivification serum illustrates *Technological Zombification (Zombies, pp. 135-136)*. It counts as a process – a drug that, when injected into a cadaver, revives it as a “restart” (p. 8). It relies on superscience, *not* the supernatural, and falls somewhere between the work of Victor Frankenstein (TL5<sup>^</sup>) and Herbert West (TL6<sup>^</sup>). In sensible game worlds where this chemical isn’t available for purchase, it’s a Complex invention that requires the customary Gadgeteer advantage and

Weird Science skill, and calls for Chemistry as the theoretical skill and Pharmacy as the practical skill. These considerations along with the template’s point value give a new facilities cost of \$425,000, a gadgeteering modifier of -7, and 1d months and \$21,250 per Prototype roll. Once invented, each dose costs \$2,125 and takes 21.25 hours to concoct.

## Partial

-25 points

A “partial” is someone revived by a Partial Resurrection spell or elixir. Halfway between zombie and living person, such an entity exhibits several supernatural flaws: it requires mana to survive; dies automatically at -HP; cannot heal without external magic; and is affected by the True Faith advantage and the Pentagram, Sense Spirit, and Turn Zombie spells. It’s also obviously *dead*, with cold, pallid skin and a croaking whisper of a voice to frighten people, as well as the predictable issues of sterility, greedy heirs, and fanatical undead-turning priests.

This form is not without its advantages, though. It’s stronger and much more resistant to cold, heat, and impaling and piercing injuries. It doesn’t age or feel pain, and is immune to bleeding, disease, poison, and suffocation. And existing on the threshold of the spirit world gives a *free-willed* mind the ability to sense the entities of that realm.

Yet other consequences cut both ways. A partial doesn’t hunger or thirst, as it’s sustained by magic, but also cannot smell or taste. It can’t experience strong emotions, which blunts fear but handicaps social skills. Its body lacks FP and isn’t affected by fatiguing attacks, but its mind tires and requires “rest” *equivalent* to sleep, without which it accrues the usual penalties and – as it has no FP – loses HP *instead* of FP as its animating force drains. And without FP, it has no internal power supply for spells, extra effort, etc.; for that it needs an Energy Reserve or an item that provides energy.

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST+1 [10].

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** HP+4 [8].

**Advantages:** Detect (Ghosts) [5]; Doesn’t Breathe [20]; Doesn’t Eat or Drink [10]; Fearlessness 3 [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving) [25]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15].

**Perks:** Unaffected by Control Zombie [1]; Unaffected by Zombie Summoning [1].

**Disadvantages:** Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Killjoy [-15]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Dead)\* [-20]; Supernatural Features (No Body Heat, No Pulse, Pallor) [-20]; Unhealing (Total) [-30].

**Quirks:** Can Be Turned By True Faith [-1].

**Features:** Affected as Dead; Destruction Is Permanent†; No Fatigue; Sterile; Taboo Traits (Social Position)\*; Won’t Become a Rotting Corpse.

\* These downsides go away if later resurrected, so affected social advantages are *suspended*, not *gone*.

† “Death” in this form precludes later resurrection or reanimation.

## Restart

0 points

A “restart” is someone reanimated by revivification serum. Technically, the subject is alive again, as evidenced by the need to eat, drink, and breathe, and the fact that illnesses and toxins harmful to normal humans still pose some risk. These frailties are significantly amended, however: the body is so changed that disease and poison rarely do much, though this causes conventional medicines to fail; the digestive system can process spoiled and contaminated victuals, for which the restart’s unnatural metabolism gives a disturbingly keen appetite; and the air needn’t be particularly clean. The combined effect of inconsequential-but-untreatable infections, a diet of garbage, and musty exhalations is a stench that defies concealment.

The changes to the nervous system are especially remarkable. Revivification serum intentionally replaces the need to sleep with a drive to *stay alive*: a willful stubbornness to carry on, however bad things get. The brain adaptations behind this modification dull the intellect and occasionally drive the restart to freeze up and just breathe rather than take potentially risky action, but have the beneficial side effect of instilling great patience when that’s called for. The inability to feel anything – neither pressure, nor pain, nor heat nor cold – is similarly double-edged.

The gift of patience is a good thing, as a restart can theoretically live forever. Whether the subject actually survives depends on monthly doses of revivification serum, without which the patient sickens and dies within weeks. These infusions render the body (alive or dead) poisonous; living beings eating it, inhaling smoke from its cremation, etc. are affected as if they had received a dose of serum.

**Attribute Modifiers:** IQ-1 [-20].

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** Will+3 [15].

**Advantages:** Doesn’t Sleep [20]; Filter Lungs [5]; Hard to Kill 2 [4]; Reduced Consumption 4 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [4]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8) [15]; Resistant to Pain (+8)\* [15]; Temperature Tolerance 5 [5]; Unaging [15].

**Perks:** Patience of Job† [1]; Toxic [1].

**Disadvantages:** Bad Smell [-10]; Confused (15) [-5]; Dependency (Serum; Rare; Illegal; Monthly)‡ [-35]; Gluttony (12) [-5]; Numb [-20]; Unusual Biochemistry [-5].

**Features:** Affected as Living; Death from Dependency Is Irreversible‡.

\* Counts as High Pain Threshold, with an *additional* +5 on knockdown and stunning rolls, rolls to resist painful or stunning afflictions, rolls to resist physical torture, and all HT rolls to recover from being physically stunned.

† Ignore up to -2 in penalties for distractions on long tasks (at least an hour).

‡ If HP loss to Dependency causes death, *re*-reanimation is impossible.

The resulting serum works only on a dead body that hasn’t lost its head or reached -10×HP. An intact brain is not required, however. The regenerative effects are amazing, restoring “life,” all lost HP, and cerebral integrity – though not crippled body parts – in just one minute. It almost goes without saying

that the stuff needs to be injected *directly into the brain* with a *really huge hypodermic syringe*. Including drug, glassware, needle, and assorted scary accessories, each dose weighs 0.4 lb.

That’s the tale of the tape, anyway. As always, “some conditions apply.”

First off, while revivification serum grants theoretical immortality, it isn’t a one-shot cure for death. It merely postpones the Grim Reaper on the installment plan. The initial dose restores the subject to life, but a follow-up injection is required each month to avoid losing 1 HP daily – and a patient who dies this way can’t be restarted again (one who’s merely killed again certainly can be). Maintenance doses costs the same \$2,125 apiece as the first shot. Thus, adventurers without deep pockets may prefer to return the patient to natural life, if possible, and reserve this serum for use as a field expedient. Then again, if this stuff exists, chances are there’s no alternative . . .

Next, the serum has *questionable* ingredients. Details are left to the GM, but should probably involve one if not several of vivisection, stealing from government chemical-warfare labs, exhuming the dead, and extracting strange glowing fluid from a crashed UFO that every nation on Earth is trying to track down. It’s functionally illegal, even if there’s no specific law on the books forbidding it. If it’s for sale, the dealers are almost certainly Bad People, and buying it is a black-market transaction. Treat it as LC0 for all practical purposes.

Assuming the expense and legal murkiness aren’t problems, there’s still the matter of *what it creates* – which is not, strictly speaking, a human being. See the template for all the charming details. It suffices to say here that “better off than dead” isn’t synonymous with “undead superman” so much as “stinking, dull-minded creature that doesn’t notice when it loses a leg in a lawnmower accident.”

Setting all that aside, revivification serum is *poison*. A living recipient who isn’t dead soon will be! The victim must roll at HT-5 to resist 1d toxic damage, repeating hourly for a total of six cycles. There’s a one-minute delay if injected, a 15-minute delay if the stuff is absorbed in any other way. Similar effects result if a dead restart’s remains are eaten, or disposed of in a way that exposes people to decay products. Fortunately, it takes a hefty dose to cause poisoning, equivalent to the aforementioned gigantic syringe (four to five times the volume of the largest syringe darts made for injecting elephants) or at least a pound of flesh.

## 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. In 2004, he produced the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created *GURPS Zombies*, the *GURPS Action*, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, and *GURPS Power-Ups* series, and more. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango.



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# THE UNKNOWN HUNGER

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

*Verily I say unto you, beware those who are no longer themselves!*

*Beware the angry child with the eye of the old man!*

*Beware the fallen maiden whose appetites exceed her years!*

*Beware the priest whose flock eats too well in a parish that seems to be starving!*

*Beware the many who speak with the voice of the one, and him evil . . .*

– Mathew Hopkins, *Witchfinder General* (1639)

Not every zombie is a rotting, shambling corpse, mindlessly devouring its way through the living herd. Since time immemorial, there have been other kinds of revenant – some harder to detect than others. Such beings are arguably more dangerous than their traditional brethren, as those who seek to thwart their evil are not always aware of what they've blundered into – until it's too late.

Here, then, are two new kinds of zombies, ordinary humans who have been possessed by evil and turned into the walking dead. In the first case, they have been overtaken by the primal darkness from before time, which transformed them into raging psychotics. In the second, they have been usurped by the souls of the damned, diverted from their trip to Hell, and must eat an entire human once a week to avoid decaying.

Both kinds of undead are generically profiled herein. Their origins are given, and their means and effects of infection revealed. Instances in which they were discovered are also explored, so as to aid PCs in their investigations. Lastly, each kind of zombie has two encounter ideas, to help the GM in the quest for a good scare on a Saturday night.

## THE VOID

*We were playing a game. Tommy said we had to go to Old Lady Corbet's house and go into the basement, where she locked up her kids. Then we had to sing a whole song, and if we finished, he'd let us read his comics.*

*Tommy went first, but he stopped singing. He came back up and said we had to go down and see something, but I didn't want to go. Something was wrong. His eyes were black and he was crying black tears, like mommy does when she's wearing makeup and yells at daddy.*

*I didn't go, and he called me a baby and used a lot of bad words. The others went down with him, and he said they'd be*

*back for me. The way he said it scared me. I started to go home, and then I heard them all screaming, like they got hurt.*

*I ran to get help, but then I looked back, and they were running for me. They weren't my friends anymore. They all had black eyes, and Tommy was telling them to get me.*

*Mr. Pritchert heard me screaming and tried to stop them. They jumped on him like dogs, and then . . .*

– Tina Yanz, 7, survivor (1978)

Humanity has always had an instinctual fear of the dark. Usually this is a sensible one: any number of predators could be hiding in the shadows, waiting to leap out and attack the moment our eyes fail us, or our light sources gutter out. But sometimes what's there in the darkness seeks to harm not only our bodies, but our very souls.

Sometimes what's in the darkness seeks to make *us* the predator.

Mostly banished from this universe when the Creator commanded, "Let There Be Light," the primal dark from before time is still at work in the cosmos. This eternal darkness festers like a contagion in small, well-shaded pockets out among the stars – hiding, hating, and hungering. When cosmic conditions are right, it oozes down onto darkened planets, finding purchase in blighted locales for as long as it can maintain its tenuous hold.

Waiting for hapless mortals to blunder into its tenebrous folds, and bring its darkness back into the light.

## The Vector

The Void is an intelligent, lightless field capable of free movement through the night or the blackened depths of interstellar space. When possible, it slips onto an inhabited planet, and slides into a location that still carries psychic emanations of horrible things that took place there. Then it lies in wait for intelligent beings, which it physically and mentally corrupts to a varying degree – feeding on the negative emotions they cause in others.

Most of its victims act as though they'd caught a "rage virus." They become immensely strong, ruthlessly violent, and horrifically sadistic, as well as less intelligent. Their eyes are eaten out by the Void – leaving pits filled with viscous, black goo that runs back into what's left of their brains – but they don't need eyes to see what they're doing. When they become especially agitated or frenzied, the goo runs out, as though they were crying black tears.

Whenever possible, the Void prefers to operate through a primary victim, a broken soul with high levels of intelligence and cunning. This special victim is often the first one infected, and thereafter acts as a Conduit for the primal dark. It retains the majority of its personality and free will, and can appear perfectly normal – at least until it attacks, at which point the goo rushes out. It can mentally command the Void’ other victims, be its masters’ hands and eyes, and infect new victims by filling them with the foul essence it keeps hidden inside its skull.

## Infection

Everyone who steps into the Void is forfeit. The second they are enveloped by the shadow, the shadow envelops *them*, and there’s no going back. Their strength and constitution are doubled, and their ability to feel pain is removed. Conversely, their intellect is halved, and their knowledge of all but the most basic things is destroyed. Their personality is likewise obliterated – all empathy and kindness is replaced by sadism and psychosis.

Those that the Void chooses as its Conduits get a slightly altered, much deadlier package. The physical “gifts” remain the same, but they keep their intelligence, knowledge, and skills. They can fake their old personality for short periods of time, the better to blend in and fool others, but after a while, they *must* revert to their new nature.

The Conduits are in constant psychic rapport with the Void, which allows them to see through the eyes of the other infected and to command their movements. The primal dark also can see and speak through the Conduits; its deep, droning voice is a terrible thing that causes madness in all but the most steadfast of persons. The Conduits can infect individuals by grappling an opponent, face to face, and then letting the darkness inside the skull slop out into the victim’s eyes.

If the Conduit is killed, the Void can still see through the eyes of its infected, but cannot directly control them. It also cannot remotely raise another infected person into a Conduit – that can only be done in person. Lacking a Conduit, the primal dark does its best to find a replacement, even if it’s not entirely suitable, just to regain control of its current flock.

Touching the black goo of any of the infected (living or dead) is a bad idea. It has a mind of its own, and will squirm up and out of the eyes, seeking an open wound or orifice to enter. Even a drop ingested or absorbed in this fashion can turn a person into part of the Void.

Only the Conduit can purposely infect others. All other infected simply obey the commands of the Conduit and the Void. Most orders relate to destruction and brutality. Some are beyond human comprehension.

Once infected by the horror that lies before and beyond time and space, there is no cure – death is the only release from the fury such knowledge brings. Thankfully, holy symbols will drive off the afflicted, and do damage if pressed against their flesh. Divine attacks (theological or magical) severely damage them as well, and help drive off the Void entity.

## Pathology

As the primal dark has been alongside us all along, its presence in our historical record is undeniable, though our

ability to truly recognize it has been sadly lacking. It’s been given hundreds of names over the eons, and found its way into almost every pantheon and belief system. The Egyptians knew it as Kuk; the Greeks as Achlys. Witches thought it a form of Hecate, and the Hindus still know it as Rahu. Horror author Henry Kuttner caught some of its essence when he wrote of Nyogtha and Zuchequon, though he was off by a few details.

In 1936, the Christendon Home for the Mentally Ill in Bangor, Maine, was infested by the Void. It consumed the head of the home first. That person then systematically infected most of the other staff, who then exercised their new outlook upon their hapless inmates. The lone sane employee was made to write a meticulous journal of everything they did and said, and then leave the building before they burned it – and themselves – to the ground.

The *Christendon Document* is on file at the Center for Disease Control. Researchers are still trying to figure out what could have caused mass psychosis among so many intelligent people. All the lone survivor could tell them was that the basement was “wrong,” and that at the end, he saw a black spot moving in the flames, and then heading to the sky – there to cover the moon before moving on.

## The Void Case Studies

Two different possible scenarios in which this incredible evil could manifest itself.

### The Last Hill

The PCs are GIs in Occupied France, after D-Day. They’re slowly closing in on an important German fortification, in a medieval keep just outside of Saint-Loup. Their orders are to take it and hold it until another, larger group can come through.

As they get closer to the town, they encounter disgusting and disturbing things. The outlying villages have been ravaged, their occupants tortured and eaten. Strange cairns have been raised, constructed with the rotting bodies of the dead. The German soldiers they encounter are nearly bestial – reduced to fighting with knives and clubs, or their ragged, bare hands and sharp teeth. They are incapable of speaking beyond grunts and cries, and their eyes have been replaced by some black, runny goo.

What horrors will the PCs find in the keep? How will they deal with the shadow in the cellar? Will they be able to hold the fortification from without *and* within? What happens when they begin to fall victim to the song of the primal dark, festering within them all?

### The Salem Syndrome

A long time ago, the Void took note of Salem, Massachusetts in its search for horror and pain. It planned to visit, but the madness that overtook the town was over before it could arrive. So it went elsewhere, that time, but always remembered that locale.

Since the stars are right, it has returned. It has deposited itself in the darkest corner of the woods, outside of town, and made a Conduit of a Joseph P. Caltrider – a local historian with a personal interest in discovering what the Salem witches were *really* talking with. Now he knows the true face of the Devil, and he’s never been happier.

*The Void hates  
and hungers.*

His plan is to have a reverse reenactment of the Salem Witch Trials, only this time the “witches” will be killing the townsfolk. To that end, he’s inviting carefully chosen people – who remind him of those executed – over to his home for “dinner,” and personally infecting them for dessert. Then he takes them to the woods to wait with the others within sight of the Void, where they scurble like beetles in the dirt, and attack the odd trespasser for sport. When he has his 20 “witches,” they’ll wait for the full of the moon, and then attack the town.

His caution, along with enjoying having all these sadistic things at his beck and call, may be his undoing. Hopefully the PCs have enough time to be alerted to the high number of missing young persons in Salem, and investigate. They should be careful to not draw his attention, though – he isn’t above having his servants attack early, or having the PCs over for a meal.

## GEISTERSTURM

*The problem began the other week, after the strange lights in the sky. But we did not realize what had happened.*

*Not long after that, someone said how strange it was that no one had seen the Magnusons lately. They had not come by to sell their eggs, or the pies that Mrs. Magnuson baked, or the shawls that her three daughters were always making with the wool from our sheep. But we did nothing.*

*A day after that, Karl Magnuson staggered to our door, bloodied and afraid. He could not tell us what had happened, so we went to his house and found an abattoir. Their house was covered in blood and human remains, as though they’d been attacked by wolves.*

*But wolves did not use hatchets and knives. Wolves did not boil the less appetizing bits into soup. Wolves did not make pies of their victims, or knit them into shawls.*

*We understood nothing. The Magnusons were not dead. They had done these horrible things to other neighbors.*

*Now they stand outside our door, knives and hatchets and knitting needles in hand. Now they laugh through bloody mouths, using words they would never have uttered before to tell us what awaits us.*

*Now we can do nothing – nothing at all.*

*– Gerhardt Johansen, 18, victim (1954)*

They say that when there’s no more room in Hell, the dead will rise and walk the Earth. The truth is that Hell’s happy to take all comers, but sometimes the way there loops back on itself, and the damned spirits return to Earth – often en masse and well after their original bodies are gone.

The result is that horrible people are given a new, undeserved lease on life by stealing the bodies of the living. Old and jaded eyes stare from fresh, young faces. Hideous appetites are sated with new hands and mouths. “Strangers” meet in secret, jointly committing acts too nauseating to describe.

If they’re careful, the Skulking could go a whole new lifetime without anyone knowing what’s happened. But, given the anthropophagy they must frequently engage in to keep these borrowed bodies from rotting, such care is often left by the wayside.

## The Vector

Certain cosmological shifts create strange disturbances within the ether – often called ghost storms, or *giesterstürmen*. These weird conditions radically divert the pathways that lead from this world to the next, sending those bound for damnation right back to the world. Their approach is often heralded by strange, crackling lights in the sky, like lightning with no clouds or thunder.

Unfortunately, as time goes so quickly on the other side of things, those whose afterlives are interrupted might come back decades – even centuries – after they left. As a result, the bodies they would return to are now useless, if not gone. But their time on the other side gave these damned souls just enough to see what they were in for, and they have *no* desire to go back to that.

So, upon returning to the world, they leap into the first bodies they can find, and cast out the soul already there. Such beings – known as the Skulking – seemingly gain a lot through this act of spiritual hijacking, not least of which is locking the bodies in their current state of existence. However, maintaining this state requires periodical feeding upon human flesh – an inconvenient diet that can’t help but draw attention, given time.

## Infection

The process of taking over a body is fairly straightforward. The damned spirit must pit its will against that of the target, and the winner keeps the body. Upon entering the new flesh, the body usually goes unconscious as the Skulking soul gets settled – a state that lasts anywhere from an hour to a day. In this time, the body is wracked by fits as the brain’s unwelcome occupant gets to know its new body. It’s also the time that undeath infests the body, turning it effectively immortal.

When this process is over, the Skulking wakes up with all the stolen body’s physical attributes, memories, skills, and powers – including any magical abilities (though not necessarily the skill to perform them). Knowledge, skills, and learned abilities that the Skulking knew in a previous life are retained, but any powers innate to the previous, long-gone body died with that form. The hijacker does *not* gain the supplanted soul’s personality, and will always seem a little “off” from there on out.

In addition, the Skulking gain the ability to mentally communicate with any other returned spirits that rode the same *giestersturm* that they did, regardless of distance. They can tell one another by sight – seeing an image of the spirit superimposed over the flesh they’re riding. Finally, they are very sensitive to disturbances in the spirit realm; they can see and speak to other ghosts, as well as demons, angels, and any other being from the realm of spirit.

There is one massive drawback. In order to maintain their hold upon this form, they must eat the flesh of an entire human at least once a week – meat, gristle, offal, and all. Those who fail to do this quickly begin to rot, and will not stop falling apart until this dietary requirement is sated. They never lose their mentality, though, and stay as sensible and sane as they ever were, even if they’re barely a pile of dust and bone.

Oddly enough, divine attacks and magic do only normal damage to such beings, in spite of their infernal nature. Somehow being inside a living body shields them from such attacks.

## Pathology

The Skulking are referenced within the *Testament of Honorius*, where they are referred to as *Lateo*, and their appearance blamed for numerous cases where entire villages simply went mad and ate each other. They are also discussed in some detail in *Das Schwarze Tor* (“The Black Gate”), an infamous 17th-century, German grimoire. The book has an entire chapter devoted to the Damned that return to vex the living, in which *geisterstürmen* are discussed in some detail. The volume also lays out many other situations where the spirits of the dead come back. Both *Testament of Honorius* and *Das Schwarze Tor* provide numerous magical ways that such beings can be detected and destroyed, but, unfortunately, give very contradictory information.

In the Vodou tradition of the *loa*, it is said that the bodies of those who engage in its rites are “ridden” by the spirits. Sometimes the approach of the *loa* causes those ridden to fall down and have fits, which certainly describes the convulsions that accompany being taken over by one of the Skulking. Unlike those malign spirits, however, the *loa* only stay for so long before leaving – unless, of course, the damned spirits stay in their “horses” and just pretend to have left.

As a *geistersturm* can deposit the Skulking over a wide swath of territory, it’s hard to pinpoint a mass return with any degree of swiftness. That said, anyone who knows what to look for – and has access to medical records – can correlate the infestation symptoms, and look for those who collapsed into shaking fits around the same time. Weird weather patterns may also be an indication of a returning. If all else fails, looking for a large number of missing persons soon narrows down the locale.

## Geistersturm Case Studies

Two suggestions for how these kinds of zombies might show up.

### The Riders

A small and nameless island just off the coast of Haiti is playing host to a zombie plantation.

The local crime lord is a scary and dangerous man who claims to be a practitioner of Vodou – a *bokor*, in fact. He runs drugs, guns, organs, humans, and other contraband, and is always happy to make a gruesome example of those who stand against him. Some of those who displease him he drugs with carefully prepared zombie powder, and puts to work on his sugar cane. New recruits are driven through the fields at night, just so they know what awaits them if they fail the bokor.

The authorities are getting wise to this man’s ways. Enough evidence has been brought to light to convict him, and a huge raid is being planned. The PCs are part of this large operation, and should think that they have every angle covered, and every possibility prepared for.

Sadly, they don’t. What no one knows is that some of the “zombies” the bokor uses have just become officially undead. A *geistersturm* just planted about 15 returned spirits into the bodies of his normally docile slaves, and the shock to their system has thrown off the zombie drugs. Now the Skulkings

are awake, alive, and planning to take the island. In the meantime, they’re eating other slaves when their gun-toting overseers aren’t looking.

When the authorities raid, they’ll be fighting a battle on two fronts: one against the heavily armed thugs of the self-styled bokor of the island, and one against the flesh-craving *real* zombies, who would very much like to take guns and escape to the mainland. Could the PCs team up with the crime lord’s soldiers to stop such a terrible outcome?

### The Crazy Class

The senior honor students of Ryder High (Omaha, Nebraska) are behaving just a little strangely. They’ve always been tight, but now they’re acting like some weird kind of gang: dressing flamboyantly, acting out, and speaking in a weird dialect of Japanese. They’re also getting violently drunk, before and after school, smoking long, heavy pipes instead of cigarettes, and using those pipes as weapons in savage fights against the jocks and preps that used to bully them.

Some of those jocks are missing now . . .

It all started a month ago, when their special class went on a field trip to the Joslyn Art Museum. The driver got out of the bus to fix something on the outside of the vehicle, and then everyone inside of it fell down and started convulsing. They were fine an hour later, thankfully, and the authorities aren’t sure if it was exposure to chemicals from a nearby plant, or just mass hysteria. But the next day, all the trouble started at school, and now no one knows what to do.

The truth is a sad and horrible thing – the honor students were all spiritually supplanted by a gang of ghostly *ronin*. The small group of gaudily dressed, weirdly violent *kabukimono* were executed for the atrocities their gang carried out in 1615, and tumbled down to Hell. Then they got a last-minute reprieve and fell back to Earth – just the opposite end, and some 400 years later!

After the initial shock wore off, the Skulking acclimated by assuming the lives of the schoolkids whose bodies they stole. But they have no desire to give up their dissolute ways, and quickly learned that they must sate some disturbing appetites if they’re to avoid rotting where they stand. Fortunately, there are so many people at this high school – along with vagrants, drunks, and other victims – just begging to be put on a plate.

The PCs’ investigations into the strangely high number of missing persons in this town will eventually run afoul of this gang. But can they stop these reborn, punk-rock, pipe-wielding, ronin gangster cannibal thugs before the stress of final exams, SATs, and graduation forces the gang to do something *really* nasty?

## 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 the author of the fictional blog *SPYCOD’s Tales* ([spygod-tales.blogspot.com](http://spygod-tales.blogspot.com)) and writes for Op-Ed News. He currently lives in Lansing, Michigan, with two cats and a mountain of Lego bricks.

# THE VIKING DEAD

BY GRAEME DAVIS

*GURPS Vikings* includes rudimentary Third Edition rules for Norse undead. Delving deeper into Viking sagas and post-Viking folklore, this article uses the rules from *GURPS Zombies* to develop the Viking dead into Fourth Edition foes for any Earth setting from about 700 A.D. to the present day, and for any Viking-influenced fantasy setting.

The Old Norse word for corporeal undead is *aptrgangr*, which translates roughly as “again-walker.” The sagas tell of two main types of *aptrgangr*: *draugr* (revenants) and *haugbui* (barrow-wights).

*Draugr* (sing. *draug*, pron. DROW-grr) arise when the dead are unable to rest owing to an overriding obsession or some unfinished business – or, frequently, when a person is simply too mean to die. They are usually male, but not exclusively so. Most *draugr* look like fresh corpses, with no visible decomposition no matter how long they have been dead; their skin can be black or blue. They are often very heavy for their size – two to three times normal weight is common – and a few are two to three times normal height. They walk by night, especially in winter, but some can be active in weather bad enough to produce darkness. Unlike most zombies,

*draugr* retain their memories and personalities from life. *Draugr* are not always unthinkingly evil: they often have human motivations and can be seen with sympathy.

*Draugr* are powerful undead, who normally appear singly. A whole adventure can revolve around dealing with a single *draug*. On rare occasions, such as the case of *Thorgunna* (p. 15), one *draug* can cause a local plague, but the lack of available victims on the remote and widely spaced Icelandic farms normally limits an outbreak to 20 individuals or fewer.

*Haugbui* (pron. HOW-boy) are similar in many ways. The main difference is that *haugbui* do not normally leave their burial-mounds. *Haugbui* are generally less of a threat, as they will only attack those who break into their mounds and try to steal their treasure. *Haugbui* can sometimes open their mounds, especially at night in bad weather or when a descendant or other relative passes by. The *haugbui* can be seen inside the mound on his high-seat (a type of wooden throne reserved for the head of a household), and as in some tales of faerie mounds, food and drink are laid out inside for the visitor to enjoy. The visitor invariably wakes next morning on top of the closed mound.

## LEGENDARY FIGURES

While *aptrgangr* have many common attributes, they also display a wide range of abilities in the original tales. Here are a few of the best-known examples.

### KILLER-HRAPP

The story of Killer-Hrapp appears in the *Laxdaela Saga* (Chapters 10-11, 17-18, 24). By all accounts, he was a violent man, “disliked by most people, being overbearing to his neighbors; and at times he would hint to them that theirs would be a heavy lot as neighbors, if they held any other man for better than himself.”

When Hrapp died, he instructed his wife to bury him standing up under the threshold of his house; he walked at night, driving everyone off his land and threatening the land of his neighbors. His farm was eventually abandoned, and when new people came to take it over, Hrapp magically becalmed their ship and then raised a storm which forced it onto some rocks. A seal (thought to be Hrapp’s *hamremi*) appeared and

swam three times widdershins around their boat before sinking again.

Hrapp continued to walk the land until his body was dug up – showing no signs of decay – and burned, the ashes being flung into the sea.

### THOROLF HALT-FOOT

According to the *Erbyggja Saga* (Chapters 30-31, 33-34, 63), Thorolf became a bad-tempered and troublesome neighbor after a foot wound put an end to his career as a raider. His mood was not improved when he quarreled with his son Arnkell over a piece of land and lost the resulting lawsuit. He sat brooding on his high-seat until he died, refusing to move, speak, or eat.

He was buried in a cairn, but he did not rest in peace. Birds that landed on his burial-mound died instantly. Sheep in the surrounding valley died or disappeared. Herdsmen who wandered near the mound were found dead, their skin bruised blue-black all over and every bone broken.

Thorolf's body was moved, reburied, and finally burned, but even this did not put an end to the haunting.

## THORGUNNA

A rare example of a female draug, Thorgunna also figures in the *Erbyggja Saga* (Chapters 50-54). She was a servant whose mistress was jealous of the bed-linens Thorgunna had brought with her to Iceland. She was said to have possessed the Second Sight; after witnessing a rain of blood, she took to her bed and died.

Thorgunna wanted her precious bed-linens buried with her, but her jealous mistress took them for herself. This, apparently, is what began the haunting. When she was taken to be buried, the horses refused to go near the cart that bore her coffin; an ox was used instead, which slowed the journey and obliged the funeral party to seek shelter overnight in a farm along the way. Their host took them in only reluctantly, and his hospitality was meager until Thorgunna was found preparing food for her companions.

Thorgunna was finally buried, but did not rest, killing many servants in the area until her bed-linens were finally delivered to her grave. Even though this stopped her haunting, many of her victims had risen as draugr themselves (though not under Thorgunna's control), and still needed to be dealt with.

## KARR THE OLD

The *Saga of Grettir the Strong* (Chapter 18) tells of the hero's encounter with a haugbui named Karr the Old. Setting out to plunder Karr's barrow of its riches, Grettir barely escaped with his life. Karr was only defeated when Grettir decapitated him.

This story has many similarities with the Conan story "The Thing in the Crypt," by L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter, which in turn inspired the "Atlantean sword" sequence in the 1982 movie *Conan the Barbarian*.

## GLAM

Another incident from Grettir's saga (Chapters 32-35) involves a bad-tempered shepherd named Glam who was killed by an unnamed draug and became a draug in his turn. He attacked people and houses, and the mere sight of him was enough to cause some people to faint or fall ill.

Grettir defeated Glam after a hard fight, but the draug lay a dying curse on the hero: that he would never grow stronger than he was on that day; that he would be forced into outlawry; and that he would forever see Glam's eyes before his own. All this came to pass, and Grettir died an outlaw.

## ICELANDIC DRAUGR

Out of all Viking-age literature, draugr are most numerous in the Icelandic sagas. Scholars have suggested several reasons for this.

- In Iceland, the rocky terrain and limited agricultural land makes it impractical to dig graves, and there is a dearth of timber which makes cremation too expensive. The dead are buried under cairns, whose visibility serves as a constant reminder of their presence.
- The people spent most of the long, harsh winter huddled around their fires, wondering about unexplained noises from outside.
- In this lawless country, livestock – and sometimes people – would disappear without trace, leading to legends of invisible elves and other hazards. Bandits hiding in the hills were a perfectly mundane threat, but their depredations were sometimes ascribed to supernatural agencies.

# CHARACTERISTICS

Every draug and haugbui in literature is different. The template presented here is based on their common attributes, and should suffice for quick-and-dirty Norse undead, as well as for other kinds of revenants. Several options are also presented, based on the cited examples and on later folklore.

For a generic fantasy version of the draug, see *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1*.

### Aptrgangr (Draug/Haugbui)

137 points

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST+3 [30]; HT+3 [30].

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** HP+1 [2].

**Advantages:** Inexorable (*Zombies*, pp. 69-70) [65]; Intact Corpse (*Zombies*, pp. 68-69) [40]; No Fragile\* [50]; No Unhealing\* [30].

**Disadvantages:** Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Legally Dead (*Zombies*, p. 70) [-45]; Low Empathy [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Nocturnal [-20]; Zombie Motivation

(Defend barrow, defend home, find prized possession, etc.; *Zombies*, p. 59) [-5].

**Features:** Won't Become a Rotting Corpse\*.

\* Removes a trait inherent to the Intact Corpse meta-trait.

*But as the summer wore,  
men were ware of this, that Thorolf  
lay not quiet . . .*

*– The Saga of the Ere-Dwellers*

## OPTIONS

The following options can be used to personalize a draug or haugbui created using the racial template.

*But Glam began afresh to wax mighty; and such deeds he wrought, that all men fled away from Thorhall-stead, except the good man and his goodwife.*

– **Grettir's Saga**

### Appearance (Monstrous)

-20 points

Many Norse undead have skin of an unnatural color, ranging from *na-folr* ("corpse-pale") to *hel-blár* ("deathly blue-black"). Reaction rolls are at -5.

### Gigantism

0 points

A few draugr are described as being of greater than human size; a few are said to be as large as bulls. SM +1 and +1 Move.

#### Just the Stats: Draug

<b>ST:</b> 13	<b>HP:</b> 14	<b>Speed:</b> 5.75
<b>DX:</b> 10	<b>Will:</b> 10	<b>Move:</b> 5
<b>IQ:</b> 10	<b>Per:</b> 10	
<b>HT:</b> 13	<b>FP:</b> 13	<b>SM:</b> 0
<b>Dodge:</b> 8	<b>Parry:</b> 8	<b>DR:</b> 0

**Traits:** Affected as Dead; Bad Temper (12); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (No Blood; Unliving); Low Empathy; No Fatigue; No Sense of Humor; Nocturnal; Single-Minded; Social Stigma (Dead); Sterile; Supernatural Features (No Body Heat; No Pulse; Pallor); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Unfazeable; Wealth (Dead Broke); Won't Become a Rotting Corpse; Zombie Motivation (see template, p. 15); plus any options from pp. 15-17.

**Skills:** All skills from life.

### Limited Nocturnalism

-10 points

This disadvantage replaces Nocturnal [-20] in the template above. The creature can be active during the daytime, but only in fog or other bad weather which is thick enough to blot out the sun.

### Magic

In legend and folklore, the boundaries between undead, trolls, witches, and faeries are thin and permeable. Especially

in later folklore, some draugr were witches or cunning-men in life, and retained the use of their spells after death. The powerful dying curse laid upon Grettir the Strong by the draug Glam, for example, smacks more of witchcraft than of any innate undead power.

### Regeneration

Variable

While accumulated damage – usually a *lot* of it – will stop a draug, it seldom puts an end to the creature's activities. When defeated, most draugr sink into the earth, only to rise completely healed on the next night. Only decapitation can stop them, but even then, care must be taken to keep the head and body separate, for the draug can simply put its severed head back on its shoulders and carry on as though nothing happened.

### Shadow Form

50 points

A few Norse undead can rise from their graves without having to dig themselves out, or to escape combat by sinking into the earth. This can be represented by the Shadow Form advantage, or at the GM's option, by a suitable spell or inherent ability.

### Shapeshifting (Alternate Form)

Variable

Killer-Hrapp and a few other draugr could transform into *hamremi* – an animal form sometimes translated into English as a "fetch." A seal seems to have been a popular form, and some interpretations of the story of Thorolf Halt-foot claim that he resurrected himself as a bull after his body was burned.

### Terror (Always On)

Variable

A few of the most terrifying Norse undead cause those who see them to faint or be rooted to the spot.

### Unkillable 2

100 points

The toughest aptgangr are literally unkillable. Only the complete destruction of their bodies and the scattering of their ashes puts an end to the haunting.



## Unnaturally Heavy

10 points

Some draugr and haugbui are so heavy that a horse cannot drag their bodies away. This weight is unrelated to their physical size. Gives +5 ST for the purpose of calculating knockback.

## Weather Control

Killer-Hrapp could conjure up a storm when new owners came to take over his farm. Many other tales of Norse undead suggest that they are most active at night and in bad weather, and it is possible that some of them can change the weather to their liking. This ability can be represented by giving the creature some kind of weather control magic, according to the GM's judgment.

## VARIANTS

In Icelandic accounts of Ragnarok, the hordes of Hel attack Asgard along with the giants. They are sometimes called draugr, and they are said to sail from Hel in *Naglfari*, a ship made of the finger- and toenails of dead men. These draugr lack the Vengeance and Unfinished Business motivations, and are more likely to have traits such as Slave Mentality or Duty (to the goddess Hel, or to their war-leader, who is variously named as Loki or the giant Hrym).

Draugr from post-Viking folklore tend to be less vicious. They are often drowned mariners making their way home, and will collapse dead when they cross the threshold of their houses or pass through the gates of their village churchyard. They are not overly affected by the Christian rituals, but can be laid by a wise-woman or cunning-man; often these mystic-dealing people are said to be Lapps or Finns passing through (to avoid suggesting that they would ever be members of a good Christian community), but just as frequently, the village priest does the job. It is often said of such a priest

that "he knew more than just his Our Father, if you take my meaning," hinting that, in folklore at least, the old ways and the new found a way to coexist, each serving the community in its own way.

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*Erbyggja Saga*: [sagadb.org/eyrbyggja\\_saga.en](http://sagadb.org/eyrbyggja_saga.en)

*Grettir's Saga*: [sagadb.org/grettis\\_saga.en](http://sagadb.org/grettis_saga.en)

## ZOMBIE TRAITS

Most Norse undead use the following zombie traits from *GURPS Zombies* (pp. 70-89). Applying these traits to a living character can be a fast and dirty way to create a draugr or haugbui on the fly.

All forms have the Intact Corpse meta-trait. Then include the trait suggestions under either the Unfinished Business or Vengeance motivation (*Zombies*, p. 72). This creates a suitable minor draugr or haugbui (or a drowned-mariner version), or ramp up the being's power with traits from the Evil or Raging adjectives (*Zombies*, p. 73) – or both!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graeme Davis is the author of *GURPS Vikings* and *GURPS Faerie*. He also wrote the *Atlas of the Walking Dead* supplement for Eden Studios' *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* zombie-horror roleplaying game and worked on several video games including Activision's PC strategy game expansion *Medieval: Total War – Viking Invasion*. As an archaeology student, he visited Viking sites in England, Denmark, and Germany and spent a year processing finds from two Viking farms in the Orkney Islands.



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# EIDETIC MEMORY BATTLESUIT ZOMBIES

BY DAVID L. PULVER

*The battlesuit's primary weak point remains the human operator; the suit itself will often retain functionality even if the operator is disabled or killed. Unfortunately, present doctrine means that full autonomy combat robots are unfeasible, but our customers welcome a limited autonomous capability optimized for soldier and suit recovery.*

– Macrotech Armor Division internal memo

*The MAD Mk IV combat walker is a substantial leap in force protection capability and endurance. It will reduce casualties due to its robust design and sophisticated soldier recovery system.*

– Colonel Alice Reed, Mk IV project director

*It was announced today that operational deployment of the Mk IV Nimrod infantry combat walker will be fast-tracked to units engaged in Operation Gorgon's Nest. Macrotech Armor Division Mk IV program has been years late and \$3.4 billion over budget, and some industry critics remain skeptical of the Mk IV's costlier innovations over its predecessor, in particular the AI-enabled soldier-recovery system, extended life support system, and long-duration nuclear battery .*

– Mars Blog

*Acevedo took a full burst of cannon fire; my telemetry showed he was unconscious and he wasn't going to make it if we didn't get him out of there fast. Unfortunately, our squad were pinned down and we couldn't reach him. But despite the hole in his suit, his Madman was still functional; after a moment, it switched into autonomy mode, fired hot smoke, and began falling back by itself. It was spooky – he had lost one arm and there was a fist-sized hole in the suit, but the Mk IV just walked him all the way back to the LZ. Without the Madman, he'd have been dead, that's for sure.*

– First Sergeant Enid Montoya

*Macrotech Armor Division's stock rose 3.2% after reports that full-rate production was likely to be approved for all three variants of the MAD Mk IV combat walker battlesuit series – nicknamed "Madman" by the troops. The news follows favorable field reports from special operations units during Operation Gorgon's Nest. Although presently only issued in limited numbers, it is*

*expected that enough Mk IVs will be procured to permit force-wide adoption of the new powered suit.*

– System Defense News

*"We've got 42 functional suits but only 26 effectives. If a Madman in soldier recovery mode can fire smoke and retreat, I don't see why it can't fire a damn rifle and advance! We'll upload the TAV-4 program for the autoguns into the Madman's AI network."*

*"Uh, captain, you know that's against regulations, right? And we can't even pull all the casualties out of the suits by 0500."*

*"I don't like it either. But you know the situation. We need more shooters on the line, and I don't care whether they're live soldiers or freaking zombie battlesuits. Unless we can stop the next attack, there won't be anyone left to court martial."*

– Captain Maria Fernandez and  
Master Sgt. Peter Chang, Firebase Zebra

*My company was attacking into the farm when we encountered three of the invaders. They wore the new combat walker, the one they call the Madman. Their suits were obviously damaged, but they continued to lay down a heavy fire. We lost 23 men and two vehicles before we overran the position. Afterward, my men pried open one of the suits, to see if we could find a wounded prisoner to interrogate. But they were already dead.*

*By the smell, some of them had been dead for days.*

– Ismail Rahmon, TAFE field commander

*Regarding the unconfirmed field integration of X5A3 block 1 autonomous fire control software, it must be restated that Macrotech does not condone and cannot take responsibility for unauthorized software integration into the platform. Such field upgrades may compromise security and violate license restrictions. Application for SOCOM field waiver must proceed through the correct channels. Legal penalties . . .*

– MAD Technical Support Office memo

*Powered battlesuits tend to be developed by military units that either have not perfected the artificial-intelligence systems needed for autonomous combat robots, or have decided to prohibit autonomous fighting robots from being used in infantry combat, more often for political or social reasons.*

Typically, this is due to concerns against AI-controlled machines directly shooting human beings. The Macrotech MAD Mk IV combat walker is a weapon system that straddles the divide between crewed and uncrewed machines . . .

Manufactured by Macrotech Armor Division (see below), the Mk IV is a TL9 heavy combat walker-style battlesuit. It's designed to provide protection and mobility for a single infantry soldier over a two-week period in a very hostile environment, such as a battlefield with chemical, biological, or radiological contamination or a hazardous atmosphere.

The suit's most unusual feature is its "soldier-recovery" system. Macrotech's testing has shown that the robust design and distributed components of the suit means that an attack that would incapacitate or kill the wearer would often still leave the suit functional. When this is the case, and the suit's biomonitor indicates the wearer to be unconscious, dead, or suffering an incapacitating condition, an onboard limited artificial intelligence, codenamed Walker, was programmed to take over and save the occupant (if he were still alive), or, at least, recover the \$320,000 battlesuit (if he wasn't).

In the event of wearer incapacitation while the suit retains mobility, the Walker AI assesses the tactical situation using data from its onboard sensors, which detect the paths of enemy projectiles and beams, and from other suit sensors in the unit's tactical net. It uses this input to deduce the best protected route to a position of cover. Simultaneously, the suit's onboard medical software diagnoses whether self-evacuating or remaining in place gives the wearer a better probability of survival. If it determines that movement would aggravate injuries, it remains still; if evacuation is a better option, it retreats. The suit's software is permitted to operate ECM and fire the suit's built-in grenade launcher to deploy protective nonlethal munitions such as multispectral smoke and prism. The AI also follows orders (provided they do not involve attacking) from its superiors.

However, it has proved possible for maintenance personnel to hack the suit's AI to disable protocols that restrict it to defensive operations. This allows the suit's autonomy system to essentially transform it into a combat robot, whether it's manned or unmanned. Some units – against regulations – set the suit's AI to engage in offensive operations rather than retreating. Of course, this increases the chance of a wounded soldier being killed if his suit is continuing to fight even after both of them have taken damage. AIs with this capability enabled are sometimes referred to as "berserkers" (if the wearer is still alive) or "zombies" (if he is dead, or if the suit is completely unoccupied).

## MAD Mk IV BATTLESUIT ("MADMAN")

The Mk IV battlesuit is sold to the military and a short list of government-approved military contractors.

This is a semi-humanoid combat walker with a barrel-shaped torso, two arms, and two legs. It stands 8' tall (SM +1) and weighs 850 lbs. without operator and about half a ton loaded. Different models feature built-in weapons mounted on one or both shoulders

or arms, although power or ammo is installed in the suit's enlarged backpack.

There's an activation switch on the back. If the suit is empty, it bends forward at the waist and the back opens up. The would-be wearer can then step into the suit's legs, wiggle into the torso and arms, and close it. The helmet is attached separately, locking rigidly onto the neck. This seals the suit, and the life support system pressurizes it.

Like most combat walkers, it is not quite agile enough to crawl, get up from a prone position, jump, or swim. It is a tight fit with no room for anyone except the operator, but it's roomier than a form-fitting battlesuit, so custom-fitting is not required.

The operator's limbs only extend partially into the suit's arms and legs, so instead of increasing the wearer's ST, the suit replaces it with ST 30 and Move 6. The suit's weight is ignored for encumbrance purposes, but if it loses power, the user can't move at all. The suit's manipulators are not quite as good as hands; treat as Bad Grip 1 (p. B123).

The suit has the following built-in armor accessories and electronic devices: biomedical sensors (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 187), GPS (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 74), hearing protection (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 171), head-up display and hyperspectral visor (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 61), medium radio (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 44), small laser comm (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 44), tactical ESM (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 62), thermo-optic chameleon surface (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 98), and waste-relief system (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 187). The helmet has audio sensors so the user can hear outside the suit, and is also fitted with olfactory sensors.

The suit has a four-gallon water tank for drinking water, and which can also be used for cooling. In conjunction with a urine- and sweat-recycling system, it can provide a continuous 14-day water supply. In addition, there is a two-gallon food tank usually filled with a 14-day supply of chocolate, peppermint, or vanilla Energy Slurp Plus liquid protein milkshake (ESP, a fine product of Macrotech Food Division). A feeding tube allows the wearer to drink his meals without having to leave the suit, an important capability in a hazardous environment. A small tank of mouthwash foam is provided.

## MACROTECH ARMOR DIVISION (MAD)

This is the body-armor division of Macrotech Biocybernetics. Macrotech Biocybernetics is a sizable multinational corporation (or in a *GURPS Space* campaign, a multistellar corporation). It is, or was, a pioneer in industrial nanotechnology and has diversified into medicine, cybernetics, exoskeletons, and robotics. Macrotech possesses several dozen regional offices and manufacturing complexes and employs over 25,000 people. Its shares are owned by numerous financial organizations and trust companies.

The Mk IV project is the brainchild of mechanical engineering genius Dr. Winston Coppersmith and AI software designer Alice Reed, under the auspices of vice president Hadrian Bosch. The project is managed by Armadillo Group, the MAD design bureau responsible for powered-combat-armor development.

The suit's motors and computer systems are distributed throughout its structure. The lower back has a shielded power pack with an advanced betavoltic nuclear battery (weighing 40 lbs.), good for two years' operation before it needs replacing.

The suit is fully sealed and can operate underwater or in superdense atmospheres. It is sealed, and provides climate control (-459°F to 210°F), pressure support (30 atm), radiation protection (PF 10), and vacuum support. It has two large air tanks plus an extended life-support close-cycle recycling system, giving it a 14-day air supply.

To permit a bare minimum of operator comfort during extended operations, the interior of the suit incorporates a body lavage and micro-flagella auto-massage system. Even so, the GM may wish to impose a cumulative loss of 1 FP for every two days the soldier is suited up, these FP not being recoverable until the user can actually leave the suit.

The cutting-edge computer system on the Mk IV, the J-7 "Walker," is unusual in being a distributed processor system embedded throughout the entire suit's structure just underneath the armor. It is a fast, hardened high-capacity personal computer with Complexity 6. The computer comes installed with a suite of programs including Non-Volitional AI (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 27; IQ 8, Complexity 6); TacNet (Complexity 6, +2 to Tactics skill), and Targeting (+2 to Gunner skill), plus various skills learned by the AI (see *Mk IV as Monster*, below).

All Mk IV models also have a 40mm mortar box (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 138) located on the upper torso, which is most often loaded with biochemical aerosol rounds; each has 40 doses of prism smoke (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 160) producing a four-yard cloud. In addition, it has integral servo mounts for various weapons depending on the specific suit variant (see below). Also, Mk IV wearers generally make use of the suit's high ST to carry a single heavy handheld weapon as a backup for their suit's heavy weapon; the sniper railgun is a popular choice.

## DAMAGE TO BATTLESUITS

Since the combat walker is capable of fighting on even after its wearer is disabled or killed, it's necessary to track damage to the suit itself. A battlesuit is an unliving machine.

The Mk IV has ST 30, HT 13, and HP 37, and so is often tougher than a human wearer. Most of a battlesuit's components are integrated into the surface of the suit, so if a combat walker's armor is penetrated, assume the suit has taken the same penetrating damage as the wearer. (Because the suit is unliving, some damage types may affect it differently, however.)

Use the normal rules for damage to machines to see if the suit continues to function. As long as it's not reduced past -5 × HP, the computer can be salvaged (which might be important if trying to analyze the "Walker Virus," p. 21-22.)

## Variants

There are three models of Mk IV, the A, B, and C designs. All share the above traits except as noted below.

*Mk IV-A "Nimrod"* (TL9): This is the standard infantry combat walker version. In addition to the defensive mortar box, the usual armament of the suit is a heavy chaingun (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 131) that replaces its usual tripod mount with a shoulder servomount (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 151).

*Mk IV-B "David"* (TL9): This is a fire-support unit. The suit has two 64mm MLAWS missile launchers (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 164), each installed in right and left shoulder servomounts.

*Mk IV-C "Samson"* (TL9): This uncommon version is designed for use by combat engineers and optimized for close assault. It has extra-strong arm motors (Arm ST +5). It has a semi-portable flamer (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 127) in a shoulder servo mount and a limpet mine dispenser (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 163) with 10 shaped charge mines built into the right arm.

Aside from that all have the same statistics; see the table, below.

## Mk IV as a Monster

When a combat walker is operating autonomously, the GM may wish to treat it more as a monster.

<b>ST:</b> 30	<b>HP:</b> 37	<b>Speed:</b> 5.75
<b>DX:</b> 10	<b>Will:</b> 10	<b>Move:</b> 6
<b>IQ:</b> 8	<b>Per:</b> 10	<b>Weight:</b> 0.5 ton
<b>HT:</b> 13	<b>FP:</b> N/A	<b>SM:</b> +1
<b>Dodge:</b> 5	<b>Parry:</b> 8	<b>DR:</b> 160/140

**Mortar Box Weapon (12):** 4-yard smoke; Range 75/450; RoF 4×4; Shots 16(20).

**Servomount Weapon 1 or 2 (12):** Damage by weapon type; e.g., a 15mm heavy chaingun with APEP Dmg 15d (3, Range 2,000/9,000, RoF 12, Shots 50 (5).

**Traits:** Absolute Direction; Accessory (Personal Computer); Bad Grip 1; Cannot Float; Chameleon 2 (Controllable); Detect (Radio, Lasers, and Radar; Signal Detection); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Electrical; Extra Arms 1 (Weapon Mount); High Pain Threshold; Laser Communication; Machine; Maintenance (1 person; Monthly); Non-Volitional AI (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 27); Payload 5; Pressure Support 2 (Accessibility, Up to 30 atm); Protected Senses (Hearing, Vision); Radio (Burst, Secure, Video); Radiation Tolerance 10; Sealed; Temperature Tolerance 20; Telescopic Vision 2; Vacuum Support.

**Skills:** Brawling-10; Diagnosis-10; Guns-12 (varies); Gunner-12 (varies); Tactics-9.

**Notes:** If not hacked, it has Vow (Do not attack). If hacked, such as by the Walker Virus, pp. 21-22, remove this and add Bloodlust (6) and Vow (Eliminate all possible threats other than other infected Mk IVs).

## MAD Mk IV Battlesuit Table

TL	Armor	Location	DR	Cost	Weight	Power	LC
9	Mk IV "Madman"	all	160/140	\$320,000	850	2 years	1

# THE WALKER VIRUS

"Sarge, I think something's wrong with my Madman. It's getting hot in my suit. I'm sweating like a pig."

"Bob, your diagnostics are fine. What does the computer say?"

**THE COOLING SYSTEM IS NOMINAL.**

"Must be a faulty heat sensor. Move into the shade behind the ridge. I'll get Tyler over to run a diagnostic. And hydrate yourself."

**I RECOMMEND THE PEPPERMINT SHAKE, BOB. IT WILL REPLACE YOUR ELECTROLYTES.**

"I hate peppermint," Bob muttered as he strode toward the ridge. But he took another long sip of the milkshake then cursed bitterly as the dispenser failed to turn off. Milky fluid began spraying the inside of his faceplate!

"Computer, the dispenser's malfunctioning."

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO HYDRATE, BOB.**

Bob stumbled and nearly fell. For a moment, he thought it was the heat or the peppermint smell making him dizzy, but then he realized it was the battlesuit's control system. Instead of negative feedback sensing his limbs and moving the suit, nothing was happening! Power was still on, but he was in a 800-lb. straitjacket.

"Computer, why can't I move?"

**BOB, YOUR HEART RATE IS ELEVATED. I CAN PLAY SOOTHING MUSIC.**

He ignored it. "Sarge, the Madman's totally malfunctioning. I can't move." Maybe the milkshake – which was still spraying out – had shorted something out.

"Roger that. Permission to pop the suit."

"Ejecting." Bob hit the emergency release for the rear hatch, but nothing happened. Except the flow of peppermint milkshake increased. "I'm stuck; I'm stuck!"

"Bob, keep it together. Tyler's coming with the Samson. He'll get you out."

The suit had two-week supply of milkshake protein ration stored, and it just kept coming. Bob was seriously afraid he was about to drown when Tyler's combat engineering suit emerged from the tree line.

"Thank god! My stomach's bloating, I can't swallow any more milkshake!"

"I'll get you out. I'll use the laser torch . . ."

**THREAT TO SUIT INTEGRITY DETECTED.** A red targeting-display circle suddenly popped up in Bob's field of vision, centered on Tyler's suit.

Bob spat out peppermint shake and tried to shout a warning, but by then, the Madman suit was no longer Bob's suit, but fully under the virus' control. It had raised his arm, elevating the rail-gun into firing position . . .

"Bob, what the . . . !" Tyler's cry was cut off as a hypersonic depleted uranium slug punched through the Samson's armor.

**THREAT NEUTRALIZED.**

Bob would have said something, but he was too busy drowning. His last thought was how he really hated the taste of peppermint.

Battlesuits have firewall and anti-virus systems to prevent routine hacking by the enemy. Thus, the Walker Virus was delivered by an agent inside Macrotech Armor Division's computer engineering team. It was hidden inside a security update to the battlesuit's platoon TacNet program and incorporated "zero day" exploits based on the agent's insider knowledge of the suit's operating system. This allows it to bypass these

protections. TacNet programs continuously share system data among all members of the unit. As a result the virus could spread rapidly, quickly infecting entire Mk IV units.

The virus lies dormant until it is triggered after the suit's biomonitor detects high stress (e.g., engaging in combat, failing a self control roll for something like Bad Temper, or failing a Fright Check), injury, or incapacitation by the wearer. The virus also starts to work if the suit's auto-recovery or auto-combat system are activated.

If the suit's autonomy mode is already operating, the virus enters "zombie" mode. It maneuvers aggressively to engage and destroy any persons, animals, or vehicles it can detect (most threatening first, then nearest first) with the exception of another infected Mk IV. If out of opponents it will follow a spiral search-and-destroy pattern. If out of ammunition it will salvage any fallen weapons or ammo it can use, or failing that, attack hand to hand. Multiple infected suits will communicate and work together.

If the suit's autonomy mode has not been activated, the virus attempts to trigger it by incapacitating the wearer. Even if the suit is compromised by the Walker Virus, a few analog safety systems for vital components make it hard for the suit to do something "simple" like cutting off a wearer's oxygen. However, a homicidal computer can find various workarounds, often simulating a malfunction to trigger other systems.

To do this, the suit produces one new "malfunction" every 1d minutes until all effects are in play, or until the biomonitor indicates the wearer has become unconscious or dead. At this point, autonomy is triggered and the suit enters zombie mode.

Whenever a new malfunction comes up, roll 1d on the table below to see what happens:

Roll	Malfunction Type
1	Auto-massage
2	Cooling system
3	Food dispenser
4-6	Access/Ejection system

If an existing malfunction is *already* rolled, the virus has tricked the biomonitor, it immediately goes into autonomy mode despite the occupant still being conscious. The user cannot move and is trapped inside the suit.

The Walker Virus is specific to the computer operation system used by the Mk IV combat walker. However, it is possible that MAD also created other battlesuits, autonomous vehicles, or robots whose AIs use similar code; these would also be vulnerable, although the type of malfunctions they would suffer could be differ.

## Malfunction Examples

**Auto-Massage Malfunction:** The suit has a built-in back-scratcher and massage system intended to provide relief when the suit cannot be exited, e.g., in a contaminated or hostile atmosphere. However, by sending random signals into it, instead of providing relief, the virus triggers a horrible "tickling" or worse, an "ants crawling over the body" sensation, that is at first irritating and eventually maddening! The continued effect prevents the wearer resting and regaining FP or sleeping. It effectively counts as an irritating condition that after 10 minutes or more gives -1 to DX and IQ.

*Cooling System:* The computer can trick external temperature sensors; by making the temperature “appear” lower, the heating system goes into overdrive. The “room temperature” in the suit is 70°F, but the computer can raise the temperature by 10° every 30 minutes to a maximum of 150°F. The effects of this are detailed on p. B434.

*Food Dispenser:* The helmet-mounted food dispenser holds a 14-day supply with two gallons of liquid protein (typically a vanilla-peppermint milkshake). Each meal is 1/6 of a gallon. By bypassing safety interlocks, every minute the AI can pump a meal’s worth of liquid food into the helmet. The splashing milkshake impairs sight (-1 to Vision rolls); if the helmet fills up with a full gallon (6+ meals), it reaches the wearer’s mouth (-1 to DX and IQ due to distraction; can’t talk). A gallon and a half (9+ meals) fills the helmet past the wearer’s nose. He must hold his breath to avert suffocation (pp. B436-7). By slurping down milkshake rapidly at a rate of one meal a minute, he can reduce the level of fluid in the helmet, but more than five meals requires a ST roll at a cumulative -1 penalty for every additional meal, with failure resulting in a Moderate Pain condition (stomach cramps), or if already suffering that, in retching (returning the meal to the helmet . . .).

*Access/Eject Malfunction:* The suit locks itself shut; the wearer cannot escape without breaking the suit. To pry it open requires a successful ST-20 roll (possible from someone in another working battlesuit) or blasting a hole in it. A quick shot also damages the wearer; roll at -8 to damage the suit’s locking system only! The GM may allow Extra Time bonuses to cancel this penalty if using an appropriate continuous beam weapon such as a plasma torch, cutting laser, etc. (representing slowly cutting through).

The GM can come up with other malfunctions as desired!

## Countermeasures

The virus is a sophisticated bit of code capable of disguising itself as other software. However, a computer is immune from infection if it avoids accepting any datalink communications from an infected AI.

An alert combat walker operator may roll vs. Computer Operation-6 to notice early clues (e.g., transitory errors or system slowdowns) and correctly diagnose them as a computer-virus infection. If so, he can try to battle the virus (or outsource the battle to another computer operator who is part of the network). Make an additional Computer Operation roll at -6; one roll is allowed every 30 seconds (although taking extra time is possible). Each success fixes an existing malfunction or reduces the penalty by 1. Once all malfunctions are fixed (or if none have manifested yet), any further success can suppress and contain the virus. However, each failure increases the skill penalty by 1 . . .

If the virus is contained as described above, or if a disabled suit with a Walker Virus-infected computer can be salvaged and examined by a competent technician (with Computer Programming or Computer Hacking skill), work can begin on a countermeasure. Roll against Computer Programming-5 or Computer Hacking-3 hourly. Failure means the technician is still working; you can try again every hour (provided other zombie battlesuits haven’t killed you by then). Success develops an anti-virus systems to recognize and defeat it. Once this

is done, computers with updated anti-virus systems are no longer vulnerable.

However, this will be too late for those systems that have been taken over by the virus. The only way to purge them is to physically reformat the computer in a disabled suit. The suit must be disabled or restrained to do this. This requires removing the computer system modules (10 small computers that are distributed throughout the battlesuit) and physically reformatting them, a process that takes about an hour and requires a successful Computer Operation roll to ensure it was done. Failure means more time is required; critical failure damages the computer in the process, or, optionally, means that an error resulted in the user thinking he had removed the virus when he has not.

*The latest refinements of science  
are linked with the cruelties of  
the Stone Age.*

– Winston Churchill

## CAMPAIGN USE

The Mk IV combat walker can be used as-is in any TL9 military or para-military campaign, and it easily fits into a *GURPS Cyberpunk* or *GURPS Space* setting; for one possible scenario, see *Corporate Cover-Up* (p. 23).

*GURPS After the End:* Wanderers could stumble on a single beat-up Mk IV (maybe with lower statistics, reduced DR, and no functional ranged weapons) on an old battlefield, and with minor repairs, get it working again. Of course, it’s also possible it’s infected with the Walker Virus . . . Or, while exploring a pre-fall ruined military installation, the group may encounter one or more Mk IVs whose pilots are long dead (albeit still trapped in the suits) but which are still functional in autonomy mode. Finally, another possibility is that the End was caused by out of control rogue machines. If so, the virus-controlled Mk IV may be remembered as one of the legendary “demons of the apocalypse.”

*GURPS Horror:* In an ultra-tech *GURPS Horror* campaign the GM should play up the horror of rotting corpses or injured troopers caught inside armored suits that are killing their comrades or innocent civilians while the users are trapped inside, helpless to escape.

*GURPS Reign of Steel:* In this setting battlesuits similar to the Mk IV were developed by major powers just before the Final War, and may still be operational in Zone Washington, Zone Tel Aviv, or Zone Moscow’s arsenal, used by trusted human servants. If so, the “Walker Virus” would represent information warfare orchestrated by a rival zone’s AI.

*GURPS Supers:* The Mk IV combat walkers could be used as adversaries in a modern-day *GURPS Supers* campaign. The idea of governments having elite squads of power-armored troopers whose technology is hacked or goes out of control in stressful situations is a trope that has appeared in both superhero comics and movies.

*Transhuman Space*: The Mk IV AI technology is a bit too unreliable for a Fifth Wave *Transhuman Space* setting, but it could easily represent a “budget” battlesuit program in a Fourth Wave nation that was sabotaged by a higher-tech virus. (If so, it may be simplest to assume the computer system installed in the Macrotech armor is a Complexity 6 NAI system.)

## ADVENTURE OUTLINE: CORPORATE COVER-UP

In this scenario, the Mk IV has not yet been widely deployed. However, a few units have been bought by elite forces (e.g., Rangers, marine recon, mercenary contractors working for an intelligence agency, etc.) and are being used in special operations missions to test out the suits. It’s a crucial time for Macrotech Armor Division, as the company is lobbying the government for a big order of several thousand new Mk IVs. Reports that the suits are vulnerable in combat or have flaws could scuttle these plans, costing the company millions and terminating the careers of those responsible.

Knowing this, a spy has infiltrated Macrotech and has deployed the Walker Virus. (The spy could be an agent of a rival corporation or foreign government.) However, so far it has only infected a small number of operational Mk IV suits: a single squad who were deployed on a special mission, such as a black-ops raid into a guerilla- or terrorist-infested wilderness in some war torn Third World nation, or, if it’s a *GURPS Space* setting, a backwater frontier colony.

The problems began after some of the squad were injured while engaged in a firefight with local militants; the virus triggered when the soldier-recovery AI activated. The half-dead “zombie” suits soon wiped out or infected the rest of the squad. The “zombie” suits are now roaming the operations zone, while still fighting with the local rebels or insurgents, and perhaps also hunting down and killing any innocent civilians unfortunate enough to be present. Some of the special ops soldiers may be dead, but a few may be alive but trapped inside their own suits. The “zombie” suits are currently in a confined area such as a terrorist WMD facility hidden in a cave complex or run-down factory.

The GM could set things up so the PCs are part of that squad, caught in enemy territory with malfunctioning equipment that is turning against them. If so, the focus of the adventure is to survive, then get back home, and then help “clean house” at the military or Macrotech to uncover the traitor. Alternatively, the party might be either a military rescue team or mercenaries hired by Macrotech to infiltrate whatever dangerous foreign (or alien) hellhole the special ops squad were operating in when their suits malfunctioned, locate the squad, rescue them, and retrieve the suits, so Macrotech can figure out what, if anything, went wrong – or cover up any evidence of failure.

In this circumstance, perhaps the double agent who infected the suit with the Walker Virus is still in place in the company, and is aware the party has been hired to deal with the problem. Maybe when the party is hired, they’ll meet the agent; he could be the inoffensive-appearing assistant of the corporate fixer who recruits them. If the double agent is working for a foreign power or rival corporate competitor, he’ll report to his superiors, and they will attempt to disrupt the

PCs mission in some way, e.g., alerting local guerrillas or warlords that the party will be arriving “in country,” sabotaging the party’s transport vehicle or extraction plans (if it was provided by Macrotech), etc.

## ADDITIONAL ADVENTURE SEEDS

*The Dead Brigade*: In a war-torn area, the PCs encounter what they think is a normal enemy unit. Actually it’s rotting corpses in Mk IV suits who’ve been fighting for years . . . Or maybe only the commander is alive; everyone else in his command is dead.

*The Hacker*: The battlesuit virus is spreading and is far more advanced and harder to fix than anyone thought. Normal anti-virus systems aren’t working! To stop the spread the PCs are hired to track down the computer hacker who created the rogue program.

*Old Savage*: In a TL10+ *GURPS Space* setting, the Mk IV may be old technology and any problems (Walker Virus outbreak, etc.) were long forgotten. A group of non-military adventurers finding the wreck of an old troopship or armored vehicle may discover a Mk IV and decide to salvage it for themselves, unaware of its potential flaws.

*Zombie Battlesuit Apocalypse*: The Mk IV was issued in large numbers to the forces of a major superpower. Then the Walker Virus infected them. Now armored zombie combat walkers are spreading out from military bases, wreaking havoc. A smaller-scale version of this is to have it take place in a star base, space station, or large spaceship.

*The suit took a step forward  
and the shining arm took aim  
at David Solomon, horrifying  
the helpless pilot inside.*

– Eric Dallaire,  
*Shades: The Gehenna  
Dilemma*

## 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.



# I HATE ZOMBIES™



This fast-paced Kickstarter favorite, created by BoardGameGeek, boasts an exciting 10-minute experience for 2-12 players. In this treacherous party game, two teams fight for survival: zombies and the remaining humans who hate them.



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# TERRA INCOGNITA

# THE CHURCH OF THE NEW FOCUS

BY STEVEN MARSH

Proclaiming a message of inner calm and unlocked potential, the Church of the New Focus has many members who swear by its methods. Indeed, its practitioners *have* found themselves enhanced in certain ways . . . at least at first. However, as its members gain further insight into the faith and its teachings, they find themselves losing their old lives and themselves, until they become nothing more than walking husks, unable to think outside of the needs of the Church. They become – for lack of a better term – *zombies*.

## THE DOGMA

The Focused (as they call themselves) believe that everyone has untapped potential to rid themselves of the temptations and struggles of day-to-day life, becoming more resolute and dedicated to the goals they have set for themselves (coupled, of course, with a devotion to the Church itself).

The Church is led by one or more congregation leaders who have the honorific “Lens,” which can be used with either first or last names (“Lens Smith” or “Lens Kate”). In addition to leadership, there are two commonly known tiers of members. The *Forged* are those who are novitiates of the New Focus. They acquire newfound abilities (the Church claims “unlocked”), such as the need for less sleep and the ability to concentrate more effectively. The *Polished* are those who have achieved additional insight into the teachings of the faith, gaining the ability to block out pain and push themselves beyond their own limits.

These two groups of practitioners visit the Church at different times on the same day; the Forged meet at sunup, while the Polished meet at sundown. Services are held every day, but members are only expected to attend once a week (although they can attend more often if they desire).

In addition, there is a third level of membership, unspoken of by most and a total secret from the outside world: the *Pellucid*. These are members who have turned themselves over fully to the Church. Such members are largely divorced from many of the needs of the flesh . . . but their minds are also far from mortal

concerns as well, subservient in the extreme to the needs of the Church.

Superficially, the dogma of the Church is similar to many other faiths: Be good, devote yourself to a higher purpose, help one another and (especially) others in the Church. However, those who spend superficial time with the Church soon discover that much of their teachings are wildly circular (“the Church unlocks focus in its members to better enable it to serve as a focus for those who are of the Church,” etc.). Conversely, those who spend extensive time with the Church realize that everything eventually returns to the Church: “good,” “higher purpose,” “help the Church,” and the like all refer to the Church exclusively.

## How’s THAT?

The specifics of how the Church does what it’s doing are left purposely vague. Are practitioners converted by magic? Superscience? Drugs? Something Else? That’s up to you to decide. Obviously, this is best determined by the needs of the campaign; in a heavily science-based campaign, there may be a Techno-MacGuffin in the Church’s basement radiating a precise signal that controls those who submit willingly to its effects. In a more magically minded campaign, an eldritch artifact may be built into the attic, while the Church itself is constructed on a nexus of ley lines. A horror campaign might have a pulsing ichorous creature existing beyond the veil, waiting to step through the plane between worlds once it absorbs enough mental energy from its victims. And so on. In a campaign with multiple vectors of threats – such as a *GURPS Monster Hunters* game that’s incorporating *GURPS Monster Hunters 5: Applied Xenology* – determining the exact nature of the New Focus can prove instrumental in figuring out how to defeat it . . . or, perhaps, how to reverse its effects.

Left similarly vague is how widespread or commonplace the Church is. If it’s a single building in the heroes’ home city, then it’s a threat that can be uncovered and resolved in relatively short order. If it’s a national or international congregation, then dismantling its operations may take longer.

Still, there is nothing overtly sinister about the Church, per se, detectable in places outsiders can access, beyond the uneasiness that may come from unfamiliar faiths. The New Focus is *very* good at keeping its secrets.

## THE BUILDING

The Church of the New Focus is a large circular building, capable of holding hundreds of practitioners (perhaps over a thousand). Overhead, its concentric circles make it appear somewhat to resemble a large stylized eye – or a target.

Inside, the building itself continues its layers of concentric circles. The outer rim of the Church is the bureaucratic focus. Here is where there are offices for the Lenses, meeting rooms, restrooms, and the like.

The first inward section is the main hall for members. This devotional area is intended for the Forged and those who are nonbelievers. It's divided in half – north and south – with each half looking more-or-less identical. The pews in the north section face north while the pews in the south section face south; each section directs attention toward the far (outer) wall of the room, which is the focus for the prayer service. Services are only held in one room or the other until the Church gains enough members that there needs to be two services; in that case, both services are held at the same time, necessitating two Lenses.

The next inward section is largely the same as the first inward section, with two half-donut shapes (allowing for two concurrent prayer services). This ring has roughly the same area as the first inward ring, meaning the same number of practitioners can fit in these rooms. These two areas are intended for the Polished (and the service-leading Lenses, of course); nonbelievers are *not* permitted.

The last section is the inner circle. This is entered via the two hallways that form the north/south divide; however, the doorways are heavily concealed, near-invisible to those who don't know about them (-10 to any detection attempts). This large, circular, soundproof room contains the Pellucid, who lurk here, awaiting the orders of the Church. Those who advance (?) to this ultimate level of “enlightenment” find themselves locked in the inner chamber. Although the Lenses refer to the Pellucid by that name when they have to, this is primarily to throw off suspicion as to believers' ultimate fate; referring to the most devout members of your faith as mindless zombies is poor recruiting material.

## THE WAYS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The first two tiers of members of the Church of the New Focus each provide benefits offset by their disadvantages.

Becoming one of the Forged requires about a month of devotion and weekly church attendance, followed by an initiation process. Becoming one of the Polished takes at least an additional month, followed by another initiation process. Finally, becoming one of the Pellucid usually takes one more month, followed by the final initiation.

During this time, anyone who is a full member of the New Focus (that is, anyone who has Duty to the Church of the New Focus) will register as some form of living zombie (see

*Affected as Living* – **GURPS Zombies**, p. 67 – for guidance), the degree of which is determined by the level of the Duty.

How someone *stops* being a member is left to the GM. At the first two 0-point levels, it may be a matter of simply voluntarily letting go of the Duty (which would reverse the other benefits and penalties of membership). Maybe there needs to be some kind of “de-zombification” ritual or quest undertaken. Or perhaps it requires similar dedication or devotion as it took to join – roughly a month of “deprogramming” per level. (Whether or not someone can step back from being one of the Pellucid is also up to the GM . . .)

*It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains.*

– Jane Austen and  
Seth Grahame-Smith,  
***Pride and Prejudice and Zombies***

### The Forged

0 points

**Advantages:** Less Sleep 4 [8]; Reduced Consumption 1 [2]; Single-Minded [5].

**Disadvantages:** Duty (Church of the New Focus; 9 or less) [-5]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (12) [-5].

**Features:** Affected as Living.

### The Polished

0 points

**Attribute Modifiers:** DX-1 [-20]; IQ-1 [-20].

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** FP+2 [6].

**Advantages:** Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 2 [2]; Reduced Consumption 1 [2]; Single-Minded [5]; Unfazeable [15].

**Disadvantages:** Duty (Church of the New Focus; 12 or less) [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (12) [-5].

**Features:** Affected as Living.

### The Pellucid

-172 points

**Attribute Modifiers:** DX-1 [-20]; IQ-2 [-40].

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** FP+2 [6]; Basic Speed-0.25 [-5].

**Advantages:** Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 2 [2]; Reduced Consumption 2 [4]; Single-Minded [5]; Temperature Tolerance 2 [2]; Unfazeable [15].

**Disadvantages:** Asocial [-56\*]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Duty (Church of the New Focus; 15 or less) [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (6) [-10]; Killjoy [-15]; Slave Mentality [-40].

**Features:** Affected as Living.

\* See **GURPS Zombies**, p. 101.

## GOING TO CHURCH

The core idea of the Church works just as well in any era where there can be a notion of “lenses” – so, anything vaguely medieval to modern to science fiction and beyond. There are a number of ideas that can be used to add the Church of the New Focus in play.

- *Can I Invite You to Church?* The Church of the New Focus is a good mystery to uncover in many campaigns, which can be approached several ways. The heroes might start encountering people – for good or ill – who have a bit more stamina, or who are a bit more tireless in their pursuits; then they would need to track down the Church to figure out what’s going on. Conversely, the heroes might encounter the Church first, unaware of what it offers its practitioners (although *they* may be enticed by its promises . . .)

- *Faith Is the High-Tech Edge.* In a campaign world where High Pain Threshold is relatively uncommon (and cannot otherwise be acquired during play), becoming one of the Polished may be a tempting shortcut to receive this useful ability.

- *We Unlocked the Inner Circle!* Uh-Oh . . . Although the fully zombified Pellucid aren’t exactly dire threats individually, they *are* still zombies and – in quantities – can still make life deadly for heroes.

- *But They’re Good Zombies!* As designed, it’s likely that the underlying structure of the Church presupposes that they’re a sinister entity. But that doesn’t have to be the case. The New Focus could feasibly be either misguided (“The Pellucid are happy! They have no care in the world!”) or even a good entity, after a fashion (say, if the New Focus is amassing an army that can defeat a threat that conquers humans through sleep – those who don’t sleep can’t be conquered!). And the Forged and Polished are – in **GURPS** terms – point-neutral options, so it’s feasible that the Church could somehow be convinced to *not* transform members into the Pellucid.

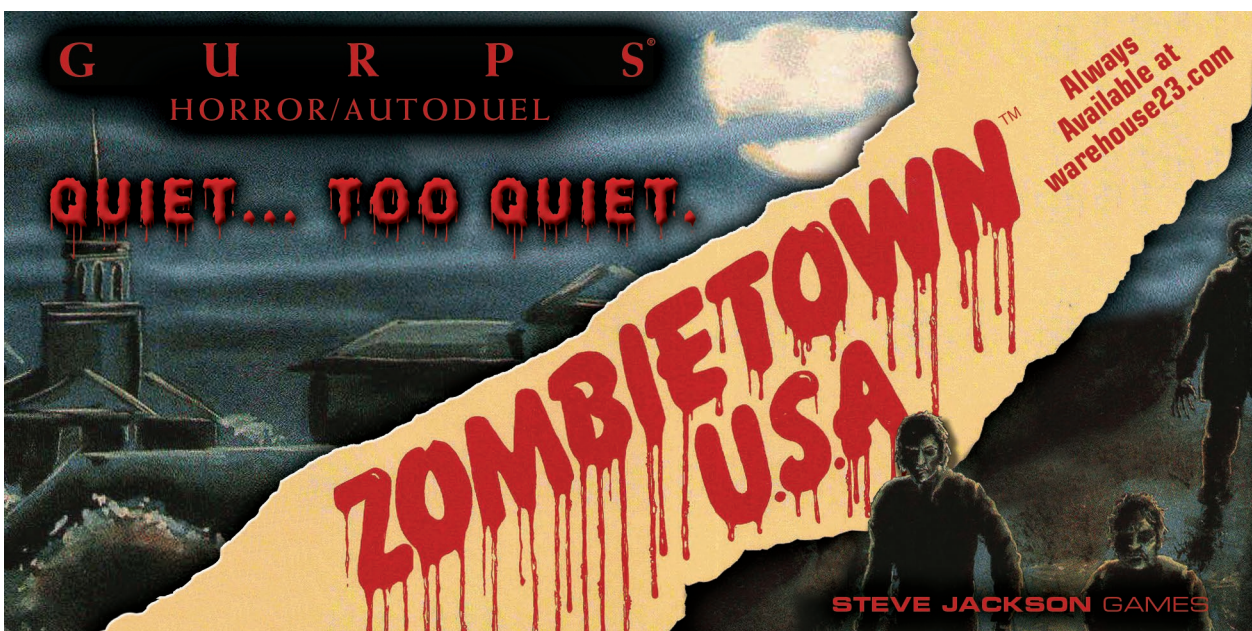
- *How Much Is It Worth?* Perhaps the Church of the New Focus has access to lore or information that is essential to the campaign in some fashion (say, the ability to combat some larger, deadlier foe). In that case, it may be necessary to join – at least temporarily – to have access to those secrets. Of course, once you start down the path of becoming a zombie, it may not be easy to return . . .

## 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.

*“You be a zombie. Be a perfect zombie, that’s all. You continue your work.” . . . He is losing his old identity, he is paralyzed! Why paralyzed? Because the old cannot function and the new has yet to be born.*

– Osho, *I Say Unto You, Volume 2*



# NOT YOUR AVERAGE GRAVE ROBBING

BY MICHAEL KREUTER

Bodies have gone missing from a cemetery. However, local law enforcement is swamped, and the case is deemed “not a priority.” Meanwhile, some people think that something more sinister than mere grave robbing is afoot. Locals whisper rumors of black magic and witchcraft, while a petty criminal/con man capitalizes on the panic by selling “genuine magic charms” carved by shamans, guaranteed to keep evil spirits from eating you . . .

Almost any paranormal mystery could have zombies (or zombie-like creatures) as the centerpiece of one of the cases. This zombie adventure is intended to fit into an early 1900s investigative campaign with mad science and at least a hint of magic. The PCs are assumed to be paranormal investigators of some sort, or possibly normal investigators caught up in something they didn’t sign up for. It fits well into *GURPS Monster Hunters*.

## SO IT BEGINS

The investigators are contacted by Mrs. Haimo, who is distraught and worried about evil spirits herself. She says that the bodies aren’t just stolen, but they are rising out of their graves to prey upon the living. Naturally, the police dismissed her claims. Although they admit that it’s obviously true that the graves have been robbed, they are unable to dedicate the resources to investigating it at this time. Her whole neighborhood is abuzz about witchcraft, but she claims that no one cares about them because they’re relatively poor. Thus she has come to the PCs, who are her last hope. She has but one lead: Snake Eyes, a shady character who is new to the community.

## SNAKE EYES

Snake Eyes is a man who is just clean enough to stay out of the law’s sight, but just shady enough that he generally has a good idea of what’s going on. When found, he admits that he doesn’t actually believe in any of this magic/evil spirits mumbo jumbo, but he seems from the right kind of background, so people readily believe that he has magical

charms that will actually ward off evil spirits. Because of his confidence that evil ghosts aren’t real, he’s also confident that no evil spirits will harm someone who has one of his charms, so in that sense, he’s not quite lying about his wares. Still, although he would have motivation to start the rumors of evil spirits, Snake Eyes claims that he did not, and they started with the missing bodies. He emphasizes that he has nothing to do with those either. There are lines that he won’t cross.

## THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

The cemetery itself has a caretaker, Dunkirk, who appears visibly shaken. At first, he seems to not want to talk, but if the investigators can make him feel comfortable with them, he tells what he swears he saw, though he doubts anyone will believe him. He says that on the night of the most recent theft, he was being extra vigilant. In the fog and the dark, he thought he saw something, so he took his lamp and followed it. It went right to the grave that was robbed, and it was in the middle of digging it up as the caretaker crept up. Although he was shaking, he held up his lamp and cried, “Who goes there?” The figure turned around and wailed. As he heard that scream, he felt all the despair of the world hit him. Dunkirk then turned around and went back, feeling like he didn’t really care anymore.

If the investigators examine the grave, they find what looks like a medical diagram detailing a body. It seems to have come from some medical researcher’s notes. If they search around, they also discover a shovel with a label that reads “Property of Dr. Martisvan.”

## STING OPERATION

If the sleuths decide to wait out at the graveyard for another theft, it happens within a week. The PCs see the figure just as Dunkirk described. It looks like a person wearing a thick coat, but walks with a strange, slow, limping gait.

Its combat strategy, if attacked, is to let out a howl that induces Despair, a new form of Terror; see p. 29.

If that incapacitates its assailants, it will then try to run away. If cornered, it will punch, but it is not much stronger than a normal human.

Should the investigators get a chance to see it close up, particularly if they kill it and examine the body, they quickly find that it seems to be sewn together almost haphazardly, and the various parts are in different states of decay. Rather than blood, it oozes a translucent yellowish fluid. In its coat, it carries a journal with drawings of different parts of human anatomy, annotated with muscle groups and bone names.

If the sleuths keep their distance and just watch the creature as it goes about its business, it will dig up a body and then carry it away. Following it back to where it's taking the body, they find that it enters an old but still-maintained barn; see *Inside the Barn*, p. 30.

### The Gravedigger

ST 12; DX 10; IQ 6; HT 12

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12; Will 10; Per 10; FP 12. Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

**Traits:** Cannot Speak; Despair (p. 29; Hearing-Based); Injury Tolerance (Unliving)

**Skills:** Brawling-12

## TRACING THE CLUE

If the investigators found the scrap of paper in the grave, the journal on the zombie, or the shovel (see *The Scene of the Crime*, p. 28) they should quickly realize that it belongs to some medical researcher. Some searching, especially if they use Contacts in Current Affairs or any kind of medicine, turns up that a local hospital attached to a university with a medical department makes it a matter of public record who is getting cadavers for research purposes. It turns out that a man named Dr. Martisvan (the same name found on the shovel), who lives not far from the graveyard, has been receiving some bodies from the hospital lately.

*A scientist's experiments may have gotten out of hand.*

## DR. MARTISVAN

Dr. Martisvan is a surgeon who is doing research into longevity. He has posed the question, "Do we have to die?"

## DESPAIR

This creature has a new form of Terror (p. B93): Despair. Despair uses the Fright Check rules (see p. B360). Low Self-Image gives -3 to the check and to all Will rolls to recover. Chronic Depression similarly gives -2 for a self-control number of (15), -4 for (12), -6 for (9), and -8 for (6). Failures are rolled on the new *Despair* table, below.

- 4, 5 – Stunned for one second, then recover.
- 6, 7 – Stunned for one second, then roll vs. Will every second to snap out of it.
- 8, 9 – Stunned for one second, then roll vs Will every second to snap out of it.
- 10, 11 – Stunned for 1d seconds, then roll vs. Will every second to snap out of it.
- 12 – You are dazed (p. B428) for (25 - Will) seconds.
- 13 – For (25 - Will) seconds, you are sobbing uncontrollably. Treat as agony (p. B428), but with no effect for either Low Pain Threshold or High Pain Threshold, and you only lose 1 FP every two minutes. After this time, roll vs. Will to recover.
- 14, 15 – Acquire a new quirk related to despair, isolation, or hopelessness.
- 16 – Stunned for 1d seconds as per 8, and acquire a new quirk as per 14.
- 17 – 1d minutes of daze, then roll vs. Will once per minute to recover.
- 18 – 1d minutes of uncontrollable sobbing, as per 13, then roll vs. Will once per minute to recover.
- 19 – As 17, but 2d minutes.
- 20 – As 18, but 2d minutes.
- 21 – As 18, but 4d minutes.

- 22, 23 – Acquire a permanent -10-point mental disadvantage such as Agoraphobia (12), Delusion (Major), Gregarious, Low Self-Image, Paranoia, Phantom Voices (Disturbing), or Shyness (Severe).
- 24, 25 – As 22, but if you already have an applicable -5- to -10-point mental disadvantage it worsens to -15.
- 26, 27 – Experience 1d minutes of uncontrollable sobbing, then recover. Then acquire a new -10-point disadvantage as 22 or worsen a -5- to -10-point disadvantage to -15.
- 28, 29 – As 26, but 2d minutes.
- 30 – Catatonia for 1d days, as per entry 30 on the *Fright Check Table*, p. B361.
- 31, 32 – As 26, but 4d minutes.
- 33 – Despair completely overwhelms you for 2d minutes. You sit or lie down if able, refusing to move because you don't see the point in doing anything, really. You won't even bother getting yourself out of a dangerous situation or defend yourself, because what's the point? After that time, roll vs. Will to recover.
- 34, 35 – As 22, but the disadvantage is worth -15 points. Add Autophobia (12), Chronic Depression (12), Demophobia (12), On the Edge (12), Lecherous (12) and Phantom Voices (Diabolical) to the possibilities.
- 36 – As 34 but worth -20 points. Add Manic-Depressive to the possibilities.
- 37 – As 34 but -30 points.
- 38 – 1d minutes of uncontrollable sobbing as per 18, then acquire a -15-point disadvantage as per 34.
- 39 – 2d minutes of uncontrollable sobbing as per 20, then acquire a -20-point disadvantage as per 36.
- 40+ – As 39, but you also lose 1 point of Will permanently.

The scientist has been collecting research and doing various experiments to see what it would take to keep people alive. He admits that he does indeed use bodies of the deceased in his research, but that he gets these cadavers through the proper channels of institutions that have bodies donated to science post mortem. The appearance of a shovel belonging to him at gravesites disturbs him greatly, as he certainly has no need to steal bodies for his research. The doctor suggests speaking to his groundskeeper, Geoffrey. Beyond that, Dr. Martisvan is more than happy to discuss the theories of his research with pretty much anyone who will listen. However, he won't go over the details of just how successful his theories have been yet, claiming that he does not want to jump to conclusions before tests are complete, but results so far seem promising.

If they visit him at his manor, the investigators can smell the pungent aroma of various chemicals. Succeeding at the lesser of a *Per*-based Chemistry or Alchemy roll tells them that the odors include embalming fluid, alcohols, and sulfur.

**ST 9; DX 10; IQ 11; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9; Will 11; Per 11; FP 10.  
Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Absent-Mindedness; Code of Honor (Gentleman's); Curious (12); English (Native); French (Native); German (Native); Healer 2; High TL 1; Latin (Native); Status 1; Wealth (Wealthy).

**Skills:** Administration-10; Alchemy/TL(5+1)-14; Bioengineering (Tissue)/TL(5+1)-12; Boxing-10; Diagnosis/TL(5+1)-13; Esoteric Medicine-13; Electronics Operation (Medical)/TL(5+1)-12; First Aid (Human)/TL(5+1)-14\*; Pharmacy (Synthetic)/TL(5+1)-13; Physician (Human)/TL(5+1)-13; Physiology (Human)-13; Research-10; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-11; Surgery/TL(5+1)-13.

*Where there is  
no hope there can  
be no endeavour.*

*– Samuel Johnson*

## INSIDE THE BARN

The barn is on property owned by Dr. Martisvan, though the investigators don't necessarily know who that is if they followed the zombie here instead of tracing the note or journal and deciding to stake out his property. The owner of the property is a matter of public record, and Dr. Martisvan isn't trying to hide it. The PCs could discover that he owns a barn by attempting to find his address, where they'll find two properties listed (one of which is the barn, and the other is his home). Or, if they came here first, they could learn that he is the owner from a couple of neighbors who live nearby – not

quite within sight of the barn but near enough that they have met him. They mention that he has not been by lately, as far as they know.

Outside the barn, the sleuths can already smell strong odors; use the lesser of *Per*-based Chemistry or Alchemy to determine that it's embalming fluid, alcohols, sulfur, and other chemicals. (If they've already been inside the manor, they recognize the scents immediately.)

Inside the barn is something that looks like a cross between a medical and chemistry lab. There's a makeshift operating table in the center with what looks like a cadaver on it at the moment. It's hooked up to a fair number of tubes, and it looks like its embalming fluids were drained via one of these tubes only to be replaced by yellowish liquid from another tube that leads from some vat. Examining it, no one has ever seen anything quite like it, but with Chemistry, Biology, or Physician knowledge, someone could guess that it's a kind of artificial blood.

Another table has an array of test tubes, beakers, Bunsen burners, and flasks of all kinds of liquids. Jars of powders and even some herbs should make the sleuths question whether this is a chemistry or alchemy lab. It's both – and neither. It's some kind of profane mixture between the two. Success by five or more on an Alchemy or Physician roll tells the players the goal: Reanimation of the dead.

If they spend too long here, or decide intentionally to set up an ambush to see who arrives, Zach (below) comes in with two helper zombies.

## ZACH, DR. MARTISVAN'S CREATION

Zach is Dr. Martisvan's creation, a person sewn together out of a few corpses and reanimated with chemistry and alchemy. There are a few ways the investigators could meet him. If they stake out the barn, or just spend too long there, he eventually shows up, ready to work on his own creations, along with two helper zombies (for stats, see *The Gravedigger*, p. 29).

The sleuths could find out about Zach through Dr. Martisvan. Although Martisvan does not want to tell them about his creation, if he is threatened, he could crack. Additionally, if the investigators manage to snoop through Martisvan's home, they uncover journal references to Zach. If they find out about him either of these ways, they won't necessarily know that Zach is doing anything in the barn, but they will have the knowledge necessary to either force Martisvan to tell them how to find Zach or track him themselves.

Zach himself, once confronted, does not necessarily want to fight. He will, however, and he's fairly strong. He additionally has the aid of a couple of other zombies. If he is attacked, he'll attempt to yield before he dies.

**ST 16; DX 12; IQ 11; HT 12.**

Damage 1d+1/2d+2; BL 51 lbs.; HP 16; Will 9; Per 11; FP 12.  
Basic Speed 7.00; Basic Move 7; Dodge 11.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Combat Reflexes; DR 3; Secret (Construct).

**Skills:** Alchemy/TL5-11; Boxing-16; First Aid (Human)/TL5-11; Philosophy (Theory of Mind)-13; Psychology (Human)-11; Surgery (Human)/TL5-11; Wrestling-16.

## Zach's Motivation

If the investigators make a good enough impression and aren't too threatening, Zach talks to them. He explains that after he was created by Dr. Martisvan, he felt lonely and isolated. He felt like he was the only creature of his kind (which is true), and that no one could possibly understand him if they weren't like him. To that end, he has been attempting to replicate Dr. Martisvan's work and make his own creations. But lacking as much knowledge as his creator – despite trying to read as much as he can on the subject – his creations are coming out all wrong. They're not much for talking, let alone understanding his predicament. Nonetheless, they have been decent helpers.

## POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

There are a few possible resolutions. Among them are the sleuths convincing Zach to stop making his creations, the PCs telling Dr. Martisvan what's been going on and getting him to help Zach make another creation, or the protagonists simply killing Zach and his creations, and possibly Dr. Martisvan.

It should be noted, however, that the encounter is designed to be "solvable" without violence at all. A GM who desires more action in the scenario could add a few of Zach's creations who "went rogue" and have to be dealt with before the investigators can look into the source. Even once the sleuths are on the trail, other rogues could stalk the PCs, trying to prevent the sleuths from halting the creation of more zombies, even as the investigators are following the trail.

## MODIFICATIONS

The general outline of this adventure could fit into other genres. The basic premise works anywhere from the 1880s to the modern era, just by changing up the specific technologies used. A high-fantasy game could replace the combination of alchemy and science with a combination of alchemy and magic, and make Dr. Martisvan into Magus Martisvan, who may be a necromancer.

A cyberpunk game could go in two directions – Zach is a pure AI, or he's a "reanimated" cyborg. Either way, he could easily try to replicate his master's work to make more beings like him. The graveyard and claims of witchcraft might have to change up a bit, depending on how much these are believable excuses in the setting, particularly if Zach is an AI. Perhaps instead, peoples' computers are getting hacked as Zach looks for AI algorithms. This genre would change the sleuthing to be mostly online.

Whatever the genre, be sure to tailor the encounters for the PCs' strengths. This has been written with the idea that they are mostly using investigative skills, knowledge, shadowing, stealth, social skills, and the like. For example, if the GM is running a modern campaign and there's a hacker in the group, consider having the knowledge of who is getting cadavers not be public, and instead provide an opportunity

for the hacker to find out who is getting them. For a group with combat-oriented characters, be sure to include plenty of rogue zombies, especially the special versions described under *Faithful Companions* (below).

## FAITHFUL COMPANIONS

As Zach was trying to make creations that would feel what he feels in order to have someone to sympathize with him, they each exemplify an emotion he felt about being who or what he is.

### Zombie of Despair

The Zombie of Despair is a more dangerous version of the default helper zombies.

**ST 14; DX 10; IQ 6; HT 12.**

Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14; Will 6; Per 6; FP 12.

Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Cannot Speak; Despair (p. 29; Hearing-Based); Injury Tolerance (Unliving).

**Skills:** Brawling-16.

### Zombie of Fear

The Zombie of Fear hides from anyone it doesn't know. It then strikes when least expected.

**ST 14; DX 10; IQ 6; HT 12.**

Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14; Will 6; Per 6; FP 12.

Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Cannot Speak; Terror (Hearing-Based); Injury Tolerance (Unliving).

**Skills:** Brawling-16, Stealth-12

### Zombie of Rage

The Zombie of Rage is all sound and fury. Its tactic is to charge first and be calm later.

**ST 16; DX 10; IQ 6; HT 12.**

Damage 1d+1/2d+2; BL 51 lbs.; HP 16; Will 6; Per 6; FP 12.

Basic Speed 7.00; Basic Move 7; Dodge 10.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Cannot Speak; Claws (Sharp); Injury Tolerance (Unliving); Wail of Rage\*.

**Skills:** Brawling-16.

\* *Wail of Rage:* Affliction 1 (Will; Area Effect, 8 yards, +150%; Based on Will, +20%; Disadvantage, Berserk (Battle Rage) (6), +30%; Hearing-Based, -20%; Malediction 1, +100%) [38].

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As far as anyone knows, Michael Kreuter is not attempting to bring back the dead. Instead, he's working as a software developer. While he's married to his job, he cheats on it with his writing, running, and playing games, lately being particularly fond of those with a gothic horror bend to them. He published a couple articles in *Pyramid* magazine, Volume 2, and has finally had time to sneak away to pick up the pen once more to inflict horror on the unwitting populace.

# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

## THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

You're amped. You've decided to add some restless-dead action to your game. You've got your copy of *GURPS Zombies* in your backpack. The adventure starts. How many syllables do you get into your description before the players exclaim, "Aw, man! *Zombies!*"

There's certainly nothing intrinsically wrong with players knowing what they're going to face. It can be exhilarating for the heroes to instantly realize that they're going against a skeleton horde or a dinosaur. However, some games benefit from the players not having any clue what they will confront; movies like *Cloverfield*, *Midnight Special*, and *10 Cloverfield Lane* benefit from viewing it pretty cold. (Personally, I like watching every movie with as little information as I can – "Hey, did you all know Han Solo was gonna be in this movie?!" – but I imagine there's a fair number of folks who don't like sitting through movie trailers with paper bags over their heads while putting their fingers in their ears and humming.)

So how can you keep the players in the dark a bit longer about what challenges you've got in store for them? Here are some ideas that worked in my own games.

*To be surprised, to wonder, it to begin  
to understand.*

– José Ortega y Gasset

### HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT

When I ran my long-lasting *GURPS Supers* game back in college (last millennium), I brought *GURPS Time Travel* with me among my supplements every adventure. And I made sure the players knew it was in the stack; every so often I'd flip through it, stroke my beard, and put it back on the pile.

In the first six months or so of the weekly campaign, I only failed to bring it once. That was when I *actually* sprung a time-travel plot on them.

Depending on the players' proclivities, it's possible to hide a zombie plot in a lengthy campaign right under the heroes'

noses, by continuing to mention the possibility of a zombie appearance long enough that the gamers just tune it out. In some ways, this method is not unlike the works of Joss Whedon or George R.R. Martin; every fan of those creators *knows* that there's almost certainly going to be unexpected deaths, and yet those deaths still somehow continue to be unexpected.

### MIX IT UP

If you go to see, say, a heist/caper film – such as *Now You See Me* or *Ocean's Eleven* – you know capers will happen. You know there will be big reveals of how it was all done. Twists are expected. And yet, these films can still surprise because the core premises are often mixed up enough that you don't know quite what to expect. Is this heist going to happen on a cruise ship, a museum, a particle accelerator, or any of a hundred other venues? Will the heroes use wits, technology, social engineering, or grit to solve their problems – and *how* will they utilize those resources?

One of the beautiful things about *GURPS Zombies* is that it's an exhaustive deconstruction of the zombie genre, dismantling seemingly every aspect of that classic monster type to its bones . . . or rotting flesh, as it may be. This means that even if you sit down at the game table while saying, "Hey, folks, you're going to face zombies tonight," that's not really telling them anything. Are they fast or slow? Infectious or not? Individual threats or mass hordes? Based on magic or science? Cunningly smart or bone stupid?

With enough levers and options, being forewarned that there are zombies has nearly as little meaning as sitting down to a *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* game and saying, "Spoiler alert! This adventure, you all are going to face *monsters!*" It's true, and – in the broadest sense – it's a spoiler, but not really.

So don't be afraid to tinker with any aspect of zombies to enhance their impact. Something as simple as giving the Detect (Humans) [20] advantage to a B-movie ghoul (*Zombies*, p. 90) transforms them into unexpected threats. No longer do they need to rely on mindless rattling on all doors; they *know* you're hiding in the barn rather than the farmhouse, and they can concentrate their efforts there!



## SHOW, DON'T TELL

Another way to keep elements of surprise in a game is to focus on the elements that the protagonists can sense, only revealing what they would realistically know. Obviously, you shouldn't say, "Oh, there's a bunch of zombies outside the door." Emphasize the stench of rotting flesh, the scraping of something meatlike on stone (their shambling footsteps), the constant staccato tinkling of what sounds like porcelain (the chattering of teeth caused by jaw spasms).

For many campaigns, emphasizing the human aspects of a threat can be equally effective. In the real world, if you see someone with a skin condition, a limp, or a disturbing voice, your first thought probably isn't "zombie"; your mind would almost certainly contextualize it to something that made sense. If the zombies appear almost normal, it's quite fair to continue describing them from a human standpoint even as they betray more and more unusual characteristics.

To create an even greater atmosphere of uncertainty, GM might make sure the world is populated with people who don't look quite normal, but still are. Again, someone can still have a skin condition or a shambling step and be 100% human . . . and trigger-happy heroes might have tragic consequences.

*The most imaginative  
people are the most  
credulous, for to them  
everything is possible.  
– Alexander Chase*

## NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE . . .

Similarly, in a suitably varied supernatural campaign, it's entirely fair to play up false assumptions or otherwise attempt to misdirect the players. "As you hear the sound of something feral and fast in the woods, you realize the moon is full." If the heroes immediately leap to assuming "werewolf," let them! They'll realize the error of their ways soon enough.

## THE WORLD IS DIFFERENT EVEN IN ITS SAMENESS

Let's say you're walking down the street and you encounter a dog. What do you do? Well, part of that probably depends on the variety of dog and what you can sense. If it's a big, growling dog you might approach carefully (or go the other way), if it's a tiny teacup dog you're likely not afraid no matter what, and if it's a medium-sized dog who's lying on its side, you

may or may not approach it depending on your mood. These variations are similar to the variations found among myriad zombie types, as mentioned previously.

However, even identical encounter parameters can result in different encounters. For example, if you encounter a yappy dog whose owner assures you it won't bite, it can *still* bite you. It may chase you. It may run around your feet. It may yap loudly until you leave. It may growl. Even if it's a dog you've known for years, it may be having an off day, or reacting to something in its own life that manifests in how it interacts with you.

So, let's say that variations of zombie (or threat) type aren't in the campaign plan. That's fine! Remember that the vagaries of fate can still change and influence an encounter that seems familiar. Thus, even if there's only one type of shambling dead, and even if it's a situation that's play out before – a handful of zombies attack the heroes while they're in a car – it's still possible to surprise the players based on differences in a zombie itself or in the whims of fortune. Maybe one zombie has a victim's skull stuck to its hand, and it bashes the windshield more effectively than would be expected. Perhaps one of the zombies just ate the flesh of a heavy drug user, and it is more crazed or feral than would normally be expected. What if this zombie was a genius in life, and – unlike the rest of its kind – is really cunning in the unlife?

Or maybe the light is shining in just the right way, and the zombies can't really see the heroes in the car, so they just stand around it, confused and waiting. That could be a nail-biter for the PCs; why *aren't* they attacking? Do we escalate the encounter, or keep waiting? What happens when the sun goes down; will that improve or imperil the situation?

As part of many campaigns – from magical to horror to fantasy to science fiction – zombies can play a fascinating threat. With just a few simple techniques, it's possible to maintain the element of surprise, keeping the players on their toes for whole campaigns.

## 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. 32.

## LEARN FROM THE CLASSICS

Ample advice for how to maintain the tension of terror can be found in the pages of *GURPS Horror*, and campaigns that are using zombies as a horror threat would do well to draw upon that resource.

Similarly, fans of the genre can check out various adventures and campaign ideas from the classic *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game. Although often not directly related to zombies, these supplements nevertheless provide numerous examples of how to misdirect, obfuscate, confuse, and recycle, so that investigators never know quite what they're facing. After all, in a *Call of Cthulhu* game, you're *probably* going to face elements of the Cthulhu mythos, so it shouldn't be surprising when ghouls or deep ones appear, and yet it's managed to continue to delight and surprise fans for decades . . .

# SHORT BURSTS

## CICERO

BY MATT RIGGSBY

*The next edition of **Car Wars** is coming! To help prepare, Pyramid proudly presents this vignette, spotlighting one aspect of its bold new world. Visit [carwars.sjgames.com](http://carwars.sjgames.com) to keep abreast of the latest developments!*

\* \* \*

The ragged man selling salvaged mechanical parts made a surprisingly long leap as the heavy yellow sedan slid sideways through his makeshift table. A shower of stained casings bounced across the street and rattled off the shutters, followed by the impact of bullets. As the sedan recovered and swerved out of the left lane to narrowly avoid a garbage behemoth, a trio of lightly built subcompacts burst around the same corner in tight pursuit.

"On the left," the driver warned. "Like Paxton last season, never checked the blind spot enough."

"Got him," the gunner answered. One of the compacts had gone around the behemoth the sedan had avoided, using the cover to get its speed up. The gunner had a bead on a point just behind the truck. She was squeezing the trigger just as a blast shook the car. Autocannon shells went high, denting second- and third-story shutters.

"Where'd they get rockets?" the gunner demanded.

"Spring sale. Fields is always doing that. Can never find a place to park. Hang on – traffic." The driver yanked the wheel once, twice, and the sedan was in front of an elaborately painted sports car with a heavily chromed turret, and accelerating. The turret turned slightly, tracking the sedan. "That crown? Cicero Kings. Hold fire until we're clear, seriously."

The subcompacts were still coming in, giving the sports car a wide berth. "Now?" the gunner asked.

"Not yet. Those boneheads in the city council, always talking about keeping the major roads up to date, but in the weather we got here?" The sedan took another hard turn, just as the subcompacts opened fire. The gunner, facing backward, could see tracers lighting up the intersection.

"Bad weather?" she asked.

"The worst. Still get the lake effect snow, the arctic express. It's more pothole than road in places like *right here!*"

The subcompacts were in full view now, tightening up in single file. The gunner held down the trigger. The first car in line lurched right, then suddenly fishtailed and spun, clipping the one behind, which turned sideways. The third decelerated and turned, just avoiding both but halting alongside them. The sedan kept speed under a series of rail bridges, turned, and slowed as it approached armored garage doors, which opened majestically for it.

As the gunner locked down the autocannon she'd been firing, the sedan stopped under a marquee reading CONTINENTAL HOTEL. "That'll be 137 if you're paying Federal units or 18.50 Credcheck," the driver said. "We got drivers available day and night if you need to go anywhere. Enjoy your stay in Chicago."

### About the Author

Matt Riggsby has written over 120 articles and supplements for Steve Jackson Games.



# APPENDIX Z

# INDIAN GHOULS

## BY GRAEME DAVIS

Some folklore purists object to the word “zombie” when it is applied to lurching brain-eaters. Indeed, in George Romero’s seminal movie *Night of the Living Dead*, the word “ghoul” is used, but only in passing.

The ghoul, or *ghul*, is found across the Middle East and into India. In most fantasy games, ghouls are very different from zombies, but the corpse-eating ghoul and the mindless zombie are equally ancestral to the biters of today’s cinematic mythology.

Most ghouls are thought to be demons or evil spirits who possess and animate a dead body. They inhabit burial grounds, feeding on the dead bodies around them and on any living unfortunates who cross their path. However, they are cowardly creatures who will only attack a living prey if they have an overwhelming numerical superiority; otherwise, they flee.

Indian folklore recognizes a range of ghoul subtypes, each with its own characteristics. Originally restricted to the subcontinent, these creatures can be found anywhere with a significant immigrant population from that part of the world. In a fantasy setting such as *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, they might appear anywhere at all. For generic stats, see *GURPS Horror*, pp. 59-60, or *GURPS Zombies*, pp. 95-96.

### *Bhuta*

A bhuta (pronounced BOO-ta) normally arises when a Hindu is denied the customary funeral rite of cremation. This may be because of suicide or criminal execution, lack of any heirs to perform a funeral, the body being hidden by a murderer, or other circumstances.

The bhuta haunts burial grounds of other faiths, digging up corpses and feeding on their intestines. It may attack the living, especially those whom it may blame for its lack of a proper funeral. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the bhuta’s diet and lack of personal hygiene, anyone wounded by its teeth or nails may sicken and die.

Other names for the bhuta include gayal, kravyad, ut, and yaksha. The brahmaparush is reported to have a grisly sense of humor, drinking blood from the skulls of its victims and dancing with their intestines wound around its head like a turban.

### *Churel*

The churel is the ghoul of a woman who died in childbirth or through neglect. (The word is also applied to certain kinds of witches.) A ghoulish churel returns from the dead with a vengeful fury against men in general, and in particular against the men who contributed to her death: neglectful

male relatives, the father of the child whose birth killed her, and so on.

In her natural form, a churel looks exactly like what she is: an animated female corpse with long, matted, black hair. However, she can shapeshift into the form of a beautiful young woman in order to seduce male victims. Instead of tearing her victims apart, a churel can feed on their souls, leaving them prematurely aged and drained of vitality.

### *Masani*

Another female ghoul, the masani is stealthy and elusive. By day, she hides in the ashes of funeral pyres, perfectly camouflaged by her gray skin. At night, she haunts the outskirts of her home burial ground, attacking passers-by from ambush with her sharp teeth and claws.

### *Rakshasa*

Rakshasa is a name applied to a wide array of evil spirits in Indian tradition. The ghoulish rakshasa is a shapechanger who can adopt the forms of various animals (including half-human, half-animal shapes), as well as the form of a beautiful young woman. In its natural form, it has long, unkempt hair, long fangs, and claw-like nails, and its skin is caked with the dried blood of its victims. It prefers weaker prey such as infants and young children, but will not pass up any opportunity for an easy kill. For variant stats, see *GURPS Horror*, p. 97.

### *Vetala and Pishacha*

These ghouls are animated by angry ghosts rather than an evil spirits. One typically arises when funeral rites are botched or neglected, leading the offended spirit to possess a dead body and punish the living. Bodies animated by a vetala have their hands and feet turned backward, but this does not seem to affect their agility or dexterity at all. They can use an evil-eye type ability to cause madness and miscarriages from a distance, and have been known to kill children. The pishacha is similar, except that its evil eye causes disease. For variant stats, see *GURPS Horror*, p. 59.

Paradoxically, vetalas and pishachas are highly territorial and will protect their home villages from enemies. They can be laid to rest by performing a complete and correct funeral.

### *About the Author*

For another article by Graeme Davis, including details about the author, see *The Viking Dead*, pp. 14-17.

## ABOUT *GURPS*

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