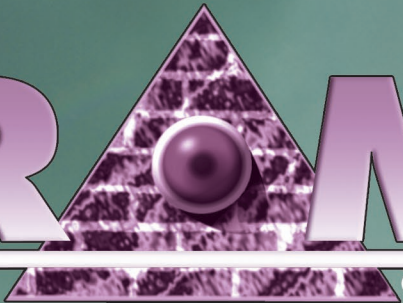


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/99 January '17

NECRO-PSI

by Christopher R. Rice

THE SLAUGHTERREALM

by J. Edward Tremlett

SOUL REAPERS

by David L. Pulver

WHAT DOESN'T KILL ME MAKES ME STRONGER

by Scott Rochat

DEATH AND BEYOND



STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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I expect to pass through life but once. If therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again.

– William Penn

Death isn't just the end; it can be the beginning of an untapped realm of adventure! This month we look at various aspects of the great beyond, and figure out ways to bring its greatness to the adventuring table.

Necromantic magic isn't the only game in town to deal with the dead; try using your mind as a *Necro-Psi*. New abilities that add to the *GURPS Psionic Powers* framework let the mental master unleash the power of the hereafter! Communicate with spirits, animate corpses, and control shadows and darkness. *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* co-author Christopher R. Rice describes the Necrokinesis power and its three divisions, including techniques, perks, and guidelines for building further abilities.

With a new way to look at the deaths of their foes, adventurers will discover *What Doesn't Kill Me Makes Me Stronger*. Let your *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* heroes gain immediate bonuses for downed enemies with this new system for track-

ing opponent difficulties. In addition to explaining the optional rules and variants, you'll get a table of monsters – and the Kill Points you can get by defeating them – spanning the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* line.

Make death more *personable* in your *GURPS Monster Hunters* campaign with *Soul Reapers*. In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* – offers new *GURPS* psychopomp templates to unleash personified servitors of

death. It also showcases a new necro power, stats for a spectral steed, and suggestions for using reapers as enemies and allies in *Monster Hunters* adventures.

When your fantasy adventurers really want to challenge their fighting skills, take them to *The Slaughterealm*. This systemless extended adventure outline describes the cruel game, its patrons, and its organizer, plus offers tips for using it with both low- and high-level delvers.

This issue wraps up with a Random Thought Table that looks at how permanent and problematic the very *idea* of death might be for various campaigns, from our own unforgiving world to soap-opera settings where *no one* ever seems to stay dead.

With this month's *Pyramid*, the “undiscovered country” has never been so accessible and ready to be discovered. If you're looking for the hereafter, then this issue is what you're here after . . . and it's *to die for!*

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

AN ISSUE TO DIE FOR?

In a tarot deck, the Death card is associated with endings and beginnings, the end of the old and the beginning of the new. In popular culture, it's often associated with the Grim Reaper, skulls, and other things painted on the sides of cool vans. But no matter how you cut it, death is an often-unexplored opportunity for roleplaying games, outside of being a "gift" you're sometimes trying to bestow upon the bad-dies you're facing before they try to do the same to you.

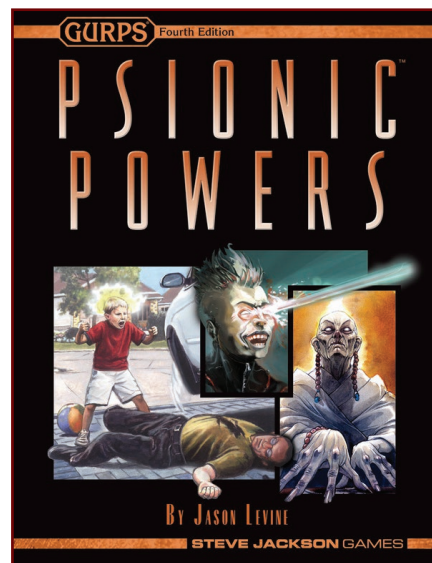
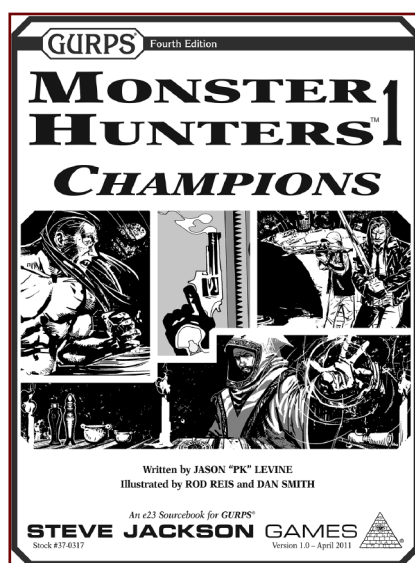
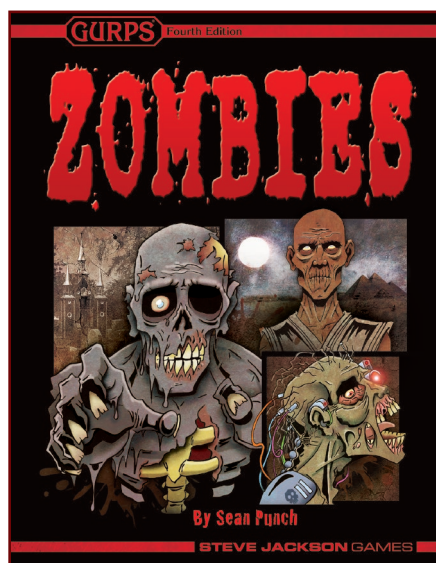
And that's a shame! Death is more than just the end of life, especially in myth and legend. The descent into the underworld is a common trope of the mythic journey. The personification of Death features prominently in Terry Pratchett's Discworld series (and, of course, that same cloaked figure can feature as prominently as you'd like if you're playing in the world of the just-released *Discworld Roleplaying Game*). Necromancy and strange powers that bend reality make for a great hook.

Allowing the veil to be thinned slightly between the worlds of the living and the dead can be the source of adventures. And if you haven't given much thought to the role of death in your game, doing so can open up more possibilities (see pp. 36-37 for food for thought).

GURPS has always been a game of possibilities, changes, and whole new opportunities with each campaign. (We've even started bringing print books "back from the dead" with eagerly awaited new printings of *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, *GURPS Thaumatology*, and *GURPS Magic!*) Don't fear the reaper; invite him to the table and get ready for the game of your life!

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of beginnings and endings, each issue of *Pyramid* is a beginning and ending of its own. . . and we love to know your thoughts! Was this theme to die for? Let us know by dropping a line at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the lively group online at forums.sjgames.com.



Additional Material: Jason "PK" Levine, Phil Masters, and William H. Stoddard

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NECRO-PSI

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

Why should magic-wielding necromancers and mystics have all the fun with reanimated corpses? Some stories portray *psychic* abilities as a way to animate and manipulate

the dead. This article presents a new form of psionic powers, Necrokinesis, that does all that and more.

NECROKINESIS

Necrokinesis is part psychic vampirism, part psychokinesis, and part ESP. Like Ergokinesis (*GURPS Psionic Powers*, pp. 30-37), it's split into three separate, but related powers. *Animakinesis* is the direct manipulation of the soul or spirit (or whatever passes for it in the campaign). *Thanatokinesis* is the ability to animate, communicate with, and control the dead. *Umbrakinesis* allows the manipulation of shadows and darkness. In some campaigns, these three divisions may be completely separate powers – ask the GM.

Power Modifier: Every ability in this power has the limitation Necrokinesis, -10%. This reflects that it is part of this power and uses the rules under *How Psi Works (Psionic Powers*, pp. 6-11).

ANIMAKINESIS

Animakinesis abilities allow the necro-psi to interact with the spirits of the dead. It also helps with manipulating whatever passes for the soul in the campaign setting. In some worlds, Astral Projection may be a part of Animakinesis or vice versa. Regardless, Spirit Communication (*Psionic Powers*, p. 43) and Aura Reading (*Psionic Powers*, p. 46) are both Animakinesis powers.

Soul Sight

7/14/21/25 points for levels 1-4

Skill: Soul Sight (IQ/Hard).

Deeper than merely reading an aura, this ability allows you to see into the depths of a target's *soul*. This only works

on beings who have a soul (GM's judgment; by default, living beings of IQ 6+ can be affected). Roll a Quick Contest of your skill vs. the subject's Will. Success gives you +3 on Detect Lies, Fortune-Telling, and Psychology against the subject. This bonus also applies to skill rolls of a spiritual nature (e.g., Exorcism for helping a possessed subject or Religious Ritual for confession) *instead* of detecting impostors (p. B51).

This ability can tell you if the subject is possessed or under any sort of mental control. You can also determine the person's current general spiritual state (e.g., any major sins or trespasses) and identify mental disadvantages. Success reveals appropriate quirks or disadvantages, up to -5 points per point of success; e.g., a success by 3 could identify one -15 point disadvantage, or multiple disadvantages totaling -15 points, such as Bully (15) [-5] and Bad Temper (12) [-10].

The GM can add other effects to this ability to suit the campaign.

At level 1, Soul Sight requires a touch *and* you must lock eyes with your target. At level 2, you need only see his eyes. At level 3, you can use it at range, but you suffer a skill penalty of -1/yard. At level 4, you use normal range penalties (p. B550).

Statistics: Detect Souls (Link, +10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Necrokinesis, -10%; Requires IQ vs. Will roll, -10%; Vision-Based, -20%; Vision-Based, Reversed, -20%) [4] + Empathy (Link, +10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Necrokinesis, -10%; Requires IQ vs. Will roll, -10%; Vision-Based, -20%; Vision-Based, Reversed, -20%) [3]. **Notes:** Empathy trades the bonus to notice impostors for a similar bonus to assist with spiritual rolls. Further levels remove Vision-Based, Reversed from both traits [8 + 6]; then replace Melee Attack with Short-Range 1 [12 + 9]; then remove Short-Range [14 + 11].

You Can Necromance If You Want To

Necromantic spells from *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Magic: Death Spells* may provide inspiration for creating new Necrokinesis powers. For example, Death Vision might be an Affliction bestowing the subject with "Visions (Overwhelming Aspected)" (*Psionic Powers*, p. 39). When magic-based necromancy and Necrokinesis abilities interact, treat Magery as Necrokinesis Power Talent and the activation or spell skill roll as a psionic skill roll.

Show Me Your Soul

Hard

Default: Soul Sight-8. Cannot exceed Soul Sight.

You see the acts, deeds, and past actions that shaped the target. This gives you +2 on Influence skills, Tactics, and Strategy rolls in situations where knowing what your target would do is useful.

Moreover, the bonus to Detect Lies, Fortune-Telling, Psychology, and spiritual skill rolls increases to +4. For an extra -10 to your roll (which can be bought off), you get an instant “replay” of those events.

Sin Eater

Default: Soul Sight-10. Cannot exceed Soul Sight.

You can consume the sins of your target. This enables *truly* repentant subjects to buy off unwholesome disadvantages such as Sadism or Bully. It may also warrant the purchase of a perk “Spiritually Clean” allowing automatic entrance into whatever afterlife is appropriate and/or never becoming a ghost with “unfinished business.” It may also permit buying off quirks like Damned (**GURPS Power-Ups 6: Quirks**, p. 34). Other effects vary from setting to setting. For example, a setting using the rules for *Power Corrupts (GURPS Horror*, pp. 146-148) might convert disadvantages removed in this way into corruption points on a 1:1 basis. The sin eater can then use the normal rules to shed these points.

Spectral Surge

19 points/level

Skill: Spectral Surge (Will/Hard).

You can disrupt the energies of nearby spiritual beings. This affects only insubstantial foes, including for this purpose any spirits who are *normally* insubstantial but are temporarily materialized. Pick a focal point anywhere you can see (or similarly sense) and roll a Quick Contest of your skill (plus long-distance modifiers) against the Will of every being within two yards. Those who lose take 2 points of corrosion damage per level.

Statistics: Corrosion Attack 2 points (Insubstantial Only, -30%; Materialized spirits are valid targets, +5%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Malediction 3, +200%; Necrokinesis, -10%) [19/level].

Auric Surge

Hard

Default: Spectral Surge-8. Cannot exceed Spectral Surge.

Spectral Surge becomes an aura (p. B102). This means that any spirit within two yards of you automatically takes damage. This effect lasts for one minute, but you may pay 1 FP to continue using it. This requires no further roll.

Cyclic

Hard

Default: Spectral Surge-8. Cannot exceed Spectral Surge.

Your attack continues to damage the target even if the being leaves your area of effect. Every 10 seconds, the target must make another Will roll against your original margin or take *half* your normal damage. This ends after a minute.

Spirit Fire

Hard

Default: Spectral Surge-1. Cannot exceed Spectral Surge.

Your attack gains the incendiary modifier (p. B105) and causes those affected to burst into colored flame (any color but a normal one).

Hard

ADDITIONAL ANIMAKINESIS ABILITIES

Manipulating souls (and/or spirits) can mean different things in different settings. The following advantages make good starting points for those who wish to build new Animakinesis abilities: Binding (with Unbreakable); Channeling; Innate Attacks (with Affects Insubstantial); Medium; Damage Resistance (with Limited, Spiritual attacks, -40%); and Telekinesis.

It's particularly common for necro-psi to become ghosts or astral beings after death (e.g., “Ascension”). Represent this as Unkillable 3 (Necrokinesis, -10%; Reincarnation, Free-Willed Spirit or Apparition, -20%; Requires Will Roll, -5%) [98] with One Use Only (x1/5 cost). Final cost becomes 20 points. This requires a Will-6 roll (a necro-psi *can* spend points to learn an Ascension psionic skill for this one use); failure means the ability does not function, and the character is subject to the campaign's default regarding ghosts. Success means the psi gains the Astral Entity meta-trait (p. B263), while success by 3 or more results in the psi gaining the Spirit meta-trait (p. B263). *Critical success* means the subject gains the Spirit meta-trait *and* immediately gains 1d×5 character points of useful traits or advantages as the GM deems appropriate. *Critical failure* means the target cannot be contacted, raised from the dead, etc. He obliterated his own soul while trying to ascend!

THANATOKINESIS

Thanatokinesis abilities help necro-psi to directly interface their minds with corpses. This allows them to control a dead body and “pilot” it, cause mortification in the living, and in general control death and the dead.

Like psychic healing, much of Thanatokinesis boils down to a kind of cellular-level telekinesis. The core of the power could be considered a macabre fusion of healing and psychokinesis, and in some campaigns, the individual skills might be in different power groups – which would mean a fully functional thanatokinetic requires access to *several* power groups (Healing, Psychokinesis, ESP, etc.)! If it weren't for that pesky psychological block on sensing or manipulating anything but dead bodies, that is . . .

Corpse Sense

26/35/50/63 points for levels 1-4

Skill: Corpse Sense (Per/Hard).

This ability has two functions. First, it permits you to locate dead bodies (*including* undead, psychically animated corpses, etc.). This ability functions like *Psi Sense (Psionic Powers*, p. 41), except that it only locates *dead bodies*.

The second function helps you to see the last thing a person saw before he died. This requires a skill roll at a penalty equal to the number of full days the subject has been dead, and you only get *one* try. At level 1, you must make skin-to-skin contact (add 3 to rolls if you taste the corpse's blood, stick your tongue on its eyeball, etc.). At level 2, you need only touch your target. At level 3, you have a penalty of -1/yard from the corpse. At level 4, you take normal range penalties (p. B550).

Statistics: Detect Corpses (Necrokinesis, -10%; Reflexive, +40%; Vague, -50%) [8] + Mind Probe (Based on Per, +20%; Contact Agent, -30%; Cosmic, Works on the dead, +50%; Necrokinesis, -10%; Only for last sight before death, -40%) [18]. Mind Probe has the Feature "Time penalty replaces the normal Quick Contest." Further levels remove Vague from Detect [11] and Contact Agent from Mind Probe [24]; then add Precise, Nontargeting to Detect [20] and add Ranged and Short-Range 1 to Mind Probe [30], and then Analyzing to Detect [30] and removes Short-Range from Mind Probe [33].

Exclusion

Hard

Default: Corpse Sense-2. Cannot exceed Corpse Sense.

As for *Psi Sense* technique (*Psionic Powers*, p. 41).

Flashes of Insight

Hard

Default: Corpse Sense-4. Cannot exceed Corpse Sense.

You're not restricted to the last moments of your target's life. Instead, make a skill roll with the normal penalties. Success means you can ask the subject a question and have it answered with the knowledge he had before his demise. Failure means you get no answer, but can try again at a cumulative -2. You only need to use this psi technique *once* (it lasts a full minute and each question takes only a second to ask and receive an answer). For a further -10 to your roll, you can take a mental "snapshot" of your subject's mind at death. A skill roll allows you to recall any information the subject knew when last probed *or* his personality (helping you to impersonate him with no Acting penalties). You may only store up to one such snapshot at a time. For an additional, -5 to your roll (which can be bought off), you may store up to your IQ + Talent in such snapshots.

Increased Range

Hard

Default: Corpse Sense-5. Cannot exceed Corpse Sense.

As for *Psi Sense* technique (*Psionic Powers*, p. 41).

Necrocontrol

30/40/50/60/70 points for levels 1-5*

Skill: Necrocontrol (Will/Hard).

You can animate and "pilot" a corpse. This must be a member of your own species, though see the Animalism psi technique (below). This requires a second of concentration, physical contact, and a Quick Contest of skill vs. the bodies'

previous HT (at +5 if it was properly buried or laid to rest). If you lose or tie, you are stunned for 1d seconds *and* cannot try to Necrocontrol the subject again without using the New Approach psi technique (p. 7). If the corpse has some other animating force (e.g., a demon or another necro-psi,) you must win a Quick Contest of Skill vs. the possessor's Will or Will-based skill to usurp control.

If you succeed, you imbue the body with psychic energy and project part of your mind into it. Your body goes into a trance, slumping to the ground if you were standing. You retain your IQ, Perception, Will, and all mental traits (including skills), but you use the subject's ST, DX, HT, and physical traits. You may stay in control for as long as you wish; the subject does not get further resistance rolls. Of course, if someone *else* attempts to possess the same body you're running, you'll be resisting with your Will-based Necrocontrol skill.

Controlling a corpse is difficult at lower power levels. At level 1, you have -8 to *all* physical rolls (against ST, DX, or HT, or any skills based on those attributes) and active defenses. Passive rolls (resistance rolls, rolls to avoid blood loss, etc.) are unaffected. It requires a solid 40 hours of practice in this body, not necessarily consecutive, to remove this penalty.

| Level | Affected Rolls | Active Defenses |
|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1 | -8 | -4 |
| 2 | -4 | -2 |
| 3 | -2 | -1 |
| 4 | -1 | -1 |
| 5 | - | - |

Statistics: Possession (Variant; Necrokinesis, -10%; No Memory Access, -10%; Poor Control -8, 40 hours of practice, -40%; Specialized, Human corpses only, -60%; Telecontrol, +50%) [30]. Further levels reduce Poor Control to -4 [40], then -2 [50], then -1 [60], and then remove Poor Control [70].

* Further levels may be purchased at the GM's option. Additional levels cost 50 points per level and permit you to control an additional corpse at a time. This treats Telecontrol as a leveled modifier with each level allowing you to possess another subject.

Animalism

Hard

Default: Necrocontrol-4. Cannot exceed Necrocontrol.

You can take over an animal (or any other normal life form that exists in your world) instead of a human. Subjects must weigh a half pound or more – no taking over a fly or cockroach – though the GM may allow *multiple* dead creatures of the same type to be controlled as one being (e.g., a swarm of dead flies).

Chronic

Hard

Default: Necrocontrol-2. Cannot exceed Necrocontrol.

When you exit a corpse, you can leave a "back door" that lets you possess it again *without* a Quick Contest. This permits you to buy your former host as a Puppet (this costs 3 points instead of 5 points, because it's a dead body).

You can only use this psi technique if you have enough unspent points to buy a Puppet at the time you leave your host.

Distant Use

Hard

Default: Necrocontrol-4. Cannot exceed Necrocontrol.

You do not have to touch your subject. Apply normal range penalties (p. B550) to your skill roll. If it is over 15 yards away, use long-distance modifiers (p. B241) instead, at an extra -5.

Ectoplasmic Overload

Hard

Default: Necrocontrol-10. Cannot exceed Necrocontrol.

By agitating ectoplasm, you may *explode* your dead host! The flying body parts (unnaturally colored flames optional) will injure those around it. Damage is equal to $6d \times (ST / 10)$; use the corpse's ST to determine damage. This technique requires that you spend 1 HP (not 2 FP) and you must make a HT-based skill roll or be stunned for 3d6 seconds.

Independent Animation

Hard

Default: Necrocontrol-8. Cannot exceed Necrocontrol.

You can animate a corpse "subconsciously," allowing it to function without requiring you to be in a trance. It remains under your control when you focus on it, and will do nothing that would deliberately harm you! (Accidental harm is possible; everyone stubs their toes occasionally.)

Animated subjects act with their own ST and use the higher of your IQ or DX for their DX; their Move cannot exceed your margin of victory in the Quick Contest, but is otherwise what their base Move would be. If your subject can fly naturally (e.g., it has wings), this inflicts a further -1 to skill roll.

This *replaces* your ability to control other dead bodies while the ones controlled by this technique are active. Those who have *permanent* dead minions should see *You Can Bring Your Dead Friends to Life* (below).

The number of "zombies" you can control depends on your Necrocontrol level and their ST. For example, if you had Necrocontrol 2, you could animate two corpses with a ST of 10 each, and you could not try to animate another corpse while they were active.

| Necrocontrol Level | Maximum Total ST* |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 15 |
| 2 | 20 |
| 3 | 25 |
| 4 | 30 |
| 5 | 35 |

* If more levels are allowed, then each additional level adds 25 levels of ST.

New Approach

Hard

Default: Necrocontrol-5. Cannot exceed Necrocontrol.

If you fail to control a given corpse, you can use this technique to try again, but each attempt is at a permanent,

cumulative -2 (for that subject), which cannot be bought off. Although success means that you take over body, the success neither worsens nor erases this penalty.

Secondary Senses

Hard

Default: Necrocontrol-5. Cannot exceed Necrocontrol.

You retain some consciousness in your own body and may take actions, move about, etc. However, all rolls (including Sense rolls, active defenses, etc.) to do so are at -4. For another -5 (which can be bought off), this penalty is removed.

You Can Bring Your Dead Friends to Life

GURPS Zombies has innumerable ideas for campaigns featuring undead. Those with Necrocontrol (pp. 6-7) can use the Independent Animation technique (above) to temporarily gain several minions. Necro-psi who have *permanent* undead lackeys buy Allies with Minion (+50%) and Thanatokinesis (-10%). In most cases, the GM should limit the maximum number of allies the necro-psi can have. Look up the level of the psi's Necrokinesis Talent in the "Size" column of the Size and Speed/Range Table (p. B550) and read "Linear Measurement" as "minions" instead of yards; e.g., Necrokinesis Talent 2 allows up to five minions.

Necrotic Blast

21 points/level

Skill: Necrotic Blast (IQ/Hard).

You can project a blast of negatively charged raw psychic energy. This attack only works against living subjects. It does 1d toxic damage per level that *ignores* non-living DR, and has Acc 3, Range 100, and RoF 1. Additionally, tangible subjects who receive damage in excess of 2/3 their HP suffer -5 on all rolls to resist mind control, possession, etc. until the injury is healed. This attack affects insubstantial beings normally, but doesn't inflict penalties to resist mind control.

Statistics: Toxic Attack (Alternative Enhancements, Affects Insubstantial or Symptoms, Disadvantage, Susceptible to Mind Control 5 at 2/3 HP, +25%; Based on IQ, Own Roll, +20%; Cosmic, Ignores non-living armor, +200%; Increased 1/2D, x10, +15%; Necrokinesis, -10%) [14/level].

Electronic Disruption

Hard

Default: Necrotic Blast-2. Cannot exceed Necrotic Blast.

You can target electronics or beings with the Electrical disadvantage (p. B134) – your attack still doesn't harm them, but it may disable them if the damage rolled is high enough. This mimics the effects some ghosts and spiritual entities have on electrical devices.

Spiritual Suppression

Hard

Default: Necrotic Blast-4. Cannot exceed Necrotic Blast.

Your targets suffer a penalty to mind-control rolls (as above) when you inflict 1/2 HP instead of 2/3 HP *and* they take -4 on Will rolls at 2/3 HP.

Additional Thanatokinesis Abilities

The following advantages make good starting points for those who wish to build new Thanatokinesis abilities: Affliction with Coma, Heart Attack, Disadvantage, Terminally Ill, or similar; Detect for dead bodies, ghosts, undead, etc.; Innate Attacks (Toxic or Corrosion only); and Leech, but not with Steal (Other Score).

You have complete control over this ability. You may, for instance, leave holes for sunlight to get through for you and your friends (though any foes in the same hex would benefit as well). While you actively concentrate, you may exert this control reflexively and fluidly; e.g., moving patches of darkness around to effortlessly follow the movements of nearby enemies while keeping your allies in the light.

The GM may allow levels higher than 10. If so, additional levels cost 6 points and increase the *radius* of the darkness you control. Consult the Illumination Table (below) to determine appropriate levels of light.

Statistics: Control Visible Light (Accessibility, Darkness effects only, -20%; Necrokinesis, -10%; Reduced Fatigue Cost 2, +40%) [11/level].

Deep Shadows

Hard

Default: Varies. Cannot exceed Shadow Control.

You can extend the time your control lasts. Consult the chart below to determine the penalty to your skill roll and how long your control lasts.

| Time | Skill Penalty | Time | Skill Penalty |
|-------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| 15 seconds | -1 | 15 minutes | -8 |
| 30 seconds | -2 | 30 minutes | -9 |
| 60 seconds | -3 | 50 minutes | -10 |
| 1.5 minutes | -4 | 1.5 hours | -11 |
| 3 minutes | -5 | 3 hours | -12 |
| 5 minutes | -6 | 5 hours | -13 |
| 10 minutes | -7 | | |

If the GM permits, permanently infusing an area with darkness may be possible at -14. (Note: The values above have been rounded for ease of play.)

UMBRAKINESIS

Umbrakinesis abilities allow the necro-psi to control shadows and darkness (concepts that are often associated with death and the dead). If Photokinesis (*Psionic Powers*, pp. 34-37) is a separate power, the GM may wish to merge Umbrakinesis abilities into that power to further expand it.

Shadow Control

11 points/level

Skill: Shadow Control (IQ/Hard).

You can manipulate shadows and darkness. Take a Concentrate maneuver and make a skill roll. Success means you can increase the local Vision penalty for darkness (p. B358) by up to -1 per level. This extends from your hex outward at a rate of one additional hex per level. This effect lasts for 10 seconds. You can never reduce the Vision penalty beyond -10.

ILLUMINATION TABLE

| Penalty | Approximate Lux | Natural Light | Artificial Light |
|---------|-----------------|--------------------------|--|
| -10 | 0 | Total darkness | Total darkness |
| -9 | 0.0001 | Overcast moonless night | - |
| -8 | 0.0005 | Starlight through clouds | - |
| -7 | 0.002 | Starlight | - |
| -6 | 0.01 | Quarter moon* | - |
| -5 | 0.05 | Half moon* | Indicator LED† |
| -4 | 0.2 | Full moon* | - |
| -3 | 1 | Deep twilight* | Candlelight† |
| -2 | 5 | Twilight* | Street lights (side road); gaslight†; cell-phone screen† |
| -1 | 20 | Sunrise or sunset | Street lights (main road); torch†; standard flashlight† |
| 0 | 100 | Very overcast day | Living room; 120W bulb†; high-quality flashlight† |

* Assumes a clear sky; apply another -1 for heavy clouds. Above the Arctic Circle or below the Antarctic, moonlight is weaker; add another -1.

† The light source is a single, nearby point. The listed modifier assumes one yard of distance from this. At two yards, apply another -1. At greater distances, add *half* the range penalty (p. B550), rounded for the worse, to this -1; e.g., a candle gives -3 at one yard, -4 out to two yards, -5 out to five yards, -6 out to 10 yards, and so on. Stop once the penalty reaches the area's ambient illumination level – a light source will never make things darker!

UMBRA OBSCURA

Many psionic powers in fiction blur, hide, or otherwise mask the user in some way. The following new variations and modifiers for Obscure can help the GM build new powers.

Obscure

see p. B72

Levels of Obscure higher than 10 are possible. Each level beyond the first gives a further -1 to rolls to discern the subject. At level 20 or more, the subject doesn't even get a Sense roll if his final skill is 2 or less! Even further levels are possible for campaigns with attributes that are beyond the human norm.

The GM may wish to allow Obscure for non-senses, as long as they "record" or "sense" information *somehow*. Examples of other "senses" are:

Emotions: Gives a penalty to rolls to discern your current emotional state. This *always* includes the following: Body Language, Detect Lies, Criminology, Interrogation, and Psychology on you, as well as some Influence skills when the GM thinks understanding the subject's emotional state would be important. It also includes uses of Empathy or Sensitive and similar traits.

Memory: Gives a penalty to rolls to recognize you in a lineup, in photographs or videos, IQ rolls to recall specifics about you, all attempts to gather facts mundanely, and so on. The higher the penalty, the harder it is for someone to recall who you are. Obscure 10 (Memory) means no one *ever* remembers who you are when Obscure is active; you're just another face in the crowd! These effects persist even after your advantage is off. For example, if your ability was on while you eluded the police, and you later turned it off, the police take a penalty to rolls to recall you equal to your level. If you came across them again without Obscure active, they'd remember that normally, but not what you did before.

Mundane Predictions: Gives a penalty to other's rolls to use Intelligence Analysis, Tactics, Strategy, and similar "planning" skills against you. At the GM's option, Obscure (Mundane Predictions) might be a normal (if cinematic) capability. Some people are just hard to plan for!

Special Enhancements

Cosmic, Massively Extended: Your Obscure covers all senses that are related to it in even the most tenuous way. For example, Obscure Vision with this enhancement could take "Cosmic, All Mundane Senses" and it would affect all non-paranormal, non-machine senses. This can be taken multiple times for different senses. For example, you could add "Cosmic, All Supernatural Senses" and "Cosmic, All Machine Senses" and cover virtually every sense! +300%.

Stealthy, Leveled: As per the enhancement on p. B72, but can be bought in levels. Each level costs +10% per -1 to notice your Obscure's effects.

Special Limitations

Anti-Targeting: Obscure normally penalizes anyone using the specified sense to perceive you *or* attack you. Yours only applies to the latter. Do not subtract your level from Sense rolls to notice you, but anyone trying to target you in combat using the obscured sense takes a penalty equal to your level. This is usually combined with Defensive; if not, the sense is blocked for you as normal. -20%

No Area Effect: Your Obscure doesn't extend beyond the hex you're in (or one hex if ranged). It still affects all your carried equipment or clothing. -50%.

Reversed: Instead of giving a penalty to Sense rolls, Obscure gives a *bonus*. This works best with the Ranged modifier (p. B72). For example, "Obscure Vision (Reversed, -0%)" would give others a bonus to see you or hit you in combat. -0%.

Gloom

Hard

Default: Shadow Control-10. Cannot exceed Shadow Control.

Your darkness doesn't just affect Vision rolls – it affects *all* of your subject's senses. Those within your radius are effectively in a sensory deprivation tank! For a further -4 to your skill roll, you can *also* affect either machines *or* supernatural senses. For -8 to your roll, you can affect *both*.

Ranged

Hard

Default: Shadow Control-4. Cannot exceed Shadow Control.

You can project your darkness up to 100 yards from yourself. For an additional -4 to your roll, you can project it to anywhere you can see.

Shadow Light

Hard

Default: Shadow Control-2. Cannot exceed Shadow Control.

You can darken an area *around* a subject and focus light in the area so others gain a bonus to see or attack that person equal to your power's level. For example, if you had Shadow Control 3 and used this technique, you'd give others +3 to Vision rolls to see your target or rolls to attack your victim.

Silhouette

Varies + 21/37/56/72/90/109 for levels 1-6*

Skill: Silhouette (Will/Hard).

You can become the stuff of darkness and shadows. By concentrating for a specific duration (see the table, p. 8) and making a skill roll, you can shift your body into the shadow realm and mentally control your shadow from there.

You cannot bring any equipment with you, but see *Bulk Compensation* (below). Your shadow looks like you and whatever you were wearing at the time.

Only the most powerful psis can remain in this shadow-state indefinitely; all others will eventually shift back to the material world, their shadows reverting to normal. See the table, below. Afterward you must wait five minutes before you can use this ability again.

While in this shadowy form, all *physical* attacks do half damage, *energy-based* attacks do normal damage, and *light-based* attacks do double damage. Psionic powers and other purely mental abilities affect you normally.

The Silhouette power does have a few drawbacks. While in shadow form, you cannot take any physical actions other than speaking or touching (though you still can't pick anything up) and must move *along* other surfaces (just like a shadow).

Finally, while in your shadow form, you inflict *thrust*-based fatigue damage with a touch, treating your Will as ST for the purpose of determining basic damage (pp. B15-16). If you injure the target, he must roll against Will, at -1 for every 2 full points of injury, or make an immediate Fright Check (p. B360) at a penalty equal to half his margin of failure.

In some settings, this is a variation of *Astral Projection* (*Psionic Powers*, p. 26), and your body may be unconscious while your shadow moves about. In others, it might be a form of world-jumping (p. B64), phasing part-way into a different realm.

| Level | Activation Time | Duration | Damage |
|-------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1 | 10 minutes | 30 minutes | thrust+1 fatigue |
| 2 | 1 minute | 30 minutes | thrust+2 fatigue |
| 3 | 1 minute | 1 hour | thrust+3 fatigue |
| 4 | 4 seconds | 1 hour | thrust+1d fatigue |
| 5 | 2 seconds | 12 hours | thrust+1d+1 fatigue |
| 6 | 1 second | Indefinitely | thrust+1d+2 fatigue |

Statistics: Fatigue Attack 1 point (Accessibility, Only in Shadow Form, -10%; Based on Will, Variant, +20%; Melee Attack, Reach C, Cannot Parry, -35%; Necrokinesis, -10%; Side Effect, Fright Check†, +200%; ST-Based, +100%) [11/level] + unarmed damage modified by Side Effect (per *GURPS Power-Ups 4: Enhancements*, pp. 9-10) [varies] + Shadow Form (Immediate Preparation Required, 10 minutes, -45%;

Additional Umbrakinesis Abilities

The following advantages make good starting points for new Umbrakinesis abilities: Dark Vision; Night Vision; Obscure, against any type of vision or visual targeting sense (p. 9); Protected Power; and Protected Sense (Vision). Additionally, just about any Vision-based Affliction may be possible. Innate attacks could manifest as conjured shadows that damage your foe with darkness or cold.

Light Sensitive†, -10%; Maximum Duration, 30 minutes, -25%; Necrokinesis, -10%; Touch (*GURPS Horror*, p. 16), +5%) [10].

Further levels raise Fatigue Attack [11/level] and modify Shadow Form as follows: change Immediate Preparation Required to 1 minute [15], then change Maximum Duration to 1 hour [23], then replace Immediate Preparation Required with Takes Extra Time 2 [28], then lower Takes Extra Time to 1 and Maximum Duration to 12 hours [35], and then remove Takes Extra Time and Maximum Duration [43].

* This is a flat surcharge in addition to the per-level cost of this ability. To find it, figure your basic thrust damage as if your Will were ST; the surcharge is 20 points for each die of thrust damage. If your thrust is not in whole dice, treat each ±1 as ±6 points. For example, Will 18 would give thrust 1d+2, for a surcharge of 32 points (20 + 6 + 6); thus, level 1 would cost 32 + 21 = 53 points, level 2 would cost 32 + 37 = 69 points, level 3 would cost 32 + 56 = 88 points, and so on.

† New modifier for Side Effect or Symptom; this changes the characteristic to resist the from HT to Will and inflicts a Fright Check on a failed roll.

‡ You take double damage from light instead of 50% more.

I'm not afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens.

– Woody Allen

Bulk Compensation

Hard

Default: Varies. Cannot exceed Silhouette.

You can shift more gear (or people, if your limit is high enough!) into the shadow realm. The default is Silhouette-1 for No Encumbrance, Silhouette-2 for Light, Silhouette-5 for Medium, Silhouette-10 for Heavy, and Silhouette-15 for Extra-Heavy.

Living Shadow

Hard

Default: Silhouette-2 or more. Cannot exceed Silhouette.

You can move around normally and are not restricted to moving along surfaces.

Perfect Darkness

Hard

Default: Silhouette-3 or more. Cannot exceed Silhouette.

You don't suffer extra damage from light-based attacks. For an extra -6 to your skill roll, divide all physical damage by 3 – or, for -12, divide all physical damage by 4.

Shadow-Walker

Hard

Default: Silhouette-10. Cannot exceed Silhouette.

Instead of shifting your form into a shadow, you transport yourself to the *realm* of shadows. This allows you to travel faster (assuming a high skill) than you may be capable of normally. Higher levels increase the speed at which you travel.

| Level | Speed |
|-------|------------------------|
| 1 | Skill/2 per second |
| 2 | Skill per second |
| 3 | Skill × 2 per second |
| 4 | Skill × 20 per second |
| 5 | Skill × 100 per second |
| 6 | Skill × 350 per second |

NECROKINESIS PERKS

The following can be taken by necro-*psis*.

Candle in the Dark

The spirits of the dead perceive you as a bright light in the astral plane. When interacting with ghosts, you gain +1 to all reaction rolls, unless they are violent or menacing (poltergeist, vengeful spirits, etc.) – in which case they covet your inner light for themselves, and you take -1 to these reaction rolls instead! As a side effect, if you are in or traveling the Astral Plane, you may choose to produce light from your body equivalent to a torch (lights a two-yard radius). This is also an Astral Projection (*Psionic Powers*, p. 29) perk.

Concealing Shadows

You get +1 to Camouflage and Stealth as long as you are standing *still* in shadow (Vision penalties of -4 or greater). The GM may opt to make this a leveled trait, with each level giving a further +1 to rolls, up to your Power Talent's level.

Corpse Whisperer

You can speak with the recently deceased dead as long as their vocal chords and body are still intact (e.g., no damage to the neck and not below -5×HP). You must make an IQ + Talent roll and spend 1 HP by bleeding into your subject's mouth. There is no penalty if the subject died within the last hour, but

the roll suffers a cumulative -1 per hour thereafter. The subject can only recall the facts of its death and cherished memories (loved ones, passions, etc.), and is considered to have an IQ for understanding questions equal to *your* (IQ + Talent) / 2.

Necrosist

You may attempt to use the Exorcism skill (p. B168) without the usual -4 penalty for lacking “holy” traits (e.g., Blessed or True Faith). Your mere attunement to spirits is sufficient.

Shadowplay

You can manipulate nearby shadows into simple shapes or forms. This requires a DX roll; the better the roll, the more complex the shadow. *Animating* shadows requires a Concentrate maneuver, 1 FP per minute, and persists for 1d seconds after you stop concentrating. Up to one hex's worth of shadows may be animated at a time. Those with Artist (Illusion) may substitute a DX-based skill roll.

Strong Soul‡

You have +1 to resist any attempts to possess you (whether you're unconscious or awake). This stacks with any other bonuses you might have against possession. You may have up to three levels of this perk.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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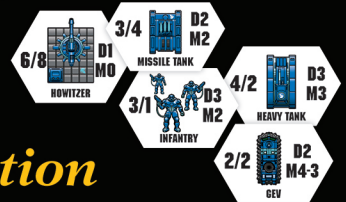
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WHAT DOESN'T KILL ME MAKES ME STRONGER

BY SCOTT ROCHAT

In the golden age of dungeon fantasy, before history became legend and *Legend* became a Tom Cruise movie, no commodity was more sought after than experience points. Swords and rings and ogre-strength gauntlets might be cool, but XPs let you level up, which gave you hit points by the gazillion and granted saving throw bonuses strong enough to face down any medusa's stare or poisoned orcish arrow.

And how do you earn XPs? Why, by killing monsters and taking their stuff, of course.

GURPS Dungeon Fantasy doesn't ignore this. Indeed, there are two supplements dedicated to "leveling up" – appropriately titled *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level* and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 11: Power-Ups* – replete with conflict-based advancement and cool character options. But even the joy of being a catfolk ninja-bard can seem incomplete without the lovely, lovely bonuses that a new level could bring, earned by the might of your sword and the cooling carrion of your monstrous foes.

This article brings that magical time back.

The following options can be used in conjunction with the *Advancement* chapter of *Dungeon Fantasy 3*, though they're really aiming at different goals. The *Advancement* rules reward you with character points, which allow your character to grow more powerful over time. These rules are about awarding *Kill Points*, which help you to get powerful. Which lets you kill more stuff. And isn't that what any decent dungeon rat is after anyway?

Get points when you kill stuff. Which help you get more powerful. Which lets you kill more stuff.

TAKING THEM DOWN

The concept behind Kill Points is the same one that's motivated dungeoners from the start: nastier monsters should give bigger rewards. But how do you measure "nasty" in *GURPS*?

This could get subjective and metaphysical – but that wouldn't be dungeon fantasy! Instead, like any good munchkin,

go to the numbers. *Which* numbers depend on just how much trouble you want to take.

Simple Formula

For the "roll and shout" GM working on the fly, take the monster's attack roll (or DX level, if it has none) and multiply by its total dice of damage. Divide that in half to determine a "base" Kill Point value. Since some creatures are either extra tough or extra crunchy, multiply by 1/3 for opponents with fewer than 10 HP, by 2 if they have more than 20 HP, by 3 if they're Insubstantial or Diffuse ("U can't touch this!"), or by 5 if their attack is Cosmic or otherwise clobbers anyone it's directed at ("I gotcha!").

So, for example:

- An acid spider has an attack roll of 15 and 2 total dice of damage. (Don't worry about the adds or the lingering after-effects.) That's $30/2=15$ base points. But acid spiders have 26 HP, so multiply by 2 to get 30 KP.
- A dire wolf has an attack roll of 14 and 1 total die of damage. That's $14/2 = 7$ KP.
- A doomchild has an attack roll of 18 and 7 total dice of damage. That's $126/2 = 63$. But doomchildren are fragile things with only 8 HP, so divide that by 3 to get 21.
- A toxifier doesn't have a normal attack roll; instead, use its DX of 14. It does 1 die of total damage, so $14/2 = 7$. But its attack is a contact agent that forces *everyone* nearby to roll resistance, so multiply by 5 to get 35.
- A mindwarper has an attack roll of 20 and 15 total dice of damage. (Hey, Compartmentalized Minds are *evil*.) That's $300/2 = 150$ KP.

Finally, to make sure your greatest foes draw the PCs' complete attention (or at least stir their avarice), apply the following modifiers, based on the power levels in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons* (pp. 27-28):

- *Fodder*: Halve the KP total, rounding down. This normally applies to things like wild animals, horde monsters (like zombies or orcs), and dim-witted mooks.
- *Worthy*: No change to the KP value.

● *Boss*: Double the KP total! This goes for any monster or opponent that the GM deems to be especially dangerous or noteworthy; this can be considered the Kill Point version of an “impressive feat” (*Dungeon Fantasy 3*, p. 42). For especially Big Bads – the sort whose death destroys entire dungeons and Empires of Darkness – the GM can choose to triple the points, which the PCs may quickly need if they achieve such an apocalyptic success (See *Pumping Them Up*, p. 16).

If a campaign also uses quickly disposable minions, they deliver Kill Points at 1/10 the base value. Again, round down, with a minimum of 1 KP.

With these modifiers, a horde zombie (6 KP) would be worth 1 KP as a minion, 3 KPs as fodder, or 6 if somehow intended as a worthy. (Making the shambling corpse a boss is either a brilliant plot twist or proof of a Major Delusion.)

DIE-DIE Formula

The “simple way” has the advantage of speed, but it also means that a creature with several dangerous abilities may garner fewer Kill Points than a brute with One Big Score. If this offends a group’s sense of Truth, Honor and the Pillager’s Way, a GM can take time to size up the threat, using the suitably named DIE-DIE formula:

● *Damage*: Take the maximum damage of the creature’s main attack. For a stone golem with a maul (3d+8 damage), that comes to 26 points.

● *Inaccuracy*: If the main attack’s chance to hit is 16 or higher, leave the point value unchanged. Take off 5 points for a 13-15 chance to hit, 10 points for a 10-12 chance, and so on. (This can take the total into negative numbers.) Our stone golem has a skill of 13 with his maul, so we subtract 5 points from the total, leaving us with 21 points.

● *Extras*: For each meaningful (GM’s call) additional attack ability, add 10%, rounded down. Besides its single weapon, a stone golem also knows the Brawling skill, adding another 2 points to its value for a total of 23 points.

● *Defense*: Add all the character points that have gone into defensive abilities, including natural DR, traits that resist common spell effects, and extra hit points and fatigue points beyond what ST and HT would normally allow. This is only fair – while most creatures can only use one or two attacks in a given turn, it’s likely that most or all of its defenses will apply simultaneously! A monster’s HT also counts here, but its

character point value is doubled since a high HT keeps a foe on its feet longer, making it *much* more of a challenge. For our stone golem, this means it gets to add the value of its HT 14 (40×2= 80 points), 10 extra HP (20 points), DR 4 (20 points), Doesn’t Breathe (20 points), Doesn’t Sleep (20 points), High Pain Threshold (10 points), Immunity to Metabolic Hazards (30 points), Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) (45 points), Pressure Support 3 (15 points), Unfazeable (15 points) and Vacuum Support (5 points) for a staggering 280 points on defense. This sentinel of stone now totals 303 points.

● *Infirmity*: If an ability or trait weakens combat defense, subtract its value in character points. That means our stalwart golem gets trimmed down a bit, losing points due to Fragile (Unnatural) (-50 points) and Unhealing (Total) (-30 points) for a total loss of -80 points. That still leaves it with 223 points, however!

● *Effectiveness*: Finally, factor in the power level. For epic-level Big Bads, leave the total unchanged. Otherwise, apply the following modifiers: boss, ×1/2; worthy, ×1/5; fodder, ×1/10; minion, ×1/100. In our dungeon, the stone golem is meant to be a significant threat, worthy of the adventurers’ steel. As a worthy, that makes him worth 223/5 = 44 KPs after rounding down. And a well-earned 44 points it is likely to be.

To make life a little easier, a pre-worked set of DIE-DIE Kill Point scores for base versions of most *Dungeon Fantasy* creatures can be found on pp. 18-21. The full range of power levels are provided for each creature, so if you really want a boss-level frost snake or a horde of minion mindwarpers, check the list and have at it.

However they’re figured, these KPs only go to the munchkin who lands the *final* blow. Yes, this reintroduces the concept of “kill stealing” in more unsavory (or calculating) parties, so make sure those attacks count! The sole exception to this is the supreme monster or villain of the adventure, which should require all the party’s talents to defeat and thus bestows its full Kill Point award on all the surviving adventurers.

My Old Hated Enemy

It’s well known that certain heroes have it in for certain monsters. A holy warrior may have vowed to destroy all demons he meets. A warrior princess of the elves goes into rage at the sight of an orc troop. And *everyone* knows about dwarves and dragons (especially the draconic barbecue joints).

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

Those who like to take extra company into the dungeon in the form of Allies may feel a little cheated by the “final blow” rule. After all, the monster was still killed by your points – so what if those points were spent on a faithful tiger companion instead of a high Axe/Mace skill?

The GM who feels merciful may rule that the Ally is simply one more “weapon” or “spell” that the PC can call upon, and award Kill Points to the controlling adventurer. This is especially recommended if the party includes Summoners from *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 9: Summoners*, who would otherwise have little opportunity to garner points at all.

If the GM insists on a stricter reading of the rules, however, players should take note and plan accordingly. Perhaps that faithful squire can cut off the monster’s escape, or the Merry Men can be used to soften up and restrain an opponent before the final blow. An inspired delver may find dozens of uses for “Team Hero” that still allow the monster-smiting to come from its proper source.

Still, there is the risk of a sidekick getting lucky. So if you’ve ever wondered why a hero or villain tells his numerous well-armed troops “Stand aside . . . this one’s mine,” it’s obviously to protect Kill Point totals!

The GM who wants to add this twist may give adventurers a 10% KP bonus when they slay a “mortal foe.” This must have a justification beyond “kill all monsters!” Suitable motivations can include an Enemy, Intolerance, a Higher Purpose, an Obsession, or even just a bit of predetermined campaign color (“The Thulid Barbarians of the North have long been tormented by ice snakes and bring a trophy home from every one they destroy”).

The GM determines whether a given opposition qualifies for the mortal-foe bonus, but flexibility is appropriate. If the necromancer’s guards are armed with blades forged from demonic iron, maybe the party’s holy warrior *should* be allowed to ignite his righteous anger and have at them.

Again, a hero must finish off the monster to claim the bonus. So don’t let anyone stand between you and your well-earned retribution!

Traps

All this may be fine and dandy for the kill-jockeys, but what about the more elegant problem-solvers? A hail of poisoned darts from the stonework can put down an adventurer as surely as the Forgotten Golem of Wang the Magnificent – “killing” the trap should be worth something, too. Reward your “lovable rogues” and curse-breakers for doing what they love most by using a similar method to determine KPs for their favorite dangers:

- *Damage:* As with a slain monster, a defeated trap has a starting Kill Point value equal to the maximum amount of damage it does. So, a spring-loaded 1d+5 crossbow has a base value of 11 KPs.

- *Inaccuracy:* If a trap requires a “to-hit” roll, use the same inaccuracy modifiers as on p. 14. Traps that *automatically* affect the first person to trigger them are treated as a skill of 16+ and take no inaccuracy penalties.

- *Extras:* If a trap has more than one attack or its main attack has a follow-up effect, add 10% of the base value for each “extra.”

- *Defense/Infirmity:* Traps normally lack the special defensive powers and weaknesses of monsters, so this is instead reflected by the modifiers to perceive or disarm the trap. Every -1 adds a point; every +1 subtracts a point.

- *Effectiveness:* As with monsters, a GM can decide that shutting down a particular trap is especially crucial or inconsequential to the story. Since the usual labels may not feel quite right (“Man, that trap was really boss!”), go ahead and change them to joke (×1/10), nuisance (×1/2), ordinary (×1), danger (×2) and deathtrap (×3) instead.

Example: If Sneaky Joe spots a suspicious floor tile (-2 to Per rolls) and shuts down the trigger (-3 to disarm) that would have sent Krigshen’s Deadly Ice Axe swinging down (13 or less to hit, 3d damage), Joe gets to collect 18 KPs, assuming that the trap is an ordinary threat.

Getting Sneaky

Not every trap deals damage so directly, though. What about vents that issue a Sleep pastille, or bracelets that shrink the wearer to 3” high, or guardian statues whose eyes freeze a trespasser in place?

Run the same formula, but assign a damage value of 6d for any effect that’s the equivalent of instant long-term coma or death (such as Flesh to Stone), 4d for any effect that’s the equivalent of immediate unconsciousness or incapacitation (such as Sleep, Ecstasy or Great Hallucination), or 2d for effects that leave the adventurer able to act on his surroundings, though at reduced capacity (such as Shrink or Transform Other).

Extra-potent traps, of course, are worth more KPs! For every -1 to an adventurer’s resistance roll, add 1 to the trap’s value.

“WE MEET AGAIN, SIR MORDRED.”

Even in the dungeon, “opponent” doesn’t always mean “monster.” There’s a long tradition of filthy brigands, scheming necromancers, and dark knights ready to do battle at the drop of a die. It’s recommended that these be worked out with the DIE-DIE formula in advance, but the “simple way” *can* give a value worthy of the effort, so long as all of the character’s damage dice are accounted for. The stereotypical barbarian, for example, would add the dice for a 1d+2 unarmed blow, a 1d+4 long-bow, and 3d+2 Big Mutha Axe, while a knight might have seven different weapons to add (including that bashing shield!), and a wizard will need to include the damage from her Lightning Bolt, Fireball, and other bursts of magical devastation.

So, when the party finally has it out with the mighty Gilkrak Skullcrusher (built on the barbarian template from *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*, p. 4, and armed as above) and lays his oversized body on the cavern floor, how much is the Monstrous Marauder of the North worth? Take his best combat skill (Two-Handed Axe/Mace-17) times 5 total dice of damage and divide it by 2 to get 42 points. But Gilkrak’s mighty frame had 22 hit points, so double that base value for a total of 84 KP . . . and since he’s the boss of the scenario, double *that* for a total of 168 Kill Points!

Note that well-armed characters and battle-master mages can get very high values this way, compared to skulkers and “support characters.” Life ain’t fair in the dungeon, but the other party members might want to be sure those supporters get compensated in other ways, to encourage them to stick around.

Say What?

Even in dungeon fantasy, there always seems to be that one party member who wants to *talk* to the monster, guard, or undead polar bear . . . or at least keep it busy while their fatigued, battered teammates slip out the back. Those who use the *Negotiation*, *Trickery*, or “*Good (Three-Headed) Doggie!*” options on p. 10 of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons* to successfully neutralize a threat can score half the KPs that would normally have been generated by a kill, if the GM is sufficiently impressed with their weaseling.

No other social interactions will generate KPs at all. What is this, a soap opera or something?

Best Supporting Actor

For “support” characters such as clerics and bards, the “your kill, your points” model may seem harsh. After all, a healer may not often be the one to deliver the *coup de grace*, but his powers and abilities may have made the victory possible – especially his healing of the kill-jockeys so they can get back to the monster-bashing!

While a GM is welcome to say “Life’s not fair,” an optional rule may keep the party together longer. Give an immediate 40% of the monster’s KP value to the hero who finishes it off and then set the rest aside in a party pool. Once all the opponents are either dead or fled (or the PCs are!), divide the pool evenly among all the survivors.

Campaigns that lack this option are encouraged to give their back-of-the-line comrades a substantial share of the treasure. Otherwise, the wilderness can be a pretty foreboding place when you’ve just ticked off the only druid.

*He’s still worth experience points
if we put him out of his misery, right?
– Mordekai,
in Irregular Webcomic*

PUMPING UP

So what does this get you, besides practice at basic arithmetic? Survival, glory, and a body count worthy of a true dungeon-er, of course! At any time, an adventurer may cash in 100 Kill Points to achieve one of the following:

- Cancel up to 10 HP of injury as it is received. (If the GM agrees, damage may be canceled in increments of 10 KP for every 1 HP.)
- Recover all FP instantly. This is especially welcome for spellcasters!
- Add +1 to a defense roll, damage roll, or Contest of Skill.
- Add +2 to an attack roll, spell roll, or resistance roll.

These bonuses *stack*! So if Charlie the Cleric has scored 830 KPs in the adventure so far and is facing the massive Cha’Loy Dragon, he can spend 400 KPs to get +4 to dodge the creature’s fiery breath – and then a further 400 to wipe out 40 points worth of burning damage if the Fiendish Firebreather of the East hits him anyway!

Note that this may result in the PCs carving their way through hordes of low-level monsters so they can “level up” before taking on the baddest of the bad. This is perfectly in-genre and should be encouraged. It also, of course, gives the GM a reason to raise the level of the opposition as the delvers get deeper into the dungeon, which is also in-genre.

Once KPs are spent, they’re gone. (Though if they were spent on a fatal blow, the victorious hero will have some new KPs coming in!) They can be saved as long as necessary with one crucial exception: once the adventure is complete, every 200 KPs turns into one character point, with the excess carried

over to the next game. In a *Dungeon Fantasy* game that uses Kill Points, it’s recommended that this be the *only* means of earning character points!

This means that dungeon delvers facing the adventure’s climax have a choice to make. Do they burn every KP they have in order to bring down the evil Duke of Earl and his half-demon bodyguard, or hold some back for “experience?” This might seem like an easy call, since the duke and demon are likely worth a ton of KPs themselves, as Big Bads. But an old-school GM with a love of epic melodrama may use that victory as an excuse to blow up volcanoes, collapse towers and otherwise give the PCs an escape scene worthy of their reward. So weigh the choice carefully – the iron-thewed barbarian you save may be your own.

I HAVE THE POWER!

Groups using *GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys* may wish to mix Kill Points with the options from that supplement. Using both presents an interesting dichotomy: KPs come as easily as drawing a sword but have a limited range of effects, while the *Power-Ups* options are far more versatile but require adventurers to bank large amounts of KPs to get the necessary character points.

To set things in motion, consult p. 20 of *Power-Ups 5* for suitable *Dungeon Fantasy* options and allow delvers to buy character points in the course of the adventure. The default rate of 200 Kill Points for every character point of effects respects the increased power of the options while not keeping them out of reach in the usual target-rich dungeon environment; the GM may go higher – or lower! – to suit the atmosphere of the particular game.

For an especially old-school feel, consider setting an exchange rate for treasure as well and watch the looters really go to town. One example: let every \$10 equal one KP, based on an item’s *resale* value back in town. Wealthy heroes get the usual bonus (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, pp. 14-15). So a \$1,000 idol would be worth 40 KPs to an adventurer of Average Wealth, 10 KPs to a Poor adventurer, and 80 KPs to a Wealthy one! Faced with this, a pragmatic group may let their wealthiest member serve as an “agent” to dispose of anything that isn’t hard coin. In such cases, in addition to his own share of the spoils, the wheeler-dealer gets a “finder’s fee” bonus equal to 10% of the total KP generated.

Artifacts

While useful, the resale model can break down when it comes to items such as the magical wonders of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 6: 40 Artifacts*, where there *is* no clear value for the item. (See p. 20 of *Dungeon Fantasy 6* for a discussion of the issue.)

For treasures that are better at building stories than building pocketbooks, set the KP value to 10 times the listed FP for the artifact as a power item, setting a FP of 10 for any item that doesn’t have one listed. (Yes, that means that artifacts will often be worth more than most monsters – these are supposed to be rare and precious finds!)

To claim this renown, of course, you must sell the artifact, or otherwise pass it to a worthy bearer! Keeping the artifact for yourself generates no KP directly – but it certainly makes it easier to kill more monsters and reap more KP down the road.

KILL POINTS AND IT'S A THREAT!

In many ways, Kill Points are the flip side of the Combat Effectiveness Rating created in *It's a Threat!* (Pyramid #3/77: *Combat*). Kill Points are a delver's reward after the fight, determining how many points the individual gets for killing 17 rabid orcs. The CER values, meanwhile, are a GM's tool, used ahead of time to determine if the party should face seven orcs, 17, or 70. The approaches can, and do, work together in the same campaign.

While KPs and CERs can function independently of each other, a GM may find it handy to have them interact. The possibilities include:

Set the Threat

When calculating Kill Points, use the CER to determine if monster is a boss, worthy, etc., instead of leaving it to GM judgment.

"How Many Points?" Redux

Rather than rely on the alternate approaches listed in *How Many Points Was That?* (below), a GM can use the CER as a handicapping tool. The most basic way is to compare each adventurer's CER to the party average and adjust the point rewards accordingly, similar to *Knights, Knaves, and Heroes of the Realm* (below). For example, Doug the Not-So-Mighty has a CER of 20 in a group where the average rating is 30. Any time he slays a monster, the KP award is multiplied by $30/20 = 1.5$.

HOW MANY POINTS WAS THAT?

As written, Kill Points and their effects should suit the typical *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign. But it wouldn't be *GURPS* if a campaign was always typical! Here are a few extra options for unique circumstances.

Dial It Up, Dial It Down

If 100 Kill Points per KP bonus gives a feel that's not quite right for a particular campaign, the GM can raise or lower the value accordingly. Setting a target of 200 KPs leads to a slower accumulation of bonuses and damage soaks, but also encourages heroes to seek out the higher-value targets and bigger hordes. A 50-KP rate, meanwhile, will be hit early on by most adventurers and give them a shiny "buff" for nearly the entire adventure!

"Well Struck, Squire Valiant!"

Blasphemous though it may seem, not everyone wants to start an adventuring career with full-fledged 250-point heroes. Low-level characters traditionally "level up" quickly, if only to keep them alive past their second troll. To reflect this, allow the following bonuses in play:

- Characters of less than 125 points (e.g., the "bargain henchmen" from *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 15: Henchmen*) earn quadruple KPs . . . and will likely need them!
- Delves built on 125-149 points (e.g., the "standard henchmen") earn triple KPs.
- Heroes worth 150-199 points earn double KPs.
- Adventurers made of 200-249 points earn 1.5× KPs.

Each bonus lasts until the next level is achieved. Once a character reaches 250 points, the free ride is over – welcome to the grown-ups' table.

Knaves, Knights, and Heroes of the Realm

Most *GURPS* campaigns assume a party of similar power levels. But over time, the vagaries of experience

may mean that the group now has a 400-point barbarian, a 350-point cleric, and a 310-point bard . . . and that's before the new player arrives with her 250-point scout. Should a monster be worth the same KPs for each party member, regardless of power level?

The simplest answer is to say "Yes, KPs are KPs." But the GM may consider that unfair. The savage orc chieftain that serves as a major challenge at 250 points may be a light snack for a 400-point hero-beast, so shouldn't the reward reflect that?

Two "handicapping" options are suggested:

- The GM can adjust the "boss rating" of an encounter up or down to suit individual heroes. A creature that's considered fodder for a 350-point team could be valued as a worthy if slain by the sole 250-point thief in the party. Likewise, if most of the party is worth around 300 points except for the 400-point knight Sir Tainly, a boss-level monster might be worth only worthy points if put down by the grizzled old warrior.
- For more precision – and complexity – the GM can award KPs normally, but adjust the total at the end of the adventure based on the "average value" of all the dungeoneers.

Example, if Dame Wilma is worth 300 character points while Shifty Ed is worth 350, the party's average value is 325 points. Shifty Ed's KP totals at the end of the adventure are thus multiplied by $325/350 = 0.93$, while Dame Wilma's are multiplied by $325/300 = 1.08$. So if both emerge from the Fiery Furnaces of Favonere with 1,000 unspent KPs, Ed's total will be adjusted to 930 KPs while Wilma will receive 1,080. Since this is the adventure's end, that means Ed's KPs are converted to four character points, while Wilma's are converted to five.

In both cases, this means lower-level characters may catch up to their higher-powered counterparts quickly!

Note that this also reduces the KPs earned by the most powerful adventurers. A GM who doesn't want that can leave them alone and stick to boosting the award for the weaker delvers. This creates a similar effect to "Well Struck, Squire Valiant!" (p. 17), where a hero gets the KP bonus only until he gains stronger abilities – or weaker friends!

"Killer Bonus, Dude"

A GM can rule that accumulated KPs are the equivalent of CER-affecting gear from *It's a Threat!* (Pyramid #3/77, p. 31) since they can grant a bonus in combat situations. In a campaign that uses the standard Kill Point bonuses, add +1 to the overall CER for every 100 unspent KPs. The ephemeral nature of the bonus is balanced by the fact that it will likely come into play when the hero most needs it. This adjustment is only matters if the GM is either re-evaluating his threats on the fly or is basing point awards on the total CER (see "How Many Points?" *Redux*, pp. 17-18).

My New Formula

For a speedy formula that still accounts for detail, make the base Kill Points equal to a monster's CER and then use

the power modifiers for the "simple way" on pp. 13-14: triple the value for Big Bads, double the value for bosses, and so on. Conversely, if a GM thinks that Kill Points better reflect the danger of a threat, they can be used as a stand-in for CER.

A FINAL NOTE

Kill Points are only generated by legitimate targets, whatever "legitimate" may mean in a particular campaign. In most settings, killing the old and benevolent queen, her damsel-in-distress daughter, and especially fellow adventurers for the "eeps" is frowned upon to say the least, and may be met with extreme prejudice. (Or worse yet, a penalty of -2 × their KP value!)

Then again . . . the code of the Munchkin is to "Kill the Monsters, Steal the Treasure, Stab Your Buddy." But if you're entering that sort of environment, remember that your buddies know *your* KP value, too, and have just as many ways to claim it in a deniable fashion, especially if the GM decides to enter the fun.

SAMPLE KILL POINT VALUES

This table presents Kill Point values for basic versions of most of the creatures from the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series. All totals have been calculated using the DIE-DIE formula (p. 14).

Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons

| Monster | Big Bad | Boss | Worthy | Minion | Fodder |
|--------------------------|---------|------|--------|--------|--------|
| Acid Spider | 148 | 74 | 29 | 14 | 1 |
| as-Sharak (Agni or Voyu) | 343 | 171 | 68 | 34 | 3 |
| as-Sharak (Other) | 328 | 164 | 65 | 32 | 3 |
| Crushroom | 174 | 87 | 34 | 17 | 1 |
| Dire Wolf | 29 | 14 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| Doomchild | 100 | 50 | 20 | 10 | 1 |
| Erupting Slime | 192 | 96 | 38 | 19 | 1 |
| Flaming Skull | 202 | 101 | 40 | 20 | 2 |
| Flesh-Eating Ape | 62 | 31 | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| Foul Bat | 43 | 21 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| Frost Snake | 99 | 49 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Giant Rat | 70 | 35 | 14 | 7 | 1 |
| Golem-Armor Swordsman | 210 | 105 | 42 | 21 | 2 |
| Horde Zombie | 89 | 44 | 17 | 8 | 1 |
| Mindwarper | 542 | 271 | 108 | 54 | 5 |
| Peshkali | 416 | 208 | 83 | 41 | 4 |
| Siege Beast | 182 | 91 | 36 | 18 | 1 |
| Stone Golem | 223 | 111 | 44 | 22 | 2 |
| Toxifier | 72 | 36 | 14 | 7 | 1 |
| Triger | 77 | 38 | 15 | 7 | 1 |

Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies

| Monster | Big Bad | Boss | Worthy | Minion | Fodder |
|----------|---------|------|--------|--------|--------|
| Anaconda | 44 | 22 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| Bat | 80 | 40 | 16 | 8 | 1 |
| Bear | 89 | 44 | 17 | 8 | 1 |
| Boar | 133 | 66 | 26 | 13 | 1 |
| Cat | 69 | 34 | 13 | 6 | 1 |
| Chimp | 56 | 28 | 11 | 5 | 1 |

| <i>Monster</i> | <i>Big Bad</i> | <i>Boss</i> | <i>Worthy</i> | <i>Minion</i> | <i>Fodder</i> |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Dog | 36 | 18 | 7 | 3 | 1 |
| Giant Eagle | 65 | 32 | 13 | 6 | 1 |
| Giant Spider | 43 | 21 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| Gorilla | 60 | 30 | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| Great Cat (Panther) | 108 | 54 | 21 | 10 | 1 |
| Great Cat (Cheetah) | 111 | 55 | 22 | 11 | 1 |
| Great Cat (Lion) | 98 | 49 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Great Cat (Tiger) | 111 | 55 | 22 | 11 | 1 |
| Hawk | 52 | 26 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Hellhound | 70 | 35 | 14 | 7 | 1 |
| Hound | 122 | 61 | 24 | 12 | 1 |
| Hound (Timber Wolf) | 136 | 68 | 27 | 13 | 1 |
| Ice Weasel | 52 | 26 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Imp | 87 | 43 | 17 | 8 | 1 |
| Insect Swarm | 286 | 143 | 57 | 28 | 2 |
| Kangaroo | 62 | 31 | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| Kraken | 94 | 47 | 18 | 9 | 1 |
| Macaw | 28 | 14 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| Owl | 71 | 35 | 14 | 7 | 1 |
| Rabbit | 46 | 23 | 9 | 4 | 1 |
| Rat | 94 | 47 | 18 | 9 | 1 |
| Salamander | 113 | 56 | 22 | 11 | 1 |
| Shark | 111 | 55 | 22 | 11 | 1 |
| Shoulder Dragon | 13 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Stallion | 98 | 49 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Sylph | 96 | 48 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Talus | 56 | 28 | 11 | 5 | 1 |
| Undine | 106 | 53 | 21 | 10 | 1 |
| Viper | 22 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| Wolverine | 127 | 63 | 25 | 12 | 1 |
| Wolverine (Skunk) | 62 | 31 | 12 | 6 | 1 |

Dungeon Fantasy 9: Summoners

| <i>Monster</i> | <i>Big Bad</i> | <i>Boss</i> | <i>Worthy</i> | <i>Minion</i> | <i>Fodder</i> |
|--|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Air Elemental (Small) | 29 | 14 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| Air Elemental (Lightning Creature) | 139 | 69 | 27 | 13 | 1 |
| Air Elemental (Living Breeze) | 49 | 24 | 9 | 4 | 1 |
| Air Elemental (Living Tornado) | 165 | 82 | 33 | 16 | 1 |
| Air Elemental (Minor Flight Spirit) | 67 | 33 | 13 | 6 | 1 |
| Air Elemental (Spirit of the Clouds) | 99 | 49 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Air Elemental (Thunder-Child) | 118 | 59 | 23 | 11 | 1 |
| Air Elemental (Walking Fog) | 49 | 24 | 9 | 4 | 1 |
| Angelic Emissary | 442 | 221 | 88 | 44 | 4 |
| Devilkin | 45 | 22 | 9 | 4 | 1 |
| Earth Elemental (Small) | 109 | 54 | 21 | 10 | 1 |
| Earth Elemental (Creature of the Soil) | 160 | 80 | 32 | 16 | 1 |
| Earth Elemental (Earth Servant) | 114 | 57 | 22 | 11 | 1 |
| Earth Elemental (Earth Titan) | 212 | 106 | 42 | 21 | 2 |
| Earth Elemental (Engineer's Friend) | 124 | 62 | 24 | 12 | 1 |
| Earth Elemental (Spirit of the Stone) | 109 | 54 | 21 | 10 | 1 |
| Earth Elemental (Talking Rock) | 134 | 67 | 26 | 13 | 1 |
| Earth Elemental (Walking Wall) | 145 | 72 | 29 | 14 | 1 |
| Embodied Animal Spirit (Basic) | 60 | 30 | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| Embodied Animal Spirit (Bear) | 70 | 35 | 14 | 7 | 1 |
| Embodied Animal Spirit (Herd Animal) | 60 | 30 | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| Embodied Animal Spirit (Huge Bird) | 63 | 31 | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| Embodied Animal Spirit (Predator) | 63 | 31 | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| Fire Elemental (Small) | 43 | 21 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| Fire Elemental (Bird of Fire) | 160 | 80 | 32 | 16 | 1 |
| Fire Elemental (Ember on the Breeze) | 45 | 22 | 9 | 4 | 1 |

| <i>Monster</i> | <i>Big Bad</i> | <i>Boss</i> | <i>Worthy</i> | <i>Minion</i> | <i>Fodder</i> |
|--|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Fire Elemental (Fire-Hurler) | 50 | 25 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Fire Elemental (Jumping Flame) | 87 | 43 | 17 | 8 | 1 |
| Fire Elemental (Living Inferno) | 240 | 120 | 48 | 24 | 2 |
| Fire Elemental (Warrior of Flame) | 150 | 75 | 30 | 15 | 1 |
| Fire Elemental (Wildfire) | 84 | 42 | 16 | 8 | 1 |
| Ghost (Lesser) | 162 | 81 | 32 | 16 | 1 |
| Ghost (Major) | 448 | 224 | 89 | 44 | 4 |
| Household Guardian | 344 | 172 | 68 | 34 | 3 |
| Metal Elemental (Small) | 118 | 59 | 23 | 11 | 1 |
| Metal Elemental (Coiled Spring) | 154 | 77 | 30 | 15 | 1 |
| Metal Elemental (Creature of the Blade) | 110 | 55 | 22 | 11 | 1 |
| Metal Elemental (Jagged One) | 144 | 72 | 28 | 14 | 1 |
| Metal Elemental (Living Lodestone) | 122 | 61 | 24 | 12 | 1 |
| Metal Elemental (Metal Lord) | 178 | 89 | 35 | 17 | 1 |
| Metal Elemental (Miner's Minion) | 139 | 69 | 27 | 13 | 1 |
| Metal Elemental (Spirit of the Forge) | 165 | 82 | 33 | 16 | 1 |
| Petty Demon | 140 | 70 | 28 | 14 | 1 |
| Servitor Skeleton | 155 | 77 | 31 | 15 | 1 |
| Servitor Zombie | 116 | 58 | 23 | 11 | 1 |
| Spirit of Place | 419 | 209 | 83 | 41 | 4 |
| Standard Demon | 157 | 78 | 31 | 15 | 1 |
| Void/Sound/Ether Elemental (Small) | 50 | 25 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Void/Sound/Ether Elemental (Abyss) | 178 | 89 | 35 | 17 | 1 |
| Void/Sound/Ether Elemental (Discord) | 126 | 63 | 25 | 12 | 1 |
| Void/Sound/Ether Elemental (Echo) | 50 | 25 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Void/Sound/Ether Elemental (Enigma) | 72 | 36 | 14 | 7 | 1 |
| Void/Sound/Ether Elemental (Nothingness) | 211 | 105 | 42 | 21 | 2 |
| Void/Sound/Ether Elemental (Resonance) | 158 | 79 | 31 | 15 | 1 |
| Void/Sound/Ether Elemental (Sensor) | 50 | 25 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Water Elemental (Small) | 132 | 66 | 26 | 13 | 1 |
| Water Elemental (Force of the Deeps) | 172 | 86 | 34 | 17 | 1 |
| Water Elemental (Living Wave) | 152 | 76 | 30 | 15 | 1 |
| Water Elemental (Lord of the Tides) | 193 | 96 | 38 | 19 | 1 |
| Water Elemental (Power of Water) | 135 | 67 | 27 | 13 | 1 |
| Water Elemental (Stream Spirit) | 166 | 83 | 33 | 16 | 1 |
| Water Elemental (Water Blaster) | 176 | 88 | 35 | 17 | 1 |
| Water Elemental (Whirlpool) | 217 | 108 | 43 | 21 | 2 |
| Wood Elemental (Small) | 98 | 49 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Wood Elemental (Forest Giant) | 190 | 95 | 38 | 19 | 1 |
| Wood Elemental (Phantom of the Forest) | 165 | 82 | 33 | 16 | 1 |
| Wood Elemental (Plant Speaker) | 95 | 47 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Wood Elemental (Power of Growth) | 130 | 65 | 26 | 13 | 1 |
| Wood Elemental (Twigling) | 98 | 49 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Wood Elemental (Vine Creature) | 108 | 54 | 21 | 10 | 1 |
| Wood Elemental (Woodland Spirit) | 99 | 49 | 19 | 9 | 1 |

Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi

| <i>Monster</i> | <i>Big Bad</i> | <i>Boss</i> | <i>Worthy</i> | <i>Minion</i> | <i>Fodder</i> |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aloakasa as-Sharak | 253 | 126 | 50 | 25 | 2 |
| Astral Hound | 114 | 57 | 22 | 11 | 1 |
| Astral Thing | 167 | 83 | 33 | 16 | 1 |
| Chaos Monk | 129 | 64 | 25 | 12 | 1 |
| Flying Squid Monster | 289 | 144 | 57 | 28 | 2 |
| Fuzzy (Biter) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Fuzzy (Spewer) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Fuzzy (Other) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Neuroid | 161 | 80 | 32 | 16 | 1 |
| No-Brainer | 79 | 39 | 15 | 7 | 1 |
| Odifier | 100 | 50 | 20 | 10 | 1 |

Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1

| Monster | Big Bad | Boss | Worthy | Minion | Fodder |
|------------------------------|---------|------|--------|--------|--------|
| Bronze Spider | 188 | 94 | 37 | 18 | 1 |
| Bugbear | 95 | 47 | 19 | 9 | 1 |
| Ciuaclá | 180 | 90 | 36 | 18 | 1 |
| Corpse Golem | 44 | 22 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| Demon From Between the Stars | 140 | 70 | 28 | 14 | 1 |
| Demon of Old | 199 | 99 | 39 | 19 | 1 |
| Dinoman | 8 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Draug | 215 | 107 | 43 | 21 | 2 |
| Electric Jelly | 349 | 174 | 69 | 34 | 3 |
| Eye of Death | 191 | 95 | 38 | 19 | 1 |
| Flame Lord | 216 | 108 | 43 | 21 | 2 |
| Giant Ape | 159 | 79 | 31 | 15 | 1 |
| Gladiator Ape | 51 | 25 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Horde Pygmy | 39 | 19 | 7 | 3 | 1 |
| Horrid Skull* | 106 | 53 | 21 | 10 | 1 |
| Ice Wyrn | 195 | 97 | 39 | 19 | 1 |
| Karkadann | 41 | 20 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| Leaping Leech | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Lich† | 359 | 179 | 71 | 35 | 3 |
| Obsidian Jaguar | 226 | 113 | 45 | 22 | 2 |
| Rock Mite | 235 | 117 | 47 | 23 | 2 |
| Slorn | 150 | 75 | 30 | 15 | 1 |
| Slugbeast | 64 | 32 | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| Sphere of Madness | 287 | 143 | 57 | 28 | 2 |
| Sword Spirit | 134 | 67 | 26 | 13 | 1 |
| Throttler | 80 | 40 | 16 | 8 | 1 |
| Troll | 389 | 194 | 77 | 38 | 3 |
| Undead Slime | 141 | 70 | 28 | 14 | 1 |
| Void Brute | 158 | 79 | 31 | 15 | 1 |
| Watcher at the Edge of Time | 527 | 263 | 105 | 52 | 5 |

* If rated as a trap, Horrid Skull is 18/12/6/3/1. This assumes -5 to find and 0 to disarm; if concealed more effectively, the KPs go up!

† Assumes 6d of Deathtouch or equivalent.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Rochat spent 16 years leveling up as a newspaper reporter before changing alignments and becoming a public-relations flack in Longmont, Colorado; his class abilities include

Placate Editor, Strain Deadline and Illusion of Busyness. He'd like to thank his friend and mentor Christopher R. Rice, as well as the *Pyramid* Write Club, but the first rule of *Pyramid* Write Club is "You do not talk about *Pyramid* Write Club."

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EIDETIC MEMORY

SOUL REAPERS

BY DAVID L. PULVER

Many cultures have personifications of death. There are singular death gods or manifestations such as Thanatos, Anubis, Yamaraja, or Death, or groups of entities such as the Norse Valkyries, the Irish banshee and dullahan, the Hindu yamadutas, or the Greek keres. There's also a menagerie of hellhounds, ravens, owls, pale horses, moths, and similar death-omened beasts. Some are believed to foretell or cause death, but many others are *psychopomps* who facilitate the passage of the soul to an afterworld.

Modern fantasy stories have evolved their own lore. While some horror-themed depictions are as terrible as anything in actual mythology, others are less dire. Typical examples are the depiction of Death as a pretty goth woman in Neil Gaimen's *Sandman*, or grim reapers as a bureaucracy of undead social workers in the dark TV comedy show *Dead Like Me*. Similarly, Japanese popular culture and urban legends were inspired by Western images of the Grim Reaper to create the *shinigami*, which, being fictional, exist in a myriad of different versions: supernatural entities or as humans with special psychopomp and super-exorcist abilities; either way, they spend as much time battling ghosts and demons as they do saving souls! Popularized in anime and manga such as *Bleach*, *Soul Eater*, and *Death Note*, they further inspired Western death personifications and psychopomps. In recent young adult and urban-fantasy novels and TV shows, "reapers" have joined vampires, werewolves, demons, and angels as popular "character types" for both angst-ridden supernatural protagonists and monster hunters alike.

This brings us to the focus of this article: urban fantasy-inspired reaper templates suitable for *GURPS Monster Hunters* and *GURPS Horror* campaigns.

CHARACTER TEMPLATES

GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions provides 400-point templates suitable for PCs. The crusader and inhuman templates can be modified to work for reapers.

When selecting skills, reapers spend a lot of time working with ghosts and sometimes trying to counsel them. Thus, Exorcism, Hidden Lore (Death or Restless Dead), and Psychology are very useful.

Appropriate *Know Your Enemy* skills (*Monster Hunters 1*, p. 16) for reapers may be identical to outcast angels (if they serve heaven). Alternatively, use skills specifically related to reapers: Hidden Lore (Death or Restless Dead) (A) IQ [2] and Theology (as appropriate to the reaper's background) (H) IQ-1 [2].

Crusading Reaper

You're a guardian of the threshold between life and death, a human or near-human who has been granted the ability to function as a psychopomp. You shepherd troubled souls into the afterlife and protect the living by hunting ghosts, necromancers, and other horrific monsters who threaten the living and the dead. Start with the crusader template, and replace the Mysticism Talent and abilities with the Reaper Talent and its abilities (see *Reaper Power*, below). Add Two-Handed Axe/Mace (A) to the available options for secondary melee weapon skills: many reapers like to fight with the iconic scythe.

Inhuman Reaper

You are supernatural psychopomp who has grown too close to humanity! It's also possible that someone was raised as a human, with their inhuman heritage hidden or sealed away, and discovered the inhuman/reaper heritage on coming of age.

Take the inhuman template, and select one of the 200-point soul-reaper templates described on pp. 24-26, such as grim reaper, revenant reaper, valkyrie, or dullahan. Reapers can replace Reputation -4 (Traitor; Your race; 10 or less) [-5] with Odious Personal Habit (Spooky and death-obsessed) [-5].

REAPER POWER

Sources: Divine.

Focus: Death and ghosts.

Reapers are psychopomps who assist souls in moving on to the afterlife. This power is focused on the transition of souls between life and death, and can be thought of as a combination of death and dimension-travel powers.

Its abilities are bought with the Reaper power modifier. Add the user's Reaper Talent level where appropriate when rolling to use abilities. This power can be justified in various ways.

First, some humans are born with reaper powers. Often this is due to early exposure to ghosts, e.g., a child born or raised in a haunted house. It could instead be a family gift ("grandma could see spirits, your mother was a medium, and now that power's grown even stronger in you"). It might instead come from a taint of inhuman blood (an ancestor or parent was a faerie, angel of death, grim reaper, etc.), or a death-haunted maternity, like being born from a dead mother by cesarean section, or being conceived while one parent was ghost-possessed. Such natural-born reapers often start with the ability to sense ghosts (the Medium advantage) as children, and grow up being thought spooky, morbid, or goth-like by those around them. By the time they're young adults, a full-fledged Reaper ability set may have materialized, leading to a monster-hunting profession. Sometimes, a particular trauma triggers the transformation (see *Reaper Triggers*, p. 26); other times, this may come after being recruited by other reapers or monster hunters.

Second, certain priests, exorcists, shamans, voodoo practitioners, crusaders, mediums, or spiritualists may form an intimate connection with death itself. Their faithful and regular performances of last rites and exorcisms, or possibly séances and spirit channeling, eventually blossom into full-fledged reaper powers. These individuals normally view their psychopomp abilities as coming directly from whatever god or tradition they follow. They typically possess advantages such as Blessed or True Faith. Again, full realization of their power may be triggered by a traumatic encounter (e.g., with a powerful ghost or evil spirit) or through recruitment and mentorship by other reapers.

Third, inhuman reapers can possess a range of Reaper abilities that can be chosen as part of their racial templates (and, unlike purely racial traits, are subject to the restrictions of the Reaper PM). A god with domain over death might grant these abilities to those servants who function as supernatural psychopomps.

Power Modifier: Reaper

-10%

Reaper abilities function both in the material world and in the spirit realm where ghosts and similar entities exist when insubstantial (*Monster Hunters* identifies this with the outer astral plane). However, Reaper powers may cease to work entirely in a particular dimension where the concept of death does not exist, such as in a heaven or hell that is entirely peopled by immortal souls who cannot be destroyed.

Reapers often have a Code of Honor [-10] that requires them to act in certain ways, typically to risk their lives to help troubled souls and ghosts cross over to the afterlife and banish evil spirits of the dead. The sanction for failing this code will either be a loss of those abilities with the Reaper PM (if the power came directly from a superior god), or -10-point Enemies (Other reapers) if the code is enforced by the dictates of a reaper organization.

Reaper Talent

5 points/level

Each level adds to rolls to use Reaper abilities. Add the Reaper Talent to skill when performing exorcisms on ghosts and other undead vulnerable to exorcism; this does not work against entities (like demons) who aren't spirits of the dead.

Reaper Abilities

In some settings, all reapers may have the same abilities. In others, reapers with different origins or ability sets may exist. All reapers should have some ability to sense or communicate with ghostly beings. Inhuman reapers are not limited to the Reaper abilities chosen during character creation; they may add more using earned character points.

Possible Reaper abilities also include Eyes of the Dead [20], Ghost Weapon [14], Spirit Communication [14/24], and Spirit Empathy [9] (but *not* Spirit Channeling!), detailed for Mysticism in *Monster Hunters (Monster Hunters 1, p. 44)*; use identical statistics.

Death Sense

8 or 18 points*

With a second of concentration and a Per roll (minus normal range penalties), you can sense the presence of the nearest death that occurred within the last three minutes.

REAPERS AND COSMOLOGY

To have reapers, one needs to posit the existence of souls and life after death. Given the presence of ghosts – and often demons, angels, and similar entities – that should fit most *Monster Hunter* campaigns.

The GM should decide if reapers are certain of whatever afterlife they're sending souls, can travel to such realms, etc. In modern fantasy, reapers are often presented as capable of assisting souls to their reward, but being unable to enter themselves (until their number is up). That's convenient if the GM wishes to avoid having any particular religion "correct" in the setting. Of course, they may *believe* they are sending souls to Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, or the next reincarnation; perhaps reapers can even glimpse this by peering through Death's Gate (p. 24).

If reapers work for a specific god or organization, it will likely have particular beliefs or traditions regarding why they're responsible for guiding souls and what happens to them. Whether these are true is another matter! Of course, the GM is also free to firmly connect reapers with a particular real-world religion or mythology that fits the flavor of the campaign, invent a unique cosmology, or decide the soul's final destination parallels the beliefs each individual held in life.

Or, perhaps reapers are driven solely by an instinct or calling to function as psychopomps, their power innate or driven by primal but impersonal forces such as Death or Order. If so, any "heaven" or "hell" the soul is transported to may be a purely subjective experience assembled from their life experiences, and a formal organization of reapers, should one even exist, may be based on the reapers' own philosophies (rather than those of a god or pantheon) for mutual support.

You can also detect individuals who have a mortal injury or are within the last stage of Terminally Ill (less than a week to live). You may screen out dead or dying people you're already aware of. Level 1 tells you that death is nearby, while level 2 indicates the direction and lets you make a follow-up IQ roll to tell what type of death or impending death you're sensing.

Statistics: Level 1 is Detect Death (PM, -10%; Vague, -50%) [8]. Level 2 is Detect Death (PM, -10%) [18].

* This may be a page or folio of the Book of the Dead, which reveals directions (and, with a follow-up roll, details) to the dead and dying in the vicinity of the reader. Treat this as level 2, but add Can Be Stolen (-20%) and Unique (-25%). Total cost drops to 9 points.

Death's Gate

50 points

Many reapers convince ghosts and troubled souls to move on via persuasion, exorcism, or physical destruction. But a few are powerful enough to open the gate to the afterlife themselves! This ability creates a glowing astral tunnel leading to an afterlife (e.g., Heaven, Hell, or a path to reincarnation) through which a soul can pass through. It requires 10 seconds of concentration, 7 FP, and a successful IQ (plus Talent) roll, after which the tunnel lingers for 3d seconds. A reaper might try to peacefully convince a troubled soul or ghost to pass through death's gate "into the light." If they can also become insubstantial themselves, they might push the target (conscious or otherwise) through it! The reaper need not pass through the portal himself (which will save him having to pay FP to return). However, some reapers (e.g., valkyries, angels of death) may actually have the power and authorization to visit the afterlife in person, and will use this ability to do so.

Statistics: Jumper (Spirit) (Accessibility, Ghosts and reapers only, -50%; Costs Fatigue, 6 FP, -30%; Interplanar, +0%; PM, -10%; Tunnel, +40%) [50].

Ectoplasmic Ropes

9 points/level

You can conjure ropes or chains of ectoplasm with which to trap living beings and spirits alike. This attack costs 1 FP per use and has Acc 3, Range 10, RoF 1, and effective ST of (6 × level); aim it with Innate Attack (Gaze), which you may purchase using points earmarked for Reaper abilities. Attacks that get past the ropes' DR of (2 × level) weaken its ST on a point-for-point basis. Your level of Ectoplasmic Ropes cannot exceed the lower of your Reaper Talent level or (your Will)/3, rounded down.

Statistics: Each level is Binding 6 (Affects Insubstantial, +20%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; PM, -10%; Reduced Range, 1/10, -30%) [9].

Ghost Walk

96 points*

You can bodily step from the material world into the outer astral plane, becoming an invisible immaterial (but also nude and unequipped) spirit who can directly interact with ghosts and lost souls. This requires a Ready maneuver and a Will roll

each minute. While in spirit form, you don't need rest nor sustenance and *cannot* attack or use magic and psi on material targets.

Statistics: Insubstantiality (PM, -10%; Requires Will Roll, -5%) [68] + Invisibility (Accessibility, Only when insubstantial, -10%; PM, -10%; Substantial Only, -10%) [28].

* You can carry clothing and gear at additional cost: No Encumbrance for 108 points, Light for 120 points, Medium for 156 points, and Heavy for 216 points. This change adds Can Carry Objects to both Insubstantiality and Invisibility.

Reaper Form

14 or 194 points

After 10 seconds of concentration, you can transform into a particular type of inhuman reaper; choose from the racial templates below or the outcast angel (*GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*, p. 51) if you become an angel of death. If you're human, this ability costs 194 points for the first form and 14 points for each additional one; the template traits are added to your own while in use. If you're already an inhuman, this costs only 14 points per form; the inhuman reaper template *replaces* your own for all purposes.

Statistics: Alternate Form (PM, -10%) [14]. For humans, also add 90% of the template cost, or +180 points.

Soul Scythe

20 points*

You can conjure a scythe-like weapon formed from thanatic energy that can slice the very soul for 3d(2) cutting damage. Use Two-Handed Axe/Mace skill to wield it. Its attack only affects insubstantial spirits, or material beings who are dying (possess either Terminally Ill disadvantage, or are suffering a mortal wound, p. B423). The weapon may reach from the real world into the realm of ghosts (the outer astral plane) and can parry astral attacks or other weapons that affect insubstantial entities. Anyone slain by it can't be resurrected or reanimated by external means, like a Resurrection or Zombie spell, or vampire bite; this doesn't bypass advantages like Regeneration or Unkillable. It's unbreakable.

Although it's a cutting attack, it's intended as a blade of *mercy* – it's so supernaturally sharp it doesn't *hurt*. Any victim is treated as if they had High Pain Threshold and suffers no extra bleeding effects from its damage. This limitation on damage is Painless (-10%).

Statistics: Cutting Attack 3d (Armor Divisor (2), +50%; Melee Attack, C, 1, -20%; Only Affects Insubstantial and Near-Death Targets, -20%; Painless, -10%; PM, -10%) [19] + Rest in Pieces (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 19) [1].

* Sometimes this is an actual, magical scythe, rather than an inherent ability. If so, add Can Be Stolen (-30%) and Unique (-25%) to Cutting Attack. Total cost drops to 9 points.

REAPER RACIAL TEMPLATES

Monster hunters with the inhuman character template may select a grim reaper as their race. Like other *Monster Hunter* templates, these are built on 200 points.

These can be used as Alternate Forms for someone with the Reaper Form (p. 24) ability. As with all PC templates, far more powerful (or weaker) NPC versions may exist.

Dullahan

200 points

These frightening psychopomps appear as headless men or women (although since they have necks, they could hide their condition with a full-face helmet). They ride black spectral horses or have their steeds pull grimly accoutered wagons, although some modern dullahan prefer sapient motorcycles. While their originals often haunted country roads in Ireland, modern dullahan may be psychopomps specializing in automobile accidents.

Advantages: Ally (Spectral Steed, below; Built on 75%; Constantly; Summonable, +100%) [24]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Injury Tolerance (No Eyes, No Head) [12]; Night Vision 4 [4]; Regeneration (Regular) [25]; Reaper Talent 1 [5]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8) [15]. • 100 points of Reaper abilities (pp. 23-24) and/or extra levels of Reaper Talent (p. 23) [5/level].

Disadvantages: Social Stigma (Monster) [-15].

Grim Reaper

200 points

This is the traditional western image of death, a robed and hooded skeleton bearing a scythe.

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+5 [10].

Advantages: Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; DR 2 [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood; No Brain; No Eyes; No Vitals; Unliving) [40]; Reaper Talent 1 [5]; Regeneration (Regular) [25]; Soul Scythe (p. 24) [20]; Temperature Tolerance 3 [3]. • 95 points of Reaper abilities (pp. 23-24) other than Soul Scythe, and/or extra levels of Reaper Talent (p. 23) [5/level].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Lifebane [-10]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]; Vulnerability (Crushing Attacks, x2) [-30].

Quirks: Cannot Float; Sexless. [-2]

Features: Skull has only 2 total DR.

Revenant Reaper (Shinigami)

200 points

This is a more contemporary depiction of a reaper, usually humans who have died or had a near-death experience, and were then returned to the mortal world with powers of a psychopomp. Alternatively, these people

may be descended from a grim reaper, angel of death, etc. Sometimes, they retain their mortal appearance; other times, they're reborn with a new one, but they often have some mark of death such as pallor or ice-cold skin. Being akin to a (very) lesser form of angel, they're usually hard to kill!

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+5 [10]; Will+2 [10].

Advantages: Reaper Talent 1 [5]; Regeneration (Regular) [25]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3) [10]. • 150 points of Reaper abilities (pp. 23-24) and/or extra levels of Reaper Talent (p. 23) [5/level].

Disadvantages: Supernatural Features (any related to death) [-10].

SPECTRAL STEED (300 POINTS)

These supernaturally swift horses are the partners of certain reapers, especially dullahan and valkyries. The horses of the valkyrie are descendants of Odin's steed Sleipnir. A spectral steed can see ghosts and even become one, bearing its rider and gear (up to 292 lbs. total) into the astral plane. These are 300-point sidekicks suitable as 75% Allies for a 400-point monster hunter.

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| ST: 27 [85]*† | HP: 27 [0] | Speed: 6.00 [0] |
| DX: 12 [24]† | Will: 11 [25] | Move: 8/32 [10] |
| IQ: 6 [-80] | Per: 12 [30] | |
| HT: 12 [20] | FP: 12 [0] | SM: +1 |
| Dodge: 10 | Parry: N/A | DR: 1 [5] |

Bite (14): 1d+2 crushing. Reach C.

Kick (14): 3d+2 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Advantages: Acute Hearing 2 [4]; Claws (Hooves) [3]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Enhanced Move 2 (Ground) [40]; Ghost Walk (Light Encumbrance) (p. 24) [120]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Reaper Talent 1 [5]; See Invisible (Ghostly) [15]; Special Rapport (With master) [5]; Ultrahearing [5]; Unfzable [15]. • Either the Headless Horse, Flying Horse, or Transformable Cycle lenses [18]; see below.

Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Native Language (Accented/None) [-4]; Restricted Diet (Herbivore) [-10]; Quadruped [-35]; Staid [-1]; Weak Bite [-2]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Skills: Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Intimidation (A) Will-1 [2]-11; Mount (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Running (A) HT+1 [4]-13.

* Cost reduced for Size (-10%).

† Cost reduced for No Fine Manipulators (-40%).

Variants

Headless Horse: Add HP +3 [6] and Injury Tolerance (No Eyes, No Head) [12].

Flying Horse: Add Walk on Air (Costs 1 FP/minute, -10%) [18].

Transformable Cycle: Can turn from a horse into a motorcycle! Add Alternate Form (Black Motorcycle, Active Change, +20%) [18]. The alternate black motorcycle form, also built on 300 points, raises Enhanced Move to 3 [+20] (Top Speed 64) and DR to 2 [+5]. It adds Injury Tolerance (No Eyes, No Head, No Neck) [17], Ground Vehicle [-100], Machine [25], Payload 18 (Exposed, -50%) [9], and Perk (Headlights) [1], but removes Acute Hearing, Claws (Hooves), Quadruped, and Ultrahearing. Its Restricted Diet changes to Hydrocarbon Fuel.

Valkyrie

200 points

A Norse psychopomp, appearing as a beautiful warrior-woman riding a flying horse. The Valkyries (“choosers of the slain”) served Odin or Frejya. They haunted battlefields to collect the souls of worthy fallen warriors to join the *einherjar*, who feasted and trained in the halls of Odin’s Valhalla or Frejya’s Folkvangr, awaiting the time they’d fight for the gods in the final battle of Ragnarok. Occasionally, Valkyries had other adventures, including falling in love with mortals, which raises the possibility of human-Valkyrie bloodline that might linger in today’s world even if the gods are gone.

Valkyries always have martial skills, often adding Weapon Master for sword or spear. A modern-day valkyrie may keep with tradition or may update the horse and Dark Age arms and armor to contemporary equipment.

Monster Hunter settings often involve a looming apocalypse, so it’s possible that Ragnarok is upon us! If so, when a PC pays 25 points for an Extra Life, a Valkyrie could appear, take him away for a brief recuperation, and then bring the person back in the next session as a soldier in a divine army . . .

Attribute Modifiers: ST+2 [20], DX+2 [40], HT+1 [10].

Advantages: Ally (Spectral Steed, p. 25; Built on 75%; Constantly; Summonable, +100%) [24]; Appearance (Beautiful) [12]; Fearlessness 3 [6]; Ghost Weapon [14]; Reaper Talent 1 [5]; Regeneration (Slow) [10]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8) [15]; Valkyrie Talent* 2 [10]. • 40 points of Reaper abilities (pp. 23-24) *other* than Ghost Weapon, extra levels of Reaper Talent (p. 23) [5/level], and/or Weapon Master [varies].

Disadvantages: Intolerance (Cowards) [-5].

Quirks: Loves a good fight. [-1]

* Broadsword, Riding (Horse), Shortsword, Spear, and Shield. *Reaction bonus:* honorable warriors. [5/level]. Valkyries can add up to two additional levels.

REAPER TRIGGERS

Reapers may be unaware of their true nature until a triggering event leads to their powers manifesting or recruitment by other reapers; this is often a key part of a reaper’s character story. Some may have grown up with these abilities (“I’ve always been able to talk to ghosts”), while others were latent until a trigger, often death-related, unleashed them. Typical triggers include:

- Their first direct encounter with death, often the passing of a relative or friend, or witnessing a fatal accident or murder.
- Their own near-death experience (perhaps including meeting another reaper who, instead of taking their soul, welcomes them into their fellowship).
 - An encounter with a ghost or other form of undead.
 - Another reaper recruits them or seeks their assistance.
 - Physical contact with a magic item associated with reapers, death, or the afterlife, such as an enchanted scythe that belonged to another reaper.
 - Exposure to an major accident, battlefield, hospital, funeral home, or other place with an unusually high concentration of ghosts, death, or spirit, or an area with death-aspected mana.

- A horrific incident related to the grave, such as being buried alive.

- The spontaneous activation of their powers to save themselves from death (e.g., by shifting into the spirit world).

In a low-power campaign (e.g., using the rules from **GURPS Monster Hunters 4: Sidekicks**), a PC might buy some reaper abilities with the Uncontrollable limitation to represent an untrained reaper new to the powers. It’s also possible that latent reapers may work as mediums, ghost hunters, etc. without understanding their real nature.

REAPERS AS A JOB

Reapers escort newly deceased souls to the afterlife and reduce the trauma of death. Considering the number of people who die every day (over 151,000 on average), this could be a full-time job. However, there appear to be many different psychopomps, allowing them to share the caseload! Most therefore find time to engage in other activities, such as monster hunting or angst-ridden paranormal romance.

Reaper Organizations

In some worlds, reapers are organized in a bureaucratic fashion, although this may vary from region to region and culture to culture, especially if psychopomps are specific to personal beliefs. Such a reaper organization may be a power answering only to themselves, or under the control of a greater supernatural hierarchy, such as a celestial or infernal bureaucracy, angelic order, or an actual death god like Anubis or Odin. The lower levels of the organization might have physical contractors or offices on earth; the higher levels may have their headquarters in the astral plane or spirit world.

In such instances, being a psychopomp may be a regular job, perhaps divided into categories and regional departments (“Violent Deaths, Vancouver Office”). In some cases – such as revenant reapers who have gained their powers after being returned following a death or near death experience – they may be assigned responsibilities to match the reaper’s own death. (A murder victim is responsible for violent deaths such as murders, etc.) You check in with your supervisor or partner, receive a list of those who are about to die (perhaps provided via an appropriate mystical fashion, such as a real Book of the Dead or a visiting angel) and their precise time of death and location. Then you race to the location via physical or supernatural methods, find the client, and make sure you are standing there to act as a spirit guide when they shuffle off the mortal coil.

Psychopomp Actions

As a default, the GM may assume that in a **Monster Hunters** setting when a person dies, their immortal soul leaves their body, enters the inner astral plane (the world of ghosts), and then, metaphorically speaking, rises up to Heaven, sinks down to Hell, or ends up in some other afterlife, possibly prior to reincarnation. At least, that’s what it’s supposed to be doing . . . The natural order is such that the soul can manage to do this on its own, perhaps assisted by “last rites” from clergy and, at the other end of the tunnel, received by a supreme being or a welcoming committee of departed love ones, saints, angels, demons, gloomy shades, celestial bureaucrats, or simply recycled, as cosmic laws decree.

If it's all automatic, why do you need the reaper? A psychopomp, or reaper, is analogous to a midwife or doctor attending a birth. Birth can work fine without help, but if something goes wrong, it's nice to have an expert. While human clergy also do this, if things go really bad or unnatural forces are involved, a nearby psychopomp may be a soul's only hope of ensuring a safe, non-evil transition from death to the afterlife.

What Can Go Wrong?

A soul may become lost or trapped after it exits the body, and *fail* to open the way to afterlife. Maybe it was too closely balanced between good and evil, and so the pull of heaven and hell canceled out, leaving it caught between worlds. Perhaps the soul was just confused or reluctant; this may happen in a few percent of all deaths, especially traumatic ones. Once in a while there's even the thanatic equivalent of a breach birth, trapping the soul in his dead body. One of the more common problems is that the tug of "unfinished business" on the mortal plane is too strong, leaving them unable to leave. A soul might also be trapped if a death occurred in a "bad place" such as a haunted house or unholy ground, where the "gravity" is such that it works like supernatural quicksand, leaving them unable to escape into the light without rescue.

In all of these circumstances, if a reaper or other form of psychopomp isn't present to take care of it, the soul's ties to the material world slowly strengthen over the next few minutes, hours, or days.

If the soul has left its body, or its body was destroyed, it may manifest as a ghost. At this stage it's usually relatively weak, but if it doesn't cross over, it may grow stronger over time, and more closely tied to the material world and its place of death.

Other more timid souls may never manifest. Instead they'll usually retreat shivering back into their corpse, and then suffer all the psychic trauma of experiencing its own autopsy, funeral, cremation or burial, and/or its lonely decay. Such unfortunates may either wither away into nothing, or end up as weaker ghosts, haunting the place they were buried or wandering the astral plane until some necromancer or other supernatural predator collects or devours them, or reaper finds and puts them out of their misery. . .

If a reaper is present at the time of death, or arrives soon afterward, he can find the lost soul before either fate (becoming a ghost or spiritual trauma) occurs. If the soul is just lost, hiding, or confused (a classic ghost in the making), the psychopomp will track down the nascent ghost or the body where the soul is cowering. He may perform a normal exorcism (adding his Reaper power level); see *Ghosts*, **GURPS Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy**, p. 4, for rules on creating ghosts as adversaries and how to exorcise them. Alternatively, if he has appropriate powers, he might use the Death's Gate ability (p. 24) to transport the soul directly to the afterlife himself. Or, if the reaper is of a less patient nature, or the ghost has become hostile, he may engage it in combat with an ability that affects insubstantial entities (such as Soul-Scythe, p. 24, or Ghost Weapon abilities, or turning insubstantial to attack it, or zapping it with a ghost blaster, or some malediction that affects spirits as well as it affects anyone else. . .) and banishing the being the hard way.

Being Death Is Stressful

While spirits have a hard time, being the face of death on a daily basis can also be stressful. In addition to facing down ghosts and traumatized souls, some reapers must deal with the issue of whether they should try to prevent deaths, or just witness them and help souls cross over.

Some reapers – especially those who receive lists or premonitions of when deaths will occur – live by a code that requires them to *just let deaths happen*, a non-interference directive. In addition to not saving the victims from their fate, they may also be dissuaded from punishing killers. The "rules" might require they stand by as a psychopath kills an innocent child, allow the murderer to walk free, and only intervene to ensure that the victim's soul can reach the afterlife rather than becoming a ghost.

This offers plenty of fodder for psychological drama, but may also lead some psychopomps to go rogue and turn into scythe-wielding avengers of the night (a perfectly valid career PC choice). Such a reaper may be either painted as a deranged villain or a heroic monster hunter but (unless his powers are mystically taken away immediately upon violating such a "prime directive") he may also end up "on the run" with other reapers, angels, or similar manifestations of Order as his Enemies.

Wrestling With Death

Monster Hunters suggests that dying heroes use Extra Life to bring themselves back, even using destiny points or wildcard bonus points to do so. If this sort of thing seems to be getting out of hand, the GM may wish to have a reaper show up to claim their soul is forfeit. This could occur after resurrection, or, more cinematically, the dead person may encounter the reaper on the spirit plane while still a naked soul. Alternatively, taking Enemies (Reaper) is one way to pay off an Extra Life. . .

Reapers as Villains

Villainous reapers usually follow the same pattern as villainous angels: they're self-righteous fanatics on a mission that takes no account of mercy. Create a major "boss" reaper by adding an extra 100 points or so of Reaper abilities to those in the crusader or inhuman template.

Reapers as Monster Hunters

Even reapers who accept tragic deaths as the natural order can still expect to see plenty of action. In a **Monster Hunters** setting, it's a good bet that some deaths are going to be supernatural in origin or take place inside a monster's lair. That means any psychopomp going about his business may need to get past hostile nasties, some of whom may be quite capable of engaging a reaper even if he's one who can turn invisible or insubstantial. Reapers can also encounter unnatural entities such as wraiths, necromancers, demons, vampires, or human-sacrificing cultists, all of whose activities may threaten not just the life but the very survival of the soul itself. In either case, "non-interference" is out and the psychopomp is free to eliminate these threats to his charge.

Some challenges may be too powerful for ordinary reapers! If some psychopomps end up dead and souls fail to show up in Heaven (or Hell), other reapers – or a psychopomp organization – might send the PCs to investigate. A reaper could bring his own A-team of monster-hunting friends with him to assist in the case, especially if the villains are something tough like a nest of soul-sacrificing vampire necromancers. Maybe the PCs are part of a special team (with a cool name like the Silver Scythes, Death Squad, or Angels of Vengeance) who are in charge of dealing with such special circumstances!

Reapers are natural enemies of anyone who prevents mortal souls from passing into the afterlife or who attempts to cheat death. These foes include the following.

Evil Spirits: Reapers' special abilities make them particularly adept at hunting evil ghosts, wraiths, skull spirits, and similar noncorporeal undead. Many reapers consider it their primary calling to send evil ghosts or wraiths to whatever hell their souls are *supposed* to occupy; this is usually the main activity in modern manga and anime-inspired stories of shinigami. A few reapers will even take this further and stand vigil when they believe an especially evil human is dying, to ensure that if they become an evil spirit, the reapers are ready to fight whatever ghost or wraith arises out of the villainous remains.

Vampires and Corporeal Undead: Vampires, liches, mummies, wights, and other sapient corporeal undead are often viewed by reapers as perversions in which a soul is trapped in a mortal body instead of passing to its reward. Reapers may dedicate themselves to destroying such creatures in order to free their souls, and, in the case of beings such as vampires, prevent them from infecting others with their curse. If a vamp is a good person (e.g., a fellow hunter), the reaper may view him as a victim rather than as a monster himself, but might still periodically offer to “release” his soul . . .

Seekers of Eternal Life: Reapers may choose to act against necromancers, alchemists, or mad scientists who develop “unnatural” magical or technological means of cheating death, or those who make similar pacts with demons or other entities. Reapers might even attempt to confiscate or destroy artifacts people have created that confer unnatural longevity or immortality, or grimoires containing life-extending or undead-creating spells such as Lich, Resurrection, Steal Youth, and Wraith.

The Resurrected: People who use seemingly benign magic such as the Resurrection spell or advantages such as Extra Life may still be seen by a reaper as contravening natural law. It's also possible that this might extend to people who were mortally injured but were saved by “unnatural” means such as a Healing spell. A sufficiently judgmental reaper (or organization of reapers) may be sent on a mission to take the soul of someone who came back to life in this fashion, essentially acting as a supernatural assassin.

Soul Predators: Reapers act as guardians against those who would steal or prey upon the souls of the newly dead, especially in the vulnerable period immediately after death. This includes black magicians and cultists attempting to sacrifice souls to demons, evil gods, or malign entities that prey on ghosts.

Ghosts: Many reapers consider it their primary duty to help these lost souls pass on to their afterlife just as or before they become ghosts. Some reapers take this further, and devote much of their energy to ghost-hunting operations. However, other reapers may consider “ghost” as a valid choice that a departed soul may make, especially one that is neither evil enough to go to Hell nor good enough to pass onto Heaven. Reapers who hold this philosophy may act as *protectors* of relatively harmless ghosts, defending them against intolerant ghost hunters, including other reapers, as well as malignant necromancers or shamans who seek to bind them into their service. Over time, such a reaper may become known as the guardian of the ghosts in a particular city, some of whom, if self-aware, may in turn serve as his Contacts or Allies.

Reapers as Astral Cops: Powerful reapers may be the policemen of the spirit world, patrolling the astral plane to keep death safe. This could lead to friction with ghosts, psis or mystics who make use of astral projection, and other entities who would prefer that reapers minded their own business . . .

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 role-playing game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating *Transhuman Space*, co-authoring the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* anime RPG, and writing countless *GURPS* books, including the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and the *GURPS Spaceships* series.

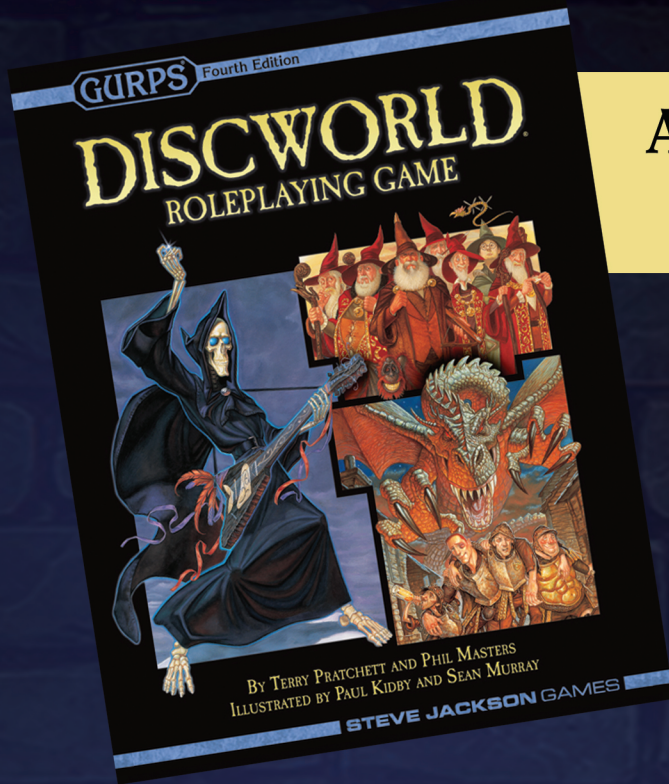
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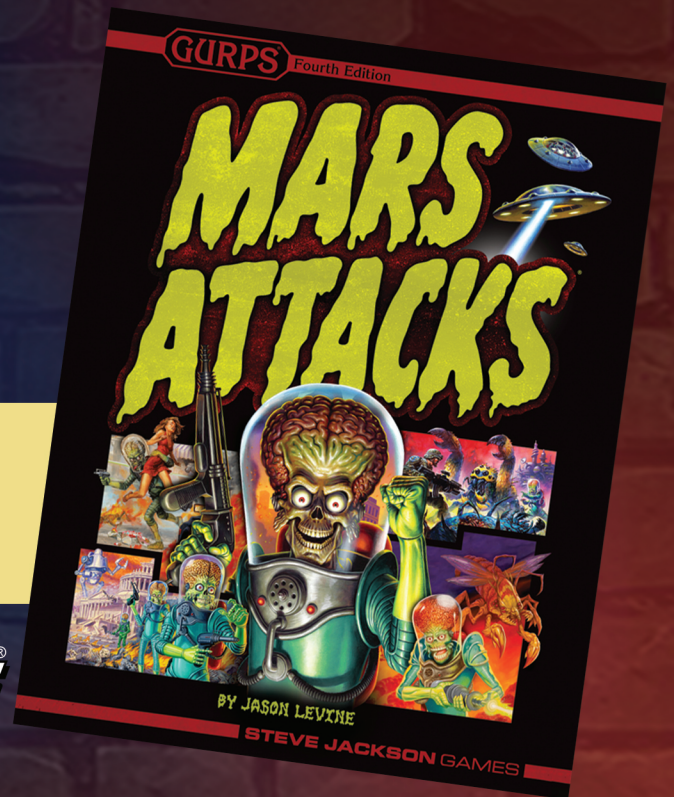
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THE SLAUGHTERREALM

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

In a magically created pocket dimension, contiguous to a number of realities, a horrifyingly brutal game – the Crawl – awaits the unwary.

Would-be participants are kidnapped from their own worlds by eerie, seemingly unstoppable Retrievers, and taken to a necromantic pocket dimension fueled by pain and suffering. There, in the Slaughterealm, they are forced to compete for the amusement of “Patrons” of unimaginable power. These unwholesome beings gather to show off their new monstrosities, make wagers with one another, and enjoy the depraved entertainment on offer.

The unfortunates forced into the Slaughterealm have a very limited number of choices, mostly coming down to “fight” or “die.” Should they make it through a full 31 days worth of sadistic and bloody scenarios, they’ll be allowed to leave. But the last challenge is always the toughest, because the House wants to make sure its Patrons get the gruesome spectacle they desire.

Can the PCs win through? Or can they find some way to escape this gruesome contest, before they’re doomed to belong to the Slaughterealm for all eternity – body and soul?

AND NOW, LET’S MEET OUR HOST . . .

The Slaughterealm was envisioned and constructed by the dark arch-necromancer Dtamyrtain. They say he got the idea from viewing snippets of some sort of morally corrupt entertainment from a more “advanced” world he scryed by chance. He doesn’t care to comment on that rumor.

No one is entirely certain *what* Dtamyrtain actually is. He hides his true form behind flowing, shimmering tan robes and a turban, and wears a pale, silver mask carved into a tableau of skeletal figures writhing in pain. Unnervingly, the tableau seems to move if you stare long enough.

When queried about it, he always claims, “I wear no mask.” His guests are sure that’s some kind of weird joke.

This article tells the sick story of this pocket dimension, the systemless rules it operates under, and the monsters that gather there. It provides sample Patrons, the creatures and victims they bring with them, and the challenges they put them to. It also gives ideas on how to use the Slaughterealm

in campaigns, provided the GM doesn’t just use it as a nasty one-shot to throw some moderately-low or quite high-level characters into.

COME ON DOWN!

The setup is fiendishly simple: would-be adventuring parties are lured into a “quest” by kind-seeming shills, who promise them adventure, riches, romance – whatever they need to be told. Newer groups of adventurers make ideal targets, mostly because they’re more likely to accept the offer, but the shills really like to collect more experienced groups, as they make for a better show.

The party is allowed to stock up on weapons, armor, and equipment, and then follow the shill to their purported destination. Once there, the shill uses a special, gold key to open a gate to the Slaughterealm. Retrievers teleport right behind each member of the party, and take them to a special cell for “processing.” If the shill was a local agent, he gets a paid a flat fee for each worthy contestant; the unworthy are taken as well, but will be put to a different use.

The special cell is ensorcelled with powerful incapacitation spells, capable of felling almost any contestant. Once the party’s out cold, all their treasure is claimed by the House. They’re allowed to keep mundane items, tools, armor, and weapons, but *all* magical items are confiscated. Books of spells are left with their owners, but objects that permit someone to use a single-use spell, such as scrolls or potions, are taken away.

Magic users are also cursed, by Dtamyrtain himself, so that they can’t use necromantic magic (except for strictly non-coercive communication) or anything that would allow them to travel within or away from the realm. The first time they attempt such a feat, there’s extreme but temporary pain behind the eyes, the second time causes brain damage, and the third results in a fatal – and messy – intercranial implosion.

After that, the party is teleported to a holding cell. Once they’re awake and upright, a Retriever teleports into their cell and explains their situation. If they choose to attack instead of listen, the Retriever just keeps talking – using this as an opportunity to show how little they can harm it.

The Retriever explains that the party is in the Slaughterealm – guests of the mighty Dtamyr Dtain, and beholden to the Patron who arranged for their capture. They are to entertain Dtain and his Patrons for the next 31 days through a variety of challenges, which might test their fighting skills, intelligence, force of will, or some combination thereof.

The party may use magic or healing skills to recover from challenges, but there will be no resurrections, reincarnations, gross physical alterations, or body-swapping allowed. Anyone who dies is forfeit to the house, body and soul – something the Retriever doesn't care to elaborate upon.

Party members who survive 30 days will undergo a final challenge, created by Dtamyr Dtain himself. If that challenge is passed, any survivors will be transported back home, or anywhere else they'd care to go. If it's *not* passed, well, that's show business.

Past that, the rules are simple: survive at all costs, and don't try to escape.

With that, the Retriever vanishes, leaving the party to ponder its fate.

I'D LIKE TO BUY A SLAUGHTER, DTAIN

The cells are made from bones – mostly humanoid – packed together to be as tough as stone. They're 15' by 20' with no windows or doors, and are weakly illuminated by a thick, phosphorescent mist 20' off the floor. Scaling the walls is useless – they go up forever.

Bone benches project out from the walls, and water constantly drips from one crack in the wall into another. Hearty and warm (though amazingly bland) food is provided in a large, covered container, which doubles as a slop bucket. At the end of every challenge, the party returns to find it cleaned and full of more food.

The party may get the distinct feeling they're being watched, and their conversations laughed at by voices just beyond the range of their hearing. It's unnerving to say the least, but, apart from that eerie feeling, there's nothing but stony silence, coupled with the sense of time going by very slowly.

When it's time for a challenge, a portion of the wall slides open. Beyond it is a bone hallway, 10' wide, also illuminated by the strange, gently glowing mist. If the group dawdles, a number of Retrievers appear to prod them forward – teleporting them if need be.

As the party gets further down the corridor, they begin to hear loud and hideous cheering. The chants and jeers become louder with every step, echoing like thunder through the mountains. Then the light goes from paltry to nearly blinding, the walls close behind them, and the sound becomes an uproarious cacophony.

The adventurers now stand before the Slaughterealm: a great, circular chamber a mile in diameter, made from the same tightly packed bone as everything else here. It's bordered by walls that reach up into the phosphorescent mists, eventually fading from view. Half-glimpsed Retrievers stand guard at the edge of that view. Before long, the strange and hideous faces of the Patrons resolve themselves through the glowing murk, and either cheer or mock the party as the victims stumble forward.

What's within the chamber depends on the challenge of the day. It could be a labyrinth, an obstacle course, a collection of traps, a thick forest, a festering swamp, a craggy mountain, an ancient castle, a watery ruin, a seemingly endless necropolis. Anything needed or required will be instantly created for the event, and then put away just as quickly when the challenge is done.

Whichever Patron designed a particular challenge gets the honor of explaining the game to its contestants. This is normally done by voice alone, though some Patrons prefer to appear in person. Such appearances are illusory, so attacking them does no good. Patrons consider it quite funny to see new contestants flail helplessly before it all starts.

After that, the game begins, and it's kill or die. Any party members who fall dead during the game are gathered by Retrievers, who teleport down to take the body and everything it had on it. Those who survive are hailed and booed in equal measure, and then teleported back to their cell by Retrievers. Food and rest await there, along with the realization that the survivors may not be so lucky the next day.

A WORD FROM OUR RETRIEVERS

The powerful beings known as Retrievers are physical extensions of the Slaughterealm, itself. When they come to initially collect the contestants, they seem as winged angels wrapped in tan robes and turbans, with silver faces that never stop smiling. Once home, they are revealed to be gruesome patchwork golems, made from the bone and gristle of those who have died here. Their robes are revealed to be roughly sewn skin, and their silver masks become grinning skulls.

Within the Slaughterealm, Retrievers are omnipresent. They guard the halls that lead from the Patrons' personal gates to the viewing room, and mill through the crowds, ensuring good behavior. They also float within the mists above the playing field, ready to gather the dead for their new roles.

The Retrievers' sole form of attack is teleportation. If they can grapple an opponent, they can teleport them anywhere within the Slaughterealm. Normally, they just fling troublemakers into a processing cell, or deposit them into a normal cell to await judgment. But, if Dtain has endured enough of their nonsense, the Retrievers can fling them into the airless void beyond the tall bone walls.

These patchwork beings gain their strength from the Slaughterealm's massive necromantic energy stores. Within it, they prove very difficult to injure or ensorcell, and heal very rapidly from all but the most debilitating of injuries. Outside of it, they're less tough, and could even be destroyed. However, it's flat-out impossible to use mind control upon them, no matter where they are.

YOU CAN'T WIN IF YOU DON'T PLAY!

The Slaughterealm is a busy place: at any given time, there's between three and 10 Patrons watching some hapless group fighting for their lives. The Patrons sit in a special room "above" the playing field, seeing and hearing everything that happens, from any angle. They are constantly served refreshments by the animated corpses of previous contestants.

The Slaughterealm can accommodate up to five separate challenges in a day. That's as much energy as it can provide without collapsing in on itself. If a deficit occurs, Dtain culls a few of the weaker contestants in their cells to harvest their soul energy. (The House always pays the Patrons of such sacrifices for their time.)

All Patrons have been vetted by Dtamy Dtain and given express permission to be within the Slaughterealm at any time. They can bring as many friends as they care to, but all betting must be done through and by the Patron. Access is provided by a magical, golden key that opens a gate to the Slaughterealm. It's similar to the ones given to their agents, except that the agents' keys can only call Retrievers.

Each key is dedicated to one individual. Anyone else who uses it gets grabbed by a Retriever, sent into a cell in the Slaughterealm, and made to participate in a challenge all by themselves.

To play the Crawl, Patrons must bring at least one group of creatures (or creations) to the Slaughterealm, and *also* bring in a group of "contestants" to hurl against other Patrons' creatures. Having been a Patron allows the right to come and merely watch, but if it's someone's first time in the Slaughterealm, they *must* come prepared to play – no exceptions.

The way the gambling works is that one Patron presents a challenge, featuring their creatures and/or creations, and another Patron offers their contestants. Other Patrons then wager on whose side will endure, with the House ensuring that all bets are clearly stated. Patrons can always bet more than they have, but the penalty for losing one's shirt is up to the winner, and may not be pretty. Being a poor loser is cause to be barred from the Slaughterealm for a year and a day, or possibly permanently, depending on the seriousness of the *faux pas*.

Neither of the Patrons involved in a challenge may bet upon it. But they can always bet on others' challenges when it's their turn, as well as on Dtain's final challenge. That said, many Patrons use the spectacles they design to show their guests the efficacy of their wares, leading to other, later forms of remuneration.

As for that final challenge: these special Crawls, personally designed by Dtamy Dtain, are usually some combination of insane and sadistic, with a distinctly necromantic flair. He often pits the contestants against the reanimated corpses of the last group, over a deadly landscape. Sometimes they face

the shifting bones of the Slaughterealm itself, and sometimes he even enters the fray if he needs to try out some new spells.

The magical items, treasure, and other valuables "volunteers" have confiscated will be the jackpot for the winner(s), but the house rarely loses.

WILL THE REAL MONSTERS PLEASE STAND UP?

Sample Patrons are given below, complete with the sort of creatures and contestants they bring along with them, and a challenge for each. The GM can invent Patrons by using old adversaries their PCs have made, foes they thought they'd vanquished, or legendarily evil figures from their homelands' history or mythology.

Dast Vel Durgelmann, the Keeper of Monsters

Coming from a long line of Iverian exotic beast importers, Dast has secured a reputation for being the best creature-capture expert in nine realms. She's arranged for the live capture of some of the most ferocious and dangerous beasts in existence, and has a vast catalogue of monsters for her buyers to choose from. The largest dragon or the smallest microbe, she'll track it, catch it, put it into a stasis gem, and sell it to the highest bidder – no questions asked.

Dast uses the Slaughterealm as both showroom and entertainment. Whenever she traps something "special," she brings it to show it off to would-be buyers. Watching such beasts plow through a passel of armed, would-be treasure raiders often helps sell her clients on the deal.

Of noble Iverian blood, Dast is a round-faced, portly lady of 50 or so years. Her skin is lily white, her eyes are sapphire purple, her hair is coppery red, and she often dresses as befits one who traipses through the great, unknown wilderness. One of her hands is a cunningly disguised mechanical replacement – testament to her younger, more foolish days – and carries a stun enchantment in the palm. She also has pockets full of stasis gems, each filled with some impressive, confused, and hungry beast she can hurl at would-be attackers.

Creatures: Does it exist? Can it be trapped in a stasis gem? Then Dast has it. Anything from swarms of vermin to large, world-crushing abominations can be found somewhere in her vast warehouse. The stranger the better!

Contestants: Dast has numerous local guides across the realms, looking for amazing creatures for her to hunt and trap. These guides, in turn, often rely on adventure seekers to bring back stories of what they've seen abroad – preferably with proof. But when those guides aren't tracking down rumors of were-unicorns or the like, they can make extra cash by luring their less-useful informants into the Retrievers' clutches.

Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor.

– Suzanne Collins, The Hunger Games

Challenge – The Monster Smash: An increasingly dangerous scrum involving anywhere from four to 10 different groups of incompatible species. It starts out with the contestants fighting one group of creatures in front of a near-indestructible timing mechanism. The machine ejects a stasis gem containing a new group of monsters at random intervals, which means that the contestants may not have vanquished the previous group before a new batch arrives. Fortunately, the new arrivals will *also* try to kill the monsters the PCs are currently attacking, but they may be smart enough to let the PCs do most of the heavy lifting on their behalf, and *then* attack them.

Isquorsh Manskull the Worldcrusher, Orclord of Krushshsh

Harsh sovereign of a world as brutal and ugly as he is, Isquorsh lives to conquer and destroy. Having subdued his homeworld, he quickly bored of “peace” and instructed his orc mages to open portals to other realms, so that he could crush those worlds as well. When he’s not planning the next invasion wave, he can be found in the Slaughterealm, cheering his warriors as they massacre rival Patrons’ parties.

At 6’ tall, Isquorsh cuts an imposing figure – even if one foot of that is massive combat boots, made from the skulls of the two-headed orclord he killed to take control of his own tribe, years ago. His eyes are black and shot through with green veins, his tusks are long and chased with onyx filigrees, and his nose has been replaced with a sharp, filthy knife.

He’s been bolted into heavy, black plate armor – magically altered to move as though it were merely leather. Its surface is studded with spikes, and each spike holds the skull of the mightiest warrior of each world he’s conquered. The largest, tallest spike is right behind his head, and left bare for his own skull, should someone manage to take it from him.

Creatures: Orc fighters from Isquorsh’s conquests vie for the honor of fighting in the Slaughterealm. This leads to many bloody tryouts in which maybe only one or two really tough orcs survive, and are put in charge of bands of less impressive warriors. These are most often orcs as well, but could be goblins of every size and shape: shifty goblins, sneaky knockers, battle-scarred hobgoblins, shambling ogres, and swarms of half-breeds of one stripe or another.

Contestants: Isquorsh brings the mismatched remnants of whatever worlds he’s conquered – usually beings that are too strong to become food, but too headstrong to be slaves. Survivors are granted the right to go to whatever new world they’d care to, the better to spread word of his eventual arrival.

Challenge – Capture the Skull: A massive mountain, riddled with caves and dotted with steel emplacements, greets the contestants. It is a mighty orc fortress, home to an equally mighty orc army that’s on high alert. To win, the contestants must sneak their way into the heart of the mountain, take the crowned skull of the long-dead orc king from its well-guarded treasure chamber, and escape with it. One wrong move, and every patrol will converge on them in minutes. Good luck, Pinkskin!

Lady Selinax, Queen of the Eternal Night

This loathsome lady comes to the Slaughterealm from Onyxon – a cold and icy necroworld, floating aimlessly

through space. It was once one of the most beautiful worlds in existence, until its long-banished race of spectral vampires worked a mighty spell to hurl the planet from its orbit. Now it’s home to legions of shrieking ghosts, and ruled by pale and hideous things that can only gain sustenance from drinking the pain of the undead.

However, even ghosts lose their flavor, over time, so the necrotic, skeletal armies of Onyxon travel through the spirit realms to invade living worlds. They appear through thick, interdimensional mists, and ravage entire cities to kill the innocent, capture their spirits in skull-shaped soul-jars, and take them home so their dread masters may feed.

Like most spectral vampires, Lady Selinax is a withered and pale thing, barely recognizable as humanoid. She hides her true appearance under a long, white, hooded shroud, leaving only her gnarled and bony hands visible. Her voice is as grating as stones being struck together, but thankfully she doesn’t speak too often – her constantly present retinue of skeletal bodyguards know her every cruel whim before she even thinks it.

Creatures: Anything dead is hers to command – ghost warriors and hungry specters, shambling zombies and brutal revenants, skeletal creations of a million sizes and shapes, and flesh golems too hideous to describe.

Contestants: Lady Selinax is a cold and hateful thing, but seeing the brave fight for their lives ignites what few feelings still reside within her. She commands her invading armies to spare the most valiant fighters, so that they might be put to the ultimate test within the games. Every so often, she’s so enamored by one of her “champions” that, just before his death in a challenge, she turns him into a skeletal guard, so as to have that brave soul by her side.

Challenge – Across the Plague Pits: The thief should not have stolen from the dead, but he dared take gold from the hoard of the Lich-Lord. Now his entire town has fallen victim to tomb rot, and the living have become the dead. The contestants must enter this zombie-infested town, and rescue a number of innocent, as-yet-uninfected souls from the temple at its center. Then they must get them out of town without losing a single person. One unmentioned complication: once they enter the temple, the revenant soldiers of the Lich-Lord will descend upon the town to kill both the living and the dead.

Baron Ales Millenius, the Trapster of Avonne

When tiny, sickly Ales turned 10, he had 10 older brothers and sisters. By the time he came of age, he’d done away with them, courtesy of increasingly baroque “accidents.” Such wholesale fratricide is a normal occurrence among the royalty of Avonne, where only the strong and cunning may survive. But while rulers are usually content to winnow down only their own families, Ales applied that ethic to the entire population of his barony – slowly turning the realm into a massive, ever-changing deathtrap.

Before long, Ales had decreased the population to just a 1/10 of its previous size, and the survivors had become some of the best thieves that world had ever seen, just to stay alive. Eventually, the Barony of Avonne became something of a proving ground for would-be thieves, attracting “business” from many worlds and realms beyond its own.

THE SHOW STOPPER

Sticking this extraplanar meat grinder into an ongoing campaign might seem an exercise in sadism. However, it can be a great way to see how the party (and players) handle a seemingly hopeless situation. It can also illustrate what kind of evil awaits beyond the confines of the PC's world, introduce new adversaries the party might encounter again, or revisit old enemies who've since become patrons. That said, few players like being railroaded for too long, and if the GM gets the feeling enthusiasm is running low, the PC's should be given a chance to escape before someone dies.

With that in mind, here are some ways the contestants can get out of the game on their own two feet.

- *I Got the Power:* The Slaughterealm is run off of death – literally. When anyone dies there, their souls are swallowed into the glowing mists that illuminate the place. Though most necromancy is blocked, communication with the dead is an exception, whether via spirit magic, a pact with the dead, a connection to higher planes, or similar means. Doing so, the party could negotiate a temporary or permanent shutdown of certain systems, and get themselves out.

- *Skullduggery:* Patrons have to play nicely with one another, but don't have to like it. There's a lot of bad blood and old grudges, and some Patrons aren't above

sabotaging another's chances by getting rid of their Contestants. Killing the party's a possibility, but then so is hijacking a Retriever and using it to teleport them out of the place, or bustle them through a gate. Of course, the PCs would owe that Patron – a *lot* – but that can be settled later, elsewhere.

- *Make the Lady Happy:* Lady Selinax, being a fellow necromancer, is wildly jealous of Dtain's achievement. She'd like the Slaughterealm for herself, but doesn't dare attack him directly. However, the PCs might make a useful diversion, provided they were helped in the right way, at the right time. She may approach them through ghosts to get their cooperation, or just let them loose – ignorant of her hand in things. Willing cooperation gains her thanks, and perhaps her mercy in the form of a trip home. Or maybe she'll kill them anyway.

- *Face the Face:* Dtamyrr Dtain runs the entire complex – and commands the Retrievers – through his silver mask. If it's removed, whoever holds it gains command over the whole show. Dtain is still a massively powerful wizard, but even he might not be able to snatch it back while fighting off every Retriever in the place, or else tumbling through the void below. But how can the PCs get him close enough to take it? Can they play off his vanity or use his paranoia? Or can they amaze him so much that he has to come down in person to congratulate them?

This is how Dtain and Ales became acquainted with one another's work, and how the seemingly frail Baron became one of the Slaughterealm's more inventive Patrons.

The Baron is short and skinny, with a head seeming too big for his shoulders. He eschews the noble finery of his station for work clothes, magnifying eyepieces, and a leather apron filled with magical tools that double as deadly weapons. He never blinks, and rarely sleeps.

Creatures: Ales is unique among the Patrons in that he doesn't bring warriors, but rather designs structures filled with elaborate, multilayered, and ingeniously deadly traps, occasionally guarded or baited by beings he's bought from Dast. Getting from one end of such a creation to the other without triggering so much as a trapdoor is a major achievement, even for a well-skilled thief.

Contestants: If you can survive in Avonne, you do so quietly and without attracting the Baron's fatal attention. However, there are "live traps" that catch those who were *almost* good enough to escape his notice, but just short of the mark. Such souls are brought to the Crawl, just to see how they do against others' offerings. Those who win are released alive, just outside of his barony, as a mark of respect.

Challenge – The True Treasure: The contestants are teleported to the center of a strange, shifting landscape, floating over a sea of darkness. Several tiers of platforms go back and forth, up and down, and vanish and reappear in regular patterns. However, deadly balls of energy bounce across those platforms at *irregular* intervals, and every so often a massive, black knight appears nearby, and slashes his long, sharp

sword at the neck of a contestant before vanishing yet again. Can the contestants get across this architectural nightmare, or are they doomed to lose the one, true treasure they have from birth – their very lives?

IS THIS YOUR FINAL CHALLENGE?

The most obvious use of the Slaughterealm has a group of PCs being fooled into "volunteering," and then having to fight their way through 31 days worth of challenges. But there are many other things that could be done with this depraved, transplanar pastime, either to start a new campaign or provide a unique challenge during a high-level ongoing one.

Come Together, Right Now

The PCs were all complete strangers when a Patron invaded their world. They fought to survive and were captured and taken to the Slaughterealm. Now, they have 31 days' worth of fighting to get through, and no guarantees of anything past that. Will this turn them into a team, or just get them killed? Where will they go from here?

The Pilgrimage Has Gained Momentum

Some Contestants actually seek out the Retrievers, hoping to fight their way through the games so as to achieve travel to more exalted and divine planes of existence.

These “Pilgrims” irritate the Patrons to no end, as they muddle the betting process, but Dtain allows them their chance. Maybe he secretly envies their ability to step into holy worlds.

A group of PCs could pose as Pilgrims to take an emergency journey off the map. Or maybe they’ve been conned by a relatively weak group of Pilgrims into being “guards” and won’t find out what they’re really needed for until they get to the Slaughterealm.

31 Days to Revenge

Dtain’s got enemies, as one might expect. One of them is powerful enough to challenge him, but that wily rogue won’t accept his invitation to duel. So he’s hired the party to bring the two of them together at last.

All they have to do is get snatched up by a shill (he knows where and when one will be) and then survive long enough for a subtle spell he’ll cast upon them to take effect. Once it does, he’ll appear, and settle things with this turbaned sorcerer once and for all. For their troubles, the party is free to take as much of the House’s jackpot money as they can carry out – quite a lot of money, if the stories are true. But will the risk be worth that reward?

Sorry to Crash Your Crawl

Some time ago, a lone survivor stumbled out of the Slaughterealm, and said he’d be back to avenge his dead friends. Since then, he’s become a magician of some renown and has managed to magically subvert a Patron. He’s planning on posing as a friend of that brainwashed monster, so as to gain access to the Slaughterealm, and confront Dtain on his own turf.

He’ll need backup, though. He wants to hire the PCs to pose as fellow friends, only to have them drop the guises at his signal to wreak havoc in the viewing room. They’ll be handsomely rewarded for their trouble, he says, telling tales of a room stacked with gold and treasure. But can they hold off the Retrievers, the other, real Patrons, and the Patron’s friends, allies,

and bodyguards while the avenger claims his long-overdue retribution?

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 *SPYGOD’s Tales* (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.

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RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

DEATH AND HOW TO AVOID IT

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Death is a part of nearly all roleplaying campaigns. In fact, it's noteworthy if death *isn't* a factor that the heroes (or villains) need to worry about. Some games – like the recently released *Discworld Roleplaying Game* – feature an embodiment of Death as an actual entity the heroes might interact with.

So how much of a big deal is death, really?

Well, like so many things, it depends on the game. In our world, death is considered the big finale; if there's any escape from it, it's not a certainty, and – at this time – no one has tangible proof that they can point to as assurance that death can be thwarted or curtailed.

Conversely, in many comic-book universes, death seems to be an inconvenience at best, with deaths often reversed before the body is done cooling off. In fact, non-death incidents are more likely to have lasting repercussions; if a hero gets a limb chopped off, he'll probably be like that for quite a while . . . much longer than if he actually dies.

Here, then, is a modest system to codify the type of death in a campaign world. It hasn't been playtested and is more of the throw-stuff-at-a-wall type ideas that *Random Thought Table* is famous for, but it should at least provide a basis for conversation.

*Death tugs at my ear and says:
"Live, I am coming."*

– Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

DEATH LEVEL

The death level of a world is, roughly, how big a deal death is.

DL0 – Death is absolutely, certainly considered to be the irrefutable end. Perhaps there is scientific evidence of

the *absence* of any possible afterlife, well-proven theorems establishing the impossibility of cryogenics or consciousness transference, etc. There may even be a known certainty of life – a universal psionic field all sapient beings are a part of, the Mark of Life glowing on everyone's forehead, etc. – which, when absent, is certain proof of death. Regardless, everyone can live with 100% confidence that this life is all there is, and there is absolutely no way to thwart, forestall, or circumvent death.

DL1 – Death is considered the finale. It's at least feasible to consider ways in which death may *not* be the end: religious afterlives, resurrection, reincarnation, and the like. However, there is no verifiable proof of these methods actually working. There may also be scientific breakthroughs that point to a possibility of death being thwartable in the future, but – again – there are no actual cases of someone who was brain dead being restored to any semblance of functionality. This is the default assumption of our world, and any world that seeks to emulate our world perfectly.

DL2 – Death is considered an insurmountable obstacle . . . almost. There are *just* enough cases of death being overcome that it's not an absolutely inconceivable notion for someone to come back from the dead. There's at least one person – and perhaps a handful of people – definitively known to be deceased but are now alive again . . . for now. Whether Lazarus of Bethany, Orpheus' near-successful descent to the Underworld, or that Harry Potter boy, it's at least not beyond the realm of possibility that someone might come back to life. The effort to come back from the dead is almost certainly the result of an epic, once-in-a-lifetime effort. There also may be stronger evidence of the afterlife, but it's not a blanket assurance or a sure thing, and agnosticism or atheism is still a comprehensible choice. Regardless, like the number of people who've walked on the moon in our world, the number of living people who've come back from the dead is either flat or going down.

DL3 – Death is definitely a problem. It's defied nearly all efforts at overcoming it through magic or technology.

However, there have been enough fluke incidents, strange occurrences, or unusual loopholes that a reasonable number of people have come back to life. There is likely at least some bureaucratic protocol or precedent for what to do when someone comes back from the dead. While returning to life is definitely noteworthy, it's about on par with the Nobel Prize, with a handful of people each year somehow thwarting the Grim Reaper. Overcoming death is still incredibly chaotic and almost certainly relies on blind luck, fortuitous time loop, or irreproducible magical/technological circumstances. Agnosticism is an increasingly sketchy position, although that may be because of increased spirituality ("We've had verified contact with the afterlife!") or scientific acumen ("Death is another form of energy!"). Most long-running science-fiction and fantasy television series fit into this category: *X-Files*, the *Star Trek* universe, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, etc.

DL4 – Death is a nuisance, and more than likely it's the end, but there are a *lot* of exceptions. Hardly a month goes by without a high-profile death being reversed, and there are occasionally incidents where large masses of people come back from the dead, either as zombies, temporal folding, cosmic events, etc. Some people may return from the dead more than once. Grief counselors probably spend a fair bit of time helping others deal with the uncertain nature of death: "How will I know when my loved one isn't coming back? When should I move on with my life?" And so on. The methods of overcoming death are myriad, and a knowledgeable person can probably rattle off a handful of possibilities. However, none of these methods are foolproof. They may well be irreproducible in specific cases, but reproducible in broad strokes (for example, "To bring your friend back, you'll need to somehow get the attention of Death and do a favor"). This is the default level of most long-running comic-book universes, as well as many soap-opera worlds.

DL5 – Death is a definite inconvenience. However, it is well known exactly how to overcome it, with one or more codified methods: resurrection magic, clone-mind transfer, etc. This method is not available to everyone, and it's almost certainly expensive, but it's about as noteworthy as laser eye surgery. Although the world knows exactly how to overcome death, there may still be circumstances where it *cannot* be reversed, such as a body that's reduced to ash. People know *exactly* how the afterlife works, whether that means maps of the planes, knowledge of how quantum patterns break down after death, or the like. Fantasy worlds with payable healers and resurrection spells fall into this category, as does the classic *Car Wars/GURPS Autoduel* universe.

DL6 – Death is known as a concept, but otherwise unknown as a concern. Thus people may be scared of dying, or know that death is Something Bad, but there's practically no evidence

that it exists. Sure, people may have heard stories about that guy who died that one time, but practically no one actually *knows* anyone who's died. For obvious reasons, time seems to be fairly static in such worlds. This is the default assumption of a *Toon* campaign, as well as much popular entertainment aimed at younger children.

DL7 – Death is utterly unknown as a concept. You can no more explain the idea of "death" as you could "transmit your soul to orange" to someone in our world. People either don't die, or there isn't a permanence of personality or experience that makes death meaningful.

DEATH LEVEL IN PLAY

So, we've got this weird metaphysical concept with an integer attached. What do we *do* with it?

Well, the most obvious thing is use it to codify expectations for a world, so the players and GM are on the same page. If the players are expecting a DL4 world but the GM wants to run a DL2 campaign, there's going to be friction.

The GM may also use it to classify nuances for the setting. For example, a setting might be DL5 for the heroes (there's some definite force that allows heroes to return from the grave if there's a will), DL4 for villains (they come back from the dead a lot), and DL2 for everyone else ("random peasant farmer gets resurrected" is a much more unlikely and "epic" incident than the same thing happening to a mighty hero).

Finally, the GM might find some creative uses for the number system in the campaign. For example, in circumstances where the GM doesn't care one way or the other about whether it's possible for someone to come back from death, maybe the GM rolls 3d for the entity; if *each die* comes up less than the DL applicable to that being, then it's at least *possible* for the person to come back from the dead. Thus in a DL5 setting, a roll of 4, 3, 1 would make it at least feasible for someone to return. The GM may well allow a person with Luck to apply it to this roll, even if it was already expended pre-mortem; that would give a hero in a standard comic-book universe a 65% chance of returning! Of course, actually coming back from death will likely require the deceased's friends to expend effort, conduct research, and possibly spend coin . . .

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshhead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

Man is the only animal that contemplates death, and also the only animal that shows any signs of doubt of its finality.

– William Ernest Hocking

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