



PYRAMID[®]

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**WHAT FOOLS
THESE MORTALS BE?**
by Phil Masters

**THE HOUSE OF
10,000 SOCK MONKEYS!**
by J. Edward Tremlett
and Christopher R. Rice

THE MONSTER MASH
by David L. Pulver

ANIMATING YOUR LIFE
by Kelly Pedersen

**DYING IS EASY;
COMEDY IS HARD**
by Matt Riggsby

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Whether a central need of a campaign or a welcome respite from more-serious affairs, humor can liven up just about any game. This issue of *Pyramid* is devoted to drollery, with tips, tools, and add-ons to get your funny's worth.

When players devise characters for a humorous campaign, one central question they must tackle is *What Fools These Mortals Be?* Phil Masters – author of the *Discworld Roleplaying Game* – looks at what's useful to keep in mind to craft *GURPS* protagonists in a comedic game, including traits and design decisions that open up the most potential for yuks.

No matter how humor is trying to come to the gaming table, it's a truism that *Dying Is Easy; Comedy Is Hard*. Matt Riggsby – co-author of *GURPS Low-Tech* – discusses some of the fundamentals of humorous gaming, including an exploration as to why comedy games have something surprisingly in common with cosmic-horror settings.

If you're looking for new threats for crypt-crawling heroes to encounter, consider *The Monster Mash*. David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* – provides three complete "rooms" suitable for dropping into any *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* campaign when the hack-and-slash antics could use a bit more hilarity. Discover how faith, necromancy, and customer service can form the foundation of memorable encounters. It includes *GURPS* stats for a half-dozen dangers that can be used as is . . . even without humor.

To include more fun to your campaign, consider *Animating Your Life*. Add cartoon characters to your real-world-style *GURPS* game, with a new template, powers, and insight into using your powers for maximum mayhem.

Unleash your inner meddling kid and uncover the secrets of *The House of 10,000 Sock Monkeys!* This standalone one-shot adventure presents an enigma for teen investigators to unravel – with *GURPS* stats for the titular threat. You also get tips for using this in other types of campaigns.

This issue also includes a Random Thought Table that presents more ideas for interjecting humor into your game, including ready-to-use ideas you can drop into your own campaign. With this issue, your funny bone is sure to be tickled . . . and maybe even tackled!

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

COVER AND INTERIOR ART

Aaron Panagos

Hey, where I come from, an anvil to the head is a flesh wound.

– Peter Porker, *The Spectacular Spider-Ham*, in *Spider-Verse Team-Up #1*

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FROM THE EDITOR

THE BEST MEDICINE

One of my earliest memories of *GURPS* is from the description for the Pyromania disadvantage: “You like fires! You like setting fires, too.” (I was delighted when this wording was retained in the Fourth Edition.) This phrase became a standard call and response at our tabletop whenever someone would do something flame-related. **Player:** “Okay, I get ready to fling a fireball at this guy.” **Me:** “You like fires!” **Other Players:** “You like setting fires, too!” There’s something we all found deeply amusing about those lines, and it helped cement *GURPS* for us as a setting that – though steeped in realism – still contains a lot of humor. (Not unlike the real world, actually . . .)

With the recent releases of the supremely humorous *Discworld Roleplaying Game* and the (potentially) darkly humorous *GURPS Mars Attacks*, the continued success of the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* line (which also has a not-entirely serious streak), and our in-the-works standalone *Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game*, it’s a great time to be a fan of the *GURPS* system. But it’s also a good opportunity to take a look

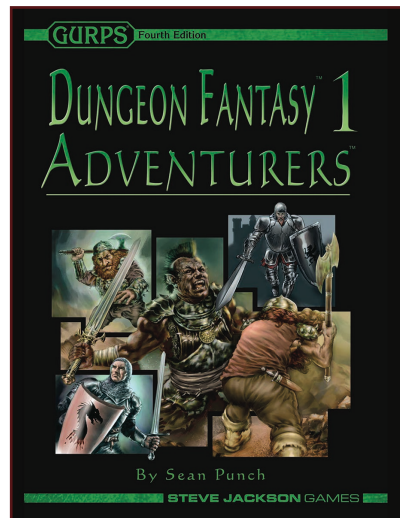
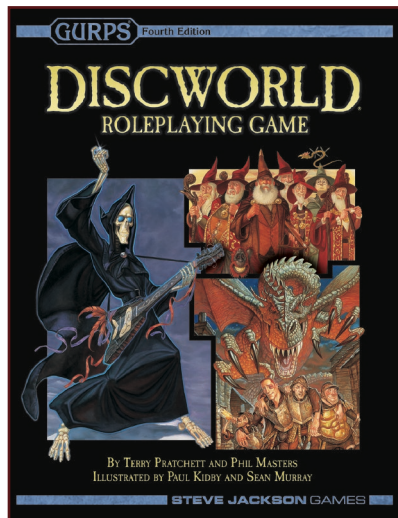
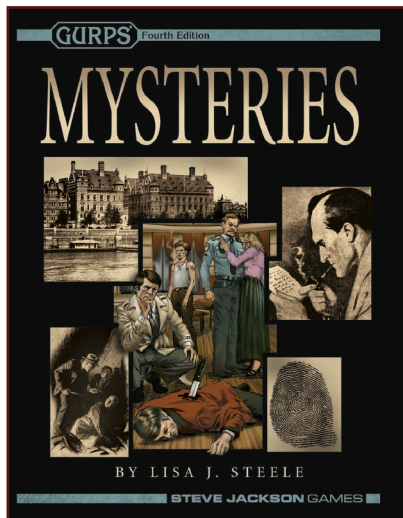
at humor in our games. And this issue examines funny stuff from a bunch of different angles.

There’s something antithetical to humor to explain the joke, so I not going to explain *too* much about this issue here. Perhaps the biggest meta-fact I’ll note is that – if everyone in the gaming group is happy – there’s not much of a *wrong* way to do humor in a game. If quoting Monty Python or *The Princess Bride* brings smiles to everyone’s faces, then go for it! If it’s better when the humor stays in-game, great.

Yet there’s a certain magic that’s happened in our own gaming when – instead of importing other humorists’ quips into the game – we’ve found *our* humorous efforts spilling out into the real world. And it’s a magic I hope can be part of your game.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So was this issue a harbinger of ha-ha, or do we need to go back to the joke mines? Should we do another humor issue someday, or is one enough? Let us know your thoughts via email at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the fun online via forums.sjgames.com.



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WHAT FOOLS THESE MORTALS BE?

BY PHIL MASTERS

While **GURPS** is a rule system that supports comedy of various sorts as well as it supports other types of game, it is less explicit about the mechanics of comedy than about those of, say, sword-swinging action. As much as the GM needs to think about setting up comical situations, the players need to consider their part in such campaigns. Their contribution, as ever, very much begins with character creation – because if you haven’t got a suitable character, for the game style and for your own style of play, it’ll be difficult for you to contribute appropriately.

*Inspiration for creating
player characters in GURPS
comedy games!*

TRAGICAL-COMICAL- HISTORICAL-PASTORAL . . .

To begin with, let’s distinguish comedy from other types of genres – bearing in mind that the terms that follow are loose, overlapping categories, and that a campaign or even a session of play may switch between one and another from time to time.

Broadly speaking, we can talk about three categories. *Action-adventure* games and stories are about people *getting things done*, and usually exciting things at that. Hence, action-adventure characters are often defined, in **GURPS** terms, by their *skills*, along with the attributes that underpin those skills and a few advantages that do the same or enhance them – things like Combat Reflexes, Gadgeteer, High Pain Threshold, or Talents. This isn’t a hard-and-fast rule – for example, in a supers game, powers (defined in game terms as advantages) may be the big thing that heroes and villains have to work with, while fantasy wizards may be defined by their spell selection – but the important thing

is the characters’ capability to affect the world. Action-adventure characters will certainly have disadvantages (after all, they need enough points to be really good at what they do), but these will *mostly* serve to motivate them to get into action (because, say, they have a Duty to fight for something, or they need to protect their Dependents), or to constrain them in action in interesting ways (as when Bloodlust or Overconfidence oblige them to be rash, or a Code of Honor forces them to fight fair).

By contrast, in a *dramatic* game, participants are primarily defined by their interactions with each other, and with all the other people they can talk to. While skills (notably social skills) can be important for this, a different set of *advantages* may be crucial in play – social features like Appearance, Charisma, and Status. Allies and Patrons, along with disadvantageous Dependents, represent a whole web of relationships, not just people who have your back or who need protecting. “Constraining” disadvantages may have slightly more subtle effects than in action-adventure games; a Code of Honor may determine your whole pattern of social relationships, not just who you can or can’t hit, a Duty implies membership of a subsection of society and not just a requirement to take orders, and a Secret Identity will mean that you’re leading a double life, not just that you have to find somewhere to put a mask on when a fight starts.

In a *comedy* game or story, while characters generally have freedom of action (the game would be boring if they didn’t), a big part of almost every story is *what the world does to them*. This doesn’t mean that they can’t be competent or proactive; plenty of well-known comedy characters are both. (For example, both Jeeves, in P.G. Wodehouse’s “Jeeves and Wooster” stories, and Captain Carrot in Terry Pratchett’s Discworld novels, are notable for being *very* competent.) But the challenges they have to deal with aren’t just obstacles to be overcome; they represent the perversity of the universe, and determine the tone of the story. Equally, comedy characters will often be quite flawed as people, maybe being unlikeable or unreliable; even if they’re competent at what they do, they may well misapply that competence. This gives us comic antiheroes such as most incarnations of the title character of the TV series *Blackadder*.

In other words, participants in comedy games are defined more often by their *disadvantages*. These don't have to be crippling or overwhelming – comedy characters who take too many large disadvantages can just look pathetic, or like annoying spotlight hogs, rather than being entertaining – but they should ideally all be interesting and potentially funny. In fact, an interesting selection of *quirks*, rather than full-strength disadvantages, may well be especially appropriate, giving people lots of comic style without dominating the game at the expense of funny.

Even when they have useful advantages, these may incorporate interesting limitations with both comedic and dramatic potential; for example, an Ally or Patron with the Unwilling limitation (p. B38 and p. B74) not only needs cautious management – they may provide a stream of sarcastic commentary on the actions of the hated PC. Likewise, Magery with limitations such as Musical or Solitary (p. B67) is a little more colorful than the unmodified version, and it provides the potential for comic scenes in which the mage has to work frantically to meet the special conditions.

See *GURPS Goblins* for a Third Edition comedy setting which makes a point of giving everyone an assortment of disadvantages and deformity-based advantages before play even begins.

THEY HAVE THEIR EXITS AND THEIR ENTRANCES . . .

Within the comedy category, there are a range of more or less standard or appropriate character types. In particular, a comedy campaign likely resembles an *ensemble* comedy, which has its own specific habits and traditions, and can have a set of roles as structured as those in a dungeon-adventuring party or a superhero team.

The Straight Man

Other characters bounce their comic insanity or stupidity off of this person (who may of course be of any gender – the term is just old comedy jargon). He can serve as a voice of reason to prevent comedy plots getting completely out of hand, and he acts as a surrogate for the relatively rational audience. The straight man may be dull-witted and stupid, serving as a perpetual victim of comedy humiliation and violence, but can just as easily be smart and highly competent, especially if he is functioning as the setting's lone voice of reason; Jeeves and Captain Carrot are both straight men. Being the voice of sanity can be a crucial if thankless task in games with both action-adventure and comedy elements.

In a classic stand-up comedy duo, the straight man usually acts as the “feed,” supplying a partner with lines to turn into jokes – not as obvious a skill as actually *making* the jokes, but important nonetheless. An ensemble consisting mostly or entirely of straight men doesn't sound very comedic at all, although a clever comedy might be shaped about how such a group endures and survives the motiveless chaos of a comic universe, or perhaps how a set of amoral rival straight men plot against each other.

In a game generally, a *competent* straight man should have a good array of skills and other useful abilities, and relatively

few disadvantages apart from positive things like Honesty or a Code of Honor (which might be one reason for him to stick around with the less sane protagonists). The perpetual victim type might be an NPC – perhaps an Ally – or might be a relatively straightforward useful character, perhaps a big bruiser or an expert in one useful but obscure field of science, whose player doesn't mind being the butt of much of the humor if he can sometimes shine when the character's special competence comes into play. If one should get a player who is unselfishly willing *and able* to act as a functional “feed” for the other players, at least some of the time, it can make for good comedy, but that *is* a skill in itself.

The Computer is your friend. The Computer wants you to be happy. Happiness is mandatory. Failure to be happy is treason.

– *Paranoia*

The Bumbler

Physical comedy and farce, and the comedy of easy laughs, are driven by the comedy of incompetence, which calls for incompetent characters. Bumpers are those who can be depended on to screw up, and very importantly, to do so in funny ways. An ensemble consisting entirely of such bumpers may make for very cheap and easy laughs, which can be frustrating and annoying for audiences who find unrelenting stupidity annoying. However, really effective physical farce definitely demands groups of seemingly incompetent characters – but that group will then have to be carefully choreographed, which isn't usually feasible in RPGs. (That said, *GURPS Goblins* and the roleplaying game *Paranoia* in “classic mode” show what can be done with an unrelenting focus on the comedy of incompetence in play.)

Bumpers aren't necessarily totally incompetent at everything – in a game with action-adventure elements, that would raise questions about why they are present and how they survive – but even when they're good at some things, they tend to overreach themselves, or succeed in weirdly fumbling ways. Extreme-case comedy-action heroes like Austin Powers or the hero of the TV series *Archer* illustrate this idea. Other bumpers, like Nijel the Destroyer in the Discworld novel *Sourcery*, just try too hard, but occasionally manage successes through sheer determination.

A variant of the bumbler is the *geek*, someone who typically combines bumping physical and social incompetence with high intelligence and academic or technical skill. Geeks bumble through social situations and action scenes, but may still make themselves useful, even in stories with a predominant action-adventure element, through IQ and focus on specific topics. (In a more socially oriented dramatic story, the socially inept geek tends to act purely as comic relief.) Whole ensembles of geeks can play off each other in a specific sort of comedy, as typified by the TV series *The Big Bang Theory*. The Discworld character Twoflower is something of a bumping geek, despite his lack of exceptional technical skills, as wealth and luck largely take the place of skill or cleverness with him, at least in the early novels.

The Joker

Not all comedy characters are there to provide deliberate humor. In fact, if too many players are trying too hard to bring the funny, the humor may well be overstretched. Good comedy is, very often, about ridiculous things happening to reasonable people.

The joker, however, is the person who tests that principle. This is a type which exists in real life as well as in comedy, after all; the person who keeps trying, deliberately, to be funny. In comedy, though, the joker has the useful role of guaranteeing a certain working minimum of humor – assuming that he hits a minimum level of competence. It's possible for the joker to be shown as not really very good at deliberate humor; in that case, the humor lies in incompetence and the reactions of others who have to put up with this nonsense. If the joker attempts practical jokes, the audience may enjoy the sight of him being foiled and humiliated by other people, who have more genuine wit but who don't try so hard. Players who try to make their characters jokers should be sure that they genuinely can be that sharp themselves, or they may end up in this "incompetent joker" role, despised by the other party members.

In a classic vaudeville-style comedy ensemble such as the Marx Brothers, *every* character may serve as a joker, at least some of the time, providing both verbal and slapstick comedy. This is a high-intensity approach to comedy, requiring considerable skill and energy; it would take an exceptional group of players to manage it in an RPG. Somewhat similarly, in classic Hollywood "screwball" comedies, comedy musicals, and Shakespearean comedy, almost everyone may display a formidable line in quick-witted repartee and word-play, enabling anyone to play the joker when the plot permits; this is a convention of the form, and doesn't imply that the participants are all *really* clever and quick-witted, any more than someone who gets an aria in an opera has to be thought of as a professional-grade singer (with their own orchestra) within the setting.

The Casanova

This is a person whose defining feature is an interest in sex – or "romance" in a more family friendly story. In fact, just what this character is after, how considerate he is of potential partners' feelings, and how successful he is in the pursuit, are generally strongly determined by the mood and tone of the story and setting. A cast consisting mostly or entirely of Casanovas makes the story a full-on sex comedy.

In some older stories, such a character may be given to flagrant leering, and apparently *wants* to be an amoral seducer, but doesn't seem to have a clue *how*, leading to a string of

comic failures. (Meanwhile, all the other, more sympathetic characters are probably honorably monogamous or celibate by nature, though they may engage in some harmless flirtations.) This type tends to be older, and may be a classic "dirty old man." In a few cases, a "romantic" character may actually be prepared to commit to a respectable long-term relationship, but be too comically dedicated to finding one, or prone to misinterpreting casual flirtations from less obsessive characters too seriously.

In more "sophisticated" stories, lecherous people may openly pursue casual flings, albeit with partners who understand the nature of the game. If the story has a moralistic tone, these seductions often will be unsuccessful, leading to a lot of comic misunderstandings, uncomfortable confrontations with jealous rivals, and so on. More amoral sex comedies may feature *successful* seducers, with the comedy lying in the ensuing complications, the problems they have juggling multiple relationships, and perhaps in the jealous reactions of their friends and acquaintances.

In darker comedies, seducers may be unpleasantly uncaring about the consequences of their actions and willing to lie to get what they want. However, ruthless heartbreakers will *usually* be treated as villains rather than protagonists, and too many broken hearts may make the laughs dry up.

(Incidentally, "sophisticated sex comedies" don't have to be modern, although Hollywood has perhaps shifted to a less moralistic approach over the past few decades. Sex comedy is probably as old as any other form of humor, and even in the "respectable" 19th century, French playwrights produced a string of brilliantly constructed farces which were all about characters of both genders quite openly pursuing sex rather than romance.)

The Braggart

Lastly, a lot of classic stage ensemble comedy features a roaring braggart, such as the stock figure of the "Captain" in the old-time *Commedia dell'arte* – a type resurrected in modern sitcoms such as *The Office* as the boastful, arrogant colleague or neighbor. Indeed, the obvious attributes of the type are that boastfulness and arrogance. These may be associated with gross overconfidence and practical incompetence, or with a smarter self-awareness which leads the braggart to disappear somehow whenever their boasts might be tested – or, most annoyingly of all, with actual competence, forcing others to put up with the braggart because he can deliver. The TV series *House*, while not presented as comedy, actually extracted a lot of humor from the fact that everyone had to endure the lead character, because he was just as competent as he thought he was.

*Most universities would find the sight of a group of students playing Frisbee – in mid-air – at least **slightly** unusual. Practicing witches, budding telepaths, illegal aliens from Betelgeuse V and novice supers are all welcome at Illuminati University, as long as they (or their parents) have good credit ratings. The University is truly an equal-opportunity institution.*

– GURPS IOU

Many game groups will prefer to treat this sort of character as an NPC, to be periodically endured and hopefully humiliated. However, in modest doses, loud-mouthed overconfidence may be an amusing PC feature – provided that the party’s internal dynamics allow others to get a word in edgewise. Unfortunately, humiliating a PC braggart, however much he may seem to deserve it, is likely to disrupt party unity and possibly cause player-level resentment – and even comedy games need a degree of party and player cooperation. Hence, braggart PCs are best played as subtle, unless the party features several such characters who can play off each other, while somehow avoiding overshadowing less boastful party members.

To be sure, humour is an essential part of the Discworld, and some of this humour can be a bit silly. But the things that happen in Discworld stories – wizardly plots, palace intrigue, battles and sieges and wars – are the same things that happen in terribly serious fantasy yarns, just warped by the sheer cussedness of the environment.

– *Discworld Roleplaying Game*

THESE, OUR ACTORS

Putting all this together – which disadvantages and other character features should players look at particularly?

Physical Disadvantages

Making a joke of physical disabilities is generally considered very poor taste these days, but a modest degree of physical incompetence – if only in the sense of low physical attributes – can drive comedy without appalling anyone too much. Someone with a fairly minor physical disadvantage may be funny less for the disadvantage itself than for a refusal to acknowledge it. For example, *Bad Sight* is a problem that could afflict almost anyone, and isn’t terribly funny in itself – but a person who refuses to wear glasses out of vanity, despite the fact that they are easily available, is a classic comedy idiot, and laughing at his failures is laughing at vanity, not disability.

Similarly, laughing at below-average *Appearance* (and related problems such as *Bad Smell*) is likely to look a lot like nasty bullying – but if it’s made clear that the problem is more one of poor grooming and hygiene than bad luck, that makes it clearly the character’s own fault. Also, an ugly character who is well adjusted to the situation and carries things off with style, perhaps outclassing prettier but less competent colleagues, is a comedy *hero*. (The Discworld’s clan of

Igors exemplify this.) Similar comments apply to physical problems such as *Paraplegic*, in fact; a wheelchair-bound figure who becomes a comedy hero by wit or determination, outclassing the able-bodied bumbler around him, is awesome, not abusive.

Relatively transient, non-disable disadvantages may be funny despite any issues of taste; *Bad Back* is one favorite, and along with *Hard of Hearing*, may be the mark of the comedic “cranky old gaffer.” Equally, *Ham-Fisted* and *Klutz* are staples of farce, and can be presented more as psychological failings than as neurological conditions, while *Stuttering* is usually seen as an acceptable basis for comedy.

Mental Disadvantages

There is a whole list of behavioral failings which are practically synonymous with comedy. *Absent-Mindedness*, *Clueless*, a grossly misplaced and overly formal *Code of Honor*, *Delusions*, *Gluttony*, *Gullibility*, *Impulsiveness*, *Megalomania*, *Miserliness*, *No Sense of Humor*, *Oblivious*, *Overconfidence*, *Paranoia*, *Short Attention Span*, and *Truthfulness* are all intrinsically at least somewhat comic, with varying amounts of darkness and danger mixed in. *Alcoholism* (and some similar forms of *Addiction*) can also fit in this category – drunk scenes are a venerable comedy tradition – but some players may be touchy on the subject, as real-life alcoholics tend to be more self-destructive than funny. Still, there’s a reason why the *Discworld Roleplaying Game* borrowed the detailed drunkenness rules from the full version of *GURPS*. *Cowardice* can be too limiting in some games, and the pre-

mise for whole campaigns’ worth of comedy in others – see characters such as the Discworld’s Rincewind. A few disadvantages, such as *Sleepwalker*, can serve simply to set up occasional comedy situations.

Conversely, some mental limitations are too serious to be used as a basis for recurring jokes, except in darker, violent games, or gory parodies of adventure stories such as *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. *Berserk* and *Bloodlust* make the character at least a potential killer (as do certain types of *Code of Honor*), while *Bully* and *Sadism* are just nasty, though a *Bully* character might be a satisfactory target for regular humiliation. *Bad Temper* looks similar, but in a social comedy where the character is more likely to insult other people than take a sword to them when his temper goes off, it can be used as the foundation for a bumbler’s personality.

Trickster is the defining mark of a compulsive and possibly self-destructive joker. Most Casanovas obviously have *Lecherousness* – but a few may replace that with *Obsession* (*Find a long-term romantic partner*). A variant that sometimes shows up in social comedy combines a simple “Romantic” quirk with unremarkable IQ and Will and either strikingly high *Appearance* or significant *Wealth* – making the person the natural target of lechers or fortune-hunters. This can still lead to a long history of complicated romantic entanglements – see P.G. Wodehouse’s stories for examples – making the character look like a lecher at first glance.

Social Features

Comedy plots are usually heavily entangled with social situations, and the comedy of social embarrassment and messed-up relationships is a common form. Friends and foes can be as important in comedy as in dramatic games – especially the disadvantageous kind. *Dependents* can be the less competent, even idiotic, comedy figures who players understandably don't want to portray. A dumb-but-strong straightman character might make a useful *Ally*. The more limited types of *Enemies*, "Watchers" and "Rivals," really come into their own in comedy stories, constraining and making trouble for protagonists and dishing out or suffering comedy humiliations, without triggering too many deadly serious combats.

Wealth and *Status* can play various roles in a comedy game. High *Wealth* can be the key feature of a rich bumbler (especially as spending points on that and the associated *Status* may leave the person less competent than poorer colleagues), while poverty and low *Status* can motivate comedy heroes as

well as they do other characters. *Rank* serves the same purpose in games set in structured organizations such as the military; many "army comedies" feature quick-witted enlisted men and NCOs running rings round oblivious officers. Also, *Social Stigma* can fit downtrodden minorities who gain comedic satisfaction from going one up on their social "betters."

Mistaken Identity (which is functionally a social disadvantage, although it's technically a physical attribute) is a classic comedy "bit," and can be hard *not* to play for laughs even in serious games. *Pitiable* is a good feature for the victim-in-need-of-help who appears in some adventure-comedies. Lastly, *Mundane Background* is a good starting disadvantage for a comedy-with-weirdness game, but the player may want to buy it off before it gets boring or grossly unsustainable.

"Luck" Features

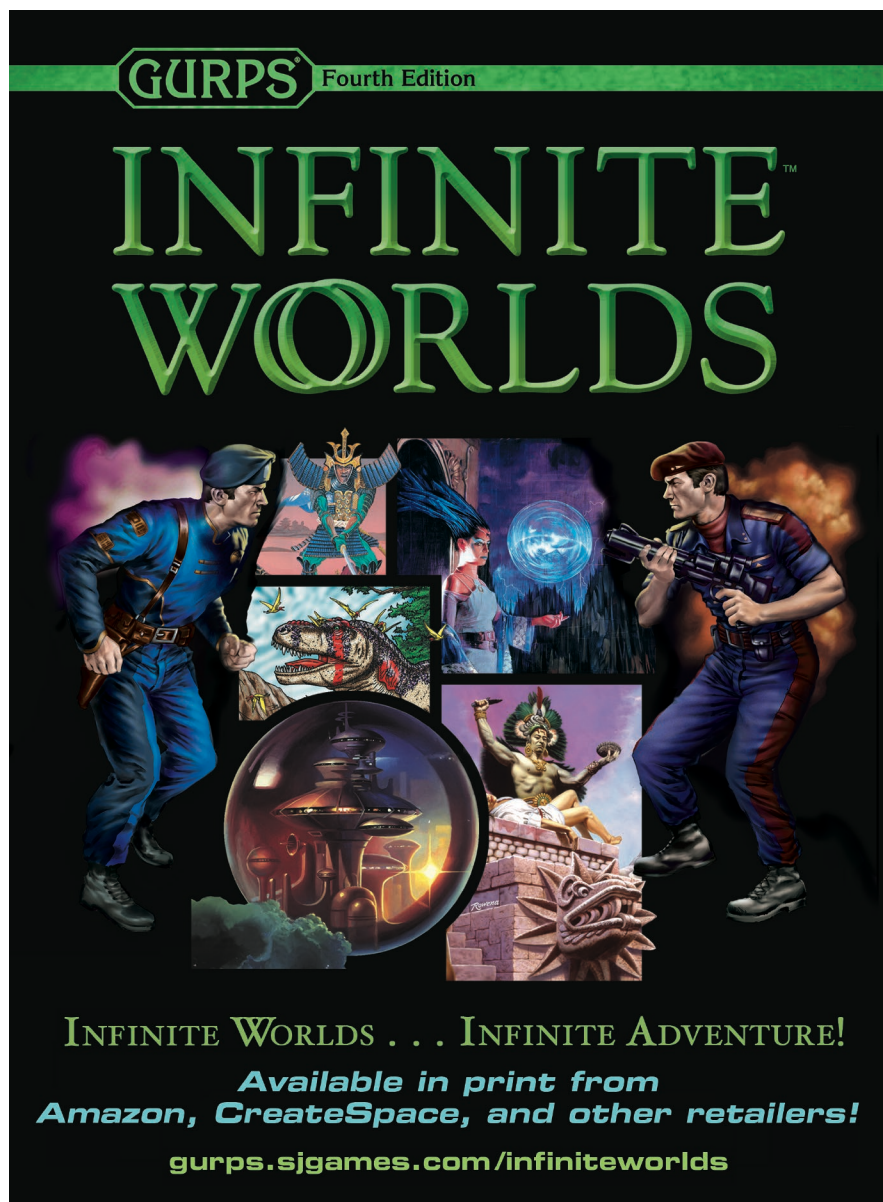
It's worth noting that luck-related advantages and disadvantages can be quite important in comedy games. Notably, *Unluckiness* and *Weirdness Magnet* can drive comedy plots, as people are forced into comic situations which they'd prefer to avoid. *Serendipity* can help things work out okay for the PCs without having to sweat serious dramatic logic too much.

Along the way, various other sorts of good luck can serve to extract the protagonists from trouble, and even allow them to win despite their comedy mistakes and suboptimal, disadvantage-driven behavior. *Daredevil* gives characters a (slightly) better chance of surviving their own folly. An *Extra Life* might provide a get-out in a game where the comedy suddenly leads to disaster (just come up with a suitably funny explanation for the person's survival), while *Gizmos* can represent the comedy character with seemingly weirdly infinite pockets. And of course, *Luck* can help a comically semi-competent individual pull through in really crucial circumstances.

Just remember – the point of the exercise is to survive to be funny. Or at least, to leave an entertaining corpse.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Masters is a long-time British roleplaying game writer with a longer list of *GURPS* and *Pyramids* credits than he can always remember; notably, he's the author of the *Discworld Roleplaying Game*, the second edition of which was recently published by Steve Jackson Games. He's also the *Transhuman Space Line* Editor, and has written for a number of other companies, as well as self-publishing a comedy RPG of his own, *The Small Folk*, which is available through Warehouse 23.



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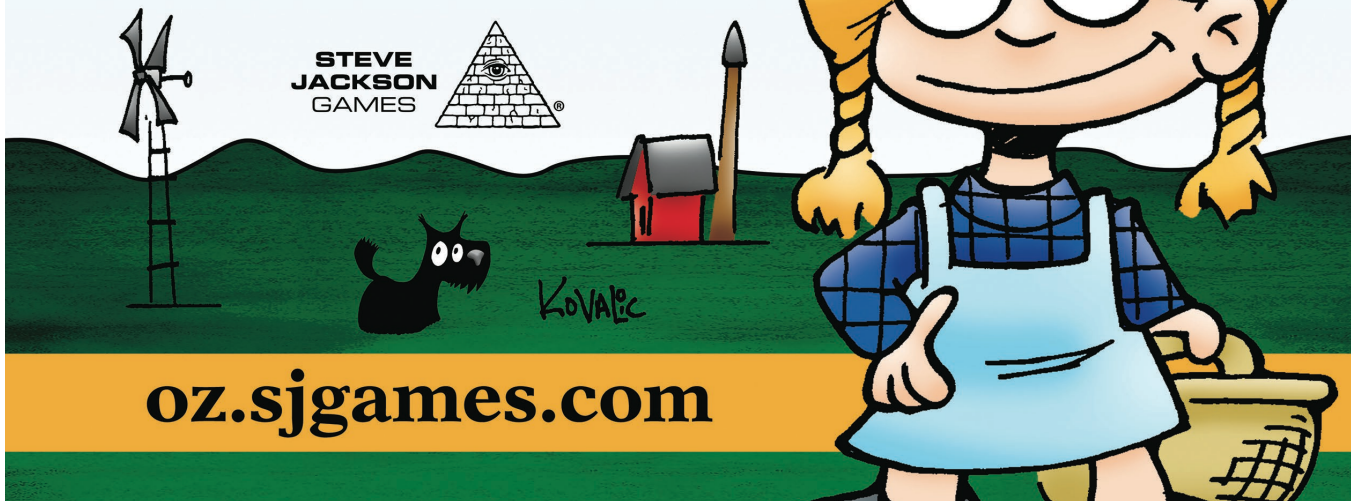


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DYING IS EASY; COMEDY IS HARD

BY MATT RIGGSBY

Superficially, it would appear that comedy would be a natural match with roleplaying games. After all, games are a fun social activity, where jokes often flow freely. For many gamers, it's not really game night until there have been at least half a dozen Monty Python quotes. However, it's often easier to make jokes with the other people around the gaming table than it is inside the game. Doing it on purpose *and* without disrupting the flow of the adventure, or, indeed, while making it organically a part of the adventure can be harder still.

Oddly enough, the genre comic games have most in common with is probably horror games. Comedy demands a specific mood and requires that the GM and players be dedicated to achieving and preserving it. Just as horror games demand that a mood of fear and menace be maintained without tipping over into complete despair and helplessness for the participants, a comedy game has to maintain a steady flow of comic situations without devolving into chaos and nonsense. This article tries to address some of the challenges in running a comic roleplaying game, with attention to fundamental issues like why things are funny as well as consideration of how comic devices do and don't work in a gaming situation.

WHAT IS FUNNY?

Part of the problem with planning to be funny is that humor is still poorly understood. Discussions of what makes some things funny and other things not go back to the Greeks, but, ironically, it's a topic which is rarely taken seriously. Many ideas have at least partly explained comedy, but few can be regarded as all-encompassing.

One of the earliest theories of humor comes from Plato, who considered why people are amused by the misfortune of others. Observing the antics and failures of the unwise allows the observer to take pleasure from feelings of superiority. This implied that laughter was a bad thing, since it derived from arrogance and the hatred of others. This was an idea which was widely accepted by a lot of Roman and Christian philosophers until the Enlightenment, who weren't all that crazy about laughing at things either. However, it began to fade away when a new wave of philosophers began to point to many instances of superiority that didn't make people laugh and instances of superiority and remarkable skill which did.

One theory meant to replace the old idea of superiority was the idea of incongruity. Humor, the idea goes, is rooted in thwarting expectations, violating moral categories and social norms, or introducing sudden shifts in frames of reference.

For example, priests, rabbis, and ministers apply religious principles to ordering drinks at a bar. People fall down in an amusing fashion rather than staying on their feet. Words are used incongruously in puns. The inadequacies in that theory concern how and why some things which violate norms are funny but others aren't. Many incongruous ideas may be tedious, nonsensical, or offensive instead of funny. A pie in the face, for example, may be classic comedy in one context, but lead to assault charges in real life.

Freud regarded humor as coming largely from relieving emotional tensions. A joke highlights tensions and, in its resolution, dissipates them. Sexual tensions were foremost on his mind, of course, but he considered any tension as fair game: worries about money, death, and so on. As a Jew in a society where anti-Semitism was a respectable position, his religious status was a matter of some concern, so Freud was a surprisingly prodigious collector of Jewish jokes. But again, the theory was incomplete. Wordplay and humor on seemingly uncontentious subjects remained unexplained.

Another useful insight to come from Freud is that humor is dependent on *surprise*. The resolution of a joke must be not just a violation of norms or juxtaposition of images; it must, in the moment, be an unexpected or unfamiliar one. This, he argued, is why a joke is funniest the first time it is heard, but becomes less so on repetition.

There are some limited exception to the value of surprise. Studies have indicated that audiences find jokes with punch lines they can predict before hearing them a bit funnier than those they can't. However, this appears to be a product of being able to figure out the humorous twist in a novel joke before actually hearing it, not hearing an old joke again.

Running gags, the repetition of humorous tag lines, might appear to violate the need for surprise. After all, if you've heard the punch line before, it can hardly be surprising to hear it again. However, what makes running gags funny is having the same punch line recycled in different contexts. For example, in *The Muppet Movie*, there are several repetitions of recommending Hare Krishna to someone who is lost. The first time is in response to someone calling for help because he's physically lost in a swamp (rather than spiritually unguided), the second in response to an observation that a performer in a dive bar has lost the thread of his act, and third is a sign incongruously outside a church. Each use makes it a new joke, with much of the humor coming from how it's different from previous instances despite having the same conclusion.

One recent idea about what makes things funny is the “benign violation theory,” which is in some ways a descendant of the idea of incongruity. The idea is that things which are funny violate moral categories and social norms and so on, as incongruities do, but do so in a way which is not threatening. This encompasses incongruities, but also points out that there’s an “upper bound” beyond which incongruities become too incongruous or simply too threatening. Ethnic jokes, for example, may be considered less funny by members of that ethnicity because their threshold for what’s threatening is different from people outside it. The theory also more elegantly explains puns and other word-play, which violate grammatical and stylistic rules, but not in ways which create nonsense. However, while it points to a bound beyond which something funny is no longer funny, it’s short on specifics on how to find that boundary beyond the universal advice of knowing your audience.

WHEN TO BE FUNNY

One thing to consider when planning comic adventures is how much comic content to use and when to use it. Comedies aren’t necessarily all laughs all the time. They retain an underlying plot structure and a background of some kind of normalcy without which it’s impossible to create the incongruities necessary for comedy. Without that background to play off of, it’s simply chaotic nonsense. A comic adventure still needs things to do and potentially unfunny people to meet, just like any other. A comic adventure can have a straight premise (the king wants the adventurers to escort the prince to his wedding . . .), but it can come with its own comic twist (. . . but he wants to elope with the dragon).

It’s certainly possible to run entire comic campaigns. There are any number of comedy RPGs, from the lost early entry in the field *Spawn of Fashion* through the classic *Paranoia* to more modern and specialized offerings like *Monsters and Other Childish Things*, as well as supplements for more serious systems, such as *GURPS IOU* and the *Discworld Roleplaying Game*.

Comedy can also fit into more-serious games. There are a few ways of doing that. For example, an ongoing campaign can have the occasional adventure conceived of as a comic interlude, much as the generally serious original *Star Trek* has “The Trouble With Tribbles” and the sometimes downright grim *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* had its sequel, “Trials and Tribblations.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a master class in combining comic and serious content. Another common device throughout literature, and one easily duplicated in gaming, is comic characters and comic subplots. A wizard’s ongoing side quest for a particular grimoire may turn into a running gag involving mistranslations or elderly book merchants finding other books with similar titles, or an elite detachment of space marines may find themselves acting as security for a military band on tour. And supporting characters like servants, underworld contacts, and distant relatives provide ongoing opportunities to drop in jokes (many superheroes have had sidekicks for this very purpose) without doing violence to an overarching narrative.

Speaking of violence, it’s fairly commonplace in comedy that its subjects aren’t really hurt or killed. For

example, slapstick, like the Three Stooges and Road Runner cartoons, depends on never-ending cycles of violence. But the same participants survive throughout and are no more than temporarily inconvenienced by any damage they might sustain. This poses a problem for roleplaying games, which are often based on the ongoing risk of lasting consequences. How can these two apparently conflicting needs be reconciled? Here especially we see a parallel between comedy RPGs and horror RPGs, particularly the cosmic-horror genre. Horror games take steps to incorporate the essential hopelessness of the genre into the mechanics of the game (for example, the sanity mechanic in *Call of Cthulhu* and the *Fear, Madness, and Decay* rules in *GURPS Horror*, pp. 139-148) and allow short-term successes in the context of the long-term inevitability of failure. Comedy games can incorporate mechanics to handle short-term failure in the context of a lack of long-term consequences. In *Toon*, characters don’t die; they simply “fall down” temporarily and soon return to the action. In *Paranoia*, characters can be killed in entertaining ways, but are soon returned to the action in the form of clones.

However, games don’t have to have special mechanics as long as they’ve got a suitable focus. In particular, adventures which are heavy on social interaction and light on combat are ripe for comedy. For example, the adventure *The Palais du Monde* (in *Pyramid* #3/54: *Social Engineering*) would be very easy to run as a classical farce. To summarize, it involves figuring out how spies are managing to pass messages to one another at a theater while a play is under way; the situation is rife with opportunities for misunderstandings, missed connections, and rapid-fire incongruities as investigators navigate a social landscape of decadent aristocrats and high-strung artists. Interstellar merchants in games like *Traveller* may deal with absurd bureaucratic obstacles to selling their goods, chipper but unhelpful tourism boosters, and excessively literal conversations with polite, well-meaning aliens or the vagaries of machine-assisted language translation.

At any rate, it’s usually important for the GM to keep comic and non-comic elements distinct in games which mix these elements. Laughter is a release of tension, and individuals may need to operate at less than optimum efficiency if they’re going to really get in on the comic action. However, in many conventional games, it’s important for adventurers to keep their guard up. Gags are more likely to be appreciated if players aren’t busy second-guessing the motives of the trio of window-cleaners who keep whacking one another with ladders and mops.

Everybody Wants to Get Into the Act

This article deals mostly with what the GM can do, with an eye toward setting up jokes and comic situations. Things look very different from the player’s point of view, which is often reactive, playing off of the situation they’re dealt. Perhaps the best advice to be given here is one of the primary rules of improv comedy: “Yes, and.” It’s a cooperative enterprise, so rather than trying to contradict what others have said or change topics, work with what’s already there and add to it. And one could do worse than reading Phil Master’s article about building comedic characters (pp. 4-8).

HOW TO BE FUNNY

What, then, are the mechanics of being funny? Here are some specific devices to insert into adventures.

Literalism: Literalism takes words and metaphors and treats them literally rather than figuratively. Use of this device is rampant in the *Airplane* movies (as in, for example, running gags involving “Surely/Shirley” and “What is it?”) and the Discworld series (among a great many other examples, members of the Watch in *Guards! Guards!*, having resolved that “million to one chances come up nine times out of ten,” make numerous elaborate attempts to engineer odds of success of exactly a million to one). Because it causes plausible miscommunication, literalism is fairly easy to drop into regular interactions between people without causing too many problems; keep an eye out for words with double meanings or close synonyms to create comic misunderstandings.

Understatement, exaggeration, and reversal: These set expectations which are in some way in line with the ultimate result,

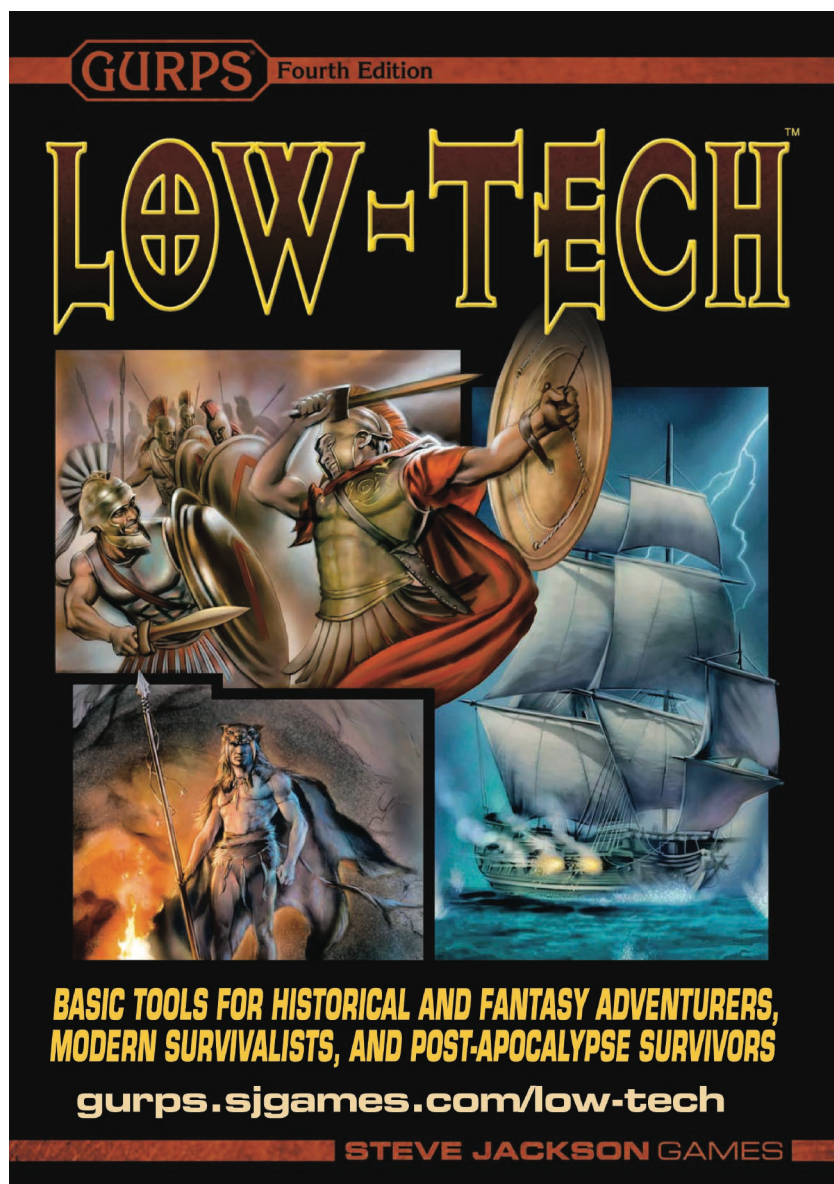
but far less, far greater, or even the opposite. Warning dungeon delvers about a deep pit (or Bugs Bunny) by saying “Watch that first step” is classic understatement. Tim the Enchanter in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* warning about a fierce beast which turns out to be a fluffy bunny is classic exaggeration, which is followed in short order by a return to exaggeration as the fluffy bunny turns out, in fact, to be a fierce beast. Critical failures and critical successes that happen to other people are prime material for this sort of treatment.

Breaking the Fourth Wall: This is when characters acknowledge that they’re inhabiting a story and, often, directly address the audience. A good example is in the middle of the Bing Crosby/Bob Hope film *The Road to Morocco*, when Hope delivers a long exposition of the action to that point. Crosby asks him why he’s talking about it, since he was there to witness everything his companion just described. Hope says that it’s for the benefit of people who came in halfway through the picture, to which a distraught Crosby moans, “They missed my song?” Making people, places, and items in the game world lightly disguised versions of ones in the real world falls into this category as well (for example, having the head of space defenses named Ronald Raygun). In campaigns which have serious as well as comic aspects, this can be easy to overuse, since it necessarily takes the players out of the game world.

Mistaken Identity: Someone has an interaction with another which appears to make sense at the time, but it gains entirely new dimensions when one realizes that the interaction was with someone mistaken for another. Twins separated at birth are common devices for mistaken identity gags in Shakespearean comedy, but it can work in situations where people are similarly dressed (for example, attempting to arrest someone dressed as a stormtrooper in the middle of an imperial base) or simply receive garbled instructions (making contact with a covert operative, but getting the wrong description of how he’s clothed). This has certain limitations in a game. It’s only funny because the audience knows something characters making mistakes doesn’t. In an RPG, since the characters are directed by the audience (that is, the players), it can be very hard to adequately compartmentalize that information. It often works best if the person who makes the misidentification figures out what he’s done almost immediately, but only when it’s too late to easily fix.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby attended the whackiest institution of higher learning in the west, then defied blue laws before coming to work for firms with the patronage of Drs. Fine, Howard, and Fine. He lives with his zany wife, madcap son, and several dogs who walk into a bar.



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THE MONSTER MASH

BY DAVID L. PULVER

I've always found that even the most serious dungeon can be enlivened with a few slightly off-kilter monster encounters. Monsters are people, too, and sometimes people can be pretty weird, especially if they live in dungeons into which bands of adventurers are routinely descending to kill them.

These encounters can be selectively dropped into a *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign. They can be used as incidental comedy relief, or, at the risk of being overly silly, combined together in the same dungeon.

THE MUSHROOM MONKS (CHOSEN OF PHOZE)

These are intended initially as random wandering encounters in a large dungeon. The party meet a pair of goblins, who are dressed in shabby ankle-length yellowish robes. The robes are crudely stitched with a symbol of a large mushroom. Each wears a small bowl on a chain around the neck. As they walk they chant the droning phrase: "Praise to Lord Phoze, praise to Lord Phoze, praise to Lord Phoze . . ."

If attacked immediately, they run. Otherwise, they cautiously approach the party. It will be apparent these goblins have seen better days; most have cuts, bruises, and broken noses, etc. But their eyes light up as they begin their spiel in accented Common: "Hey brother (or sister)! Humble thanks for not slaying us yet, and greetings in the name of almighty Phoze! Will you accept Lord Phoze as your patron god and savior?"

If they refuse, a goblin will extend his begging bowl (which can be seen to hold something like two copper pieces, a rusty nail, and a giant rat's tooth) and say: "Begging a small donation to Lord Phoze, so that he may build his Dark Legion and hold the line against the armies of light? Even a copper piece helps!"

If the adventurers are intrigued enough to ask for details, the goblins tell them: "The great Lord Phoze has awakened from his slumber! He is the Guardian of the Dark, protector of weaker monsters, Voice of the Deep, one true Lord of the Gods! Only Lord Phoze's grace can protect you in the coming End of Night! To accept Lord Phoze simply, sign your name

in these facsimile pages of the Book of Phoze and become one of the Chosen of Phoze." The inquirers are then handed a dirty scroll covered with goblin scratchings.

If the PCs agree to sign, they will be given a small mushroom patch to wear on their clothes (+2 reaction from goblins in this dungeon and other Phoze supporters), an invitation to recruit more followers, and a sacred mushroom to eat (HT-3 roll to avoid Hallucinating and Euphoric condition; lasts 20 – HT minutes). The goblin will receive a small bonus from the cult if he brings back some written proof of conversion.

If, as the goblins generally expect, they are attacked, they try to flee.

Background

The Chosen of Phoze is a recent cult that was started by a charismatic wizard/bard named Othbug the Revelator. After being kicked out of the mages' guild for selling substandard magic items (he claims racial prejudice), Othbug reinvented himself as a holy monk and began preaching a new religion. Dusting off the figure of Phoze, a mostly forgotten minor goblin-kin chief or tribal deity (no one quite remembers which), he claimed to have experienced a revelation in which Phoze spoke to him to demand restoration of his worship and funds to find and rebuild the Great Temple of Phoze, somewhere in this dungeon. All goblins, orcs, and hobgoblins should work together in harmony, to pray for the restoration of Phoze. Indeed, even other creatures could join up, for Phoze would create an army of many races, bound together under his dark charisma!

The Chosen of Phoze preaches radical doctrines of fellowship and equality among monsters ("All mortal worms are equal in the eyes of the Great Lord Phoze"). As such, it has only proven popular among those who are the bottom of the heap, such as goblins (bullied by orcs and hobgoblins) and a few dinomen and similar dungeon rabble. Sadly, the Prophet Othbug met a tragic end in the dungeon when, giving a sermon to a bunch of new goblin converts in a cavern filled with giant fungi, the giant mushroom he was using as an improvised altar turned out to be a crushroom. Followers of Phoze say he was "taken unto Phoze" and took the mushroom as their new holy symbol.

The Chosen of Phoze do not fear death due to having been told they will go to Phoze after death and – post-Othbug martyrdom – their excessive consumption of “holy” hallucinogenic mushrooms. They roam the dungeon seeking converts and picking mushrooms. If they come upon injured people of any race, they will take them to shelter. They live in their own room complexes. They are mostly ignored by other goblin-kin (“who cares what goblin scum think?”), although no orc is above mugging a Chosen of Phoze if he has more than a few coppers in his begging bowl, or to get some magic mushrooms.

They are considered meals-on-legs by most wandering monsters. The GM may wish to scatter a few mushroom-robbed goblin corpses through the dungeon before the PCs actually encounter their first pair of Mushroom Monks. Other possible encounters would be Mushroom Monks being harassed or bullied by orcs or other goblins. . .

Cult Shrines

The cult have a few small shrines scattered about the dungeon (calling them temples dignifies them), mostly in rooms no one else wants. Usually, 1d+1 cultists are there (goblins or dinomen) stitching new robes and mushroom symbols. There are crude smelly bedding, some work tables and benches, a chest with a few dozen coppers and a couple of silver pieces, baskets of mushrooms or other fungi, dead rats and other foodstuffs, and a clay altar or stone image of Lord Phoze (a fat goblin with horns and bat wings seated on a toadstool). The cult has no real clerics yet, perhaps because the godhood status of Phoze is uncertain. Will worship bring him to life eventually? Of course, a goblin or other PC, or Ally, could also become the first cleric of Phoze since Othbug. . .

Mushroom Monks

Goblin monks resemble deformed hunchback elves with pointy ears, green skin, and needle-like teeth, wearing yellow-stained robes and carrying staves and begging bowls. They tend to have larger than usual eyes (and often a spaced-out expression).

ST: 10	HP: 10	Speed: 5.50
DX: 10	Will: 9	Move: 5
IQ: 9	Per: 10	
HT: 11	FP: 11	SM: 0
Dodge: 8	Parry: 9	DR: 0

Bite (10): 1d-2 cutting. Reach C.

Kick (10): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Punch (10): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Staff (10): 1d+2 crushing. Reach 1-2.

Traits: Appearance (Ugly); Cowardice (12); Fanaticism; Infravision; Odious Personal Habits (Annoying proselytizing); Pitiable; Rapid Healing; Resistant to Disease 5; Resistant to Poison 5; Social Stigma (Savage).

Skills: Brawling-10; Diplomacy-8; Fast-Talk-10; Naturalist-10; Staff-10; Stealth-10; Theology-8.

Class: Mundane.

Equipment: Quarterstaff; robes; a few scraps of parchment; 1d-2 mushroom patches to hand to converts; 1d-3 hallucinogenic magic mushrooms; 2d6-2 other mushrooms

(2-in-6 chance one of them is poison – take 1d toxic damage/minute until HT-2 roll succeeds – due to a failed Naturalist roll).

CHARA’S UNDERWORLD GRILL

This encounter takes place in a huge room in a lower dungeon level. The room should be accessible through two doors on different walls. The doors are not locked. The encounter should occur in a well-populated dungeon with diverse wandering monsters.

The door the PCs entered through opens into a huge room (at least 10 × 10 yards). Nearest the door the party opened are a trio of circular tables, each with sturdy, oversized stools or benches beside them. At the first table is a tough-looking ogre. Seated at the second table are two of what look like lizard men, except with crimson scales and wings; the third table is empty. Each table has large iron trenchers and tankards set out before it. The ogre is loudly chanting “Bring the meat! Bring the flesh!” The winged lizard men hiss in sibilant voices, “Charraa, Charraa, we is *hungry!*”

The object of their impatient attentions is cooking at a giant iron table and grill, which glows red-hot from dancing flames that emerge from a crack in the floor. Mouth-watering aromas are coming from great slabs of meat being cooked on it. Working the grill is a muscular six-armed woman dressed in an apron, who has a snake’s lower body! The chef is wielding two knives, a skillet, a meat cleaver, and a couple of shakers of spices as she sears, chops, seasons, barbecues, and sautés the meat with heaps of giant mushrooms and other dungeon fungi. Her six arms move with inhuman speed and dexterity in a dazzling display of culinary celerity.

Behind the grill, an open door leads to a connected chamber (see *Store Room*, p. 16). The room is lit by the fiery glow of the flame, as well as candles in the center of each table.

Guests have their regular armaments propped against the tables or on nearby benches, so they can ready weapons in a couple of seconds, but they want to eat, not fight.

What’s Happening

This is a dungeon restaurant! It caters to intelligent monsters who are tired of sitting in their lairs waiting to die or wandering the corridors searching for things to eat.

The six-limbed chef is Chara, half-peshkali, half-naga, a member of a race of mighty demonic sentinels. Her kind are usually placed by arch-mages or gods to guard ancient places of power. Chara was set to guard the Fabulous Flame of Fajora (that’s the dancing flame) and for many years did so in this chamber, efficiently slaughtering those adventurers or wandering monsters who blundered into her lair or quested after the relic.

But Chara was more imaginative than most demonic guardians and ultimately grew bored with her duties. She first relieved her tedium by strangling or chopping up and then eating the occasional adventurer or monster, but that got old quickly. Then one day she massacred some hobgoblin brigands who had bags of spices and peppers they’d looted from merchants, and a sack of mushrooms from the lower caverns. Mixing them together, she found they made goblin-flesh taste a lot better! That gave her an idea. . .

Now when people visit or blunder into her lair, Chara will rise up on her coils, and offer them a choice: “Welcome, dungeon delver or monster! I am your host and chef, Chara of the Outer Dark, devil-guardian of the Fabulous Flame of Fajora, and master of the Underworld Grill. If you cross this threshold, I will be pleased to serve you . . . one way or another. I offer culinary delights that fill the stomach, if you will pay my price. . .”

Chara considers her restaurant to be “neutral territory” and expects guests to refrain from attacking or insulting each other. She is tough enough to enforce it, and most uninformed guests are willing to help her beat down any intruders who’d rather mix it up then chow down. However, PCs may still wish to charge in with swords swinging and fireballs blazing, in which case, the result will devolve into a melee. The hungry customers (in this instance, the ogre and dragon men, or whatever other patrons are here if the GM reuses this with a different crowd) will get up from the tables and grab their weapons, ready to defend their underworld bistro. Chara will not draw any weapons as such, but will slither forward armed with cleaver, sharp knives, a heavy haunch of meat or skillet (as a club), and two shakers of super-hot pepper. The result will be essentially a subterranean bar brawl.

If the PCs lose to Chara and her customers (and Chara survives), anyone dead will end up on the grill, and anyone taken alive or incapacitated will be stripped and hung up on meat hooks in the pantry. . . Chara will awaken them, taunt them for having missed the “meal of their lives” but congratulate them on becoming part of her dinner service anyway. Chara is, however, susceptible to flattery and manipulation: PCs who beg to have a chance to sample her cooking before they die, cast doubt on her skill and instead challenge her to a cooking competition, or express knowledge of some distant rare ingredient or item that would benefit her cookery may get out of it alive . . . Should Chara and the monsters lose, the PCs can loot the place; possible treasure is detailed below.

If the PCs are willing to talk, and ask what her price is, Chara recites her menu: The day’s special is “pepper-spiced wyvern tail with fried crushroom” for \$100 a serving (hey, dungeons have inflation), but she can also recommend “seared goblin liver” (\$50) and “dragon’s egg omelet” for \$200. “Should you have cannibalistic tendencies, I am woefully short of demi-human or human meat, with the exception of stuffed dwarf brains (\$200), also very delicious with mushroom sauce.”

Any insulting of the meals will provoke her ire as well as that of her customers; she continues to expound on the virtues of her food, but advances with a dangerous look in her eyes. The adventurers had better either come on board, flee, or prepare to fight. If they’re willing to talk food, however, she adds: “All of my meals are cooked in the sacred flames of Fajora, and share its amazing properties. Are you reluctant

due to shortage of funds? I love to cook! Bring me tasty monster or demi-human parts, and I will give you credit! Or put you on my special suppliers list, like Slinok and Snarg here.” (She gestures toward the dragon men table.)

One of the dragon men interrupts: “Hisss, we bring Chaaara the best flesh, the most scrumptious crushrooms. Snake-girl pays us in gold and yummys, yesss!”

This is all on the up-and-up. Chara will deal with customers or suppliers honestly, or try to butcher anyone she catches cheating her or insulting her food after trying it. The meals are actually pretty good, and even cannibalistic fare is healthy thanks to the sterilizing effects of the holy flame, although perhaps not for the squeamish.

Regarding her offer to pay, Chara has a box of coin in her store room (see below), which is regularly replenished from her profits. She’ll pay \$1 a pound for ordinary fungi or animal flesh, 1d × \$1 per pound for most monster, human, or demi-human flesh (assuming it’s not rotten or undead); and 3d × \$10 per pound for anything especially exotic (unicorn, basilisk eggs, human children, etc.) that she can make the centerpiece of a new dish. It’s up to the GM whether oozes, bugs, and the like count, but the answer is probably yes: Chara can usually make them into some sort of pudding. Chara is also fascinated by cooking magic and lore, and buys magic items, potions, books, or scrolls relating to cooking at 25% over the usual value.

After a meal, Chara likes to chat with her customers, hoping to soak up praise and suggestions; provided her food is praised, she is good source of gossip on the goings on of the dungeon. Of course, you need to have bought and eaten her meals to get this information. Any gossip will often be couched in terms of things she wants: “By the way, my latest creation would really benefit from manticore liver. I have been informed there is a nest of manticores on the third level infesting the Dead King’s Chamber. My last supplier promised to bring me some, but he never came back. Is there any chance you can fetch me some?” She’d be willing to pay \$1,000 per liver.

Incidentally, Chara is also willing to deal with the party for ordinary cooking supplies. As she’s bound by sacred vows to stay in her chamber, shopping is difficult, and most of the monsters down here aren’t folks who can roll into the general store and order onions and fish sauce. She’ll pay 1.5 times the usual cost (up to a maximum of \$1,000 in any given week) for ordinary surface dweller’s spices, animal flesh, wine, veggies, or other mundane ingredients she’s short of (GM’s option). This could be a good racket for adventurers, although of course they may run into encounters on the way to or from the dungeon, and any rumors they’re trading with a demon may harm their reputation.

I cook with wine. Sometimes I even add it to the food.

– W.C. Fields

The Fabulous Flame of Fajora

The reason the iron table Chara uses for grilling is red hot is that it's sitting on top of the sacred place that Chara was appointed guardian of: the Flame of Fajora. This is a 3' high flame that emanates from a crack in the dungeon floor. According to Chara (or a successful Hidden Lore or Occultism roll by a clever PC), the flame exists because, in ages past, the ancient fire goddess Fajora, fled underground to escape her enemies. In payment to the earth for sheltering her, she left a piece of herself behind.

- It is Essential Fire.
- Its holy nature purifies anything passing through, or anything cooked or boiled over it. Effectively it acts as area-effect Purify Food and Purify Water spells. This also means the provender that Chara cooks is free of parasites, etc., which is one reason it's popular!
- It provides 12 energy (which regenerates at 1/hour) that can be used for casting any Fire spells. This can be drawn upon by anyone within two yards of the flame.

Store Room

The back room behind the restaurant is used by Chara to hold various supplies. Staff only. It's a cramped pantry with indescribable smells of blood, spices, and meat.

It contains:

- Six meat hooks hanging from the ceiling, with a couple of bloody carcasses dangling from them, including the skinned carcass of a man-sized two-legged dragon (a wyvern), its tail and several chunks of its torso missing.
- A five-gallon barrel of orcish fire-brand (200, 40 lbs.).
- A five-gallon barrel of decent cooking wine (400, 40 lbs.).
- Six bronze buckets for collecting blood (45, 3 lbs., each), under the meat hooks.
- Shelves with sacks holding 40 meals' worth of dubious ingredients (dried rat, spider jelly, powdered dungeon molds, various local fungi, etc.; 160, 20 lbs.).
- An alcove with 50-gallon barrel of water (200, 400 lbs.) with tap.
- A barrel of salted dwarf brains (200, 40 lbs.). At the bottom is the key to the iron strong box. Chara doesn't mind reaching into dwarf brain to get it.
- A barrel of 150 lbs. of salt (1,500) with a wyvern tail (10 lbs., \$100) and a dwarf leg (1 lb., \$2) in it.
- A shelf with various iron pots, pans, and kitchen implements (20 lbs., \$200).
- A row of jars holding 2 lbs. of black pepper (4,800), 5 lbs. of ginger (3,040), 2.5 lbs. of mustard (1,520), 1.5 lbs. of saffron (7,200), 0.5 lb. of cinnamon (1,200), 5 lbs. of cloves (12,000).
- A stack of iron trenchers (4 lbs., \$80 each) for serving food; there are no dirty dishes, Chara just sterilizes them in the flames.
- A jug holding 20 doses of toxic monster drool (800, 10 lbs.).
- On the shelf, next to the spices, a locked iron strong box (DR 12, HP 10, \$250, 15 lbs.) with 500 copper pieces (500, 10 lbs.) and 600 silver pieces (12,000, 12 lbs.) and four ounces of gold dust (10,000, 0.25 lbs.).

Chara

Chara is a supernatural guardian demon, half-peshkali and half-naga. While she doesn't *need* to eat or drink, she loves experimenting with food! She fights with her cooking implements and her body's abilities.

ST: 20 **HP:** 20 **Speed:** 6.50
DX: 14 **Will:** 15 **Move:** 6
IQ: 11 **Per:** 15
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 10 **Parry:** 13 (x6) **DR:** 4

Grapple (16): Effective ST for grappling is 22 due to Wrestling skill. May use snake body and up to six arms, gaining +2 to skill *and* ST per body part used after the first two! Inevitably followed by Constriction Attack, which counts as an attack. Reach C.

Weapons (18): Haunch of meat or iron skillet (3d+3 crushing); two cleavers (3d+3 cutting); two large knives (2d impaling or 2d+1 cutting). Reach 1.

Pepper Shaker (14): Hot pepper to the face. Treat as an Affliction jet attack with reach 2 and three shots. A hit requires two HT-2 rolls to resist coughing and blindness respectively; both endure until the pepper is removed with water and towels.

Traits: Appearance (Attractive); Combat Reflexes; Constriction Attack; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Double-Jointed; Extra Arms 4; Extra Attack 5; Immunity to Disease; Immunity to Poison; Indomitable; Infravision; No Vitals; Oblivious; Obsession (Perfect her dungeon cuisine) (9); Slithers; Supernatural Durability (Can be killed only after all six arms are crippled); Truthfulness (6); Unfazeable; Vow (Guard the Sacred Flame of Fajora at all times).

Skills: Axe/Mace-18; Broadsword-18; Cooking-17; Knife-18; Wrestling-16.

Class: Demon.

Notes: Can attack *six times* but can use each body part – arm (to use a weapon or grapple) or serpent tail (to grapple) – just once. Chara is a cooking nerd.

Slinok and Snarg (Dragon-Men Customers)

These two warriors survived a recent battle and are celebrating by doing lunch at Chara's kitchen. Dragon men have long snouts, crimson and gold scales, leathery wings, and long tails. They wield hefty glaives that glow red with heat.

ST: 13 **HP:** 13 **Speed:** 5.50
DX: 11 **Will:** 9 **Move:** 6
IQ: 9 **Per:** 9
HT: 11 **FP:** 11 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 10 **DR:** 4

Bite (13): 1d cutting. Reach C. Any hit counts as a grapple, even if it doesn't penetrate DR, after which can roll bite damage each turn as a free action; C

Clawed Kick (11): 1d+1 cutting. Reach C, 1.

Clawed Punch (13): 1d cutting. Reach C.

Flame Breath (14): 2d+2 burning. Treat as a jet spell with reach C-3. Five-second recharge between shots.

Glaive (14): 1d+5 impaling. Reach 1, 2*. Fine weapon. When wielded by a dragon man it becomes a Flaming Weapon, doing 2 extra HP of injury.

Tail Strike (11): 1d+2 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Disturbing Voice; Flight (Air Move 12); Nictitating Membrane 2; Odious Racial Habit (Eats other sapient beings, -3 reactions); Peripheral Vision; Temperature Tolerance 5 (Heat).

Skills: Brawling-13; Glaive-14; Stealth-11; Wrestling-12.

Class: Mundane.

Class: Glaive, \$100, 8 lbs.; belt pouch with 1d gold and 3d silver pieces.

Grumpf the Ogre

This hulking brute works as a heavy for some of the dungeon orcs. He heard good things about the kitchen and wants his spiced wyvern tail.

ST: 20 **HP:** 20 **Speed:** 5.75
DX: 11 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 5
IQ: 7 **Per:** 9 **Weight:** 800 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** +1

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 11 **DR:** 2 (DR 6 on skull)

Bite (13): 2d-1 cutting, Reach C.

Morningstar (13): 3d+6 crushing. Reach 1, 2*.

Kick (11): 2d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Punch (13): 2d crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Appearance (Hideous); Fearlessness 3; High Pain Threshold; Magic Resistance 2; Night Vision 5; Odious Racial Habit (Eats other sapient beings; -3 to reactions); Resistant to Disease 3; Resistant to Poison 3.

Skills: Brawling-13; Flail-13; Intimidation-12.

Class: Mundane.

Equipment: Morningstar (\$80, 6 lbs.); oversized pot-helm (\$200, 10 lbs.); belt pouch with \$170 in copper coins.

*If you cannot get rid of
the family skeleton, you may
as well make it dance.*

– George Bernard Shaw

THE DUNGEON DETECTIVE (LAIR OF ZABRINA THE LICH)

This encounter may be used if the same party have been raiding a single dungeon over a period of multiple weeks, killing and looting monster lairs.

The party will come upon an ordinary dungeon door. If anyone listens, there are some noises within that vaguely sound like *washing*.

This is a complex of two connected rooms: Zabrina's outer chamber and inner sanctum. The outer chamber connects via its own door to her inner sanctum and office.

Zabrina, the master of this complex, is only in her rooms about half the time. The rest of the time she's working in the dungeon. It's up to the GM whether to have Zabrina present when they first visit her rooms; it is probably more amusing to let them hack through the skeleton guards, then try to make sense of what they find there, only to have Zabrina show up later, perhaps half-way through their ransacking of her lair.

Outer Chamber and Laundry Room

This is a plain stone room (perhaps about 6 x 7 yards) with two doors, one of which leads into the corridor the party entered from (and the other to the inner sanctum). The room contains three large tubs filled with soapy water.

Busy in the room are five undead skeletons, doing laundry – squeezing out water, scrubbing stains from clothes, etc. Already hanging up or in the tubs are six very wet hooded black robes, several cute little indigo socks, four black cloaks, and five black slippers. The skeletons wear black robes and helms and have swords or hammers slung on their back (there's no reason for them to take them off; unlike humans, they don't get sweaty. . .)

These are Zabrina's guards, pressed into service as servants. The lich is fastidious about her personal hygiene (one reason she prefers skeletons to icky zombies) and once a week insists her guards do her laundry. They will, however, put down their work to defend her lair.

Zabrina's Skeleton Guards

The skeletons Zabrina has attending her were the result of animating some ancient bones (the Knights of Zor) in a crypt she found. She outfitted them with some salvaged armor and weapons from their burial chamber. Half are armed with warhammers, the other half with greatswords. All have weapons sheathed while going about their laundry or cleaning tasks, and wear black robes and boots along with their mail.

ST: 12 **HP:** 12 **Speed:** 8.00
DX: 13 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 8
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 12 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0
Dodge: 11 **Parry:** 10 **DR:** 6 (see notes)

Bony Claw (14): 1d crushing. Reach C.

Weapon (14): Greatsword (1d+5 cutting); Reach 1-2; or Warhammer (1d+5 impaling; Reach 1-2).

Traits: Appearance (Monstrous); Automaton; Brittle; Cannot Float; Cannot Learn; Dependency (Loses 1 HP per minute in no-mana areas); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Disease; Immunity to Mind Control; Immunity to Poison; Indomitable; Mute; No Blood; No Brain; No Eyes; No Sense of Smell/Taste; No Vitals; Reprogrammable; Single-Minded; Skinny; Temperature Tolerance 5 (Cold); Temperature Tolerance 5 (Heat); Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Unliving; Unnatural; Vulnerability (Crushing x2).

Skills: Brawling-14; Two-Handed Axe/Mace-14; Two-Handed Sword-14.

Class: Undead.

Equipment: Mail shirt (\$150, 16 lbs.), pot-helm (\$100, 5 lbs.), leather boots (\$80, 3 lbs.), leather gloves (\$30, neg.), and either a greatsword (\$800, 7 lbs.) or warhammer (\$100, 7 lbs.).

Notes: Total DR is 6 (4 vs. crushing) for torso, 6 for skull, 4 for hands and feet, and 2 elsewhere. Unaffected by Death Vision or Sense Life. Susceptible to Pentagram, Sense Spirit, and Turn Zombie.

Inner Sanctum

A large room that serves as the lich's bedroom, conjuring area, and laboratory. The door has a Magelock spell on it.

There's an iron four-poster bed covered with a white bearskin and two big black silk pillows (filled with griffin feathers). On a bedside table (4 lbs., \$100) sits a stick of charcoal and a dagger (\$400, 0.25 lbs., very fine).

In the center of the room is large reinforced-iron work table (400 lbs., \$800) heaped with the sort of disturbing things one might expect in a necromancy lab: skulls, bones, body parts, and so on, some labeled.

On one wall is a 6' x 3' oil portrait of a very handsome young but pallid man with red eyes and a sinister half-smile dressed in a fancy hunting outfit and cloak. An appropriate Area Knowledge, Occultism, or Hidden Lore roll will identify it as the vampire Count Karzi (supposedly driven into exile a century ago).

On a shelf behind the bed is a thick book (*A True Account of the Depravity of the Undead*); perusing it shows it is a popular bodice-ripper detailing lurid affairs between vampires and humans, written by the bard Ingrid Yalvatter a century ago, and often banned by moralizing clerics (1 lb., \$100). Another well-thumbed grimoire, *Mastering the Art of Death, or Necromancy for Beginners*, sits next to it (2 lbs., \$2,000). A third well-thumbed book – *Great Adventures of Toramere the Sage* (1 lb., \$500) – is a popular set of morality tales starring a cunning scholar who solves mysteries using logic.

A wooden chest of drawers (80 lbs., \$400) are normally full of clothes, but today empty. Atop the chest of drawers is a black obsidian unicorn statue (0.25 lbs., \$2,000) and a large fluffy stuffed bunny-demon with fangs and a spiked tail (2 lbs., \$200).

Something tall that is draped in layers of black silk (3 lbs., \$300) stands in one corner. It is in fact a silvered glass mirror. It is enchanted (the Mirror of Life and Death). After a second, any living person who looks into it will see themselves transforming into a rotting corpse and then a skeleton (treat as Death Vision 15 spell). However, any undead who looks into it will see an image of themselves as if they were alive and healthy at the age at which they became undead, even if they are of a type that normally do not produce a reflection. The mirror is heavy (20 lbs.) but worth \$20,000 to collectors of weird items, vampires, necromancers, etc.

Other than the decorations noted above, the walls are whitewashed. On one wall are numerous glyphs and spell formulas drawn with charcoal. They can be recognized by a mage as essentially study notes for someone learning a necromancy spell, specifically Skull-Spirit (something Zabrina has just recently mastered through her studies, for the purpose of self-defense, and which she is eager to try on intruders).

On another wall is a crude partial map of the dungeon drawn in charcoal. What's interesting about the map is that certain rooms have Xs marked on them and next to them various numbers and letters; some have question marks. The layout will seem familiar if the party has been mapping the dungeon, as the areas in it are mostly those they have visited. In fact, what the map actually depicts are rooms where the party attacked and wiped out monster denizens, and left behind evidence of this; the dates are those in which the room's occupants were believed to have been attacked.

The work table contains not just a mere selection of necromantic spell components. In fact, the macabre collection of "monster bits" (skulls, bones, and other hard residue of various dead monsters, many in advanced states of decay), are also remnants of the adventurer's own dungeon depredations. The exact mix of this evidence will depend on the PCs prior actions, for these are any remnants that were left behind after their attacks (and after opportunistic scavenging by oozes or rats). All have tags or marks written on the bone (date and room) that match the map that is keyed on walls.

In short, this is basically a giant "serial killer wall" by someone who has been tracking the PCs raids into the dungeon, and playing Dungeon Detective for the monsters!

Zabrina's Background

Zabrina was a teen prodigy of a necromancer. Her jealous stepmother, a powerful baroness and wicked sorcerer, had seen her own power and beauty fade with time; somewhat envious of her husband's daughter, the older woman "just wanted what was best for her" and tricked the young woman into drinking a potion of lichdom when she was only 15 years old. Her body quickly rotted away, but she became an immortal undead. Peeved by this, she ran away from home and got a room of her own in the nearest dungeon to find herself.

Zabrina is fairly good at being a necromancer but turning into lich as a teenager is a drag. She never got a chance to do weird potions, drink, or attend school, and she really misses the whole courtly romance thing. She is still rather girlish, and in fact, she wants a handsome guy. These days, she figures maybe a darkly handsome vampire or budding dark lord would be willing to accept her, but a hunky barbarian or anti-paladin will do!

She is a fairly social for an undead horror, and has spent the last few months getting to know other monsters in the dungeon. Imagine her surprise when they started turning up dead (after adventures began dungeon raids)! Zabrina is overconfident, so she has decided to see if she can solve this mystery and track down the villains behind it – hence the "serial killer wall" she erected in her office, the result of her forensic investigations.

Zabrina doesn't sleep so she doesn't need the bed, but she does like lounging on her pillows while she reads her spellbook, detective stories, and romances, or wistfully viewing her original form (pale, long black hair, perky nose) in the mirror. Zabrina is quite sensitive about her looks (especially the "skeleton" thing). While she does appreciate no longer having to watch her weight, she is insecure at becoming a lich so young. Also, lich jokes such as accurately saying she "lacks a brain" will annoy her. Unlike most liches, she has not had centuries to invent obscure diabolical spells, create an array of cursed magic items, or build up a big lair.

She is, however, very clever, as well as competent at raising the dead, fear spells, basic necromancer things, and general magic.

ST: 9	HP: 10	Speed: 7.00
DX: 12	Will: 18	Move: 7
IQ: 16	Per: 16	
HT: 14	FP: N/A	SM: 0
Dodge: 10	Parry: 11	DR: 2

Staff (12): 1d+1 crushing. Reach 1, 2.

Traits: Brittle; Cannot Float; Curious; Dark Vision; Dependency (Loses 1 HP per minute in no-mana areas); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Energy Reserve 25 (Magical); High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Disease; Immunity to Poison; Magery 6; No Blood; No Brain; No Eyes; No Sense of Smell/Taste; No Vitals; Overconfidence; Skinny; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Heals only when Unkillable is triggered); Unkillable (Total; Achilles Heel, Can be truly killed in no-mana areas); Unliving; Vulnerability (Crushing x2).

Skills: Area Knowledge (Dungeon)-16; Criminology-15; Hidden Lore-15; Occultism-15; Research-15; Staff-12; Thaumatology-15.

Spells*: Armor-20; Apportation-20; Banish-20; Control Zombie-20; Counterspell-20; Daze-20; Death Vision-20; Deflect Missile-20; Delay-20; Detect Magic-20; Dispel Magic-20; Evisceration-20; Fear-20; Flight-20; Foolishness-20; Hide Thoughts-20; Illusion Disguise-21; Lend Energy-20; Lend Vitality-20; Levitation-20; Light-20; Magelock-20; Mass Zombie-20; Minor Healing-20; Mind Reading-20; Mind Search-19; Panic-20; Reflect-20; Sense Emotion-20; Sense Foes-20; Sense Life-20; Sense Spirit-20; Shield-20; Simple Illusion-20; Skull-Spirit-20; Soul Jar-20; Soul Rider-20; Steal Energy (H)-20; Steal Vitality-20; Steal Wisdom-20; Summon Spirit-20; Teleport-19; Terror-20; Truthsayer-20; Turn Zombie-20; Ward-20; Zombie-21; Zombie Summoning-20.

Class: Undead.

Notes: Favorite spells are at -2 to energy cost and half casting time due to skill 20+. Depending on how seriously the GM may wish to treat this encounter, Zabrina could have on an Illusion Disguise that makes her look like a teenage girl, and will likely have a few spells (such as Armor, Shield, or Hide Thoughts) powered up at all times. If she is out and sees signs that her front door has been knocked down, she retreats and summons some Skull-Spirits or raise some more undead first. She has a staff taken from her mother tipped with a jeweled bat-winged skull that is 10-point Powerstone and enchanted to cast Deathtouch

(4 lbs., \$20,000) and Blur. She has little interest in money but has a belt pouch with 10 gold and 10 silver pieces, and a magic mushroom she got from a wandering Phoze cultist (which she can't eat).

* All spells include +3 for Magery.

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

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

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ANIMATING YOUR LIFE

BY KELLY PEDERSEN

We laugh at the antics of Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, or Woody Woodpecker because they are safely contained behind the silver screen. But what if they came out of cartoon-land and invaded the human sphere? Would that be “funny-ha-ha”? Or “funny-strange”?

This article describes “animates,” cartoon characters who can interact with the world of humans. It gives the option of playing as one and presents some advice for the GM. For more details on playing animate-style characters in their own setting, with no humans involved, see *Toon: The Cartoon Roleplaying Game*, published by Steve Jackson Games.

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING (A CARTOON)

Animates can be unique intrusions into otherwise-normal settings, rare-but-known creatures, or a recognized group with their own communities and concerns. Animates or even humans turned into animates can show up in any genre that includes a wide variety of strange beings: superheroes, urban fantasy, or even soft science fiction.

unconsciousness. Most importantly, they *can't die* (at least not in the traditional sense). Animates can be crushed into a pancake from a fall, burned into a pile of ashes by a huge explosion, turn green and fall over after taking poison, and none of it will be permanent. A few minutes later, they'll be back, cracking jokes.

THE ANIMATE RACIAL TEMPLATE

205 points

You're an animate, a living animated character. Even if you don't *want* to be funny, you're a magnet for comedic situations, and your abilities work in the funniest way, not necessarily the most useful.

Animates always look somewhat different than humans, usually appearing drawn or painted. Some may look more realistic, but they are always distinguishable from humans. Whether or not this is a disadvantage depends on the status of animates in the setting – see *Animates in Public*, p. 21.

An animate's body is *enormously* resilient – they don't need to eat, drink, sleep, or breath, and they don't lose fatigue from physical exertion (though deliberate expenditures in the form of Extra Effort still cost FP). They're challenging to harm (divide all injury by two, except from their Weakness, see below), and they don't bleed (wounds sometimes leak “paint,” but this doesn't bother them – not so the janitorial staff, though!). They're very difficult to knock out. If they *are* hurt, animates recover quickly, both from the raw injury and

Animates may be temporarily inconvenienced by many hazards they would normally be immune to, if that would be funnier.

There are two important limitations on these tricks. First, all of them are subject to the Rule of Funny – animates may be temporarily inconvenienced by many hazards they would normally be immune to, if that would be funnier. Animates on the ocean floor might

talk and breathe normally – until someone points out they're underwater, at which point, they start to flail about as bubbles rise from their mouth. These restrictions form the Comedic limitation; for more guidance on how to apply it, see pp. 24-25.

The second major flaw is less humorous. A chemical mixture has been discovered (composed of paint thinner, acetone, and other substances) that can literally *dissolve* an animate. Even brief contact with this substance inflicts 1d-3 of injury every five seconds, while contact in major quantities (such as full immersion) can inflict up to 2d per five seconds. Injury from this source is not reduced, cannot be regenerated and must be healed normally. Any crippling injuries inflicted by it can't be grown back. If the animate fails an HT roll to resist death due to damage from it, he is *really* dead – no coming back next week!

Mentally, animates have extreme reactions. Animates never just flinch in pain, grin a bit at a joke, or gaze appreciatively at someone attractive. They scream in agony, laugh uproariously, or do a wolf whistle then literally howl at the sky. They also frequently act before they think – animates may be clever enough to come up with a good scheme on the spot, but they'll rarely consider the long-term consequences.

Finally, animates are just *more likely* to find themselves in situations with the potential for humor, often at their expense! Animates can't walk down the street without dodging three banana peels, ducking a ladder swung by an incautious housepainter, and having a big bag of money shoved into their hands by a *very* nearsighted bank robber.

Advantages: Doesn't Breathe (Comedic, -20%) [16]; Doesn't Eat or Drink (Comedic, -20%) [8]; Doesn't Sleep (Comedic, -20%) [16]; Hard to Subdue 5 (Comedic, -20%) [8]; Indefatigable (p. 22; Comedic, -20%) [24]; Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction 2; Comedic, -20%; Limited Defense, Not against paint remover mixture, -10%) [35]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood; Comedic, -20%) [4]; Perfect Comic Timing 1 (p. 24) [12]; Recovery (Comedic, -20%) [8]; Regeneration (Fast; Bane, Rare, Paint-remover mixture, -10%; Comedic, -20%) [35]; Regrowth (Bane, Paint-remover mixture, -10%; Comedic, -20%) [28]; Unkillable 2 (Achilles' Heel, Paint-remover mixture, -10%; Comedic, -20%) [70].

Perks: Can always spend character points to buy success on Public Speaking (Comedy) rolls; Animate Gifts*; Unusual Training (Can buy Enthralment skills without Charisma; audience size equals margin of success). [3]

Disadvantages: Easy to Read (below; Extreme Reactions, +50%; Heart on Your Sleeve, +25%, Concealed Intentions, -100%, Physical Reactions, +25%) [-10]; Impulsiveness (12) [-10]; Weakness (Paint-remover mixture, 1d/minute; Reduced Time 3, +60%; Variable, -40%) [-24]; Weirdness Magnet (p. 22) [-15].

Quirks: Leaves animate traces†; Animate takes‡; Visibly obvious§. [-3]

Features: Physician, Surgery, Diagnosis, and similar skills are ineffective for healing an animate, instead replace with Artist (Cartoonist), Electronic Operation (Media), or other skills for manipulating art.

* Allows the character to increase or purchase animate-appropriate abilities; see pp. 23-24.

† Leaves obvious traces of yourself on the scenery – holes shaped like you when jumping through a window, touches of paint in your colors on objects you handle, and so forth. Gives +1 to Forensics, Tracking, and similar skills to trace you or identify your presence at a location.

‡ Your reactions, due to Easy to Read, are not only obvious, they also fall into standard animate clichés, such as showing anger by having steam come out of your ears. Observers with any points in skills like Artist (Cartoonist) or Connoisseur (Cartoons) get an extra +2 above the bonus Easy to Read already provides.

§ You're visually distinctive, usually because you're "painted" in bright, primary colors. Enemies have +1 to spot you, or you have -1 to Stealth rolls, whichever is most appropriate.

ANIMATE TRAITS

Several traits in the template need a little explanation.

Easy to Read

see p. B134

Animates use several new modifiers for this disadvantage.

New Special Enhancements

Extreme Reactions: You don't just display your intentions or feelings, you *flaunt* them! Others get +8, rather than +4, on all skill rolls or quick contests that Easy to Read normally gives a bonus to. +50%

Heart on Your Sleeve: You not only give away your intentions, but your emotions, too. The bonus from Easy to Read also applies to all skill rolls or Quick Contests when a watcher is trying to discern what you are feeling right now. Additionally, anyone trying to read your emotional state can roll against IQ, if that would be better than their default, including the bonus from Easy to Read. +25%

Physical Reactions: Your body's physical state – tired, hungry, in pain, etc. – is just as obvious as your feelings and intentions. The bonus from Easy to Read also applies to skills such as Diagnosis, First Aid, or Observation, when someone is trying to determine what sort of physical state you are in. Additionally, whenever you are subjected to pain (definitely including any wound that could cause a shock penalty, but also common hazards like stubbing your toe), you must make a Will roll, at a penalty equal to half the bonus Easy to Read provides to others, to avoid crying out, interrupting stealth and possibly causing social offense. +25%

New Special Limitation

Concealed Intentions: Your intentions are *not* made obvious by Easy to Read! You can lie, and your body language, facial expressions, or other "tells" will not automatically give you away. Others do not get the usual bonus to discern your intentions. Note that this only applies to intentions. If you have taken either Heart on Your Sleeve or Physical Reactions, above, your emotions or physical condition will still be obvious. -100%

Animates in Public

The animate racial template assumes either that the animate is a weird one-off, or that animates are completely integrated into general culture. Either way, they aren't significantly restricted in civil rights or by "racial" prejudice. The GM can change these assumptions. First, animates can be *creatures*; the public at large reacts to them as potentially dangerous beings, not people. If this is the case, animates should have Unnatural Features (Animate) [-5] and either some level of Secret or Social Stigma added to their racial template. The other option is to treat them as a *minority*; animates are viewed as people, but not treated as full equals of humans. Their status (and corresponding Social Stigma) can range from "treated with suspicion and socially limited" to "assumed to be property, with no civil rights at all."

Indefatigable

30 points

This trait is essentially Immunity to FP Loss from Physical Exertion. A character with it is immune to losing fatigue from any sort of physical exercise; they can run all day, swim for hours, etc. It doesn't prevent FP loss from *deliberate* expenditure, such as Extra Effort, and doesn't block loss from other sources, such as missed sleep, suffocation, and so forth. (This trait is based on the zombie feature No Fatigue described in *GURPS Zombies*, pp. 67-68).

Perfect Comic Timing

See the description of this ability on p. 24.

Weirdness Magnet

see p. B115

For animates, this functions as "Funny Magnet." The situations they find themselves in are still inconvenient and cause others to react to them poorly, but the circumstances are always comedic. Note that animates don't react negatively to each other because of this. After all, that's just their life!

ANIMATE MORTALITY

Animates' weakness to the chemical mixture has been included to add additional drama. If there's absolutely *no* chance of death, it may be hard to care about such characters. But this isn't absolutely necessary. A hero who isn't an animate full time, but only transforms into one, is vulnerable when he isn't transformed. In some settings, the GM may just feel like animates should be totally unkillable. Removing the weakness to paint remover increases the cost of Regeneration, Regrowth, and Unkillable to [40], [32], and [80] respectively, and removes the Weakness disadvantage entirely, for a final template cost of [253]. Conversely, in a setting where animates' weakness is well-known, or expanded to any mix of such chemicals, the degree of rarity should be reduced, making the limitations and disadvantage larger.

Alternatively, a different substance or condition can be substituted for the chemical. If animates are really a species of faerie, for example, iron would be an appropriate replacement, or the "removing drawings" theme could be retained with something like erasers (giving a whole new meaning to "rubber bullets"). Or animates could be vulnerable to other conditions, such as "children crying."

ANIMATING CHARACTERS

Besides the traits on their template, there are some advantages and disadvantages that are common to many animates.

Compulsive Comedy

-5 points*

You want to make people laugh! You try to do an impromptu or formal comedy routine at least once a day, occupying at least 15 minutes. You must also make a self-control roll whenever an opportunity to deliver a punchline or complete a classic "bit" presents itself. If you fail, you do so, even if that would compromise stealth or a disguise.

Cursed or Unluckiness

see p. B129, B160

These are remarkably common disadvantages among animates. Schadenfreude makes it funny to see characters have bad things happen to them. Some animates experience this constantly; others have the Karmic limitation, below.

New Special Limitation

Karmic: Bad things happen to you, but *only* when you deserve them. You only suffer the effects of Cursed or Unluckiness when you do something bad first. On Unluckiness, this means that you get one bout of bad luck for each bad action you take. Do three misdeeds in succession, and you can look forward to three sessions of Unluckiness. Similarly, the more nasty actions you take, the longer the effects of Cursed will persist. Each evil deed gives you one hour of play time where Cursed applies.

The GM decides what counts as a "bad" action. He should make it fairly clear what counts ahead of time, but there's no need to warn the player each time the character seems about to transgress. The strength of the disadvantage's effects can also be tailored to how bad the triggering action was – a minor

sin results in a small inconvenience like spilling coffee on your dress shirt, while a serious crime could lead to crashing a car into a dynamite factory. A series of smaller, related bad actions is best treated as a single worse one, to make a short, memorable punishment, rather than a prolonged series of annoyances. -50%

Delusion

-10 points

"Humans are just like animates": This Major Delusion means that you don't recognize any difference between humanity and . . . animanity? You treat them both the same. This can be *very dangerous*, because a human cannot take the sort of punishment an animate can. Drop a save on them, and they don't get back up!

Higher Purpose

see p. B59

"Make people laugh": You have a goal – comedy – and the skill to pull it off. You get a +1 to any rolls deliberately intended to amuse at least one person watching you.

Talents

see pp. B89-91 and *GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents*

Many animates are natural entertainers. Talents such as Born Entertainer (*Talents*, p. 6) or Musical Ability (p. B91 or *Talents*, p. 13) can represent this. Other animates are skilled in fooling their opponents, which can be represented by Craftiness (*Talents*, p. 9) or Talker (*Talents*, p. 16). Smooth Operator (p. B91 or *Talents*, p. 15) covers both these areas and is very appropriate.

Unaging

see p. B95

This advantage isn't on the template because it won't come up in most games. But many animates seem immune to the ravages of time! Animates can justify taking this easily, and the GM might add it to the racial template.

ANIMATE ABILITIES

Several abilities are common to animates, but not universal. Thanks to the Animate Gifts perk (see p. 21), an animate can spend points to buy them at any time. The animate racial template includes one level of Perfect Comic Timing (p. 24), but animates can buy more.

All animate abilities have the Comedic limitation (pp. 24-25)

Animated Exit

10/20/30/40 points for levels 1-4

When you're scared or startled, you can really *move*. Add 25% to your Basic Move as long as you're running away from whatever spooked you, though you will need to make a DX roll to suddenly change direction. If you take a second before bolting – a good time for a cartoon moment like your eyes bulging out or running on air briefly – add 50% to your Basic Move instead. Two levels of Animated Exit double the speed bonuses above, three levels quadruple them, and the fourth level multiplies them by six.

Statistics: Enhanced Move (Ground) 1/2 (Accessibility, Only to escape danger, -20%; Cosmic, Instantaneous acceleration, +50%; Emergencies Only, -30%; Takes Extra Time 1, Only applies to half the levels of Enhance Move (Ground), -5%). *Notes:* Takes Extra Time is an example of *Partly Limited Abilities*, **GURPS Power-Ups 8: Limitations**, pp. 6-7.

Big Back Pocket

11.8 points/level

Once per session per level, you can pull nearly *anything* out of your pocket, handbag, sleeve, or just from behind your back. The object can be anything that you could potentially own (that is, you could afford it based on your Wealth), weighs no more than 12 lbs., and fits into a space of about 2/3 of a cubic foot. Multiply the weight and space limits by the number of levels you have of Big Back Pocket. You can store things you pick up in the same way. Anything you stash must fit into your space's volume and weight limits. If you have already stored something, your ability to pull out anything else is limited to the mass and volume remaining.

One common gag is to pull out several useless items before finding the one you want. The extra stuff never seems to stick around, and thus doesn't count a use of Big Back Pocket.

Statistics: Gizmo 1 (Comedic, -20%) [4] + Payload 6 (Comedic, -20%; Cosmic, Items are pulled from "nowhere" and cannot be found by searches, +50%) [7.8]. *Features:* Payload mass and volume are always calculated using Basic Lift 20 and are unaffected by the character's actual ST. Each additional level adds one level to Gizmo and an additional six levels to Payload.

Make 'Em Laugh

24/31/39/46/54 points for levels 1-5

Your comedic abilities are so potent they can leave others stunned, paralyzed with laughter, or even give them permanent disadvantages! You usually need to do at least a brief comedy routine to make this work, but sometimes just a single well-timed quip can do the job. Your targets must either be able to see your antics, or hear and *understand* your words.

To use this ability, decide whether you are doing a physical or verbal routine, and if you are trying for just a quick gag or taking a full minute for a proper bit. Once you've delivered the punchline, everyone who can see you or hear you, as appropriate, must roll against their Will, at -1 per level you have above the first, but with a +5 if you tried this without the minute of set-up, and an additional +1 for every previous time within 24 hours you've used this ability on them. If a target's Will, after all modifiers, exceeds 13, treat it as 13, as per a Fright Check (p. B360). This includes your friends! Anyone who succeeds is immune to your jokes for the next hour. If anyone fails, the GM rolls 3d, adds the victim's margin of failure, and consults the *Awe and Confusion Check Table* (**GURPS Powers**, p. 85), using the *Awe* results (except for result 21, which uses the *Confusion* result), and interpreting the outcome as being overcome by hilarity.

Statistics: Terror (Awe, Visual; Comedic, -20%; Weakened Without Immediate Preparation, 1 minute, -15%) [20] + Terror (Awe, Audible; Accessibility, Only on those who share a language with you, -10%; Comedic, -20%; Weakened Without Immediate Preparation, 1 minute, -15%; Alternate Ability to above, 1/5) [4]. Each additional level adds -1 to resist both versions of Terror.

Payload and Gizmos

Payload with Cosmic increases what a hero can do with Gizmos. Since someone with such a Payload could reasonably carry considerably larger items without being spotted, the size and weight restrictions on Gizmo ("small enough to fit in a coat pocket") are relaxed to "whatever you could fit in your Payload."

Don't Mind The Drop

10 points

You can walk on air . . . as long as you don't look down! You can only move horizontally, since this trick is based on the fact that gravity only works if you acknowledge that you're not on a stable level surface anymore; vertical movement breaks the illusion. If you move out over thin air accidentally, you must make a Per roll every second. On a *success*, you realize there's nothing under you and must make a Will roll to avoid looking down and plummeting. After that, or if you walked out over empty space deliberately, you can survive by *very firmly* looking up, at a friend, or anywhere besides the deadly, deadly ground. Whistling nonchalantly is not required, but does help convince no one of how cool you are.

You must make a Will roll every 10 seconds, at a cumulative -1 per roll, and a similar roll every time someone interacts from below you – attacking, shouting, etc. If you fail, you look down involuntarily. Whoosh!

Statistics: Walk on Air (Accessibility, Not while looking down, -20%; Comedic, -20%; Horizontal Only, -10%) [10].
Notes: “Horizontal Only” is a new limitation. It is a smaller limitation than “Vertical Only” (*GURPS Powers*, p. 87) because you can reach more places with horizontal movement than vertical.

ANIMATE TRICKS

One thing you can say about animates, they're versatile. Most can bring out a particular joke ability as needed, even if it isn't part of their common repertoire. Swapping out uses of Perfect Comic Timing via *Using Abilities at Default* (*GURPS Powers*, p. 173) represents this. The hero must declare which other ability he wants to use, concentrate for a second, spend 1 FP, and make a roll against IQ, at -2 if the ability chosen is worth three points or less, -4 if it is four to six points, -6 for seven to nine points, and -8 if the ability is worth 10 to 12 points. More expensive abilities are available if the animate has more levels of Perfect Comic Timing. Divide the point cost of the chosen ability by the number of Perfect Comic Timing levels expended when calculating the penalty. Additionally, if the GM thinks the ability used is particularly funny or unfunny, he can declare a modifier from +5 to -5.

Example: Wilhelmina Weasel is stuck in a jail cell, due to a *complete* misunderstanding regarding a large pile of explosives and a banana-cream-pie truck. She'd like to get out now (that fuse was long, but it won't burn forever), and she could really use Double-Jointed to squeeze through the bars. Unfortunately, she hasn't *bought* Double-Jointed. But she does have a level of Perfect Comic Timing left. She declares what she's swapping it for, spends the FP, and rolls IQ, at -8 for an ability worth between 10 and 12 points. Wilhelmina's description of tying herself in knots as she squeezes through grants +3, enough to succeed. Now there's only all those police officers staring at her! Easy!

Perfect Comic Timing

12 points/level

Once per session per level, you can suggest a coincidence to occur that sets you up for a joke or is inherently funny. This can involve anything plausible (which isn't the same as *likely*), including having you appear on the scene unexpectedly, as long as you could have moved from your last known location to the new one in a reasonable manner. Your request can be specific, but the GM decides what actually occurs. He may supply an alternate situation if he thinks it makes a better joke.

This trait also lets them try using other animate abilities in a pinch; see *Animate Tricks*, above.

Statistics: Serendipity 1 (Comedic, -20%) [12].

Other Animate Abilities

Other advantages can become animate abilities with the addition of the Comedic limitation (below). These are usually physical, involving the animate manipulating his body, or meta-narrative ones that change the story to make it more funny.

- Clinging (Attraction, +25%*; Comedic, -20%) [21].
- Elastic Skin (Comedic, -20%) [16].
- Enhanced Dodge 1-5 (All-Out, -25%†; Comedic, -20%) [8.25/level].
- Extra Arms 1-2 (Comedic, -20%) [8/arm].
- Flexibility or Double-Jointed (Comedic, -20%) [4 or 12].
- Lifting ST and Striking ST at level 1-10 (Comedic, -20%; Preparation Required, 1 minute of weight lifting, -20%) [4.8/level].
- Peripheral Vision (Comedic, -20%) [12].
- Slippery 1-5 (Comedic, -20%) [1.6/level].
- Speak Underwater (Comedic, -20%) [4].
- Stretching 1-10 (Comedic, -20%) [4.8/level].
- Super-Jump 1-5 (Comedic, -20%) [8/level].
- Terror (Visual; Comedic, -20%; Preparation Required, 1 minute of deforming features into a “fright mask,” -20%) [18].

* An enhancement from *GURPS Powers* (p. 45) that allows the character to cling to surfaces with just their hands or feet, allowing them to walk up walls or on ceilings.

† A limitation from *GURPS Powers* (p. 110). In this case, it only allows the bonus when the character takes the All-Out Defense action.

THE COMEDIC LIMITATION

This limitation is key to understanding animates. It is, in effect, a power source limitation (see *What is a Power?* in *GURPS Powers*, pp. 7-8), although it doesn't really have to represent an actual *source* as such. But it is common to all of an animate's abilities and behaves the same on all of them, so describing it as a power modifier is reasonably accurate.

Any advantage with the Comedic limitation only works properly when that would be *funny*. Every use should get at least a smile, if not a chuckle or outright belly laugh, from the audience (typically the GM and the other players). If the GM doesn't think a proposed use of an advantage with this modifier is funny, he is free to twist it until it *is*. On passive, normally always-on advantages, the Comedic limitation often means they fail, if *that* would be funnier.

This limitation absolutely *requires* a good rapport between the player and the GM. They need to be on the same page about what's funny and what isn't. Good gags often require cooperation. The other players should also be willing to play along with the humor, or at least try to find the animate's antics entertaining.

The GM shouldn't treat this as a reason to make a player's life miserable, and the player should remember that a good bit may require some setbacks or pratfalls first. Good comedy is also not repetitive. Don't use the same joke, or even the same *type* of joke, for every action.

Failing an HT Roll to Avoid Death Is Easy, Comedy Is Hard

The Comedic limitation is on many of an animate's "defensive" advantages, including Doesn't Breathe, Doesn't Eat or Drink, and *Unkillable*. Does that mean those traits will fail when it's funny? Well, yes, but . . . an animate who's incapacitated is an animate who's not making jokes. So the GM should treat these traits carefully. It's best if the animate's resistances fail in a way that puts in him in trouble, but not in a way that takes him out of the action entirely. For example, when asked "hey, don't you need to eat (or sleep, or *breathe*)," the animate

"remembers" that he hasn't done that in a while and suddenly has to make up the lack. Imposing the penalties for the missed substance or condition until then is good for a laugh, as long as he can still act.

Dying is a special case. The sort of joke that involves the protagonist's death is not usually the sort of joke that animates do. When *Unkillable* gets involved, err on the side of letting the animate continue to function. Elaborate death scenes that never get around to the *death*, bodies lying there that continue to talk, sudden bolts of reanimating lightning, or even temporarily letting the animate walk around in an Insubstantial "ghost form" are all good tricks that let the funny flow.

CARTOON COMEDY

Cartoon humor tends to fall into three broad categories. The simplest, but also possibly the hardest to learn, is *wit*. Animates have snappy dialog and make quick jokes. Being witty is a skill you can learn, but it takes a lot of practice. One good trick is to have a strong, consistent persona in mind. It's easier to think of something funny if you know your character well.

The second sort of humor in classic cartoons is *slapstick*. This sort of comedy is very physical, involving lots of pratfalls, violence, and general injury to both the protagonist and their opponents. The laughs come at the expense of *someone*, either how the violence is done to them or their reactions. Slapstick can be tricky to implement in a roleplaying game. It's easy to bore your fellow players with an over-detailed explanation of the terrible things happening. Keep it brief!

The third major type of humor animates indulge in is *absurdism*. These sort of jokes rely most heavily on the unexpected, because they create comedy by breaking with reason and logic. When an animate pulls a giant sombrero out of a back pocket, something far too small to contain it, that's absurdism. Absurdism is often the easiest sort of joke to make – just make sure your actions are impossible by the usual rules of the world. Remember to maintain *some* connection to what's happening though. Complete randomness isn't that funny, just confusing.

Of course, all these sorts of jokes can overlap. When an animate reacts to someone on the beach blocking the sun by pulling a giant bazooka out of a nearby picnic basket and exploding the offending beach umbrella, that's slapstick for the violence, and absurdism for both the unlikeliness and level of the overreaction. And if the animate quips afterward "the umbrella got blown away," that's wit.

One very important tip for being funny is *don't hog the spotlight!* While your fellow players are your audience, they're *also* your co-actors. If you constantly interrupt or talk over everyone else, your jokes are going to wear thin very fast. Don't try to interject at every opportunity; save your wit and funny actions for the most appropriate moment. Don't forget you have skills and advantages without the Comedic limitation, and use them, too. Another good trick is to agree with one or two other members of the group in advance that they'll be regular parts of your "routine," either setting up straight lines or being the ones delivering the punchlines you set up. This ensures that there's at least one other person in

the group besides the GM who wants to participate in your comedy, and it isn't a completely one-man show.

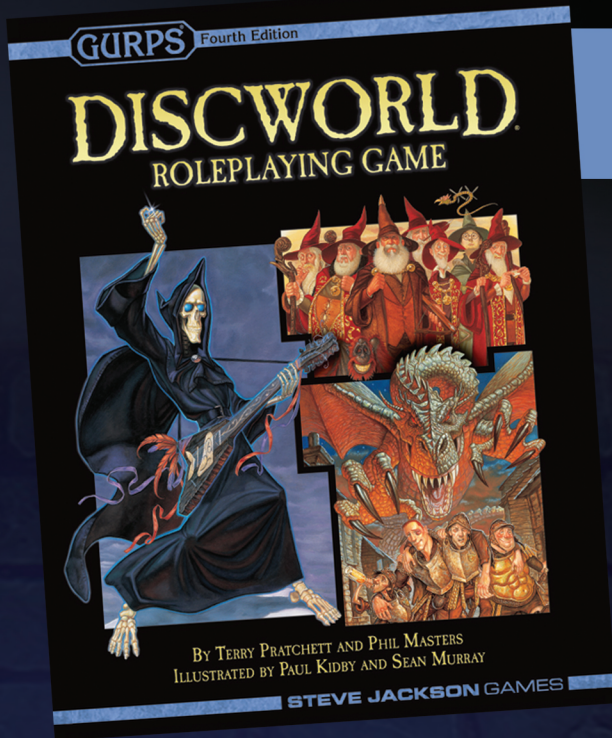
While an animate might be a funny *character*, nothing says that the stories surrounding them have to be hilarious. Several of the source works for animates have plots that, if they didn't happen to involve wacky animated characters, would be fairly dark – noir tales of public corruption, innocent protagonists thrown into mob conflicts, and even stories where the whole Earth is in danger. Ensuring that the *plots* of the adventures involving animates are still serious, with significant consequences to the heroes, can make it easier to shift the tone back to completely serious later on if animates stop getting involved.

SPREADING THE INK AROUND

Animates can have a place in other published settings, with a little bending, folding, and mutilating. Good thing they can recover from that! *GURPS IOU* is nearly the perfect setting for animates – they fit in just fine with the wackiness of Illuminati University, and the Departments of Animation or Comedy are suitable additions to the usual IOU politics. The titular society of *GURPS Cabal* knows of eidolons and eikones who take the forms of entities from popular culture, which could include cartoon characters. *GURPS Infinite Worlds* could contain timelines full of animates, with or without humanity alongside them, and the Patrol might even recruit one or two. (Centrans would despise animates, but that's what makes them perfect straight men.) In the hidden world of *GURPS Monsters Hunters*, a deranged animate could be a deadly foe, and the hunters would have to work out what it was before they could fight it. Is it a strange fae or an in-between? The result of a ritual? Something even stranger? Or an animate could be an ally! To create a suitable version of the Inhuman racial template, add Unnatural Features 5 [-5] to the animate racial template, and perhaps tweak the weaknesses if appropriate (a fae animate, for example, would avoid iron).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Pedersen has to eat, sleep, breath, and can't take much more than a small anvil to the head. He hopes he's funny nonetheless. He'd like to thank Jason "PK" Levine for the name of Indefatigable, and, as always, Nicolas Juzda for helping to turn the article into something actually readable!



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TERRY TOUCAN & THE PUZZLE PALS: THE HOUSE OF 10,000 SOCK MONKEYS!

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT
AND CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

“So,” the middle-aged man at the drive-in burger joint said, looking down at the teens and their squawking tropical bird as he brought out their food. “You kids are interested in the ghost of Mingo the Monkey, eh?”

“That’s right,” the one in charge said, “What have you heard, sir?”

“Oh, I don’t know much,” he said, leaning into the car. “But you know what? All these years this town’s been eating out on his name, but no one ever stopped to ask him what he felt.”

“Well, like, what does he feel?” one of the others asked – his face suddenly rather pale.

“Anger, son,” the man said, grinning. “And trust me, there’s nothing worse than an angry monkey.”

Silence fell, broken only by the toucan saying, “Uh-Oh,” followed by what may have been canned laughter . . .

California – dateline 1960-something. The Puzzle Pals and their noisy friend Terry Toucan have been solving spooky mysteries for years. There isn’t any part of the state they haven’t driven their converted ice cream truck to, bringing greedy crooks in silly costumes to justice.

But their fun’s coming to an end. Soon they’ll graduate from high school and go their separate ways, so there’s not much time left to say what needs to be said. Will he ask her out? Will she tell him what she really feels? Will they all finally air their grievances with each other? Heartwarming teenage drama abounds!

That isn’t the only drama at hand, though. Their cute animal sidekick, Terry Toucan – smarter and more sour than they ever knew – had enough of their nonsense a long time ago and wants revenge for being dragged all over by these

darn meddling kids. So the conniving bird’s going to do everything possible to get them killed.

As if *that* wasn’t bad enough, she’s not the only one aiming to make this their final mystery. Unbeknownst to anyone, *real* ghosts – their vengeance kept at bay for generations – are about to rise from their slumber and destroy the living.

Within one day, the sunny town of Solivar, California, will be overrun by the cutest killers of all . . . *possessed sock monkeys!*

This **GURPS** adventure (set in a fictional town on the West Coast) for three to six players is a cock-eyed homage to the old Hanna-Barbera cartoons, where a wholesome group of kids and their semi-intelligible animal companion solved mysteries through curiosity, grit, and dumb luck. But it takes it one step further, asking what would happen if the kids encountered a *real* monster for a change, and adds a wild-card by having the adorable animal be monstrous as well. It could be run as a (somewhat) light-hearted **GURPS Monster Hunters** scenario, standard **GURPS Horror**, or with some other game system.

Being a Teen Sleuth

Depending on the campaign, and how the GM wants to run the adventure, a template for the Puzzle Pals may be needed. *That Darn Kid* (**GURPS Mysteries**, p. 106) will probably work best, with skills like Brawling, Filch, First Aid, Knot-Tying, Search, Stealth, and Traps substituted for some of the listed secondary and background skills that would be otherwise useless in this adventure (Area Knowledge, Musical Instrument, Swimming, etc.).

LIKE, WHAT'S HAPPENING, MAN?

This is a mash-up between the comfortable comedy of a *Scooby Doo*-style mystery and a one-shot horror scenario where a total party kill is a definite possibility – with the adorable animal “friend” trying to destroy them (however ineptly). Ideally, the players will have no idea this will go from cute to deadly, and will be genuinely surprised when their retro-RPG trip suddenly acquires a body count.

Teen Sleuth Mystery

The teens are right – this *is* the work of some clown in a ghost suit. C. Richard Oriza (frustrated geologist and former locksmith turned local burger cook with delusions of acquiring wealth) learned that Solivar's abandoned Bluefeather stuffed-animal factory sat on a fortune in rare minerals. He didn't have the money to buy the land, so he decided to use the legend of Mingo the Monkey to scare buyers away. He figured he'd purchase it for a song once the price came down, and make at least 10 times its worth back.

Oriza's in cahoots with his wife, Danni, who made Massive Minnie when she was just 12. She stitched together a costume of Mingo for him, and they've soaked it with luminescent paint. He then broke into the abandoned factory – cleverly hiding his entrance point in the back – and used it to store his costume between hauntings.

Unfortunately for Oriza, the factory sits next to the spooky, old sock monkey museum, home of the nosy Widow Redheel. She caught him early on, so the scummy land-grabber conked her over the head, tied her up, and hid her in the factory. Danni's been pretending to be her ever since, and visits once a day to make sure she's alright, relatively speaking. They plan to keep her alive for as long as it takes to buy the factory. After that, who knows . . .

One-Shot Horror

The Orizas did more than just inconvenience an old woman. Redheel also has been placating the evil spirits that haunt the town. In May of 1852, Solivar's initial settlers – a disgraced Spanish noble and his followers – slaughtered a whole village of Omop natives. One year later, the angry ghosts possessed inanimate objects to attack and kill their murderers, driving the survivors far away.

After that, anyone who settled in Solivar was killed or run off at the end of May – known ever after as *Malo Mayo*. Fortunately, a settler to the area was a witch who found a way to keep the spirits placated using a special amulet. The Widow Redheel is the last descendant of that witch. When Malo Mayo approaches, she leaves the stone out in the moonlight (or lack thereof), and the ghosts stay at rest.

The anniversary is midnight, this Friday. The widow's unconscious, tied up, and impersonated by someone who knows nothing about the amulet. When the ghosts awaken, they'll surge into the widow's home to take revenge, only to find a house full of stuffed bodies for them to inhabit. One thing leads to another, and the killing begins.

How the Party Goes Down

The Puzzle Pals most likely spend Friday asking questions, exploring locations, and gathering clues. They know they'll be dodging curfew if they stay out too late, but probably figure anything they miss can be visited the next day.

By the time the teens wake up Saturday, the monkeys have been on the move. Unless freed or captured, the widow and Mrs. Oriza are both dead in the factory and museum, respectively. The monkeys have holed up in both locations, along with the town hall – where they've disposed of the mayor and his secretary. The sheriff most likely escapes the carnage, but gets so freaked out he goes into hiding until night, when his nerve returns.

Saturday night, the ghosts meet at the ruined mission and swarm through the town, killing anyone they encounter. By Sunday morning, Solivar will be a tomb, unless the Puzzle Pals learn how to use the amulet to dispel the ghosts, or join the survivors in stomping stuffed monkey butt.

Darn Those Meddling Kids

Hopefully this scenario will appeal to those in search of humorous, pseudo-retro “Scooby Doo” roleplaying that eventually implodes into actual horror. However, if some aspects don't quite work for the GM or players, there's lots of customization options. It can be easily transformed into a more “realistic” scenario, be brought up to date, or placed into an ongoing campaign instead of being a one-shot.

I Want My Internet: The story can be brought into the modern day without sacrificing the 1960s flavor. Small tourist towns don't change too much, and the PCs will still have to dig through non-digitized info at the town hall and talk to real people to find out what's really going on. If the GM is worried that cell phones might ameliorate some of the suspense, then it turns out reception is rather spotty in Solivar (all those darn ghosts).

I Hate Kids: If teen sleuths with a talking animal doesn't appeal, this mystery can be done with other actors. It could be run as a **GURPS Mysteries** procedural (at least at first), with the PCs being some combination of eccentrics, specialists, and helpers. Perhaps they've been called in to investigate the “ghost” by the sheriff, who's too scared to confront the monkey, but wants the case closed before the mayor finds a way to have him removed.

Needs More Guns: While this is a lighthearted take on the **Monster Hunter** genre, it doesn't have to be divorced from that game. Maybe a group of hunters find out about the haunting from one of their sources. They figure it's a hoax, but go to check it out as a favor to that informant. However, when dead bodies start to appear, they'll realize their unique skills are truly needed and break out the weapons. If the GM needs some extra laughs, the teens and their toucan can show up as part of the comedy – meddling incompetently before dying horribly, either at the hands of the sock monkeys or their disgruntled bird.

No Time for One-Shots: If the group doesn't want to interrupt their long-running campaign for an entirely different kind of game, this can be added in as a palate-cleansing "funny" story – giving a few sessions of much-needed amusement in an otherwise-serious chain of **Mystery, Monster Hunters, or Horror** adventures. It could also be the start of a campaign, as the surviving teens, now all too aware of the supernatural, "grow up" to become proper monster hunters. This can't be the only haunted town in California, and maybe the widow's journal has more information on haunts, spooks, and other situations in need of cleansing. Plus, were some of the hoaxes they "solved" in the past actually the real deal?

WELCOME TO MONKEY TOWN

It's 5:45 p.m. on a pleasant Friday afternoon in late May, and the Puzzle Pals are almost at Solivar, California – Sock Monkey Capital of the West Coast. The small tourist town lies just west of Santa Rosa, between Freestone and Occidental on the woodsy, two-lane Bohemian Highway. But as much as everyone might love to see the ruined Spanish Mission, pose with "Massive Minnie" – one of the world's largest sock monkeys – or just go down to Bodega Bay and hit the beach, *there's a mystery to solve!*

According to a recent article in the *Groovytown Gazette* (see box *What the Puzzle Pals Know*), the ghost of Solivar's long-dead mascot, Mingo the Monkey, is haunting the town. The spooky, glowing primate has been seen scampering around the highway, north of town, and scaring people away. Local police are baffled, so it's up to the Puzzle Pals!

After so many years of solving cases like this, the gang already figures it's just some guy dressed up like a monkey to frighten people. As for *why?* Well, they'll solve that when they get there and start snooping around. They always do.

Still, their good spirits and amusing conversation have a slight edge. High school graduation's right around the corner, and an uncertain future looms ahead. Everyone's all too aware this mystery's the last ride of the Puzzle Pals, and there's so many things left unsaid and undone that everyone's more than a little distracted.

Except for Terry Toucan, of course! That silly bird's as perky as ever, and just can't wait to get to town and solve one more puzzle.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Solivar's a small town of a few hundred people. Most of their houses are along the Bohemian Highway, south of the town's center, and they primarily work for Solivar's tourist-friendly businesses. The closure of the Bluefeather toy factory didn't really affect the local population – its workers mostly drove in from nearby.

WHAT THE PUZZLE PALS KNOW

The teens have taken the case based on a recent story from the *Groovytown Gazette*: "Mingo the Monkey Run Amok?"

- About a month ago, residents of Solivar, California, witnessed what appeared to be the ghost of the town's long-dead mascot, Mingo the Monkey. The famed capuchin was said to be angry, destructive, and much larger than normally depicted.
- The glowing ghost was seen on a stretch of highway north of town on multiple occasions. He came out at night, making a spectacle of himself before quickly disappearing. Eyewitnesses include: Sidney William, the owner of the nearby closed Bluefeather stuffed-animal factory; Barbara Redheel, curator of the Sock Monkey Museum; Sheriff George Smothers; and several panicked motorists.
- Local business owners claim they've lost business, as tourists are too scared to stay after dark. Mayor Fred Norbert has angrily denied the existence of the ghost as "some hippie fools causing trouble," but cannot positively identify who's responsible.
- Mingo was a capuchin monkey who escaped from his abusive organ grinder, back in the 1920s. He made it to the small town of Solivar, and everyone there took turns hiding him. Eventually, the town made him Solivar's mascot – erecting a statue after his peaceful death in 1932. This is what led to the town's profitable monkey obsession.
- Solivar has a spooky history. It's named after the disgraced Spanish noble who settled the area in the 1850s, only to be purportedly driven out by the ghosts of a local native tribe who called themselves the Omops. All other settlers who followed had similar experiences until 1875, when the Redheel and Smothers families managed to stay past *Malo Mayo* and built the town. Some say the mission Don Solivar failed to complete is haunted, but no one's seen an actual ghost until now.

Notable establishments include: Solivar's *General Goods*, with anything an intrepid teen could need; *Krump's Kamera*, which sells film and cameras, and offers overnight developing; *the Banana Bar*, which won't serve minors, but whose tipsy patrons may say more than they should; *Doctor Kasem*, whose office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., but can be rosted for small emergencies (the nearest hospital is in Freestone); and *the Solivar Sleep-Well*, which has large number of small, no-frills rooms, but won't allow teenage co-ed cohabitation, noise after 10:00 p.m., or personal checks.

A small drive-in restaurant named Mingo's serves the all-important tourist staples of hamburgers, hot dogs, soda, and malts from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. When he isn't pretending to be a dead monkey, grumbly proprietor C. Richard Oriza serves "banana burgers," and happily warns impressionable outsiders about the dangers of staying out after dark. He also proudly shows off a recent picture of his wife, Danni, beaming as she poses before Massive Minnie.

The center of town's important locations follow, listed from south to north.

The Midway Monkey Mart

"The Midway" is exactly what it sounds like: a store selling anything with a monkey on it, smack-dab in the town's center. It primarily carries clothing, toys, and gee-gaws, generally sporting likenesses of Mingo and/or Massive Minnie.

Minnie is a 9'-tall, 30-lb. monkey – squatting in the center of the round store, and surrounded by overly cheerful signs asking customers to *not* sit on her. Pictures are allowed, and most folks try to get one by the recently added explanatory plaque telling the story of the stuffed leviathan. It bears an equally recent picture of Danni V. Oriza – the same one her husband shows off at Mingo's.

The bored teenage staff is happy to talk about the ghost, but they don't know anything more than was in the *Groovytown Gazette* story. They *will* mention that *Malo Mayo* is almost here, and wonder if that doesn't have something to do with it – if you believe in ghosts, that is.

OH, THAT SILLY BIRD!

Having a trusted and beloved part of the party secretly trying to kill the others is part of the humor of the scenario. But, like any joke, the punchline's timing is critical – the GM should be careful about having Terry tip her hand too soon.

Luckily, Terry exists to do two things: provide comedic relief, and find clues. The comedy is mostly physical, with her ungainly bumbling and poor flight skills causing her to knock things over, and then try (and fail) to keep them from falling. Her constant hunger makes her seek crackers, birdseed, or other toothsome goodies, often demanding them of her “owners.”

As for clues – whenever the gang enters a new environment, Terry hops away and explores on her own. When she finds something interesting she says, “Over here!” or “A clue!” She then expects a cracker or at least a pat on the head.

It's not at all unusual for the teens to lose sight of their “friend” for several minutes, during which time she could find ways to set up a trap. If the assassination attempt goes awry, they'll probably think she had yet another accident. Any otherwise-suspicious behavior is just Terry being “that silly bird.”

Terry's well aware of these advantages and doesn't want to ruin them. She won't attack blatantly unless she gets desperate, or actually gets a PC all alone. She will happily stand by and watch a stricken PC bleed out instead of going for help, and hop-flap away for cover if the teens get ambushed by sock monkeys. She also knows all their weaknesses and failings: who can't see without glasses, who always goes poking where she shouldn't, and who bends over to look down the well every single time . . .

Provided the Puzzle Pals don't figure it out, the GM should save the revelation for a dramatic moment. Perhaps Terry blatantly tries to kill the PCs while they're desperately fighting or fleeing for their lives. Alternatively, if the teens have had it too easy, having one of them get suddenly stabbed by a knife-wielding toucan will bring the horror home.

Another option is to drop the clue-brick: have Terry accidentally intercept a fatal blow from a monkey, or get carried away by a swarm of them. Her last words will be to croak, “I hate you all!” – at which point the GM can take a moment to remind the players of all the weird things the goofy bird's been up to since Friday, and let them slowly realize the awful truth . . .

Terry's stats aren't really important. She's just smart enough to be dangerous, just tough enough to engineer slow-moving “accidents,” and can survive as much damage as the GM needs. If the GM wants full stats, see *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies*, p. 23, for a (suitably cinematic) macaw template.

Mingo's Statue

The “world famous” monkey's coquettish bronze likeness sits on a brown, concrete pillar. It's in the center of a small, sparsely wooded grass park between the Monkey Mart and town hall, directly across from the Ruined Mission. A historical plaque tells the story of poor Mingo and how the town saved him from a hard life as an organ grinder's monkey.

A small band of hippies sits under a tree, strumming on guitars and busking for change for food and gas. If asked, they say the ghost's just something the “ungroovy” mayor came up with to hassle them, and bust out into a funny song about Mingo haunting the town.

The Ruined Mission

The mostly collapsed adobe structure is broken, sad, and surrounded by a 6'-high iron fence with no entrance. It's clearly infested with spiderwebs and vermin, and feels cold and haunted, even in the daytime.

A historical plaque tepidly speaks of “unfortunate deaths and unforeseen complications, culminating in Don Solivar's untimely demise at the end of May, 1853.” It says nothing about dead Omops.

Town Hall

The stately, two-story building houses the mayor's office, town records, the sheriff's office, and the two-cell jail. Seeing either Mayor Norbert or town records requires talking to his very stern secretary, Mrs. Joseph, who, like the mayor, doesn't want to hear any “nonsense” about a ghost. She'll let them look at the records regardless.

Sheriff Smothers has quite a bit more to say, but won't say it where the mayor could overhear. See *Town Hall Clues* (pp. 31-32) for more information.

LOOKING FOR CLUES

Checking into the hotel takes until 6:00 p.m., and then there's five logical avenues to explore. Each one takes a group around two hours to do. If the gang splits up, that allows two groups to be active at the same time, so they'll hit four of the five areas before 10:00 p.m. – a half hour after the well-posted curfew. Each entry describes the important clues, how Terry might take advantage of the situation, and what happens at that location after the monkeys come alive.

The Scene of the Crime

The twisting stretch of the Bohemian Highway where Mingo's ghost was seen is quite spooky. The tall redwood trees seem to stretch up forever and block all sunlight – even during the bright of day. It's easy to imagine shapes swirling out of the dark, and jumpy teens might scare themselves silly.

During the day, there's steady, slow-moving tourist traffic as people enjoy the natural sights of the highway. At night, there's much less traffic, but people speed up to avoid seeing the ghost.

Clues

Mingo appeared by a turn in the highway – one that allowed the ghost to remain hidden until it leaped out. Mysterious large footprints lead to and away from that spot, going into the brush beyond the trees on the road's west side. Following the footprints during the day becomes almost impossible, but does uncover a torn patch from the costume on a pointy tree branch. At night, traces of the costume's glow-in-the-dark paint make finding the spot and following the path much easier; they gently luminesce after being illuminated by headlights or strong flashlights. The spooky path eventually leads to the glowing torn patch, and then the rear exit of the abandoned stuffed animal factory.

Terry

The wily bird can lure the teens into the path of oncoming cars, or scare them into stumbling back into one. The woods are full of hazards to trip over, and old trees with heavy dead branches that can fall down.

Monkeys

The possessed critters are more interested in the buildings than the woods. Some might be cruel enough to jump out at passing cars with rolled-down windows – attacking innocent motorists, and piloting their cars into dangerous situations.

Museum Clues

The Sock Monkey Museum sits near the end of Museum Road – just south from where the ghost was seen. It's thoughtfully marked by a very large sign. Another large sign sits next to it: the one for the Bluefeather factory recently covered by a "for sale" sign, complete with the owner's phone number.

The museum is a sizable three-story faux-Victorian house, sitting before the tree line. It sits next to the long, rectangular factory, and shares its cracked and weed-grown parking lot. A historical marker by the front door identifies it as one of the oldest homes in Solivar, built by James Redheel shortly after the town's founding.

To enter, one must ring the large bell and be let in by the Widow Redheel – proprietor and caretaker of the collection. She's an old and officious woman who's happy to take the dollar admission charge (children, retirees, and animals are free) before pointing toward the "exhibition areas." She doesn't give guided tours, preferring to sit in her rocking chair by the door and knit; guests can go anywhere except for the back of the first floor – helpfully roped off. If anyone tries to do anything snoopy or sneaky, she's there in seconds, asking if they need help in a tone that indicates she *knows* what they're up to.

The entire house is packed with 10,000 sock monkeys of every shape, size, and color. Most come from "private donors" who sent their stuffed childhood friends to the museum for evaluation and possible display. They're spooky and still things, and after a time, one can barely breathe for feeling like they're being buried alive in the black-eyed, staring toys.

The widow's happy to talk about the ghost. She says that at the same time the ghost was being seen on the road, she started seeing it around the abandoned factory, too. It would yell and scream, and then disappear. She told the reporters when they came around, and since then, there haven't been as many visitors to the museum, sadly.

Clues

The widow's really Mrs. Oriza, wearing a gray wig and made up to look like the old lady. Somehow, no one's caught her yet. If the teens bumble back into her rooms, they'll find work clothes covered in traces of glow-in-the-dark paint under the bed, and stage makeup and a wig box in the bathroom. She has the keys to the locked doors in the factory on a ring in her pocket. The real Widow Redheel keeps the monkey amulet in a locked box in her room – the key is on a chain around her neck. The amulet is small, made from translucent brown stone, and

looks like either a monkey's face or a human skull, depending on what angle it's held at. Next to the box is her family journal, which tells how her ancestor placated the Omop spirits, and explains that the amulet should be left out at night on the last days of May. Reading the journal takes an hour.

*He's not in a bad mood,
Scoob, he's a monster.*

– Shaggy,
Scooby-Doo (movie)

Terry

The house is old and spooky, with long and dangerous stairwells teens could fall down, and heavy glass cases that could topple onto them. It's also full of old, precode wiring that could give nasty shocks if someone fiddled with appliances.

Monkeys

Fighting the monkeys here will be dangerous; as soon as one is destroyed, the spirit can inhabit another. The house's creepiness invites the sort of low comedy where the stuffed beasts slowly sneak around – making scary noises and pushing objects about to unnerve the teens before attacking. They may even stack themselves up into the widow's disguise to pretend to be her before attacking.

Town Hall Clues

The initial reason to go here is to talk to Sheriff Smothers about the ghost. During the day they can find him at his desk, doing paperwork, as he only ventures out if he gets a call. He will *not* discuss the matter in his office, but will quietly agree to meet with the teens either after work, or before it the next day. He also begs them to say nothing of this to anyone – especially the mayor.

Smothers wants to meet north of town, a little way down Museum Road. Before he'll talk he wants to know why they're so interested. If he finds their answers earnest and well meaning, he'll spill; if he thinks they're just thrill seekers he'll clam up and go.

His story is exactly what the Pals read in the papers, except that he admits Mingo scared him (he's *terrified* of monkeys) and he didn't dare get out of the car. He also says he thought he saw the ghost head into the woods. He can show them where, but isn't keen to go too far past the treeline.

The sheriff's a practical man, and shares the teens' belief that it's some prankster. He can't imagine who would do it, though – it's too elaborate for the local kids, and everyone's being hurt by the lack of tourism. As for the mayor's accusations, Smothers says all the hippies do is sit by the monkey statue, play their guitars, and ask for spare change so they can go to Bodega Bay. He's supposed to run them off, but really just gives them a few bucks for the trip.

He won't get any more involved in the investigation, or explain what's up with him and the mayor, but tells the Puzzle Pals to call if they find more evidence. He also gently reminds them of the town's strict curfew for teens, an hour after nightfall.

Clues

The hall of records is a dusty trove of historical and legal treasure, occupying the whole of the second floor. The Puzzle Pals won't get any help from Mrs. Joseph, but if they

look for things that have been disturbed recently, they find the following.

- *The History of Solivar*, written by Augustus Redheel in 1932. The chapter "Ghosts and Legends" has been bookmarked. It tells how Don Solivar's party slaughtered the local Omop tribe, only to flee the area in terror a year later. The ghosts "took form within the trees and rocks and tore apart the Spaniards, dashing them to pieces upon the ground." After that, no one could stay past the end of May without similar results – hence *Malo Mayo*. Undeterred by "Spanish superstition," the Redheels and Smothers settled, and no ghosts attacked. Some say you can still hear the Omops screaming near the mission, late at night. Not many care to try.

- *The Register of Deeds* has clearly been perused. The Bluefeather factory's plot has been taken out and examined. One reason for doing that would be to see the exact lay of the land, and who owns it.

- *The Mineral Assay of the town*. The one page has been earmarked, corresponding to the Bluefeather factory's location. Deposits of certain rare and valuable minerals were found there.

Mrs. Joseph makes everyone who isn't an elected official sign the book of town-records appointments. While signing in or out, the teens can see it's been accessed by C. Richard Oriza six times in the last year and a half – the last time being a month and a half ago. The only other visitor was Bob Tucker, two years ago, and he's since died of dropsy.

Terry

The toucan won't start any problems with the sheriff around, but the bird might lure the teens into the woods near the abandoned factory before or after Smothers shows up. As for Town Hall itself, the building has a long, steep stairwell leading to the town records. There's also many heavy shelves to topple over, and many dangerous things lying around to cause an accident. Terry might also get crafty. She knows the teens want the authorities on their side, or to be invisible to them. So if she engineers an incident – like getting them into an off-limits area, and then making a racket to draw the sheriff or secretary – she'll make them look bad. Being stuck in jail and/or told to leave town won't dampen the teens' desire to find the truth, but it *will* make it harder for them to be seen in the open. Terry can find all kinds of ways to kill them, in private.

Monkeys

The spirits make Town Hall their deranged headquarters after "cleaning up." Norbert and Joseph get stabbed with office supplies and then flung down the stairs.

BUT . . . THEY'RE SO CUTE!

The spirits of the Omop have been kept at bay for lifetimes – their anger blocked by the efforts of the widow's family. Without her to complete the annual ritual, they have risen and infested the handiest forms available. A legion of evil sock monkeys now stalks Solivar, armed with whatever sharp and pointy objects they can get their cute little paws on.

Animated Sock Monkey

ST: 6	HP: 12	Speed: 6.00
DX: 12	Will: 12	Move: 6
IQ: 10	Per: 12	Weight: 5 lbs.
HT: 12	FP: 14	SM: -5
Dodge: 10	Parry: 10 (Brawling)	DR: 0

Improvised Knife (14): 1d-2 cutting or 1d-3 impaling. Reach C. Typically a pair of scissors (-1 damage), pencil (-2 damage, no swing damage), or some other object sharpened into a shiv (-1 damage).

Punch (12): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.

Other Improvised Weapon (7): Based on damage 1d-3/1d-2.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Dark Vision (Color Vision); Disturbing Voice*; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Double-Jointed; Fragile (Combustible); Ham-Fisted 1; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Improvised Weapons (Knife); Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction 2; Limited, Only crushing, impaling, or piercing); Injury Tolerance (Homogenous; No Blood; No Eyes; No Head; No Neck); No Sense of Smell/Taste; Numb; Regrowth (Reattachment Only); Silence 4; Striking ST 2; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Partial†); Vacuum Support; Vulnerability (Knockback x2‡).

Skills: Brawling-14; Climbing-14; Knife-14; Stealth-14.

Notes: Thanks to its Injury Tolerances, it takes x1/2 damage from crushing attacks, x1/4 damage from impaling or huge piercing, x1/6 from large piercing, x1/10 from piercing, and x1/20 from small piercing.

* The sock monkey sounds normal (even cute!), but it's coming from a *talking stuffed animal*, which results in penalties.

† Can be healed by using Sewing or Professional Skill (Seamstress/Tailor).

‡ Any knockback damage suffered is *doubled* after totaling final injury.

Smothers most likely freaks, fights his way out, and runs away, but he can come to the teens' rescue at some point if the GM decides. Alternatively, they find him at some appropriate juncture – run over by his own car.

Town Center Clues

Separate from town hall (pp. 31-32), this includes the Midway Monkey Mart, the Ruined Mission, and Mingo's Statue. The two-hour period allows for some quick shopping at the general store and/or Krump's, some discreet inquiries at the Banana Bar, and a hasty meal at Mingo's.

Clues

Checking out the various locations, the Puzzle Pals discover what is described in *First Impressions* (pp. 29-30). People at those locations either don't want to talk about Mingo, or are happy to blab what's generally known. One common thread the teens *haven't* read in the paper is the notion that Mingo's taking revenge on the town, but no one's able to remember where they heard that.

One point of interest: no one's buying the mayor's story about hippies, but they love the funny story about how the sheriff wrote him a parking ticket his first day on the job! Norbert's hated him ever since, but can't fire a fellow elected official. Rumor has it he's trying to have Smothers legally removed, and plans to use his statement to the papers about "seeing ghosts" to do so.

A few locals hanging out at the Banana Bar are drinking away their terrified memories of encountering the ghost. The teens aren't allowed in, but they could catch someone going in or out. They don't get more information, but the less inebriated could give a description of where they saw the ghost.

One person who's happy to talk to the Puzzle Pals is the ghost himself – C. Richard Oriza. He'll serve them tasty grub at Mingo's and tell them *all* about the angry monkey taking revenge on the town. He gives such a virtuoso performance that the teens might decide he's been the sole cause of the revenge rumor and investigate him. If they do, people describe him as a ne'er-do-well with aspirations who failed to become a geologist, bankrupted Solivar's only lock shop, and then married the town celebrity for her share in Mingo's. He does, however, make a mean banana burger.

Terry

The bird's smart enough not to try anything in broad daylight. As with the town hall (pp. 31-32), she might get crafty and try to engineer some kind of problem with tipsy informants outside the Banana Bar, steal food from the general store, or make too much noise after curfew to try and get the teens busted.

Monkeys

Except for the town hall, the possessed stuffies leave the rest of the city alone until Saturday night, when they meet at the Ruined Mission, raise a war cry, and go forth to kill every living being they can get their cute little paws on. At some point Massive Minnie is broken out of the Midway and carried through the town like some weird idol; they eventually start tossing smaller victims in front of her.

Factory Clues

Mr. Sidney William, owner of the abandoned factory, happily speaks with the Puzzle Pals about what he saw. He'll only meet in town; his wife's very ill, so he doesn't receive guests at his house.

He saw Mingo while traveling to his house, late at night, after a meeting in town with a potential buyer. The beast leaped out and scared him, and he almost ran off the road. Now he won't travel the road after dark, and is nervous about being too close, even in the daytime. That's all he knows, other than to complain that the land prices are probably going to fall, and he'll have to sell at a lesser price – if he ever finds a "legitimate buyer."

Asked about the property, he wistfully tells them the Bluefeather Stuffed Animal Factory used to be a booming business. In better times, tourists could see the museum and then go to the factory's gift shop to buy an exclusive sock monkey. Unfortunately, automation put paid to the factory's long tradition of making things by hand, and it's been shuttered and locked for five years.

Asked if anyone still wants to buy it, Williams tells them a local man has been trying for about a year and a half. However, he wants it for an unreasonably low price, won't come any higher, and has gotten very shrill, so he stopped taking the man's calls. William's too genteel to name names, but if asked if it's Oriza, he nods.

If they ask Mr. William if he knew that Widow Redheel has seen the ghost by the factory, he turns pale, excuses himself, and leaves. He will never go back to the factory again.

Clues

If the teens check out the factory, they find the building's in decent repair. Getting in seems tough, as the doors and lower windows are tightly boarded up, and one would have to climb to shinny into the high windows. However, the boarding on the rear exit is false, and can be moved aside to reveal a locked steel door.

Inside, the cavernous and mostly empty factory floor is dark, spooky, and dusty. A trail of recent, slightly luminescent footprints leads to the offices by the front doors. It continues past the long-empty gift shop, full of nothing but tall, tottering shelves, and the business and shipping departments, stuffed with empty desks and office equipment too large to throw away.

The trail ends at the assistant manager's office, which is locked up. The whole office is spattered with drops of luminescent paint, mostly in the center of the room. The glow-in-the-dark Mingo costume is hidden in the ceiling tiles directly above, along with cans of the special paint.

Across the hall, in the also-locked manager's office, the real Widow Redheel lies bound and unconscious next to bottles of knock-out drugs. Danni comes over once a day to check on her, and then uses the pills to put her under again.

Terry

The factory could be a murder park for Terry, given that what remains here is heavy enough to be slid, pushed, or knocked over onto her victims. The power's off, though, so she can't turn on any deadly equipment or electrocute anyone.

Monkeys

Dealing with the widow's a top priority for the monkeys – they break through the windows, crawl through the vents, and kill her where she lies. Some stay behind with her corpse, and the teens may encounter them. As with the museum, the place offers a lot of opportunities to sneak around and unnerve victims before pouncing.

WHEN STUFFED MONKEYS ATTACK

Given the short timeframe before the ghosts appear, this scenario's unlikely to end with a trap, a cop, and a pulled-off mask. It's more likely the Puzzle Pals will still be trying to solve the case, or else have it mostly cracked – but still need to catch "Mingo" in the act – when all Hades breaks loose. That said, it could be incredibly amusing for the monkeys to attack just as the teens are about to put their trap into play, or while they're explaining the whole caper to Sheriff Smothers.

What happens to the widow, and when, are key factors. Discovering her before midnight on Friday effectively ends the teen-sleuth part of the story, but can lead to a faster, potentially less-bloody resolution. If the GM wants the players to enjoy the full brunt of the plot twist, it'd be best to have any Friday-night factory explorations be cut short by Terry's deadly antics, necessitating a trip to town for first aid and recuperation.

If the widow *does* get found before the monkeys attack, hopefully the teens get her to the doctor's, or call the sheriff. However, the widow will be so out of it that she won't be able to coherently warn about the ghosts, much less identify her abductors. Getting her to the doctor's rouses her enough to look them in the eye and cry "amulet!" before collapsing for 24 hours; the sheriff will want to get her to the doctor, and then go to the museum by himself to arrest the impostor – a trip he won't return from.

If they find the widow on Saturday, she'll be either dead or dying. Dead, she leaves a cryptic note in her own blood ("get amulet into moo . . ." "stop ghosts with am . . ." "find journal in my roo . . ."). Dying, she gasps out a more grammatically complete sentence, only to trail off at the end. Either way the key around her neck could be in her hand, unless the GM wants to watch the PCs squirm while searching a dead woman's body for clues.

Getting into the house to retrieve the journal, or find the amulet, should not be easy. The investigators might not understand what they're up against until they walk in and find dozens of killer sock monkeys. With pluck and a good plan (like smashing in her bedroom window instead of running through the infested house), they might avoid a lot of character death. They might also get chased out, and have to fight or flee without the amulet.

THE END

The scenario most likely ends one of three ways.

Happy Victory: The Puzzle Pals figure out how to use the amulet in time, and bring it out into the moonlight. The monkeys all shudder, scream adorably, and fall down "dead" as

their ghosts leave. After a time the real-life haunting becomes conflated with Oriza's poor imitation of Mingo, and he takes the blame for all the deaths. The teens are feted for their heroism, urged to keep quiet about the weirder points, and leave town for home – knowing that while their toucan was a jerk, and their future might be uncertain, the last mystery of the Puzzle Pals was solved.

Sensible Surrender: Surrounded by ectoplasmic entities with a seemingly infinite supply of spare bodies, the teens do the smart thing – fight their way to the ice cream truck, get in, and flee. At some point in the exit, Terry makes one last, desperate attempt to kill as many of them as she can, possibly dying in the attempt. For weeks thereafter, the papers are filled with details of the "Slaughter of Solivar." The teens do their best to avoid talking about how they were in town, and just missed being killed by what the governor has called "an angry army of hippies." Shamed, the Puzzle Pals disband after graduation and never speak to one another again.

Affendammerung: Faced with legions of cute stuffed killers intent on slaughtering everyone in town, the Puzzle Pals dig in their heels, grab whatever weapons they can, and kick stuffed monkey butt. The good news is that no adults are going to tell them to unhand the guns in the sheriff's office, or the knives from the restaurant, or pay for the high-test ultra-flammable booze from the Banana Bar, or various weaponizable objects from the general store. The bad news is that they might not be able to find more than a handful of NPCs to stand alongside them as they slash, shoot, and burn their way through 10,000 sock monkeys. With luck, they hold out until outside help arrives, the next morning, and those who survive are quietly praised for their heroism. But seeing all this death and destruction never quite leaves them. Between that and Terry's betrayal, the Puzzle Pals return to Groovytown changed people. No longer swinging teens, their 1960s innocence is gone – replaced with the hard, gray cynicism that predominates the decades to come. In time, their childhood seems like some strange cartoony dream they all woke up from.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christopher R. Rice hates sock monkeys. They are evil. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's eking a living out of writing (somehow). Of course, if he's not writing about *GURPS*, he's blogging about it. Visit his site "Ravens N' Pennies" (www.ravenspennies.com) for more *GURPS* goodies. He wishes to thank L.A. and his gaming group, the Headhunters; and Beth "Archangel" McCoy, the "Sith Editrix," for being most excellent sounding boards.

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 *SPY GOD'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.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

AMONGST YOUR WEAPONRY ARE SURPRISE AND ANTICIPATION

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

As a GM, one of the greatest challenges to having humorous adventures or encounters is providing the framework for the players to make their own humor. It's not the GM's job to create humor, *per se*. Yet, paradoxically, the GM has to design *situations* that are humorous.

The difference? Well, it's a lot like an amusement-park roller coaster. A roller coaster relies on participants to generate its thrills. Watching an empty roller coaster from afar might be somewhat interesting, but it's unlikely to instill much in the way of actual excitement in someone watching it. A park that continually draws attention to how exciting its roller coaster is likely will be less enjoyable than one that shows people on it having a blast.

The same holds true for comedic elements. If you draw attention to the fact that they're humorous, then you'll likely have less impact than if you let events play out. Plus, if you set up a comedic situation but don't draw attention to the fact that it's *supposed* to be, and no one laughs . . . well, that's okay! Folks don't laugh at lots of things . . . what's one more?

Here, then, is some advice for providing the *situations* of comedy, using two broad ideas that you can apply to your own games.

THE MYSTERY BOX

One of the greatest tools in a comedic arsenal is mystery. To maintain a sense of mystery, have something the *characters* don't know but are at least somewhat curious to find out about. It's especially helpful to ensure there isn't an air of mortal danger around this secret. It's also useful if the players can *anticipate* what the secret might be (see p. 36); even if they're proven incorrect, the desire to fill in the gaps generates more humor than a wide-open mystery where the answer could be anything.

For example, the heroes might learn that there's a battle in court, as the crown princess has yet to reveal the name of her newborn child. That's not terribly funny by itself; the name

could be anything, so there's no fun in filling in the secret. Now, if – instead – the adventurers learn that the princess hasn't yet revealed the name of the child because the prince doesn't approve of the name . . . well, that's a bit more interesting, but not necessarily humorous.

Imagine if the heroes have the hook of the premise above, *and* they overhear the prince yelling at her, "The name's not even anatomically *possible!*" If confronted, the prince refuses to clarify. Now we've got the hook of a humorous encounter. What kind of name couldn't be anatomically possible?

It's a fine art to let something percolate in the background an appropriate amount of time. Let something hang too long, and the players can lose interest or forget. Resolve it too quickly, and the players may not have as much enjoyment as they might otherwise have. It's possible to drop clues and possible answers to keep interest up. For example, a townsperson might say, "Maybe she's chosen the name 'Bill'? The prince isn't the brightest bulb, so maybe he thinks it's, like, a duck's bill or something."

Ideally the revelation raises more questions than it answers, or leaves everyone struggling for an answer. Perhaps the heroes confront the prince, who exasperatedly admits to the heroes, "*Triscore!* She wants to name the child Triscore. It's Old Common for 'counts to 60.' I mean, who can *do that?*! It's not even anatomically possible. Ten! [*shows his fingers*] That's as high as you can count. Or maaaaybe 21 [*whispers*] if you're nude."

Again, how the heroes (and players) resolve this is up to them, but the odds are fairly decent that it raises more questions than it answers, and exposes them to a problem – or possible opportunity – they didn't have before . . . namely, that the prince isn't the sharpest spoon in the drawer.

Some other possible mysteries to give you inspiration:

- The queen is hiding from both the royal baker and the Captain of the Guard. (*The queen stole a stellar recipe from the baker to enter the annual spring festival's baking contest, and the Captain of the Guard is the judge of that contest.*)

- A previously staid – but successful – businessman has started wearing hideous, garish cowboy boots everywhere and laughing in a high-pitched squeal periodically. (*He recently acquired a pet kitten that he absolutely adores. He’s been carrying it around with him in his coat pocket, but he doesn’t want people paying attention to the fact that his torso is squirming periodically, so he’s hoping the boots will draw attention downward. He’s been laughing like that because the kitten periodically mews, and he’s trying to stifle the sound.*)

- The short alien ambassador – the first (and, so far, only) contact of a new species – has successfully negotiated two treaties with other races; now the heroes are charged with negotiating with it for humanity’s sake. Unfortunately, it spends most of its time sleeping and seems remarkably cranky and prone to attack, even as it’s making salient points about its species and what it can offer. (*In fact, the “ambassador” is a koala, a long-forgotten species genetically resurrected from extinction centuries prior. It’s had a voice box implanted that’s being controlled from far by another – hostile – species hoping to embarrass those races who negotiate with a dumb-but-cute animal.*)

“I UNDERSTOOD THAT REFERENCE!”

It’s tricky, but it can be very humorous when the *heroes* don’t know something, but the *players* do. In the last example above, you could show the players a picture of a koala and say, “It looks just like this,” then remind them that their *heroes* don’t know that; they’ll have the chuckle of the inside knowledge. Go ahead and let them import their knowledge to their players if they can figure out how in the game or universe. (“It seems fairly animal-like; are there any Earth animals like that?” “Well, let’s see how your Research roll goes . . .”)

As another example, if the newly discovered “coffé” beans have been brewed into a strong beverage, the players can chuckle as they bring their own knowledge to the situation. (“Those who attempt to stop coffé consumption after drinking it for a while find themselves possessed by demons that claw their skull from the inside out.” “That’s . . . accurate.”)

I SEE YOU SHIVER . . .

A sense of anticipation can be vital for humor. Matt Riggsby notes in his article (on pp. 10-12) that we actually enjoy jokes a bit more when we anticipate the punchline. As one minor example, I remember seeing author Neil Gaiman talking

about the BBC television adaptation of his novel *Neverwhere*. He was explaining to the audience about budget concerns. After showing a scene set in a sewer, he said (paraphrasing): “In a Hollywood production, you’d build a set that looks like a sewer, and you’d do all this special-effects work to make sure the sewer looked realistic. But the BBC realized that it’s *much more affordable* if, instead, you just go . . . [laughter from the audience] Exactly.”

In an RPG, to build a sense of anticipation, let the characters know that Something Interesting will happen if X condition is met. You don’t need to know exactly *what* will happen . . . only that it will be noteworthy. Ideally, the tone and situation make it clear that this will *not* be life-or-death stakes; the end of the world usually isn’t funny.

Some examples include:

- A tongue-tied wizard tries to dampen the embarrassment he feels sending an anonymous written declaration of love to the object of his affection. However, a magical mishap means it’s been sent to *everyone* in the kingdom . . . staggered, at a rate of one per hour. Given the thousands of people in the realm, this is going to play out for a *loooooong* time.

- Due to a scheduling mishap, a crate of live butterflies intended for a wedding has ended up at the church for a funeral for an adversary the PCs had a direct hand in sending to his maker.

- The heroes have analyzed a universal background radiation “noise” as concurrent with six musical tones – C, G, G, A, G, and (after a period of silence) B – each of which has lasted for dozens of years. If the heroes speed it up to something more human-scaled, they recognize it as the first six notes of the seven-note “Shave and a Haircut” ditty . . . and the final note is due any day.

In all things, it’s important to remember that what you’re looking for at the game table is the heroes’ (and their characters’) reactions to madcap events that go on around them; reveal the situation, and let the characters react as they wish to. The odds are good there will be some laughs. And if not . . . well, no one laughs when various monsters attack in a dungeon, so what’s one more guffawless situation?

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, Hogshead 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.

Eddie Valiant: Do you mean to tell me you could have taken your hand out of that cuff at any time?

Roger Rabbit: No, not at any time. Only when it was funny.

– Who Framed Roger Rabbit

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