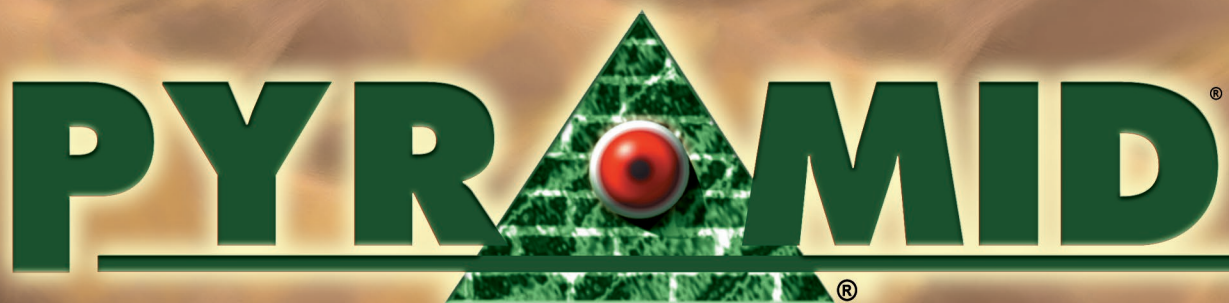


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/80 June '15

FANTASY THREATS



THE GRYNDEL MENACE

by Christopher R. Rice

GOG AND MAGOG

by W.A. Frick

MORE PSIONIC THREATS

by Cole M.B. Jenkins

**THE KNIGHTS OF
THE IRON TABLE**

by David L. Pulver

ON THE BOUNTY BOARD

by Justin Yoder

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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*In comradeship is danger
countered best.*

– Goethe

ARTICLE COLORS

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue (humor, editorial, etc.)

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: GURPS Features

Purple: Systemless Features

COVER ART

Abrar Ajmal

INTERIOR ART

Greg Hyland

IN THIS ISSUE

In a world where monsters lurk in little-traveled forests and magic is in the air, incredible heroes must be ever ready for fantasy threats. This issue of *Pyramid* delivers, with an avalanche of adversities awesome for adventurers.

What if the death of a dragon signifies the start of something more strange and horrific? Learn about the terrible potential of *The Gryndel Menace*. Longtime *Pyramid* contributor Christopher R. Rice reveals this monster's history, its life cycle, the danger of its infectious nature, and much more. It comes with **GURPS** stats for its three stages, plus rules for its various strains, treasure that can be forged from the fallen creatures, and *much* more!

When two goblin tribes engage in a never-ending feud, their clash resembles the historic war of *Gog and Magog*. The Garguk and Skrixid both lay sole claim to the same tunnel complex . . . which they share with a *third* ravenous threat. This adventure framework is ideal for crypt-crawlers who want a threat that requires more finesse and subtlety than destroying dungeon dwellers. It includes a myriad of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** stats to represent the goblins, their spiders and hell-hounds, and the One Who Eats.

What happens when you look at legendary tales through a darker lens? You might end up seated with *The Knights of the Iron Table*, this month's Eidetic Memory offering from **GURPS Banestorm: Abydos** author David L. Pulver that's suitable for nearly any fantasy campaign. Discover the story of Baron Vordag, including how he gained a reputation as a tyrant, why he went to war against "evil" elves, and the kingdom-shattering secret behind his magical sword. In addition to **GURPS** stats for key people, you'll find **GURPS Mass Combat** stats in case the baron's insatiable ambitions take a larger scale . . .

Heroes often turn to public calls for adventure. But what do they do if they find themselves *On the Bounty Board*? Discover how to make the PCs sweat by putting them on the run from the law, and how they might use their wits (as well as **GURPS Social Engineering**) to extradite themselves from the situation.

Dungeon Fantasy delivers, beware; there's more danger than you "think" when *More Psionic Threats* make themselves known. Discover six new creatures – and two new **Dungeon Fantasy Monster** prefixes – that are perfect campaign additions to **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi**.

This month's *Pyramid* also includes a Random Thought Table that expands on understanding the unknown, plus Odds and Ends that include a Murphy's Rules ideal for prying eyes. Fantasy has never been so threatening!

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FROM THE EDITOR

ALL MANNER OF SURPRISES

When I ran a combat-light, low-magic fantasy campaign with low-powered heroes, the first adventure I took them through had the heroes end up in the Ethereal Plane. And by “the Ethereal Plane,” I mean they were kidnapped by a madman and tied up in a warehouse with multicolored cloth streamers dangling from the ceiling and a hand-painted sign that said “Welcome to the Ethreal [sic] Plane.” The warehouse ended up catching fire, and the heroes had to stage a daring escape from their bonds, keep the flames from spreading to the rest of the city, and capture the lunatic. From then on, they were able to truthfully say that their first adventure was traveling to the Ethereal Plane.

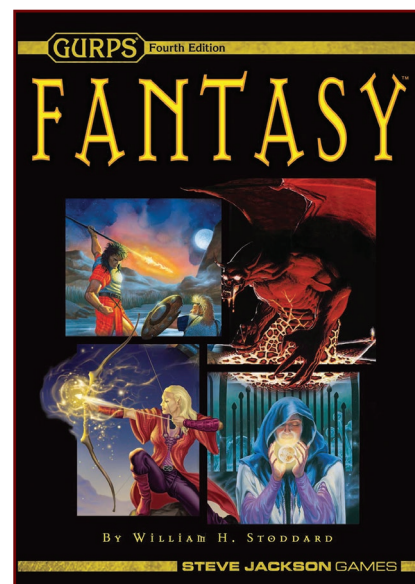
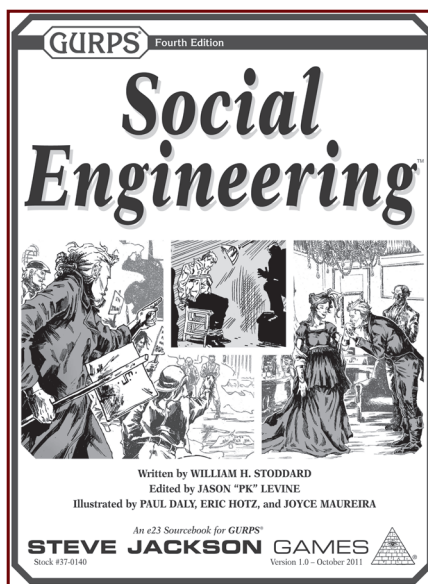
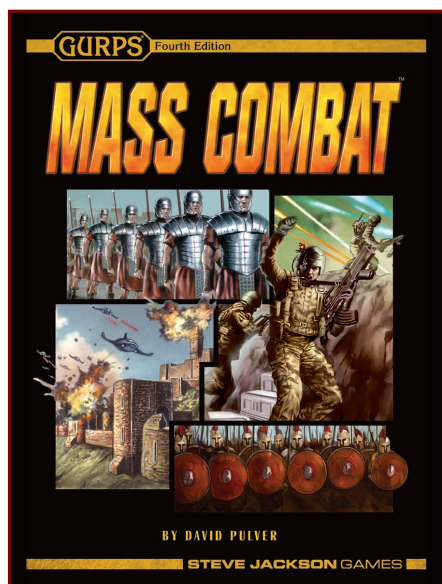
I mention that anecdote because one of the amazing things about fantasy as a genre is that it's so *versatile*. Low-power heroes could fight brigands . . . or face a kobold invasion of a village . . . or serve on a diplomatic mission for a town.

Mightier heroes might face demons, powerful nobles, magical traps, or otherworldly dungeons.

This issue tackles some of that “diversity in adventure” potential. Unlike the draw of pure dungeon-fantasy hack-and-slash encounters, many of the threats in this issue require some finesse or acumen to resolve. (Of course, we're not going to leave *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* entirely alone; for one offering, see pp. 32-35 for more psychic threats than you can stake a think at!) And ensuring a variety of encounters and adventures is one of the easiest ways to provide that sense of wonder and awe that helps keep fantasy so *fantastic*.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So, how fantastic were we this month? Were we a triple threat, or did we put the “ick” back in fantastic(k)? Let us know via messenger owls at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the nonstop celebration of the virtual tavern that's online at forums.sjgames.com.



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THE GRYNDEL MENACE

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

Throughout history, the most feared creature has been the dragon. Tiamat was slain by the god Marduk, and her bones

became the world. The *tarasque* was a horror of French legend that was charmed by a saint. Fafnir was the master of a hoard

of treasure until slain by the hero Siegfried. It was a dragon Beowulf fought and killed at the cost of his own life in the final act of the eponymous epic. Even Grendel (and its mother) have been linked to draconic lore by some. The dragon has colored the stories we tell one another more than any other creature . . . but what if there was more to the stories? What if the death of a dragon was not the end of its life cycle? What if it was the beginning?

This creature description makes use of material from *GURPS Bio-Tech*, *GURPS Horror*, and *GURPS Low-Tech Companion 3: Daily Life and Economics*. However, none of those books are required for this article.

TERMINOLOGY

gryndel (*grin-dahl*): A dragon-like creature that use hosts to breed.

grinner: Someone addicted to or currently “high” after consuming gryndel flesh or blood.

hive: A large collection of gryndel under the supervision of at least one queen.

riding the dragon: Injecting gryndel blood directly. Produces a superior high, but increases the transformation quicker.

wolfer: Gryndel hunter.

vlad: Hemovoric gryndel strain (see p. 10).

THE HISTORY OF THE GRYNDEL

Gryndels may be a prehistoric creature, alien, or from another dimension; their first known appearance dates to sometime around 15,000 years ago. As a “super predator,” it quickly made an impact on the local environment. Normally, gryndels laid their eggs in their kills – or, if killed themselves, would contaminate whatever ate their bodies. The ice age that happened next resulted in the extinction of hundreds of species. The continued global cooling trend and lack of sufficient prey sent gryndels into hibernation underground, to wait for warmer climes.

A TIME OF DRAGONS

Gryndels have appeared throughout time, though rarely in large numbers. Documented occurrences (or speculation by cryptozoologists) are as follows.

15,000 B.C. (approximately): The first gryndel skeletons appear in the fossil record.

13,000 to 9000 B.C.: Remaining gryndel become inactive on Earth thanks to cooling temperatures and scarcity of food.

2600 B.C.: The *Epic of Gilgamesh* recounts tales of the “beast man,” Enkidu, and many agree he was the first gryndel hybrid to be documented.

200 A.D. (approximately): Claudius Aelianus writes *De Natura Animalium* (“On the Nature of Animals”) and produces a secret 18th volume devoted to the gryndel after a visit one night by a man calling himself Putholetēs, who tells him his sad tale before departing, to never be seen again.

217: Flavius Philostratus discusses gryndels in his “The Life of Apollonius of Tyana,” but is forced to remove most of those essays as they are “dangerous for the common man to know.”

975 to 1025: The epic *Beowulf* is written by an unknown author. It’s an entertaining yet cleverly disguised warning of a gryndel (“Grendel”) and its mother and the inevitable destruction of the titular hero by, of course, a dragon . . .

1100: In France, a small hive of gryndels (called *guivre*) awaken and begin terrorizing the countryside. The queen gryndel is killed in 1186 by the combined forces of Phillip II of France and Henry II of England, in a secret collusion to stop the monstrous creatures before they spread further. Despite their efforts, several knights from both countries become infected (see *Gryndel Anatomy*, pp. 5-10) and flee to live in secret.

1200: The *Völsunga* saga serves as a “how-to” manual for using gryndel flesh and blood for those who understand its secrets, but leaves out the horrors awaiting the consumer.

1454 (approximately): Pedro Tafur encounters a juvenile gryndel during his travels in Egypt; he records the event as a footnote in his book, *Andanças e viajes de Pero Tafur por diversas partes del mundo avidos* (“Wanderings and voyages of Pedro Tafur through the diverse parts of the world”).

1456 (approximately): Vlade Tepes becomes obsessed with “the blood of the dragon” after reading a 12th-century French

knight’s diary. He eventually finds a vial in the Vatican’s secret archive. It gives him everything he could desire – strength, endurance, and the like – but it comes with a cost: his sanity. As the madness within him grows, so grows his legend. This is also the first documented appearance of the hemovoric gryndel (see p. 10), which may have been created thanks to some oddity in Vlad’s DNA.

No one that has tasted the power that comes with being one of the Brood can forget the sensation. You will crave it to your dying day.

– *Ghost Rider*, #3.27

GRYNDEL ANATOMY

Gryndel biology is, at best, strange. While they hunt for food, they also catch, wound, and release their prey to *breed*. They can either reproduce through sex or by infection via the *dracovirus* (see pp. 7-8); if not thrown off by the host’s immune system, the host will develop growths that become larval gryndels, or spawnlings (p. 6). The spawnlings (from either method) develop into juveniles (pp. 6-7) and then adults (p. 7).

When ingested, the *dracovirus* behaves differently! Instead of forming larval gryndels, it slowly transforms the *host himself*. At first, this transformation gives the host enhanced abilities and eventually an addiction to gryndel meat or blood. The completed transformation results in an adult gryndel who retains the host’s intelligence and other personal traits, though the mind is effectively rewritten. Sometimes, the transformation doesn’t occur fully, and the host retains his own shape and capabilities *and* gains those of a gryndel (see *Gryndel Parasitism*, pp. 8-9)!

COMMON GRYNDEL TRAITS

All gryndel (spawnlings, juvenile, and adults) have the following traits at varying degrees of ability. See p. 7 for the meta-trait.

- **Bones and Musculature:** Gryndel bones and muscles are much stronger than appearances might lead one to believe, as they are replaced with biological materials more akin to spring steel and carbon fiber than actin, myosin, and hydroxyapatite. Their bones are nearly impervious to breaking, thanks to an especially flexible composition. Any crippling is usually the result of ligaments and tendons tearing rather than broken bones. This also applies to their teeth, claws, horns, and so on, which are razor sharp. Their jaws have special muscles, which can extend outward, increasing their bite range much like a goblin shark.

- **Corrosive-Resistant Skin:** The skin of a gryndel is extremely resistant to all forms of corrosives (liquid or otherwise), thanks to a semi-permeable layer of biological “plastic”

and oily secretions. These secretions give them a resistance to dangerous levels of radiation unlike anything found on Earth.

- **Corrosive Necrotizing Spit:** A gryndel’s saliva contains a combination of strongly acidic substance, bacteria, and traces of the *dracovirus* (pp. 7-8). The latter two are encapsulated in protein-like structures, protecting the virus from the acid that would otherwise break them down. The structures also act as a hemotoxin ensuring bite wounds bleed freely. When interacting with the potassium chloride naturally found in the human stomach, the saliva (as well as flesh and other fluids) does odd things (see above).

- **Echolocation:** Gryndels “see” through a form of echolocation, which functions equally well in air or water, using several special sensory organs radially spaced. These organs look more or less like spots. Older gryndels have them all over their bodies – not just their heads – which gives them a wider awareness and longer range. Without their echolocative capabilities, they are effectively blind.

- **Enhanced Olfactory Awareness:** A gryndel’s sense of smell is extremely strong. Due to a quirk in their neurochemistry, they can actually *see* scents (much like a synesthetic).

- **Hexapedal Body Structure:** All gryndels have six limbs – the hind legs, middle limbs (which vary by sex in adults), and forearms (for grasping work). In adult males, the middle limbs are powerful and used for digging, holding, and walking. In adult females, the middle limbs are wings, which can also function as legs on the ground.

- **Mentality:** Gryndel are driven by their most base instincts – eat, survive, and reproduce – despite having an almost human-like intelligence. These drives tend to produce a mind that’s not quite Hidebound (p. B138), but close.

- **Metabolism:** Gryndel metabolism is like a furnace in constant need of stoking. They are rabidly hungry almost all the time; when they are *not* eating, they are looking for their next meal. Furthermore, they heal rapidly and have an incredibly robust immune system. As a survival mechanism, in times when food is scarce, or it’s too cold, they can hibernate almost indefinitely, slowing their metabolism to a crawl.

NORMAL GRYNDEL LIFE CYCLE

The “normal” gryndel life cycle is pretty standard: after mating, eggs are laid, from which hatch larvae. The hungry larva eat whatever is around them, including each other, with only the strongest larvae becoming juveniles, which then become adults. A single queen can produce 10 to 20 eggs every two weeks (which she can fertilize if no male is nearby), one of which is always a female. When the new female reaches adulthood, she either submits to her mother-queen or flees to a new territory.

Eggs are incredibly resilient (DR 6, HP 14) and all but immune to acid-based attacks (DR 20). They are flammable (p. B433). They require no attendance (though less dominant gryndels often care for them).

When a group of gryndels reaches more than 50 adults, they build a hive. Such hives can be found anywhere, but are usually underground, in dark places, and preferably moist and/or warm. The walls of such structures are enhanced with a gryndel’s enzyme-laden spit, letting them use their Binding attack (see descriptions, below) to create walls and other structural modifications to their home. Gryndel hives have even been found using primitive multi-cellular organisms mimicking sphincter-like doors or windows.

Left unchecked, gryndels can become the dominate form of life in an area within a matter of weeks. They continue to spread until they’re killed or food becomes scarce.

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

Gryndels are “calibrated” for a TL3 or TL4 campaign in which the most damage a handheld weapon inflicts is around 4d. For campaigns at different TLs, values like DR, damage, and the like can be adjusted to properly affect the setting’s assumptions.

For example, in a TL10 setting where dinosaur laser rifles (*GURPS Ultra-Tech*, p. 115) are common, the DR would be *doubled* (treat DR 0 as 1). Adults, for example, would have DR 24 (12 vs. impaling attacks, *halved* vs. attacks to their underbelly).

This can also apply to damage the gryndel deals. Determine the average DR of the setting and increase their bite damage to an appropriate amount or add an Armor Divisor. The GM is free to do this with other traits if he wishes gryndels to be a real threat despite local technology or other means of suppression.

Stage 1: Spawnlings

Gryndel larvae are 5-7” when they hatch. They resemble hellbender salamanders, except they are usually a mottled grey, black, or brown with red highlights, yellow eyes, and six vestigial limbs (one set of back legs and two sets of forelegs). They weigh 2-3 lbs. While queens are markedly larger (nearly twice the size and double the weight), both sexes look the same. They have incredible jaw strength (around 75 lbs. of pressure), and their bite is vicious, their teeth designed to rend and tear flesh.

As soon as they hatch, they immediately seek out food, which can be anything from rotting leaves to nearby warm bodies. Once they eat their body weight in organic matter, they slither off to find a dark hole (or make one) and sleep for nine hours. After that, they exit their new den and do it all over again. If there is enough food, they can become juveniles within six *days* thanks to explosive growth spurts. At the larval stage, they are primarily concerned with food and survival, but have an intellect on par with most primates.

ST: 4	HP: 4	Speed: 6.00
DX: 12	Will: 10	Move: 6
IQ: 6	Per: 12	Weight: 2.5 lbs.
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: -6
Dodge: 10	Parry: N/A	DR: 0 (20 vs. acid attacks)

Bite (12): 1d-2 impaling + follow-up 1 point toxic (6 one-minute cycles) and 1 point corrosion. Reach C. Toxic follow-up damage can be resisted with a HT roll. If the target takes *any* toxic damage, he must make a HT roll (at -1 per 2 points taken) or gain Hemophilia (p. B138) for 1 hour per point he failed by (minimum 1). Treat as a weapon (Striker), not as a body part.

Traits: Bad Temper (12); Flexibility; Gryndel (p. 7); Horizontal; Increased Consumption 2; Lifting ST+4 (Bite only); No Fine Manipulators; No Legs (Slithers); Striking ST+4 (Bite only).

Skills: Brawling-12; Climbing-14; Stealth-12.

Notes: Specimens with higher ST and HP aren’t unheard of; other traits remain unchanged. Thanks to natural instinct, they use their IQ, *not* IQ-4, to dig a tunnel. Early Maturation 11 (matures in 6 days!). Vestigial tail.

Stage 2: Juvenile Gryndel

If a spawnling lives long enough, it forms a cocoon and pupates into a juvenile form (this takes about a week). Juvenile gryndels look like miniature versions of adult males. They are about as big as a medium-sized dog. Their forearms have developed more and their seven-fingered hands (two thumbs and five fingers) can manipulate objects as delicately as any human hand. Their skin hardens into a carapace strong enough to withstand a lot of punishment. Their echolocation now has a wider arc (240°), and they develop extremely keen senses of hearing and smell. Their legs lengthen to increase their stride; combined with higher senses, they can hunt prey very quickly (they’ve been clocked at over 21 mph!) over extreme distances. They can stand upright for extended periods. They also develop modifications to their salivary glands, which let them store excess saliva and spit it later, much like a cobra. This same saliva can also be repurposed (via the introduction of certain enzymes) into a sticky, viscous material that hardens on contact.

ST: 14	HP: 14	Speed: 6.50
DX: 13	Will: 12	Move: 6/9
IQ: 8	Per: 14	Weight: 50 lbs.
HT: 13	FP: 12	SM: -1
Dodge: 10	Parry: N/A	DR: 6*

Bite (13): 1d+2 impaling + follow-up 1d-1 toxic (6 one-minute cycles) and 2 points corrosion. Reach C. Toxic follow-up damage can be resisted with a HT roll. If the target takes *any* toxic damage, he must make a HT roll (at -1 per 2 points taken) or gain Hemophilia for 1 hour per point he failed by (minimum 1). Treat as a weapon (Striker), not as a body part.

Claw (13): 1d+1 impaling. Reach C. Treat as a weapon (Striker), not as a body part.

Spittle (12): 2d-2 toxic damage + linked 1d corrosion. Jet (Range 3 yards). Toxic effects are as Bite, but are considered a Contact Agent (p. B111). Optionally, this can be used for a ST 5 Binding with the Engulfing, Sticky, and Only Damaged by Crushing enhancements instead (see p. B40). Usable 3 times a day.

Traits: Bad Temper (12); Discriminatory Hearing; Discriminatory Smell; Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground); Extra Arms (Foot Manipulators); Extra Arms (Two arms); Flexibility; Gryndel (below); Lifting ST+2 (Bite only); Semi-Upright; Striking ST+2 (Bite only).

Skills: Brawling-14; Climbing-17; Innate Attack (Breath)-13; Stealth-14.

Notes: As for Spawnling (p. 6).

* This DR is reduced to 3 vs. impaling attacks and does not apply to any attacks made against its underbelly. It has DR 20 vs. acid attacks.

Stage 3: Adult Gryndel

Adult gryndels resemble juveniles, but are much larger (about the size of a pony) and much more dangerous. At this stage the middle limbs of the female become chiropteran-like wings that also serve as forelegs when walking. Their carapace hardens further, and their echolocation now allows them to see in a 360° arc. Adult male gryndel are fierce and fly into killing rages that only food will satisfy. Gryndels also become fertile at this stage. While any female can produce eggs, usually the “queen” female is the only one who breeds, as she intimidates or kills any competition.

ST: 18	HP: 18	Speed: 7.00
DX: 14	Will: 14	Move: 8/16
IQ: 8	Per: 14	Weight: 200 lbs.
HT: 14	FP: 14	SM: +1

Dodge: 11 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 12*

Bite (14): 1d+4(2) impaling + follow-up 1d+1 toxic (6 one-minute cycles) and 1d corrosion. Reach C. Toxic follow-up damage can be resisted with a HT roll. If the target takes *any* toxic damage, he must make a HT roll (at -1 per 2 points taken) or gain Hemophilia for 1 hour per point he failed by (minimum 1). Treat as a weapon (Striker), not as a body part.

Claw (14): 1d+4 (2) impaling. Reach C. Treat as a weapon (Striker), not as a body part.

Spittle (13): 2d+2 toxic damage + linked 2d corrosion. Jet (Range 3 yards). Toxic effects are as Bite, but are considered a Contact Agent (p. B111). Optionally, this can be used

for a ST 10 Binding with the Engulfing, Sticky, and Only Damaged by Crushing enhancements instead (see p. B40). Usable 3 times a day.

Traits: Bad Temper (12); Discriminatory Hearing; Discriminatory Smell; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground); Extra Arms (Foot Manipulators); Extra Arms (two arms); Extra Attack 1; Flexibility; Gryndel (below); Semi-Upright. Males have Berserk (12) (Battle-Rage), while females gain Flight (Limb, Forelegs; Winged) and Parthenogenesis.

Skills: Brawling-16; Climbing-18; Innate Attack (Breath)-15; Stealth-16.

Notes: As for Spawnling (p. 6), except females are smarter (they have IQ 10) and queens tend to have even higher IQs!

* This DR is reduced to 6 vs. impaling attacks and is halved against attacks made against its underbelly. It has DR 20 vs. acid attacks.

GRYNDEL META-TRAIT

For the sake of brevity, these traits have been excluded from the stat blocks on pp. 6-7. Any exceptions are noted in the description. While all gryndel have them to one degree or another, individual creatures might exhibit variations.

Acute Hearing 2; Acute Smell 2; Blindness; Chameleon 2 (Dynamic); Combat Reflexes; Damage Resistance 20 (Limited, Acidic Attacks); Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Absorption); Dull; Frightens Animals; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Increased Consumption 1; Injury Tolerance (Unbreakable Bones); Linked Sonar to Smell; Metabolism Control 10 (Hibernation); Natural Biter (Switchable); Natural Tunneler; Parabolic Hearing 3; Radiation Tolerance (PF 5); Regeneration (Slow; Heals Radiation); Scanning Sense (Sonar; Reduced Range, 1/10 (Accessibility, Underwater only); Increased Range, 10x; Penetrating); Sealed (Acid-Resistant); Silence 2 (Dynamic); Slippery 2; Temperature Tolerance (35°F to 200°F); Tunneling (Move 1); Ultrahearing; Vulnerability (Sound-based attacks x2).

INFECTION VIA DRACOVIRUS

Gryndel blood, saliva, other bodily fluids, and flesh are *highly* infectious. Though the infection superficially resembles a retrovirus, it behaves like a prion disease, acts like cancer, and does . . . unexpected things to hosts. Early stages outwardly resemble a mild flu or cold accompanied by headaches and fever. Despite its contagious nature, most healthy immune systems can throw it off, and multiple infections result in an increasingly resistant host. Should the virus manage to multiply in large numbers in a host, he becomes increasingly paranoid and withdrawn, preferring dark, moist, warm places. Eventually, the virus creates embryonic tissue from the host's body, which takes the shape of ovoid, tumor-like growths. These growths actually contain spawnlings (see p. 6), which feast on the host until they burst, often eating their host before they continue their life cycle. In **GURPS** terms, the *dracovirus* uses the following mechanics.

Vector: Bodily fluids of other infected or gryndel (including saliva delivered via a bite!).

GENESIS OF A MONSTER

For a nonarbitrary system to determine how far gone a given host is, have specific acts inflict either permanent or temporary "Biogenesis Points" (BP), which measure how much a given host has been taken over. Every week, beings with at least 1 BP must make a roll against the *average* of HT and Will. Failure results in BP being turned into *negative* character points (spent on the traits listed under symptoms, above) at a rate of -1 per 10 temporary BP, *and* the character gains 1 permanent BP. When a character reaches 100 or more BP (temporary *plus* permanent), he rampages, cocoons, and transforms into a gryndel.

Bathing in Blood or Saliva: Immediately inflicts 10 permanent BP, but grants 5d points in randomly assigned advantages, increased attributes, etc.; 1d levels of DR; *and* 5d points in negative disadvantages (except Appearance).

Being in a Hive or Den: Short trips inflict 1 temporary BP on those who have 50 or more BP, while long stays inflict 1d per full 24 hours within the hive or den on those who have 75 or more BP.

Eating Gryndel Flesh and/or Fluids: This inflicts 1 temporary BP, gives 1d-3 (minimum 1) points in randomly assigned advantages, increased attributes, etc., *and* 1d-3 (minimum 1) points in negative disadvantages (except Appearance) per 0.25 lb. of flesh eaten or pint of blood consumed.

Injecting Gryndel Blood or Saliva: Per injection, this inflicts 1d temporary BP and provides 5d points in randomly assigned advantages, increased attributes, etc. *and* 5d points in negative disadvantages (except Appearance).

Wearing or Using Gryndel-Based Gear: This inflicts 1 temporary BP per day – *doubled* if it's next to the skin.

For activities that result in further traits, see *Gryndel Meta-Trait* (p. 7) and *Gryndel Parasitism* (below) for ideas.

In addition to the above, those who have 1 BP never suffer the *normal* effects of the *dracovirus* (pp. 7-8). Instead, they gain 1 temporary BP for every 4 points of damage inflicted by a gryndel.

It takes around 0.25 lbs. of flesh or 1 pint of blood to inflict 1 BP. Direct injection assumes a transfusion of 1 pint of blood and is about four times as effective as eating it. Actually bathing in the blood requires at least two gallons for a SM 0 being.

Transformation of the host into a gryndel requires a critical mass of the virus in his system. Before this happens, the victim may try to rid himself of the parasitic cells. He must have no contact with gryndels, and he must fast for a week. This requires a roll against the average of HT and Will; success sheds a number of temporary BP equal to the margin. Critical success *doubles* this amount. Failure means nothing happens, but critical failure *gives* 1d temporary BP. This also inflicts the normal FP damage for starvation (p. B426) due to the fasting. If the host abstains from food, *and* exercises daily for at least 1d hours, he gets +2 to his roll. Instead of 10 temporary BP, the host can remove 1 permanent BP. However, no more than one permanent BP can be shed in a week unless a critical success is rolled – in which case any number can be shed.

Resistance Roll: HT, at -1 per 4 points of damage suffered if the vector was a bite.

Delay: 1d+1 days.

Damage: 1d-3 fatigue.

Cycles: 7d (hourly cycles).

Symptoms: Moderate Pain after losing 1/3 FP. Severe migraines resulting in Chronic Pain (Severe; 4 hours; 12 or less) after losing 1/2 FP. Paranoia and Loner (6) after losing all FP. Fatigue or Hit Points lost in this way *cannot* be regained naturally! However, methods of supernatural healing have their normal effects. Remember, excess FP loss translates to HP! Lost HP result in Chronic Pain (Agonizing; 8 hours; 15 or less), Increased Consumption 1, and two levels of reduced Appearance as tumors begin to form, creating gryndel spawnlings. Every 3 HP lost in this way results in 1d-1 tumors, which each contain 1d-3 spawnlings (minimum of 1); these burst forth 2d days later. Once HP is lost, and the spawnlings begin to form, the symptoms are permanent until either the host is dead, or the spawnlings are removed via surgery.

Contagiousness: *Dracovirus* is highly contagious and spread by bodily fluid contact. If contracted more than once, it gives the subject +2 to HT rolls to resist the effects. Those who roll a natural 3 or 4 gain immunity to it (treat this as a perk).

Diagnosis and Treatment: Before the spawnlings form, the virus can be treated like any other disease, except some antivirals or antibiotics don't work properly. Treat the virus itself as having Unusual Biochemistry with the following effects: 1-3 – Normal effects; 4-5 – Normal effect, but accelerates the virus, causing the host to suffer 1d cycles immediately; 6 – something *unusual* happens; the GM should roll the subject's HT and then decide from there. A list of possible effects can be found under *Not My Gryndel, Not My Strain* (pp. 9-10).

GRYNDEL PARASITISM

Strange things occur when gryndel meat, blood, or saliva is *consumed* by another being. This also applies to any hide or bone kept too near the flesh, or injecting gryndel fluids.

Consuming gryndel parts (or injecting fluid) causes a spike in the dopamine levels of the eater, resulting in a highly pleasurable (and addictive) experience. Once in the digestive tract, it breaks itself down in the imbiber's stomach in a reaction between the fatty tissue and the stomach acid. This frees the *dracovirus* to begin changing the subject from within. Ingesting gryndel parts once is not habit-forming, but the more it's consumed or injected, the more the eater craves it. Moreover, it's not without its perks. Eaters become faster, stronger, and tougher. Consuming or injecting just blood or saliva gives the same effects, but quicker. Physically bathing in gryndel blood makes the skin of the bather tougher without changing appearance.

Gryndel hide can be cured like any other leather and provides excellent protection, but the longer it's worn, the longer it might fuse permanently to the wearer's skin.

GRYNDEL GEAR

Gryndel corpses can be repurposed into potent equipment.

Gryndel Flesh: An adult gryndel takes two hours to butcher – roll against the better of either Professional Skill (Butcher) or Survival – and yields 80 lbs. of meat and six pints of blood plus another 10 lbs. and half a pint per point of success on the skill roll (maximum of 140 lbs. and 16 pints). Due to its narcotic-like properties, gryndel meat or blood goes for (average monthly pay × 0.2) per 0.5 lb. of meat or a half pint of blood. Bones and hide can also be harvested during butchering, for fashioning into armor or weapons.

Gryndel Armor: Any leather, scale, or plate armor can be made of cured gryndel hide. Such armor grants *half* the DR of the gryndel. Bone armor grants full DR, but costs twice as much. +29 CF, or +59 CF for bone.

Gryndel Weapons: Any weapon can use the bone of gryndels instead of metal. This requires a roll against an appropriate Armoury skill at -5, as the bone must be flaked away slowly. Since their bones are basically bio-organic diamond, they have a razor's edge. Cutting or impaling weapons get +1 damage per *die* and an Armor Divisor of (2). All weapons get +2 to their HT and -4 to odds of breakage. +29 CF for non-projectiles; +49 CF for all others.

Although gryndel bones are as hard as diamond, they can be shaped using other gryndel bones or similar hard material, making them excellent weapons.

Regardless of how the parasitism begins, it always proceeds along a particular path. The host finds all of his emotions are heightened, along with his physical capabilities (strength, stamina, etc.). He can jump higher, fight harder, see further – he is simply *better*. Hosts tend to “feel” more alive and believe they are more capable than they otherwise might be (treat as Overconfidence *and* the euphoria irritating condition for the next 1d hours). They also develop a hunger for gryndel flesh or blood, which cannot be sated, resulting in constant hunts for the beasts. The more they consume, the more gryndel traits they begin to exhibit. They gain enhanced hearing, echolocation, and so on, which only drives their hunger. Eventually, this isn't enough, and the host goes on a rampage, killing everything in sight and consuming it. After this happens, he seeks a warm dark place, and a cocoon forms around his body – secreted by his changing skin. He emerges as a fully adult gryndel (with an IQ equal to his former level minus two) 2d days later.

Sometimes, when the host cocoons himself instead of emerging as an adult gryndel, he turns into something *else* – a hybrid of the host's race and a gryndel. Outwardly, he still looks more or less like himself, but he takes on gryndel traits, which fuse with his biology, creating something *new*. The GM should let him keep all of his enhanced traits from the first part of the transformation (though any traits related to hungering for gryndel are removed), gain another 1d×10 points of others, and add Unnatural Features. Should it matter, this occurs rarely (roll 3d, on a 3 or 4, roll 3d again, any roll under 9 produces a hybrid).

The game-mechanical effects can include the development of *any* racial gryndel ability (see *Gryndel Meta-Trait*, p. 7), as well as increased ST (up to +8), DX or HT (up to +4), Basic Speed (up to +1.00), Basic Move (up to +2), and Perception (up to +4). Hosts also tend to gain one or more of the following: Addiction *or* Dependency (Gryndel Flesh or Blood), Berserk, Bloodlust, Bully, Delusion (“I am invincible!”), Gluttony, Increased Consumption, Megalomania or Overconfidence, Obsession (Hunting gryndel, constantly wearing gryndel-based armor, etc.), Sadism, Supersensitive (though this is based on sensory overload, rather than

telepathy), decreased Appearance, and similar traits the GM deems appropriate.

NOT MY GRYNDEL, NOT MY STRAIN

Thanks to their varied methods of reproduction, gryndel are prone to mutations. Given their lightning fast growth rates and the narrow gap between generation. The species presents a model for real-time evolution! The GM should feel free to juggle the statistics of a given gryndel strain. They tend to take the best traits of whatever species they're feasting on or infecting to enhance their own.

Optionally, roll 2d on the following table.

- 2 – Strain has *two* traits. Roll again and combine the results in a workable way.
- 3 – Strain is faster and sleeker. Increase DX and Basic Speed by 20% (minimum +1 and +0.50 respectively). Add Enhanced Move 1 (Ground).
- 4 – Strain is armored! Add 2d levels of DR, which protect against *all* forms of damage.
- 5 – Strain is toxic. Add Lifebane, but double Toxic damage and increase uses of Spittle (if any) to six times per day.
- 6 – Strain is airborne. Spawnlings gain Flight (Gliding), while both juveniles and adults have Flight (Limb, Forelegs; Winged). Females increase base Air Move by 1d+3.
- 7 – Strain is amphibious. Add Amphibious. Replace any levels of Enhanced Move (Ground) with Enhanced Move (Water) and reduce ground speed by half (round up). Spit-tle attacks can be used underwater, but reduce range by half (round up).
- 8 – Strain is cold adapted. Temperature range becomes -100°F to 55°F. Add Fur, Immunity to Cold Thermal Shock, Terrain Adaptation (Snow/Ice), and Infravision (as a feature).
- 9 – Strain is bigger. Increase ST and HP by 20%, and SM by 1, but add Berserk (12).
- 10 – Strain has enhanced awareness. Increase Per by 4 and add 1d levels of an Acute Sense. Roll 1d and use the following: 1 – Vision; 2 – Smell; 3 – Taste; 4 – Hearing; 5 – Touch; 6 – special sense (e.g., Acute Echolocation). Add an improved trait appropriate for the sense as well.

For example, if a strain had an enhanced sense of touch, they'd have at least one level of Acute Touch *and* Sensitive Touch.

11 – Strain is smarter. Increase IQ by 2. Queens get Tactics and Leadership at their IQ+2.

12 – Strain is hemovoric. Increase HT by two and add Vampiric Bite (roll 1d+1 to determine level). Optionally, the GM might instead give it some exotic trait or ability in his campaign (superpowers, psionics, etc.).

CAMPAIGNS

Gryndel could appear in any campaign from science fiction to low fantasy. The problems they bring remain the same: the introduction of a dangerous predator, a new form of addictive drug, and an infectious disease that can rip through populations. This begs another question: If they're so dangerous and reproduce so fast, how have they not taken over yet? The GM can use any sort of explanation he likes, but one idea is that gryndel outbreaks occur in largely populated areas where they're noticed. Another is that most of the surviving "old hives" are in places of intense cold or no prey (say, Antarctica), keeping them dormant.

BANESTORM

Introducing the gryndel is as simple as saying, "Something strange arrived in a banestorm last night . . ."

Storm on the Horizon: The Ministry of Serendipity has encountered a new problem it needs its troubleshooters to solve. News of strange dragon-like beings is filtering in, along with reports of a disease resembling the black plague . . . but worse. Can the Ministry get a handle on the situation before it gets out of hand? Will it need to hire disposable investigators or send its own?

DUNGEON FANTASY

The gryndel is a monster like any other, but it does present a new problem: its remains can make awesome weaponry and armor . . . at the slow cost of your mind and your transformation into a monster yourself.

A Plague of Gryndels: Reports from the south tell of a strange new monster attacking anything moving. Survivors spread rumors that delvers entered a mad archmage's tower and accidentally released the gryndels on an unsuspecting populace. Magic doesn't seem to work on them, and it's proving difficult to discover how bad the problem is. Whole cities are succumbing to some new magic-resistant plague, and there seems to be no cure. Can the heroes find the archmage's tower and the answers that lie within to defeat this new terror? Or will they succumb to the temptation of power the gryndel represents?

INFINITE WORLDS

Like the Gotha virus, gryndels can cause entire worldlines to be shut down.

Beowulf-3: Infinity has been aware of them for a while, but Centrum just lost a lot of personnel after a world jumper addicted to gryndel meat landed on a worldline they were colonizing and transformed into a gryndel! What's worse, it appears queens of this particular strain are able to jump

worlds themselves. Besides being a Class Z/Zone Red world, Beowulf-3 seems to be a perfect place for gryndels to propagate. Most of humanity died out thanks to runaway global warming, which swallowed up entire seaboards and heated the planet to intolerable levels. There are some survivors left, but not many.

MONSTER HUNTERS

Gryndels are a nasty form of cryptid and there are likely multiple organizations trying to suppress knowledge of them.

The Order of St. George: The Order has been killing gryndels for over 4,000 years in one form or another. Its latest incarnation is named after one of its most famous members. All members are trained in HAZMAT procedures, epidemiology, and how to fight in an NBC suit. They've managed to keep the problem in check for centuries, but lately, someone seems to be harvesting gryndel blood and selling it in a crystal, snortable form not unlike cocaine. Unfortunately, it's 10 times as addictive and has other side effects . . . More disturbing, the last team the Order sent has yet to report in. The PCs work for the Order directly or are freelancers and are sent to find out what happened to the last team, as well as suppress the hive discovered near a small town.

Casiodorus Rex: It is better that they should die that others might live. I created the lottery! Me! And from the moment it began, the dragon was tamed! The kingdom has prospered!

Galen: At what price? You can't make a shameful "peace" with dragons. You must kill them as I have done.

– *Dragonslayer*

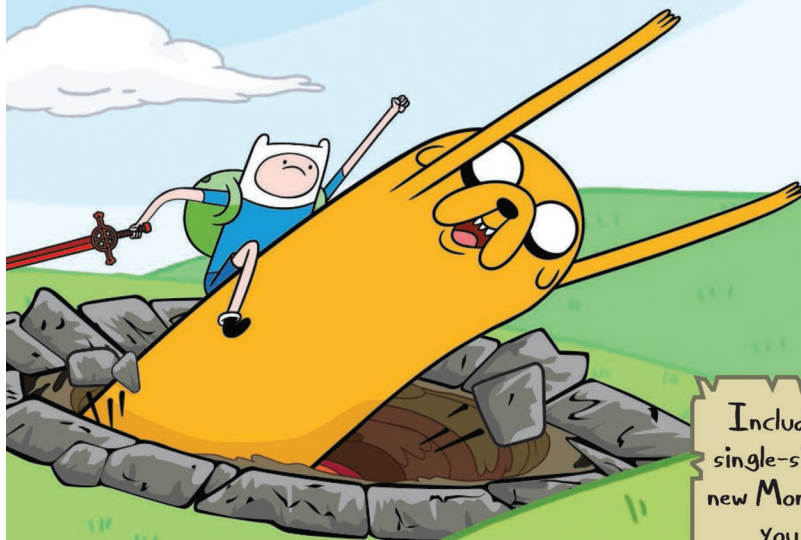
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice had a series of night terrors about the gryndel for several days in a row until he wrote this article in hopes he could share his fear with others. Sharing is caring, after all. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he dreams of being able to write full time, or at least eke out a living doing it. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group; Antoni Ten Monró; and Beth "Archangel" McCoy, the "Sith Editrix"; for being most excellent sounding boards.

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GOG AND MAGOG

BY W.A. FRICK

Deep in the twisting caverns of an abandoned dwarven mine (where else?), two tribes of goblins fight a never-ending feud over . . . over . . . oh, who even remembers why they're fighting? They certainly don't. They fight and fight, but no matter how long the war goes on, neither side can gain the upper hand. Both are *desperate* for something to happen that will tip the balance of power. Something like a party of adventurers straying into their little ecosystem . . .

This adventure framework is perfect for any fantasy game that finds itself in need of a cave full of goblins. It's especially suited for a **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** campaign that's tired of mindless killing and wants a little unexpected intrigue . . . and then probably some mindless killing. The material can also be salvaged for parts: either tribe makes a fine "theme" for a dangerous location – or Iron Fortress, Spider Forest, etc. – and the individual monsters can vex heroes in any setting that will have them.

TERRITORIAL MARKINGS

Long, long ago (maybe 20 years – goblins have short lifespans and shorter memories), *two* tribes of goblins found their way into *one* set of caves. These caves were in a mighty mountain range that separated two lands, and entrances were on both sides. Almost no one knew this, except for the dwarves that had mined the caves – but they've been dead for quite a while. As happens to dwarves now and again, they unsealed a cavern deep in the bowels of the earth, which housed something *unpleasant* (something that the current residents have come to call *The One Who Eats*; see pp. 13 and 14). This thing ate the dwarven miners one and all, leaving a vacancy.

The two tribes of goblins, each finding their way into the caves from a different side of the mountain, were refugees from the Dark Armies of two Lords of Evil, each crushed by the Forces of Light in spectacular battles. Neither group remembers much about those days, other than how awful it was to serve in a Dark Army.

The Caves

The caves in question have no terribly remarkable qualities, unless being infested with goblins, giant spiders, and *something else* counts as remarkable. They began as natural, geologic tunnels. Then one day, dwarven prospectors found something they wanted, and set to digging. The natural tunnels and passages have been widened to comfortably accommodate a dwarf (or goblin – but humans sometimes have to hunch down in tighter passages). Many contain the rusted-out fragments of what were once mine-cart tracks. Many of the larger caverns have been evened out for habitation, and these tend to be where the tribes have settled.

The uppermost level (where the tribes live) is large enough to comfortably accommodate both tribal commons, each consisting of several large caverns and the twisting tunnels that connect them. At least a good mile of winding, interconnected passages separates the two fortified tribal areas. The Fungus Room (p. 13) and other unclaimed caverns (or claimed by creatures not affiliated with the tribes) can be found in the contested territory.

There's natural bio-luminescent fungus throughout the caves, as well as occasional torches left wedged in cracks by Garguk raiding parties. The overall lighting is good for a -5 darkness penalty without a light source. As it happens, the goblins' keen vision allows them to see perfectly in this environment (but see *Garguk Caves*, p. 16, and *Skrixid Caves*, p. 19). It's very likely that the caves connect to a lower series of tunnels, which may house any number of ancient subterranean treasures or horrors. However, neither tribe has been brave enough to explore any deeper. They will, eventually, if they can just get rid of that *other damn tribe*!

The Tribes

The *Garguk* are a tribe of hearty, infernally inclined warrior goblins who train and ride massive hell-hounds. They are lead by a vicious two-headed ogre and his insidious warlock adviser. The *Skrixid* are a tribe of stealthy goblin skulkers whose "mother" – a giant centauroid spider-sorceress-thing – has magically bred and altered them to more closely resemble her *other* children, a host of giant spiders. Goblins being prolific breeders, both tribes' numbers remain fairly static in spite of high casualty rates.

Neither tribe is particularly ambitious. No one has any use for *yet another* Dark Lord or War Against the Light, but both are exceptionally petty, vicious, and vindictive. Hence, the feud.

The Feud

Whether it was a misunderstanding, a struggle for territory, or "hate at first sight," the *Garguk* and *Skrixid* tribes have been at war for as long as any of them can remember. Upon spotting members of the opposite tribe, all will either attack, sound an alarm, or flee, depending on circumstance and relative numbers. There's no chance of an encounter between the tribes ending in Kumbaya around the campfire; if they meet and one side doesn't avoid the encounter, there will be blood. For this reason, both usually travel in war parties anywhere outside of their own tribal commons. Both are at an advantage in their own caves and a disadvantage in the other tribe's, so most conflicts take place in the common caves around the Fungus Room (p. 13).

Both tribes are wary of outsiders. However, unlike most goblins that adventurers meet, these guys *don't* necessarily attack on sight. They are instantly suspicious that any outside group is a spy or raiding party for the other tribe, but they willingly and peacefully take the party to their leader for parlay. They don't insist that anyone surrender weapons, but they do insist that weapons are sheathed, stowed, etc. If pressed, they will reciprocate, sheathing/stowing their own.

In that darkness, the white walkers came for the first time. They swept through cities and kingdoms, riding their dead horses, hunting with their packs of pale spiders big as hounds . . .

*– Old Nan,
in Game of Thrones #1.3*

The Fungus Room

In the “buffer caves” between the two tribal commons, there's a cavern that has a natural water flow that has given rise to a pocket of vibrant life. In addition to magnificent stalactites, stalagmites, and crystal formations, the cavern has a profusion of edible mushrooms and lichens, and an even-greater profusion of other lifeforms that live on the fungus and the things that eat it – giant grubs and beetles, huge spiders and burrowing critters that eat the beetles, and so on. There's enough to feed two tribes of goblins without making a dent.

The One Who Eats

One other thing populates the Fungus Room's food chain – sitting right at the top. Just as the fungus feeds beetles that feed spiders that feed critters that feed goblins, goblins (and anything else it can grab) feed the One Who Eats. Having eaten all the dwarves, the entity went back into hibernation – but its prison had been unsealed, and when life stirred in the caves above again, it awoke . . . hungry.

Whether because it was smart enough to devise a scheme to give it a steady supply of food, or it simply hasn't gotten hungry enough to depopulate the caves again, it only eats one or two goblins at a time – and then only when they go to the Fungus Room.

This is a simple fact of life that the tribes have come to accept: when you go to get food, you're going to lose somebody. Both already tend to travel in war-bands, and often come back with fewer than they left with due to skirmishes, so a foray to the Fungus Room is just another day in the caves.

A Delicate Balance of Power

A strong group of adventurers could probably wipe out *both* tribes. Although the tribal leaders don't automatically assume this (both are Overconfident), they're each aware that an outside force could very well tip the balance. Thus, both groups treat adventurers something like a powder keg: quite useful, but to be handled with care. Each will come to the conclusion that their best approach is to get the outsiders to attack the *other* tribe, possibly by hinting that their rivals guard some marvelous treasure, and then follow the adventurers in. Let the strangers take point and do the heavy lifting, the goblins will clean up any survivors and possibly even finish off the outsiders if they're weakened enough.

Of course, adventurers being adventurers, they may give the goblins the old hack-n-slash treatment right off, despite any efforts made to parlay. In this case, it's a pretty typical, shortish dungeon crawl, though the dungeon will seem to “change themes” about halfway through.

THE GARGUK TRIBE

The Garguk are large and strong for goblins, and those that survive an attempt to become hound-riders still more so. Natural dungeon Darwinism has provided a sort of survival of the fittest: the core of the tribe is made up of those goblins who have the brawn and skill to survive training and riding a beast who'd love to eat them. They're also naturally resistant to fire and smoke, which helps assure them the advantage in their sooty section of the caves (see *Garguk Caves*, p. 16).

They favor hatchets and light spears in battle. They carry at least half a dozen of each for melee and throwing. They're trained to snatch one from a fellow (or a corpse) if they run out, and they can do so as a free action with a Fast-Draw roll if they're within one yard of an enweaponed corpse.

Like all goblins, they have a natural horde instinct, which causes them to gang together and pile on to take down an opponent too large for any one of them. Even the hell-hounds

get in on it, using a biting grapple worry to rip an enemy apart, or to help pin him in place for a more casual dismemberment.

GORG0 AND MORMO

Gorgo and Mormo are the two heads of one really big ogre who leads the Garguk tribe. He's in charge because he's the biggest, pure and simple; he thinks nothing of snatching up a goblin who's annoying him and casually popping the creature's head like a zit. If it were a matter of smarts, Gramm (p. 15) would be in charge . . . but it's not. Gorgo and Mormo is interested in outsiders, but acts disdainful, praising his own might and making excuses or changing the subject when asked why he can't lead his tribe to victory.

His heads refer to themselves by name instead of pronouns, speak in broken Common, and bicker constantly.

THE ONE WHO EATS

The being that the tribes call the One Who Eats is a subterranean predator with preternatural stealth and/or speed. The tribes don't even know what it looks like, only that it will grab one of their number from the shadows of the Fungus Room (p. 13) without warning. They've long since disabused themselves of the notion of killing it, having lost many of their number to previous attempts. They've simply come to accept that the One is a feature of their home.

If the dungeoneers venture into the Fungus Room, they too are candidates for an attack – determine a victim randomly, and give him a Vision -2 (plus the current darkness modifier of -5 without a light source) or Danger Sense roll to notice the giant rubbery tentacle whipping out of the shadows that cling to the ceiling. If successful, the person may attempt to defend at -2. Failure means he's grappled around the torso by a ST 24 tentacle. On the next turn, it will attempt a takedown (p. B370), actually lifting the character off the ground instead of throwing him down. Once successful, it will pull him to its mouth for a bite, a process taking two turns – during which the victim can try to break free. A buddy lending a helping hand gives a bonus of 1/5 his ST, round down. The tentacle has DR 8, and takes 15 points of damage to break its hold. On the third turn, if it still has a victim in its grasp, it attempts a pin (p. B370) to get him into its mouth. Once successful, it chews on him for an automatic 5d cutting each turn. *Chomp, chomp, munch, munch, GULP!*

Those who attempt to engage the One directly will face the following.

ST: 45	HP: 45	Speed: 6.00
DX: 10	Will: 12	Move: 12 (Air)
IQ: 6	Per: 12	
HT: 14	FP: 14	SM: +2
Dodge: 9	Parry: 11	DR: 8

Tentacle (16): Grappling ST 24. Reach C-6.

Bite: 5d cutting. Reach C. Can only bite victims that have been grappled and brought to its mouth; in that case, damage is automatic each turn.

Traits: 360° Vision; Cannot Speak; Chameleon 4 (Only in darkness or shadow); Dark Vision; Doesn't Breathe; Extra Arms 6 (Long +5; Weak); Extra Attacks 6; Extra-Flexible (Tentacles); Flight; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Injury Tolerance (Unliving; No Brain; No Eyes; No Neck; No Vitals); No Legs (Aerial); Unfazeable; Silence 4.

Skills: Stealth-14; Wrestling-16.

Class: Elder thing.

Notes: Multiple tentacles grappling one target give +2 to effective grappling ST per tentacle. Unwilling to negotiate; just hungry. The One itself doesn't intentionally keep treasure, but its victims' belongings scatter the floor. Most are rotted/rusted and worthless, but if the One is killed and the adventurers are free to search the Fungus Room, they can find an old dwarven thesis on mining and prospecting (worth \$1,000 due to the etched metal pages), a bloodstone worth \$360, and a beautifully decorated medium dwarven shield (enchanted, Defending Shield +2), worth \$20,540. They can also find scattered coins worth \$4 × margin of success on a Per or Search roll.

Gorgo seems to be the “smarter” one, and typically does the talking; Mormo interrupts to agree or disagree and often blurts out what they're both really thinking (which is usually violent). Nevertheless, it would be a bad idea to underestimate Gorgo and Mormo; he's much more cunning than he comes off, ruthless and deadly in battle.

In combat, he's fearless and brutal but at least passably tactical, using the mobility of the hound-riders to his advantage. His heads can coordinate separately, each usually guiding one arm (with a club in each hand), allowing him to take mixed or double actions. Although not an actual goblin of the tribe, he's acquired some of their characteristics through prolonged cohabitation (and possibly through eating so many of them), including a resistance to fire and smoke.

ST: 25	HP: 30	Speed: 6.50
DX: 12	Will: 13	Move: 8
IQ: 10	Per: 13	
HT: 14	FP: 14	SM: +1
Dodge: 9	Parry: 11	DR: 9 (+4 vs. Fire)

Fist (16): 2d+3 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Giant Club (16): 5d+3 crushing. Reach 1, 2.

Hurled Rock (16): 2d+6 crushing. Acc 0, Range 88, RoF 1, Shots T(1).

Traits: Altered Time Rate 1 (Temporary Disadvantages: Move -4, One Arm); Ambidextrous; Appearance (Monstrous); Bad Temper (12); Bloodlust (12); Bully (12); Danger Sense; Easy to Read; Extra Head 1; Fearlessness 3; Filter Lungs (Smoke Only); Fit; High Pain Threshold; Infravision; Laziness; Magic Resistance 4; Night Vision 5; Overconfidence (12); Peripheral Vision; Sure-Footed (Slippery).

Skills: Axe/Mace-16; Brawling-16; Intimidation-16; Throwing-16; Wrestling-16.

Class: Mundane.

Notes: DR 4 from Tough Skin and 5 from the malodorous layers of skins and hides he wears, which don't cover his heads or necks, and leave many gaps at the joints, etc.; targeting chinks in armor (p. B400) allows the attacker to ignore, rather than halve, DR from armor (leaving DR 4). His personal effects include 10d silver pieces (\$1 each), and an ornate (even gaudy) hand mirror; the glass is broken and filthy, but the gilded and gem-encrusted frame itself is worth \$600.

GARGUK GOBLINS

All Garguk train as warriors. The largest and strongest become hound-riders.

Garguk Groundling

A Garguk groundling generally carries a javelin, a shield, several hatchets on his belt, and several more javelins in a quiver on his back.

Garguk are competent formation fighters. They will use tactics such as shield-walls, flanking, and wedges where effective. While in formation with a line of his fellows, he will throw weapons at his enemies, keeping the last one or two for melee.

ST: 12 **HP:** 14 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 6
IQ: 9 **Per:** 10
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 10 **DR:** 4 (+4 vs. Fire)

Bite (12): 1d-1 cutting. Reach C.

Hatchet (15): 2d-1 cutting. Reach 1. *Thrown:* Acc 1, Range 19/32, RoF 1, Shots T(1), Bulk -2.

Javelin (15): 1d+1 impaling. Reach 1. *Thrown:* Acc 3, Range 19/32, RoF 1, Shots T(1), Bulk -4.

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

Traits: Appearance (Monstrous); Bad Temper (12); Bloodlust (12); Chummy; Infravision; Filter Lungs (Smoke Only); Night-Adapted Vision; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3); Shield Wall Training (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 11: Power-Ups*, p. 12); Sure-Footed (Slippery); Teamwork (Formation fighting); Teeth (Sharp). If alone, Cowardice (9); if in a group of five or more, Overconfidence (12).

Skills: Climbing-12; Fast-Draw (Axe or Spear)-14; Jumping-12; Melee (Axe or Spear)-15; Running-12; Shield-14; Stealth-14; Thrown Weapon (Axe or Spear)-15.

Class: Mundane.

Notes: Medium shield (DB 2, Block 10) gives +2 to all defenses against frontal attacks. DR 2 from Tough Skin, 2 from hides and skins; see notes for Gorgo and Mormo. Night-Adapted Vision gives the groundling no penalty in darkness -5, as for most places in the caves, but -5 in full daylight or -5 in total darkness (see *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level*, p. 16). Loot includes 3d silver pieces.

Garguk Hound-Rider

Those Garguk who show an aptitude with hell-hounds, and who survive the process of choosing one to train and ride, become the elite cavalry and shock troops of the tribe. They use their mount's mobility to make circling passes that bring them briefly into melee range (ideally they attack in the *middle* of the hound's full Move, so they're out of range when their turn ends), then throwing weapons when out of reach. Their saddles carry many extra hatchets and spears, and they're not afraid to use them. They only have their mounts close into biting range when they've got a target on the ropes; then it's dinner time.

ST: 15 **HP:** 16 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 12 **Move:** 6
IQ: 8 **Per:** 10
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 10 **DR:** 5 (+5 vs. Fire)

Bite (12): 1d cutting. Reach C.

Hatchet (15): 2d cutting. Reach 1. *Thrown:* Acc 1, Range 22/35, RoF 1, Shots T(1), Bulk -2.

Javelin (15): 1d+1 impaling. Reach 1. *Thrown:* Acc 3, Range 19/35, RoF 1, Shots T(1), Bulk -4.

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

Traits: As Groundling, above, plus Good with Hell-Hounds.

Skills: As Groundling, above, plus Animal Handling (Hell-Hound)-12; Hands-Free Riding-15; Riding (Hell-Hound)-15.

Class: Mundane.

Notes: Medium shield (DB 2, Block 10) gives +2 to all defenses against frontal attacks. DR 3 from Tough Skin, 2 from hides and skins; see notes for Gorgo and Mormo. When mounted on a hell-hound, use the *hound's* movement; the rider can take a full (or All-Out) Attack without suffering the penalties of a Move and Attack.

GRAMM, GARGUK WARLOCK

Gramm is the tribe's warlock, a clever and devious goblin if ever there was one. He's figured out how to play Gorgo and Mormo against one another to get what he wants. Although it doesn't always work – he risks being squeezed to death like a tube of toothpaste each time – he often sways the leader by such tactics. He also has a great deal of leverage, being the only spell-caster in the tribe *and* the one who most easily and reliably controls the hell-hounds. For Gramm's part, he naturally thinks he'd make a better leader, but he doesn't want the tribe to lose Gorgo and Mormo's strength.

ST: 10 **HP:** 11 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 14 **Move:** 6
IQ: 14 **Per:** 14
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 12 **DR:** 3 (+5 vs. Fire)

Bite (12): 1d-3 cutting. Reach C.

Burning Touch (15): Staff damage + 1d to 3d burn that *ignores* DR from armor. Costs 1 FP/1d.

Fiery Breath (16): 1d+1 to 4d+4 burn. Reach 1-4. Costs 1 FP/1d+1.

Fireball or Explosive Fireball (16): 1d to 9d burn. Acc 1, Range 25/50. Costs 1 FP/1d; Explosive Fireball costs 2 FP/1d.

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

Staff (15): 1d+2 crushing. Reach 1, 2.

Traits: As Garguk Groundling (above), plus Animal Empathy; Energy Reserve 8 (Magic); Magery 3; Weapon Bond (Staff).

Skills: Alchemy-14; Fast Talk-14; Innate Attack (Breath, Projectile)-16; Intimidation-14; Occultism-14; Poisons-14; Staff-14. Most spells in the Animal (specialized in hell-hounds where appropriate), Fire, and Healing colleges at level 15, including the attack spells above *and* Shapeshifting (Hell-Hound).

Class: Mundane.

Notes: Magic staff set with a sizable black onyx (worth \$580 and acting his power item with 5 FP for spells). -1 FP cost to all spells due to high skill. He owns a single major healing potion (worth \$350), which he won't hesitate to drink if sorely injured. Loot also includes 6d silver pieces.

The rider is effectively 3' above a foot-bound opponent, giving him +1 and his target -1 to defend in melee; if he attacks while the hound is moving at 7 or more, he gets -1 to skill but +1 to damage. Due to his training, a rider ignores penalties for "no hands" riding, and uses his full skill when attacking with melee or ranged weapons. See *Mounted Combat* (p. B396) for details.

I was going to tell you . . . I found something in the Goblin tunnels.

– Bilbo Baggins, in *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*

GARGUK HELL-HOUNDS

Fire-breathing infernal canines the size of a tiger, they are strong and vicious enough to carry a fully armed Garguk warrior into battle. Although highly aggressive, they can be trained to follow the commands of a rider, and will generally do so unless something sends them into a frenzy.

ST: 21	HP: 22	Speed: 7.00
DX: 13	Will: 12	Move: 10/15
IQ: 4	Per: 14	
HT: 13	FP: 13	SM: +1
Dodge: 11	Parry: N/A	DR: 5 (+10 vs. Fire)

Bite (18): 2d+1 cutting + linked 1d burn. Reach C, 1.

Fiery Breath (16): 1d+1 burn, Jet, Range 5/10.

Traits: Berserk (12); Bloodlust (12); Combat Reflexes; Discriminatory Smell; Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground); Filter Lungs (Smoke Only); Gluttony (12); High Pain Threshold; Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction 3; Fire/Heat only); Infravision; Night Vision 9; Quadruped; Sure-Footed (Slippery, Uneven); Teeth (Sharp); Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-18; Innate Attack (Breath)-16; Stealth-15; Tracking-18.

Class: Demonic Animal.

Notes: A rider is Light Encumbrance, for Dodge 10, Move 8/12.

GARGUK CAVES

The Garguk have selected caves with certain specifications and optimized them for defense against creepy-crawly spider goblins. Although tall enough to accommodate a hound-rider or ogre, most don't have high vaulted ceilings where spiders can skulk. In places where attacks have been common, the floors, walls, and ceiling are routinely coated with oil, both to make them slippery (-2 to skill, -1 to defenses; any failed DX-based roll forces a DX check to avoid falling – but all Garguk ignore this effect), and so they can be ignited (1d-1 burning per second per square yard). Being resistant to fire damage, the goblins won't hesitate to torch the room even if they're inside. All passages into the tribal commons have built-up mounds of

rubble that act as cover, from behind which sentries can make pop-up attacks (p. B390). The passages also have large gongs that can be struck to alert the rest of the tribe to an attack.

Further, all Garguk areas are filled with smoke, giving a -3 to vision *on top of* lighting penalties to anyone who lacks Infravision. Anyone who breathes the smoke for over one minute must make a HT roll (and another after each minute spent breathing smoke) to avoid coughing (-3 to DX, -1 to IQ, can't be stealthy). Air spells can clear an area temporarily (for the duration of a battle), but the smoke is coming from a great bonfire in the tribal commons, which will have to be put out before the caves will clear permanently. Garguk (including Gorgo and Mormo as well as hell-hounds) can all see and breathe fine in smoke.

The tribe is on high alert due to the constant threat of Skrixid attack. A typical sentry group or war-party consists of at least six goblins (or *twice* the number of adventurers, if more), about a third of which are hound-riders. In a sentry group, one always has the job of hitting the alarm gong, and he will do so on the second turn of combat (one turn to get there, and a Fast-Draw roll to Ready the mallet instantly). Once the alarm has been sounded, another group of Garguk guards arrives in 3d turns; then 1d minutes later, Gorgo and Mormo arrive, along with Gramm and yet more goblins, to investigate. The tribe is at least 50 strong altogether, with no noncombatants.

THE SKRIXID TRIBE

Goblins of the Skrixid tribe are nimble and sleek, some might say downright spider-like. The magical experiments of Shiirith have left them with several traits adapted to living among arachnids – clinging to walls, immunity to venom, and the ability to see and move through the many spider webs that choke their section of the caves (see *Skrixid Caves*, p. 19).

Skrixid usually crawl stealthily across the ceiling (-2 to be spotted), and either snipe enemies from afar (falling back when approached) or wait in ambush and attack from above (-2 to target's defenses; see *Attack from Above*, p. B402). They use long knives (not balanced for throwing) and pistol crossbows in battle, all treated with a sticky spider venom. A successful Fast-Draw (Arrow) roll allows them to reload and

ready a crossbow to fire in a single turn; Skrixid war-bands will stagger shots so someone is firing every turn.

SHIIRITH THE MOTHER

It's unclear exactly *what* Shiirith is, or was. She has the torso, arms, and head of what might once have been a beautiful raven-haired human, elf, or faerie woman . . . but from the waist down, she has the bulbous abdomen and spindly legs of a gigantic black widow spider. Whether she is some sort of demon, is the victim of a curse, or has done this to herself (intentionally or otherwise), she's a monster, if an unusually comely one above the hips.

Ruthless and cunning, she accepts – nay, *demands* – the worship of the Skrixid tribe as the goddess she likes to think she is. She often refers to herself in the third person, and her demeanor is generally imperious and aloof (in a creepy, arachnid way). Those who don't address her with the proper respect are normally slain on the spot, though she's willing to be lenient for strangers who may be able to tip the balance of power in the caves.

She's a talented and accomplished sorceress, to the point that she has magically altered the goblins of the tribe. She commands spiders of all kinds at will, and she is deadly in melee combat due to her spear-like forelegs – through which she can cast spells. Her cognitive acuity is such that she can concentrate on mental tasks (e.g., commanding spiders or casting spells) while doing others things, including casting *and* attacking with a Jet, Melee, or Missile spell in a single turn.

ST: 12 **HP:** 25 **Speed:** 7.00
DX: 14 **Will:** 15 **Move:** 8 (Clinging 8)
IQ: 15 **Per:** 15
HT: 13 **FP:** 13 **SM:** +2

Dodge: 11 **Parry:** 12 **DR:** 8

Acid Ball (18): 1d to 12d corr. Acc 1, Range 20/40. Costs 1 FP/1d.

Bite (16): 2d+1 impaling + follow-up 1d+2 toxic *and* roll vs. HT-2 or physically stunned. Reach C.

Deathtouch (16): Foreleg damage + linked 1d to 4d toxic; *ignores* DR from armor. Costs 1 FP/1d.

Foreleg (16): 2d+4 impaling Reach C, 1.

Spider Silk (18): ST 10 Sticky Binding (p. B40), DR 3 to break. Acc 3, Range 5 yard/1 FP spent.

Spit Acid (16): 1d to 4d corr. Reach 1-4. Costs 1 FP/1d.

Traits: Appearance (Monstrously Beautiful); Bloodlust (12); Callous; Climbing Line; Clinging; Combat Reflexes; Compartmentalized Mind 1 (No Mental Separation); Dark Vision; Energy Reserve 12 (Magic); Extra Attack 1; Extra Legs (Arachnid); Good with Spiders (**GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks**, p. 13); Immunity to Poison; Magery 4; Mind Control (Spiders); Overconfidence (12); Penetrating Vision (Cobwebs; Line of sight range); Speak with Spiders; Strikers, Impaling (Forelegs, 2); Super Climbing 4; Teeth (Fangs).

Skills: Alchemy-15; Brawling-16; Innate Attack (Breath and Projectile)-18; Occultism-16; Poisons-16; Stealth-16; Thaumatology-15. Most spells in the Animal (specialized in giant spiders where appropriate), Body Control, Earth, and Water colleges at level 17, including the attack spells above *and* Shapeshifting (Giant Spider).

Class: Mundane?

Notes: She has -1 FP cost to all spells due to high skill. Shiirith has the torso, arms, and head of a shapely and beautiful (if still clearly inhuman) woman, which is good for the full reaction penalties for Monstrous Appearance, and those with traits such as Xenophilia may find her . . . intriguing. She wears a silver tiara (worth \$575), a silver chain set with a large ruby (worth

*Shiirith
demands to be
worshiped as
a goddess.*

MOTHER'S FAVORITE

There are many giant spiders in the Skrixid caves, but there's one that Mother loves best. Her web is in the cavernous vaults above the main entrance, and she will attack *any* nontribe members she sees, unless they're accompanied by enough Skrixid to make clear that they're not invaders.

ST: 27 **HP:** 30 **Speed:** 7.00
DX: 14 **Will:** 12 **Move:** 10 (Clinging 10)
IQ: 6 **Per:** 14
HT: 14 **FP:** 14 **SM:** +2
Dodge: 11 **Parry:** 12 **DR:** 6

Bite (16): 3d+1 impaling + follow-up 1d+2 toxic. Reach C, 1.

Forelegs (16): 3d+5 impaling. Reach C, 1.

Webbing (16): ST 20 Sticky Binding (p. B40), DR 6 to break. Reach C. This is a melee attack that allows Mother's Favorite to grapple and cocoon an enemy and then save him for later, often hanging from the ceiling.

Traits: As Giant Riding Spider (p. 18), plus Compartmentalized Mind 1 (No Mental Separation; Only for Mind Control); Extra Attack 1, Mind Control (Spiders), and Strikers x2 (Impaling; Forelegs).

Skills: Brawling-16; Climbing-16; Stealth-16.

Class: Dire Animal.

Notes: As Giant Riding Spider (p. 18).

\$900 – used as her power item, holding 7 FP for spells, and an expensive silver hairbrush (worth \$100).

SKRIXID GOBLINS

As a rule, all Skrixid are good at sneaking, stalking, and attacking from ambush.

Skrixid Skitterer

The Skrixid are nimble, quick wall-crawlers who skulk along the shadows across the ceiling and harass enemies from afar for as long as they can, before dropping down onto them from above. They carry their knives in their teeth so that their saliva repoisons the blade when not in use. Each carries a bandoleer of poisoned hand-crossbow bolts. If one runs out, he will salvage ammo from a fallen comrade.

ST: 11 **HP:** 12 **Speed:** 6.25
DX: 13 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 6 (Clinging 6)
IQ: 9 **Per:** 12
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 10 **Parry:** 9 **DR:** 2

Bite (12): 1d-2 cutting + poison. Reach C.

Crossbow (15): 1d+2 impaling + poison. Acc 1, Range 165/220, RoF 1, Shots 1(4), Bulk -4.

Knife (15): 1d cutting *or* 1d-1 impaling + poison. Reach C, 1.

Poison: All Skrixid teeth and weapons are coated with a mild spider venom, causing 1d toxic damage as follow-up.

Punch (12): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Appearance (Monstrous); Bloodlust (12); Chummy; Clinging; Crossbow Finesse; Dark-Adapted Vision; Enhanced Dodge 1; Flexibility; Good with Spiders (**GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks**, p. 13); Immunity to Poison; Infravision; Penetrating Vision (Cobwebs; Line of sight range); Quick Reload (Crossbow); Super Climbing 3; Teeth (Sharp). If alone, Cowardice (9); if in a group of five or more, Overconfidence (12).

Skills: Attack From Above (Knife)-15; Climbing-16; Crossbow-15; Escape-15; Fast-Draw (Arrow or Knife)-14; Jumping-14; Knife-15; Running-12; Stealth-16.

Class: Mundane.

Notes: Dark-Adapted Vision is similar to Night-Adapted Vision (see *Dungeon Fantasy 3*, p. 16), but gives them no penalty in darkness -5 or worse, as is found throughout the caves. Loot includes 3d silver pieces.

*It is not merely cruelty that leads
men to love war; it is excitement.*

– Henry Ward Beecher

Skrixid Spider-Rider

Some Skrixid are born not just with an affinity for spiders, but with the ability to communicate with them. These become spider-riders, deadly venomous cavalry that can scurry across walls and ceilings along with the skitterers. They attempt to use their mobility to keep out of range and fire crossbow bolts at enemies, only engaging in melee when cornered or confident of victory – at which time the spider likely does most of the damage.

ST: 13	HP: 14	Speed: 6.25
DX: 13	Will: 10	Move: 6 (Clinging 6)
IQ: 9	Per: 12	
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: 0
Dodge: 8	Parry: 9	DR: 3

Bite (12): 1d-1 cutting + poison. Reach C.

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

Crossbow (15): 1d+3 impaling + poison. Acc 1, Range 195/260, RoF 1, Shots 1(4), Bulk -4.

Knife (15): 2d-2 cutting or 1d impaling + poison. Reach C, 1.

Poison: As Skitterer (pp. 17-18).

Traits: As Skitterer (above), plus Speak with Spiders.

Skills: As Skitterer, plus Animal Handling (Spider)-12; Hands-Free Riding-15; Riding (Spider)-15.

Class: Mundane.

Notes: See *Garguk Hound-Rider* (pp. 15-16) for notes on mounted combat.

SKRIXID SPIDERS

Mother loves spiders, and so all of her children do too. The Skrixid caves are literally crawling with them, from regular-sized to puppy-sized to Mother's Favorite (p. 17). The following are the most likely to vex intruders.

Giant Riding Spider

A spider about the size of a motorcycle or small pony, fitted with a special saddle that allows a Skrixid to cling to the saddle while inverted, and control the spider's movements without reins. It obeys the commands of its rider in combat and sneaking; left on its own, it does what spiders do (spin webs, hunt, etc.). It just does them *bigger*.

ST: 21	HP: 22	Speed: 7.00
DX: 14	Will: 12	Move: 10 (Clinging 10)
IQ: 4	Per: 14	
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: +1
Dodge: 11	Parry: 12	DR: 5

Bite (16): 2d+1 impaling + follow-up 1d+1 toxic. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Appearance (Monstrous); Bestial; Bloodlust (12); Callous; Cannot Speak (Mute); Climbing Line; Clinging; Combat Reflexes; Dark Vision; Extra Legs (Arachnid); Horizontal; Immunity to Poison; No Fine Manipulators; Penetrating Vision (Cobwebs; Line of sight range); Super Climbing 5; Teeth (Fangs).

Skills: Brawling-16; Climbing-16; Stealth-16.

Class: Dire Animal.

Notes: A rider is Light Encumbrance, for Dodge 10, Move 8 (Clinging 8). Can use Climbing Line to lower itself (and its rider) from the ceiling, or pull back up, at *half* normal Clinging Move.

Spider Swarm

The thousands of crawling spiders in the Skrixid caves aren't just for show; they will swarm to attack at Mother's (or Mother's Favorite's) command. See *Swarm Attacks* (p. B461) for more details. Several swarms will also attack anyone who attempts to set the webs in the caves aflame; see *Skrixid Caves*, p. 19.

ST: 1	HP: 10	Speed: 5.50
DX: 12	Will: 8	Move: 5
IQ: 1	Per: 12	
HT: 10	FP: 10	SM: 0
Dodge: 9	Parry: N/A	DR: 1

Attack (16): 1 point impaling + follow-up 2 points toxic, no defense, each turn to anyone in the same hex as the swarm; DR from armor doesn't protect, and Tough Skin doesn't stop the toxic follow-up damage.

Traits: Appearance (Horrific); Bestial; Bloodlust (12); Callous; Cannot Speak (Mute); Climbing Line; Clinging; Combat Reflexes; Dark Vision; Extra Legs (Arachnid); Horizontal; Immunity to Poison; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse; Body of Swarm); No Fine Manipulators; Penetrating Vision (Cobwebs; Line of sight range); Super Climbing 5; Teeth (Fangs).

Skills: Climbing-16; Stealth-16.

Class: Animal.

Notes: Individually, the spiders are Size -10 to -15; the stats above are for a one-yard-square swarm, which attacks by getting close its intended victim, creeping inside armor and under clothes, and biting. Larger swarms have 10 HP *per square yard*, but don't do any additional damage to those within.

SKRIXID CAVES

Like the Garguk, the Skrixid have selected and customized their home to fit their needs, including defenses against their primary foes. Skrixid areas tend to have high ceilings for them to skulk along. They have been deliberately cleaned of the phosphorescent lichens that light the rest of the complex (total darkness -10 without a light source). The floors are often scattered with rubble to make them uneven (-2 to skill, -1 to defenses for those lacking the appropriate version of Sure-Footed); this has no effect on wall- or ceiling-crawlers, of course.

The most notable feature of Skrixid areas is the ubiquity of spider webs – hanging from every wall and ceiling, strung from boulder to stone over the rubble-strewn floor, and constantly crawling with thousands of spiders. In addition to triggering Squeamishness and the like, this gives all non-Skrixid -3 to vision *on top of* lighting penalties, increased to -5 when attempting to spot hidden spiders or Skrixid. Although the webs won't normally catch human-sized victims (pixies might need to worry . . .), anyone who falls down or is knocked against a wall must make a DX roll or be grappled by the webs with effective ST 11 – and then attacked by a spider swarm in 1d turns.

Any attempt to burn these webs will meet with limited success. The dank air in the caves makes it so that only webs *directly* exposed to flames are destroyed. The fire doesn't spread, and it takes one second per square yard with an open flame (torch, etc.) to clear an area enough to remove vision penalties. Other fire sources don't have much more success: non-area Fire spells (Fireball, Flame Jet, etc.) can clear a single square yard per use (or turn). Larger-area fire effects are -1 *per die* to burning damage due to the clammy atmosphere, and alchemist's fire only covers a one-yard radius due to the rubble-strewn floor. Of course, this will upset the spiders, who will swarm to attack the intruder – one swarm *per hex* that is cleared. An Explosive Fireball might *seem* like a good idea, until the 19-square-yard spider swarm responds . . .

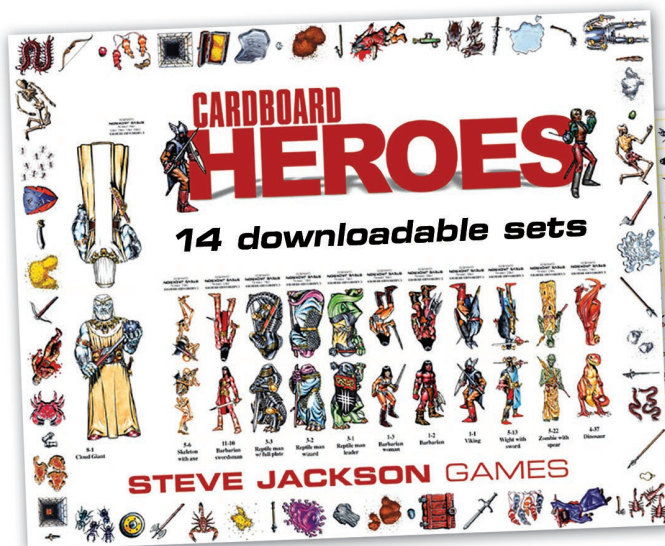
The webs and spiders also act as an early warning system. Anyone approaching is sure to disturb them, which will bring sentries to investigate. Once intruders have disturbed any webs (including by burning them, or even just walking across them), a Skrixid sentry party arrives in 3d turns. The sounds of combat will draw others in short order, including both Mother and her Favorite. The tribe is at least 50 strong altogether, with no noncombatants.

“So, Why Are We Here Again?”

These caves of goblins are designed to be dropped into a campaign as a “side quest,” or even just some interesting distractions while the adventurers are on their way from Point A to Point B. It's up to the GM to decide exactly why the heroes need to head into *these* caves . . . perhaps this is the best or only passage across the mountains, or it's at the top of a much deeper complex of tunnels that contain some other quest-worthy object. Maybe the dungeoneers have been sent by the clan of those dearly departed dwarven miners to discover their fate, or they're exploring rumors of “that mine that ate those dwarves a while back.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Crestfallen from his ignoble defeat at the hands of the Forces of Light, and the mass desertion of his once-mighty Dark Army, W.A. Frick broods in his cave deep under the mountains. He passes the time by pacing, plotting, and excoriating his few remaining minions for their incompetence. He uses an arcane system of occult numerology and strange symbols called “**GURPS**” to play out his various wicked schemes in order to predict their effectiveness, but he still has yet to run a successful simulation for world domination. He would also like to give thanks to the Pyramid Write Club, but the first rule of Write Club is “We do not talk about Write Club.”



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EIDETIC MEMORY

THE KNIGHTS OF THE IRON TABLE

BY DAVID L. PULVER

This is the story of a young man's rise from poor birth to nobility, his quest for a magic sword, his struggles with sibling rivalry and true love, his ascent to power, and how he formed an order of knights to defend the realm against inhuman foes . . .

The possession of unlimited power will make a despot of almost any man. There is a possible Nero in the gentlest human creature that walks.

— Thomas Bailey Aldrich

THE RISE OF BARON VORDAG

The borderland of Vorsmarch had been ruled by the Barons of Vordag Castle for many generations, ever since the king had granted it to them for military service. For the most part, the barons of Vordag ruled wisely, but everyone makes mistakes eventually.

Baron Ivan Vordag was killed in a hunting accident. His wife had died in childbirth a few months before, leaving an infant son, Gwindel, as the heir. His half-uncle Rickon, the baron-regent, had other ideas. Rickon plotted with several henchmen to have the baby Gwindel smothered with a pillow, planning to say it had died of a night-sickness.

A retainer loyal to the former baron, the sharp-eared minstrel Sarkon, got wind of the plot when one killer had an attack of conscience at slaying a babe and spilled the plan while drunk at tavern. By then it was too late to prevent the coup, as the castle guard were nearly all Rickon's men. Rather, Sarkon and the knight Sir Xaber managed to

substitute a washer-woman's child for the real baby, while spiriting infant Gwindel and a few key heirlooms out of the castle. Rickon never knew the difference.

Sarkon placed Gwindel in a distant peasant village, with Zoltan, a yeoman loyal to the old baron. Zoltan and his wife Clea raised Gwindel in secret, alongside their natural son Joseba. As a soldier, Zoltan had been an arms instructor to Vordag's guard, until losing his arm and retiring to become a farmer. He'd been on many a campaign in his day, and he ensured that both boys had what passed for a military education despite their rustic upbringing.

Meanwhile, the new "Baron" Rickon's regency took a turn for the worst. This was largely due to his poor economic sense and love of expensive tournaments, which left the barony broke. After borrowing money from the wealthy dwarves of the neighboring Hilargi Mountains, he ended up indebted to them. The dwarves then pressured him into a territorial dispute with their ancient rivals, the elves of Itzal-Izar, the Wood of Shadow and Stars, also on the barony's border. Poor diplomacy led to a border war, which he lost. During the fighting, Rickon's son, Tivar, was taken hostage by the elves. They demanded an enormous ransom; he paid, but the taxes raised to pay it left him deeply unpopular with his subjects, who remembered better days under the Vordags. Many poor knights now turned to banditry or piracy to support themselves, and roads and riverways were no longer safe. Supporters of the old regime began spreading tales of a surviving secret heir . . .

The Secret Heir

The heir, young Gwindel, grew up on his adopted family's turnip farm, sharing a room with his peasant foster brother Joseba, a pig, and several chickens. As boys cannot keep secrets, neither he nor Joseba were told of Gwindel's true heritage. The boys often wondered, though, about the regular weapons practice and tactical lessons their father insisted on, which seemed unusual for farmers.

Over a decade passed, until a sudden outbreak of fever took Zoltan and his wife prematurely. At the funeral, the 16-year-old Gwindel and 17-year-old Joseba were met by an “old friend of the family”: Sarkon, a wandering minstrel they had seen a few times before. This time, Sarkon revealed the truth to both of them, while also informing them of the terrible state the barony was in under the usurper Rickon.

Though shocked that Zoltan was not his real father and Joseba not his blood brother, Gwindel was a good-hearted lad. When he heard about the suffering the people were enduring, he found himself filled with a new sense of purpose. He resolved to regain his birthright, loyal foster brother by his side. As the first step, to prove his heritage, Sarkon charged Gwindel to retrieve the heirloom blade Star-Fang, a sword forged from meteoritic iron that had been presented to the baron’s great-great-grandfather; it had been spirited away during their escape from Rickon. Sarkon assured Gwindel that everyone in barony knew that the sword’s possession marked the true heir, for only if one of the Vordag family blood wielded it would its enchantment activate and the blade glow with celestial flame. Thus would Gwindel’s heritage as Baron Vordag be revealed to his supporters.

Star-Fang had been hidden away for safekeeping after the coup by Sir Xaber, the other loyal retainer. Unfortunately, Sir Xaber had died a few years ago (in fact, he drank himself to death over guilt at letting another baby die in Gwindel’s place). The sword had been buried with him in the ancient Sky Faith cemetery of Usoa, several days journey north in a region now infested with brigands and trolls.

The Quest

Gwindel and his ersatz brother Joseba – who could still hardly believe the story – dutifully journeyed north, and they had many adventures. From Joseba’s perspective, many seemed to involve him pulling Gwindel’s fat out of the fire, like the time Gwindel gave away their food to feed a starving beggar, or how he almost fell for the wiles of a seductive dryad before Joseba’s axe saved the day.

As they searched the northern woods for the cemetery, the pair encountered an ally – the scholar Nekane, daughter of a wandering philosopher-mage. She offered to assist the young men with their quest if they helped her rid herself of a fierce troll that had kidnapped her father after a failed riddle game. While Gwindel distracted the troll, Joseba poisoned his dinner using herbs Nekane provided. Then Joseba chopped off his head with an axe while the monster slept. Afterward, Nekane decided to accompany them, having discovered the troll had eaten her father after all.

Nekane was a pretty and well-educated girl, and Gwindel and Joseba both fell for her charms. But Gwindel seemed to have an advantage in their courting – he promised she would become his baroness after he won back his castle.

With Nekane’s magical assistance, the group located the hollow hill where faithful Sir Xaber had been buried. The site proved to be an underground tomb, abandoned by its keepers but still protected against tomb robbers. After avoiding several subterranean monsters and traps, they located the crypt where Xaber was buried, and they found Star-Fang resting on his breast. Gwindel snatched it and to his delight it did indeed glow like a star . . . immediately awakening a fierce giant spider that dropped down on the minstrel Sarkon! Fortunately,

Star-Fang also proved a decent weapon, and Gwindel assisted his brother ably in driving off the overgrown arachnid. Unfortunately, it had already stung old Sarkon, who expired of poison. As he died, he urged Joseba promise to take care of his brother, the barony’s last hope.

Said hope, meanwhile, was chasing the spider down a side passage that lay beyond the crypts, only to lose it. However, he had spotted an interesting statue recessed into the wall at its end, and a shiny glitter of gold and jewels. Any treasure they could find could help alleviate the barony’s poverty; he also felt that Nekane deserved something to make her feel better, so he charged ahead, magic sword held high.

At this moment, Joseba came to the conclusion that his foster brother would have made a better turnip farmer than warleader. Hadn’t the other boy listened to their father’s lessons on strategy? Of course, Joseba reflected, he was their father’s real son. Gwindel was the son of some rich idiot who had gotten killed while hunting and left his barony in a mess. As he and Nekane caught up with Gwindel, Joseba heard the telltale “click” of another trap activating. Instead of reaching for his brother to pull him back, Joseba chose to halt Nekane and take a step back himself. Gwindel never saw the 5’ steel blade that scythed down from the ceiling to deal him a fatal wound. As he lay in a pool of blood, turning to see Joseba holding the shocked Nekane, he smiled and thanked his brother for saving her, then he closed his eyes and died.

Joseba shook his head sadly. After a moment, he asked Nekane to hand him a clean cloth and one of her empty potion bottles. He began dabbing at Gwindel’s blood, and squeezing it into the bottle . . .

Nothing is so burdensome as a secret.

– French Proverb

The Return of the House of Vordag

Besides the minstrel Sarkon, Sir Xaber, and Zoltan – all dead now – no one in the restoration movement knew what the true heir looked like as an adult, only the legend of Star-Fang and that the baron’s son had been raised by peasants. Over the next several weeks, Joseba – now calling himself Lord Gwindel Vordag – met with a few groups of partisans that Sarkon had told them how to contact. When he demonstrated his flaming star-sword, he was able to recruit enough loyalist knights and men-at-arms to prepare an assault on his ancestral castle. He was careful, each time, to use only a few drops of his foster brother’s blood to activate the sword; he could not keep it flaming for long with this trick. In any case, as he explained to his new followers, a night attack was the best choice, and a flaming sword would draw too much attention. Gwindel instead insisted on carrying an axe.

For a man raised by peasants, he impressed them with his grasp of tactics – he’d listened to his father and to Sarkon’s plans, and he carefully rehearsed them with Nekane (who still wanted to be a baron’s wife). Helped by a few loyal spies and Nekane’s own sorcery, Vordag Castle fell to the partisan’s surprise night assault. Vordag stormed into the baron’s bedchamber and killed Rickon with his axe after a one-sided duel.

When one of his own knights balked at Vordag's order to hunt down the teenage son Tivar and the rest of Rickon's family and put them to the sword, Vordag found a couple of men-at-arms who would assist him. He knighted them on the spot, and led them to the deed himself. He wanted no "exiled heirs" real or otherwise, after him!

With "Baron Gwindel Vordag" now installed in Vordag Castle, the bells rang out in town and in the temples across the barony, announcing the end of the despised Rickon's regime and the restoration of the old baronial line. The true heir had returned, magic sword and all. Over the next few months, Vordag made homage to his distant king, tried to put the barony's messy financial affairs in order, and attempted to deal with the ongoing elf and dwarf crises.

Any excuse will serve a tyrant.

– Aesop

Baron Vordag

The young baron's ruthless pragmatism cut through a lot of problems but also made him some new enemies. Then there were those who resented his peasant manners – he had a dreadful accent and was a poor reader – or who could not forgive the harsh massacre of Rickon's family.

Vordag had his own solutions. Remembering his experiences in the underground tomb, he knew that under Rickon's regime, many areas had fallen into ruin and were now haunted by treasure-accumulating monsters. He had soldiers identify these locations and set up guard posts. Gwindel then publicized them and enacted a 33% dungeon-delving tax. It proved an irresistible draw. He used the income to recruit mercenaries and knights (and successful adventurers) to swell the barony's forces.

Meanwhile, Vordag made peace overtures to the elves of Itzal-Izar by repudiating the policies of the usurper and inviting their nobles to a great tournament to celebrate the first year of his return. The elves bought it, the tournament was a success, and wine flowed freely. Then the baron revealed the presence of 100 dwarf axemen who he had arranged to hide in empty wine barrels. These set upon the drunken elven leaders with a vengeance, assisted by his own knights, eager to repay old scores. The "Bloody Tournament" literally decapitated the elven leadership at a stroke. The combined Vordag and dwarf forces then marched into the elven lands, capturing several villages and their largest town, Fenoria.

The following season, after the dwarves had withdrawn, Vordag returned to the elven forest, pressing further inward, his forces augmented by orcish mercenaries hired from the hill tribes. Many atrocities were committed and entire villages burned. The remaining elves retreated to sanctuaries in the deep woods, but their power had been broken, their lands seized, and many thousands of their people were now in chains.

Vordag considered another massacre, but he still had debts to pay off. To this end, one of his knights, Sir Izotz, proved helpful. Hailing from a coastal village, he'd sailed as a pirate

during the troubled Rickon reign. With Izotz's connections, Vordag opened a slave market, selling elven captives to buyers from far and wide. He faced some opposition to this from the local religion, the Sky Faith, who had some longstanding theological and social ties to the elves. However, the faith was no longer as powerful as it had once been, having also lost ground itself to other religions and philosophies, such as those Nekane's father had preached. Worse, the recent war had turned many in the barony against them.

We're Knights of the Iron Table

With his share of slave earnings, Baron Vordag finally had enough money to pay back the dwarves what they had been owed from dealings with him and his predecessor. The baron capped the payment with a lucrative trade to provide elfwood timber for the dwarves' iron forges. In gratitude, and not displeased with the humiliation of their elven rivals, the dwarf lord Hilargis sent Vordag a gift of friendship: a huge wrought-iron table as a centerpiece for his great hall, itself carved with a detailed relief map of the barony.

Vordag was pleased, and it gave him an idea. He announced the formation of an elite order of knights in his barony – the Order of the Iron Table. It would be open not just to aristocrats, but also to other warriors who had proven their loyalty and ruthlessness in his service against inhuman foes. The Iron Table was, in fact, to serve as a recruiting tool – many of his best soldiers had fallen in the war against the elves, and he needed a gimmick to help recruit new foreign fighters to replace their ranks. Nekane also suggested they hire some decent bards. Soon, neighboring baronies were singing of the "Knights of the Iron Table" and their brave deeds hunting dragons, wyverns, and trolls and battling the "wild and cruel dark elves of the forests" in the rough Vordag borderlands.

Indeed, the knights saw much action. The elves had been broken, but scattered guerrilla resistance continued. Despite this, many of the veteran knights, eager for profits from the slave trade, led further raids into the elf woods, seeking the fugitives that had escaped them during the first campaign. Sometimes, they were victorious. At other times, they fiercely clashed with elves and other forest creatures and lost men to the skilled archers, fierce forest beasts, and sylvan magic as the elves defended their remaining strongholds.

Fearing his men would be frittered away, and with the border largely stabilized, Vordag reduced the frequency of the elven raids. Instead, he decided to expand the slave market to humans as well. He reformed the barony's traditional laws that had the hands of thieves cut off or poachers executed with the more "merciful and practical" punishment of being sold into slavery instead. Many of these ended up toiling in the dwarven mines under Mount Hilargi. Vordag intended to keep the dwarves happy for now – and mining gold. He had plans for them later – Iron Table or not, he resented having to pay off the Rickon's debts to the dwarven clans. Their time would come.

Before any blitzkrieg could be launched against his former allies, he had more immediate concerns: securing his legacy by arranging an heir. He had taken Nekane as his concubine, but the clever young scholar and witch was unpopular with the elites, lacking any genteel blood.

Vordag considered disposing of her – she really knew too much about him – but he also suspected from some subtle hints she'd dropped that Nekane had hidden evidence of his true parentage that would come out if anything happened to her. Besides, he liked her. Instead, he put her in charge of picking a suitably rich and ideally naive bride from a neighboring barony – it turned out to be Lady Maia of Haizea – and married her. Then Gwindel looked the other way when Maia died tragically of some postpartum fever soon after giving birth to a healthy noble-born heir he wanted. Nekane was, indeed, skilled with all manner of herbs. Vordag named the baby boy Joseba.

His announcement a decent period later that he would marry his old companion was greeted with less resistance from most quarters. For one thing, his new Knights of the Iron Table were now packed with trusted men of less-than-noble birth. The only concerted opposition came from the Sky Faith clergy, who disapproved of Nekane on religious grounds (her father's philosophy, which she followed, did not allow for their gods' existence). Vordag, however, had gotten sick of the faith's carping – they had continued to grumble about his pragmatic slavery policies as well – and decided to take decisive action.

He engineered an escalating series of provocations aimed at pushing the priesthood into open rebellion. Vordag then used that treason to have the Knights of the Iron Table seize control of the temples (along with their coffers), with the temple lands being distributed among new knights. A new "reformed" and compliant clergy were promoted from sons and daughters of knights and other loyal families.

Even so, Vordag realized that he needed something to take the commoners' minds off of this rather naked power grab. He decided to soften the blow by announcing a new tradition: the Iron Quest, open to all Knights of the Iron Table and those commoners who aspired to join them. Each year, a new victor would be richly honored and rewarded at the mid-summer feast, should he complete the quest. The first year's quest was a hunt for a unicorn, which had been sighted in the elf woods. See *Unholy Quests* (pp. 25-26) for additional details.

THE BARONY OF VORSMARCH

This is a mid-sized barony. It's located on the distant edge of a kingdom or empire, on a rugged borderland with orcs, dwarves, and elves. The baron has a free hand, as long as he keeps the kingdom's borders secure and supports the king in time of war.

The population is about 15,000 people. The capital is Vorton, a town of 2,000 people overlooked by Vordag Castle. The rest of the population live in villages around the 25 manors scattered through the barony. Each manor is held by a wealthy landed knight and surrounded by villages averaging 500-600 people. About 150 landless knights-errant (younger sons or mercenaries, mostly) – the rest of the Iron Table – are attached to the service of the manors or garrison Vordag

Castle. This force plus some 1,500 men-at-arms, sergeants, squires, aspirant knights, rangers, and crossbowmen, and a few special units of mercenaries that Vordag has recruited, make up the bulk of his army.

OPPOSITION

Vordag's rule hasn't gone unchallenged – it's just that he and his knights keep killing or imprisoning those who challenge it. But some foes are still left, for now.

Elves

After the sack of their capital, the remaining wood elves retreated deeper into the forests. Several camps remain and continue to resist the baron's forces, as outlaws, often raiding merchants and logging parties that operate in their former woods. These skirmishes have sometimes escalated into hit-and-run raids or sweeps between up to 100 knights and soldiers and nearly as many outlaws. Other elves have found sanctuary with the wild druid Oihana and her swamp-beasts, or took service in the court of the cloud-giant Zeru, whose mountaintop fastness overlooks the northeastern woods.

The Sky Faith

At one time, the prevalent religion in the barony was worship of two ancient local sky spirits, the Summer Queen and the Night King. Their temples were ancient stone circles. Its indigo-robed priests performed divinations; blessed crops; officiated at births, marriages, and funerals; and sealed the dead to keep them from walking.

Baron Vordag's relationship with the Sky Faith turned sour following his support of slavery and his marriage to Nekane. The high priest Sedonia refused to bless the marriage, and time in the dungeons did not change his tune; after a turbulent election, the priesthood replaced him with the fiery prophetess Izaria. She sermonized against Vordag's legitimacy, and after Vordag sent Knights of the Iron Table to arrest her, she was spirited away to safety by loyal followers. Vordag had 50 priests rounded up and threatened to hang them if she didn't surrender. Instead, she held funerals for them and had him excommunicated.

Vordag has ransacked temples and replaced the clergy en masse with his own puppets (see *We're Knights of the Iron Table*, pp. 22-23). Even so, Izaria is still on the loose with some followers, who are fomenting rebellion in concert with the elfen outlaws.

BARON GWINDEL VORDAG

Vordag (actually Joseba, son of Zoltan) is 20 years old, with black hair, blue eyes, and a handsome face marred by a battle scar. He is tall and muscular, with big hands. He usually dresses in simple but well-tailored fashions, including a black fur-trimmed cloak. He has a distinctly rustic accent. His only jewelry is a ruby signet ring and a ruby-hilted dagger.

ST 14; DX 14; IQ 13; HT 13.

Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14; Will 14; Per 13; FP 13.

Basic Speed 6.75; Basic Move 6; Dodge 10.

SM 0; 6'2", 200 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Appearance (Attractive); Callous; Charisma 1; Claim to Hospitality (Loyal knights); Combat Reflexes; Common Sense; Dependent (Son; Loved One; 9 or less); Enemies (Rebel factions; Hunter; 9 or less); Fit; Independent Income 3; Legal Enforcement Powers (High Justice); Reputation +3 (Good leader; Among ruthless men; All the time); Reputation -1 (Uncultured country bumpkin; From Status 2+; 10 or less); Reputation -4 (Evil tyrant; Among Sky Faith and elves; All the time); Secret (Peasant masquerading as baron); Semi-Literacy; Wealth (Filthy Rich).

Skills: Administration-12; Acting-12; Animal Handling-12; Area Knowledge (Barony)-13; Axe/Mace-17; Axe Throwing-14; Brawling-15; Broadsword-14; Carousing-13; Current Affairs (Politics)-13; Diplomacy-12; Farming-12; Hiking-13; Intelligence Analysis-11; Intimidation-15; Knife-13; Lance-13; Leadership-15; Navigation (Land)-12; Politics-12; Public Speaking-12; Riding (Horse)-13; Shield-15; Soldier-14; Strategy (Land)-14; Survival (Woodlands)-13; Swimming-13; Wrestling-13.

Equipment: Axe (fine quality); plate armor and great helm; thrusting bastard sword "Star-Fang" (+2 burning damage and glows as per continual light when held or touched by Vordag family scion or their blood); Vial of blood good for 10 activations (each lasting a minute).

BARONESS NEKANE

Nekane is a pretty woman with curly brown hair and hazel eyes. She dresses in soft gray silks and scarves, and silver jewelry. She is quiet in public, but not at all demure in council meetings. She enjoys debating philosophy and foreign customs. She loves reading, especially works of romantic and philosophical literature. She has a fondness for imported wines.

The baroness has a talent for intrigue, and she uses her Information spells and a well-trained network of handmaidens and servant-informers to assist her husband. She does indeed have a stash of blackmail on him; her death could trigger its release. She is mildly fond of Vordag and of her stepson Joseba, but would betray both if it were her neck.

ST 9; DX 11; IQ 14; HT 10.

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 10; Will 14; Per 14; FP 10.

Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

SM 0; 5'5", 130 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Appearance (Attractive); Callous; Duty (To husband); Fit; Greedy; Magery 3; Reputation -1 (Evil counselor and gold-digging commoner; Among barony's elite; 10 or less); Reputation -2 (Evil witch and atheist; Among Sky Faith and elves; All the time); Wealth (Wealthy).

USING THE KNIGHTS OF THE IRON TABLE

Vordag's barony is located on the edge of some outlying human kingdom that borders on barbarian lands. Vordag himself, though only 20 years old, is a would-be tyrant with a fratricidal secret. Eventually, he plans to turn against allies and neighbors, and with his ruthless cunning, possibly might become a threat to the realm itself.

One way to involve the party is to start with a chance encounter with one of the Knights of the Iron Table (for good or ill), and then work up to the politics of the baron. Alternatively, the opportunity of taking part in an epic quest in exchange for some great reward may prompt PCs to join in, either for adventure, out of greed, or perhaps a desire to infiltrate the baron's ranks. Perhaps adventurers may hear of the Iron Table through Vordag's paid minstrel propaganda, join one of his annual quests, and find themselves competing with actual and would-be Iron Knights who will do anything to overcome any rivals who get in the way of their own victory.

The PCs might be sent to the barony to work against Vordag's interests, perhaps as agents of the local clergy, vengeful elves, any group opposed to slave trading, a suspicious monarch, or even elements among the dwarves who suspect Vordag may be up to something. Or they might be drawn to the barony due to the rumors of his state-sanctioned dungeon delving operations. They might opt to accept the 33% tax he levies, or try to think up clever ways to bypass it (e.g., through finding alternate entrances).

Successful service in Vordag's military forces or achieving a quest could get the party into his inner circle.

Anyone who achieves a seat at the Iron Table or otherwise gets close to the baron's court may learn some of Vordag's history. Accidentally or through careful investigation, they may discover some clues that lead them to poke holes in it. If running this as a sort of mystery/investigative scenario, the GM may wish to expand the number of people who heard rumors about Gwindel and his real or adopted families. Perhaps the minstrel or old retainer confided in other family members or left a secret diary with clues (e.g., a physical description of seeing the true heir as a boy that matches the real Gwindel but not the fake).

One big clue is that Star-Fang – which will theoretically activate for anyone in the baron's family – would not glow if Vordag or his son touched it. Vordag is careful to have his vial of blood handy (it still has a several alchemically preserved drops) but his son Joseba has no idea of this. Of course, the boy is only a year old, so no one expects to see him to wield an adult's blade. But some accidental touch when the blade was hanging in Vordag's quarters, perhaps witnessed by a servant or maid, might result in the child's lack of reaction being noticed, and a rumor might spread. Of course, it could be the wrong rumor ("Vordag is impotent – his dead wife cuckolded him with another man and the child does not bear his blood!"). Vordag and Nekane, of course, will kill ruthlessly to keep things buried. A mysterious death or too, and PCs hired by relatives to investigate these deaths, could be one path that leads to the truth . . .

Skills: Administration-13; Alchemy-13; Area Knowledge (Barony)-14; Current Affairs (Politics)-14; Diplomacy-12; Intelligence Analysis-14; Knife-12; Occultism-14; Politics-13; Philosophy (Atheism)-13; Research-13; Riding (Horse)-12; Savior-Faire (High Society)-14; Staff-11; Survival (Woodlands)-13; Sex Appeal-13; Stealth-14; Swimming-11; Writing-13.

Spells: Analyze Magic-15; Apportation-15; Aura-15; Continual Light-15; Counterspell-15; Darkness-15; Deflect Missile-15; Dispel Magic-15; Haste-15; Identify Spell-15; Ignite Fire-15; Itch-15; Lend Energy-15; Light-15; Mind-Reading-15; Recover Energy-15; Seek Earth-15; Seeker-15; Sense Emotion-15; Sense Foes-15; Shield-15; Trace-15; Truthsayer-16.

Equipment: Large knife; fireball wand with a 10-point Powerstone (dungeon salvage tax); variety of poisons and antidotes.

*And then there are those who
operate on the fringes of society,
unburdened by the confines of morality
and conscience. A ruthless breed of
monsters whose deadliest weapon is
their ability to hide in plain sight.*

*– Emily Thorne,
in **Revenge** #1.19*

TYPICAL KNIGHT

"I swear to serve Baron Vordag, to show no mercy to his enemies, to defend the lands and reputation of the barony against all foes, human and inhuman, to punish those who break its laws, and to faithfully quest to prove my honor and win glory for the House of Vordag as a Knight of the Iron Table."

Vordag's knights are veterans of the restoration, the elf war, and conflicts with the church rebels. A few are remnants of the loyalists; most are jumped-up cutthroats, robber-knights, and mercenaries. Use these statistics for an ordinary knight.

Those who begin as knights of the barony may adapt the warrior template in **GURPS Martial Arts**, p. 41, the knight-errant template in **GURPS Banestorm**, pp. 208-209, or the knight template in **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers**, pp. 8-9.

Vordag has been actively recruiting new knights, and offering the most successful land holds carved out of conquered elfen territory and confiscated Sky Faith holdings.

ST 13; **DX** 13; **IQ** 10; **HT** 12.

Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13; Will 11; Per 10; FP 12.

Basic Speed 6.25; Basic Move 6; Dodge 10.

SM 0; 6', 180 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Ally (Squire); Bloodlust (12) or Jealousy; Callous or Overconfidence (12); Combat Reflexes; Duty (To baron); Intolerance (Elves and the Sky Faith); Reputation +2 (As good fighter; In the barony; 10 or less); Reputation -2 (Brutal; By commoners and elves, All the time); Status 2; Wealth (Comfortable).

Skills: Area Knowledge (Local)-11; Armory (Body Armor)-10; Brawling-13; Broadsword-15; Carousing-12; Heraldry-10; Knife-13; Lance-15; Law (Local)-10; Leadership-10; Riding (Horses)-14; Savoir-Faire (Police)-13; Shield-15; Tactics-11; Two-Handed Sword-15; Wrestling-13.

Equipment: Plate armor; thrusting bastard sword (fine quality); large knife; medium shield. If mounted for war: lance, warhorse with mail barding.

Typical Knights of the Iron Table

Sir Davis, The Black Dog of the Moors: He loves hunting. He has a pack of well-trained war dogs, and he often hunts captive elves. Add Animal Empathy and Animal Handling (Dogs)-16.

Sir Xabier Troll-Bane: Immensely strong (ST 17); he once wrestled a troll and won (Wrestling-17). Son of Sir Xaber (see p. 20). Xabier disapproves of Vordag's more brutal excesses but is loyal, believing him the true heir to the barony.

Sir Mara, The Wyvern Knight: Lighter build than the average knight (ST 11, 140 lbs.). Growing up in the woods, she found and raised a baby wyvern; now, she rides it. She often fights from the air with throwing spears or javelins, rather a lance.

Sir Basajuan, The Oak Knight: A woodland knight and a very tough fellow (HP 18, High Pain Threshold). His armor is adorned with bronze leaves. He hangs poachers and rebels from a great oak outside his manor.

Sir Shagarat, Knight of the Morning Star: The pretty title refers to his weapon; he has Flail-15. He is a half-orc warrior who led a band of orc and half-orc mercenaries accepted into service. Knighted for being first over the wall storming an elfen keep.

Sir Vandrel, Knight of the Stone Steed: This knight rides Petrifax, a stone golem in the form of a horse and a gift (looted from a dungeon) he received as a reward for a quest. His backside is always very sore; he has Bad Temper (9).

Sir Duvainor, Knight of the Ivy Chains: Famous as a slaver and very handsome, but sadistic. He is of half-elf stock but was rejected by his elf family and driven out of the woods. After serving as a mercenary, he joined Vordag's army for vengeance.

Sir Zorion, the Laughing Knight: A terrifying warrior (ST 15, Ambidexterity, Berserk (12)) who fights with two broadswords. He laughs constantly during a fight (or at himself when losing), which can be unnerving as he continues to do so when he goes berserk.

UNHOLY QUESTS

One of Vordag's challenges has been how to keep his knights busy when not at war. Being a good judge of character, he knows that the collection of blackguards he has assembled would be plotting to overthrow him if left to their own devices.

While tournaments are the traditional solution, they cost a lot of money, and he can only afford to throw a couple each year.

Nekane, while reading old romances, came up with an idea: Send the knights on quests, with those who complete them being honored with a seat at the Iron Table (if not yet so seated) and a valuable prize, such as a fair maiden or an elf blade (or a fair elf maiden). Since only the winner gets a prize, this reduces the financial cost. They could also help find some useful ingredients for her alchemical researches . . .

After completing a quest, the victor sits at the right hand of the baron at the next court feast at the Iron Table. The knight often receives a gift of a very fine quality weapon (thanks to his connection with the dwarves), some jewelry, or a minor magic item (usually acquired as dungeon tax). Vordag sometimes rewards industriousness with a military command (leading to further adventures). The Baron is also inclined to listen to any requests or boons the winner asks, or any counsel that he provides.

When you finish wrestling with your conscience, may I suggest you return to your chamber. Leave the quest for the stone to me.

– Septimus, in *Stardust*

Example Quests

Elf Extermination: The knight who brings back the most elf ears will be judged the winner, and will receive the prize.

Quest for the Outlaw Izaria: Izaria (see *The Sky Faith*, p. 23) is the defiant young high priestess that leads the remnants of the Summer Queen and Night King clergy. She travels about in disguise among the faithful in various villages, accompanied by a small bodyguard of paladins of the faith, to minister to the faithful and stir up trouble. She also liaises with the elf

outlaws. Her death, or better yet, capture and public execution, would be a great blow to the rebels.

The Unicorn Hunt: Unicorns are periodically sighted in the Wood of Stars and Shadows – they sometimes attack and gore to death travelers on the forest road. Unicorns are fierce beasts whose only weakness is a fascination with pure maidens, and who seem to maintain a suspicious loyalty to elves. Due to a paucity of virgins in the area (thanks to the depredations of certain knights) and many hunters having been either killed by or joined the elf outlaws, the creatures have not been stopped. Not only would the baron like to eliminate this threat to travels, unicorn horns are useful as a sovereign remedy against poison (the baron doesn't really trust his wife).

BARON VORDAG'S ARMY

The baron has been building up a sizable military force, supposedly to suppress the rebels within his own territory. He actually plans eventually to use them against the dwarves.

The composition of the baron's army is described here using **GURPS Mass Combat** stats. One of the four Knights of the Iron Table elements is led by the baron himself.

Baron Vordag and the Knights of the Iron Table

Heavy Cavalry

The most elite of the knights, in full plate armor and with excellent training, led by the baron with his magic sword.

TS: 17.5. **WT:** 2.

Classes: Cv. **Mobility:** Mounted.

Quality: Very Fine equipment; Elite troops.

Features: Impetuous.

Cost: \$1,000K to raise; \$116K to maintain.

The four elements of Knights of the Iron Table have a total TS of 70.

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Vordag's Knights

Heavy Cavalry

This represents ordinary plate-armored knights and supporting men-at-arms. The baron has used the wealth from his dungeon tax and slave trading to finance a well-equipped heavy cavalry force, who maintain fighting form due to constant skirmishes. The knights are also trained to fight afoot, with sword or axe.

TS: 15. WT: 2.

Classes: Cv. Mobility: Mounted.

Quality: Very Fine equipment; Good troops.

Features: Impetuous.

Cost: \$800K to raise; \$108K to maintain.

The barony has 15 elements of knights with a total TS of 225.

Longbowmen

Bowmen

Regular conflict and competition with the elven archers have fostered a strong indigenous archery tradition. Vordag's men are armed with longbows. They wear leather and mail armor and carry broadswords or axes for close-quarter battle.

TS: 5. WT: 1.

Classes: F. Mobility: Foot.

Quality: Fine equipment; Good troops.

Features: None.

Cost: \$120K to raise; \$17.6K to maintain.

The baron has 80 elements of bowmen with a total TS of 400.

Orc Warband

Medium Infantry

Savage orc mercenaries, often employed in night raids to terrorize elven villages.

TS: 3. WT: 1.

Classes: None. Mobility: Foot.

Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.

Features: Impetuous; Mercenary; Night; Nocturnal.

Cost: \$36K to raise; \$7.2K to maintain.

The 30 elements of orc warbands have a total TS of 90.

Foresters

Light Infantry

Local foresters, loggers, and half-elf renegades serve as scouts. They are equipped with bows and leather armor.

TS: 2. WT: 1.

Classes: Rec. Mobility: Foot.

Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.

VORDAG'S ARMY ROSTER

Elements: 140. Cost: \$27,290,000 to raise; \$3,828,000 to maintain.

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Total TS</i>	<i>Classes</i>	<i>Mobility</i>	<i>Features</i>
4 Knights of the Iron Table (Heavy Cavalry)	70	Cv	Mounted	Impetuous
15 Vordag's Knights (Heavy Cavalry)	225	Cv	Mounted	Impetuous
80 Longbowmen (Bowmen)	400	F	Foot	—
30 Orc Warbands (Medium Infantry)	90	—	Foot	Impetuous, Mercenary, Night, Nocturnal
10 Foresters (Light Infantry)	20	Rec	Foot	Mercenary
Nekane and Her Maids (Battle Mages)	5	Art, C3I, F, Rec	Foot	—
<i>Artillery TS</i>	5			
<i>C3I TS</i>	5			
<i>Cavalry TS</i>	295			
<i>Fire TS</i>	405			
<i>Recon TS</i>	25			
<i>Force TS</i>	810			

Features: Mercenary.

Cost: \$40K to raise; \$8K to maintain.

The baron has 10 elements of foresters with a total TS of 20.

Nekane and Her Maids

Battle Mages

Nekane has trained a half-dozen or so of her handmaidens in magic. In major conflicts, they take the field in support of the baron. They are armed with a variety of weak magic items salvaged from the dungeons (stored in Vordag's treasure vaults when not in use).

TS: 5. WT: 1.

Classes: Art, C3I, F, Rec. Mobility: Foot.

Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.

Features: None.

Cost: \$200K to raise; \$40K to maintain.

One element with total a total TS of 5.

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.

ON THE BOUNTY BOARD

BY JUSTIN YODER

Sometimes, it happens. The adventuring party, after a week's travel across open country to slay the ogre chieftain who was sending sieges to the local villages to plunder them on a regular basis, comes back to town to collect their wages from the local guild, only to be greeted with a strange sight. The guards seem agitated as the heroes approach the gate. "By the power granted us by His Majesty, you are under arrest!" The rogue in the dungeoneering group spots the source of their problems: Bounty posters, one for each member of their group, have been slapped upon the city wall on each side of the gate. How did this happen? What will the intrepid adventurers do? Will they turn themselves in and inquire directly, or will they flee and get to the bottom of things . . . on the other side of the law?

Especially for those that consider themselves righteous heroes, finding oneself on the bounty board can be a great shock (though the rogue may have been accustomed to it before she turned her skills toward saving the day). A team of intrepid heroes may find their ability to restock supplies limited. Shopkeepers may refuse to serve them, inns may refuse to house them, and the city guard could be on the watch for such troublemakers that would have a bounty on their head. Not to mention, heroes and villains alike may be interested in claiming that reward. The party may have to resort to foraging or using less than legal sources until they get their names cleared.

Although geared toward a medieval fantasy setting, such as *GURPS Banestorm* or *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, anyone reviewing these criminal possibilities should not feel that they can only be applied there! Any setting can make use of the adventure seeds and ideas presented. Just keep in mind that, without magic, it may take much longer to get bounty posters distributed unless law enforcement has access to a printing press or something more modern like the Internet.

GURPS Social Engineering can be of immense help, for its guidelines in manipulating of the reputation of the party, not to mention the possibility of forming a lynch mob!

How Could This Be?

Now, some may think that their actions are righteous. After all, they're the intrepid heroes, come to save the day, right wrongs, and plunder the dungeons of wicked monsters and bandits. What could they have possibly done wrong to have earned the ire of somebody to the point they put a bounty on their heads?

They Actually Did Something Wrong!

That's the short answer. The party may not have realized their wrongdoing. After all, the customs of one country may be different than another. As such, the plunder of an ancient temple to recover an artifact for one person may be sacrilege for another. Once word gets out about how the adventurers saved the day by spreading violence within the ancient temple of the God of Peace, a god their patron could care less about, they may find themselves at the mercy of the Inquisitorial Squad of another country!

Perhaps their patron wasn't as reputable as the party was lead to believe, and sent them into a situation without providing all of the details on local customs. Or maybe the High Necromancer in the Tower of Death may have been an otherwise law-abiding citizen of the nearby village, disguised as a priest, even donating to charities!

The key with this reason is that the heroes have legitimately broken the law in some way during the course of their adventures, though maybe not be the laws of their homeland. The adventuring group may run into problems with the town guard and local townsfolk in a land they have unwittingly crossed the cultural norms of.

Now you're on the wrong side of the law.

They've Been Framed!

Heroes tend to upset those who are already on the wrong side of the law themselves. People such as that may not wait for the group of adventurers to do something that they can exploit. Instead, they may trump up charges. Perhaps the party's last raid against the Bandit King stirred up his patron in regional politics, and now they're both plotting to get their revenge. Alternatively, when the group helps the crown princess, her jealous brother may have other plans in mind.

The key to this cause is that the heroes are still in the right, but somebody with a large amount of pull has decided to unrightfully smear their name. They can truthfully claim their innocence, but without evidence, their arguments may fall upon deaf ears. Unless they can convince the public otherwise, either due to past reputation or convincing them through other means, they'll likely still run into trouble the same as if they'd committed the crime. For ways to counter this, see *Social Engineering* (p. 29).

A Big Misunderstanding

Of course it is! However, the harm the adventuring group has caused due to whatever quest they've been sent on cannot be denied. They are innocent of any direct wrongdoing (maybe even indirect), yet the result of their quest has a negative outcome. The blame for the outcome is shifted to the party by the authorities, or the townspeople have taken matters into their own hands and the party is their scapegoat.

Maybe the group's patron was the true villain, and the party is now guilty by association. Alternatively, the party (or a portion thereof) has been put in a compromising position that was innocent in the proper context, but not outside.

Unintended consequences from completing their quest may arise. For example, that bandit leader that the group defeated may have been holding back his lieutenant from going to all out war with the townspeople!

The key is that whatever quest the party has performed has caused secondary issues that cause others stress, and the group is blamed for the outcome. With this reason, it is much more likely to be a more local problem, with nonsanctioned lynch mobs or families of nobility taking matters into their own hands. The adventurers might not have bounty posters, but the issues caused by this are the same nonetheless! See *Social Engineering*, pp. 71-72, for more on "the mind of the mob."

WHO WOULD DO SUCH A THING?

The suggestions for causes gave some examples of who might initiate this kind of response. But the GM shouldn't feel limited by just those. A great deal of other people may have a vested interest in seeing the party's reputation tarnished. A few other possibilities include jealous nobility, local villains, upset significant others, intelligent monsters, religious cults, legitimate claim holders, disloyal henchmen, or former party members.

RAMIFICATIONS

In *GURPS* terms, the negative advertisement toward the party should give them a negative Reputation, with all of the penalties thereof. See *Social Engineering*, pp. 74-76, for reaction tables for various people. If the party already has an applicable positive Reputation, then feel free to use the full range of reactions. Otherwise, the maximum reaction somebody should have is Neutral – unless the person is working with those with similar negative reactions!

The GM shouldn't feel limited to the example given here, which are presented for inspiration.

SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Chapter 5 in *Social Engineering* goes over a lot of what techniques a mastermind wanting to discredit an adventuring party should use. But keep in mind that clever heroes could also use the same techniques!

The Mood of the Crowd

Social Engineering, pp. 56-58

Direct observation is what the heroes will likely be doing to determine if the townspeople are ready to become an angry mob or not! This requires an Observation or Per roll and, unless they've already got their torches and pitchforks out, will require about a minute of watching. If someone uses Perception, then the party is being very obvious about it!

Opinion polls are more likely to be used by the villain if they want to discover whether their negative advertising campaign is succeeding. Any group of heroes trying out this method may find themselves at the mercy of the crowd sooner than expected!

Rumor will be much more effective for the heroes in finding out discreetly what's going on about them. Current Events (Headline News, People, or Regional), Carousing, or Streetwise will be useful in this regard. Treat it like finding a quest through rumor, but the rumors found may be regarding the party instead of a new adventure.

Sampling the media is probably the bard's job, but it can take just as long as opinion polls and is rarely specific to the party. Use the rules for rumors instead.

Direct Influence

Social Engineering, pp. 59-61

Working to clear the party's name is a long and hard road. Trying to throw off the rumors that have been unfairly (or perhaps fairly) slung about them may require more than simply doing good deeds. Spreading the word directly may be necessary.

Working the crowd is the likeliest form of direct influence the party will use. This is simply bragging about their achievements at the local tavern or other place of social gathering. This can evolve into viral marketing through word of mouth.

Making speeches is a possibility, but it is also a good way to get a mob going if the crowd's already against the group! This applies both for speeches and ballads the bard wrote.

Indirect Influence

Social Engineering, pp. 61-62

Advertising and propaganda take a long time to plan and implement. The party will likely have too much on their plate to use these time-consuming techniques. Nonetheless, these approaches are exactly how those bounties gained traction as legitimate!

If the party *does* engage in propaganda, it will likely be as a viral marketing campaign, to spread word of their good deeds without making a scene. The GM may even allow their casual interactions with the town to count as "passive" viral marketing, if any PC has Propaganda. In all cases (viral or not), treat anyone actively discrediting the party as a rival campaign.

Psy ops is basically a targeted approach to working the crowd. It can be used by both the party and those seeking to undermine them.

Of course, eventually, the party will have to find a way to handle the situation more permanently, while trying to get their reputation back on track!

City Guard

The adventuring party should have a difficult time moving along posted roads, where guards regularly walk along to keep the peace. Entering walled cities with posted guards may also become difficult. The party should employ some form of disguise or stealth to make it through such situations in a Quick Contest between that and the guard's Observation or Per with appropriate modifiers depending on the situation.

Townpeople

Suspicious townspeople might report unusual people or activities to neighborhood law enforcers. If the locals feel threatened, they may wait until the group leaves the area to report them. If the reaction roll is low enough, though, they may immediately call the guards – especially if there is a reward simply for giving information on a criminal's whereabouts! Efforts to keep townsfolk's silence through bribes or intimidation may lend credence to the group's bad Reputation and lower it more, while aiding the locals may help to decrease the effects of negative advertising by improving their positive Reputation.

Bounty Hunters

If money is involved, both heroes and the less scrupulous alike may be after a party whose wanted posters are around. Some may actively hunt down the adventurers while others may simply be opportunists. Various types of these individuals exist.

The single exceptional Bounty Hunter is one person who should be a challenge for the entire party to take on. He even may be hunting them down specifically. He is highly experienced in dealing with individuals such as them and should be avoided at all costs. He may have henchmen available to do his bidding, but he is typically the only competent individual among them.

The mercenary band is a group of individuals who are roughly on the same level as the party. While together they are a challenge, separately they can be handled fairly easily. For even better effect, they should be individually trained in how to handle one or two party members specifically, attempting to divide and conquer. This can also be a rival group of heroes or adventurers seeking to "deal justice" to those who are unfortunate enough to find themselves on a wanted poster!

Finally, there are lone gangs. What they lack in skill, they make up for in quantity. They have no specific specialty and are only mildly trained, but they try to overwhelm the group with sheer numbers. A few members may have lasted long enough to be considered "experienced," but overall, they're just a lot of mooks.

CONFRONTATION

The question now remains, who is to blame? If the party is at fault, how will they redeem themselves? If not, how do they confront the people that have been spreading lies about them? The type of confrontation will depend largely on the

real reason for being accused and it will depend on how the adventuring party handles the situation. Be prepared for any of these major ways of dealing with the situation.

How Can We Redeem Ourselves?

If the party was tricked into committing a crime or else offended another culture enough that they're considered criminals, then the best way to handle things is to have them turn themselves in and ask for forgiveness. Rather than throwing them into jail, they may be tasked with some sort of "community service" by undergoing another quest for the good of the house, the people, the kingdom, or whatever. This task may start the cycle all over again, though . . .

The Real Culprit

If the party has been blamed for a crime they didn't commit, then they may try to investigate the crime in question themselves and attempt to bring the true (or another) culprit to justice. It is up to the GM and players if they want to role-play court proceedings or if the party is simply congratulated for their help. If a trial is run and the party ends up losing it, then they may end up being punished anyway! The section on *Direct Influence* in **Social Engineering**, pp. 59-61, could be used to roleplay the proceedings. The judge and the jury should be treated separately in such a case, and it could make for an interesting change of pace in the adventure!

Run for It

If their Reputation hasn't spread to foreign lands, the group may flee the country altogether to begin a new life. This is no real confrontation, simply running from the problem at hand. Their bad Reputation won't vanish from their old homeland, but if it never reaches their new home, this is at least a temporary solution. Given enough time, the people may forget about the party's transgressions. How long that takes depends on how well-known their Reputation is and how severe the crime was, not to mention who it was the group upset. For certain offenses, it might be never. Not to mention, bounty hunters could still be out there, hunting the party to get their hands on that reward . . . A GM should use his best judgment on how long it could take for it all to just blow over.

How will you fix your Reputation?

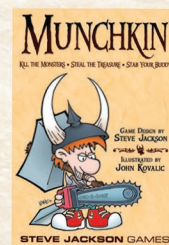
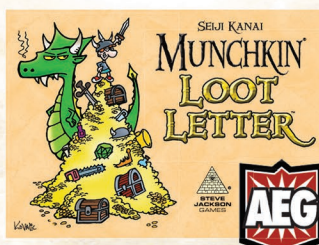
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justin Yoder is a software engineer and first-time freelance author. He's been playing tabletop roleplaying games since 2003, starting with **Dungeons & Dragons** 3.5, but has been reading **GURPS** books since early 2000, just needing a group to play with. Once he got into college, he began gamemastering for the roleplaying club on campus with campaigns using **GURPS Technomancer** and **GURPS Supers**. He loves sharing esoteric information about things both common and strange, and hopes to write roleplaying articles on a more frequent basis. He has never been on a bounty board, though the groups he regularly guides through adventures are!

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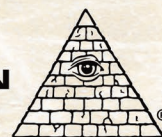


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MORE PSIONIC THREATS

BY COLE M.B. JENKINS

GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1**, and **Psychic Swords Against Elder Evil** (from *Pyramid* #3/76: *Dungeon Fantasy IV*) offer dozens of things that can pop up when a mentalist causes a psionic threat to appear. But the cosmos provides a seemingly infinite supply of weirdness, and if a mentalist is in the party, there's always room for more bizarre threats and eldritch monsters.

Like the adversaries in *Dungeon Fantasy 14*, these foes may be unfair if used against a party without a mentalist.

WORMS IN MY BRAIN GET THEM OUT

– Jack McLaren and Paul Spacek,
The Parking Lot Is Full

ASTRAL GHOST

Unlike most people, psis are already accustomed to weird changes in lifestyle and separation of mind and body. They can make the transition to a ghostly existence with their memories and personalities intact, becoming functional denizens of the Astral Plane.

The ghosts are still motivated by the same things they were in life, and as they were psis, this can be problematic. They remain fascinated by psionics and elder weirdness, and they are especially drawn to living psis. Astral ghosts feel they can aid psis in the material world. Using psionic powers still risks psionic threats, but the ghost has forgotten how inconvenient those used to be.

ST: 9	HP: 9	Speed: 6.25
DX: 12	Will: 16	Move: 6
IQ: 14	Per: 14	
HT: 13	FP: 15	SM: 0
Dodge: 9	Parry: 11	DR: 0
	(Psychokinetic Lash)	(6 vs. psionics only)

Mind Stab (16*): See *Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 9. Malediction; resist with Will or lose margin of failure points of either FP or HP (up to 10). Costs 1 FP.

Psychokinetic Lash (14*): 3d crushing; Acc 3, Range 10/100. Costs 1 FP to attack or parry. See *Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 10.

Traits: Astral Entity (Insubstantiality has Affects Substantial); Curious (12); Delusion (My powers are perfectly safe!); Frightens Animals; High Pain Threshold; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous; No Blood); Mind Control 2; Mind Reading; Mind Shield 10; Mind Stab 1; Psi Talent 3; Psychic Armor 6; Psychic Sensitivity 2; Psychokinetic Lash 3; Telekinesis 12; Telesend; Unusual Background (Psionic); Weirdness Magnet.

Skills: Hidden Lore (Psi)-16; Hidden Lore (Elder Things)-15; Innate Attack (Gaze)-17; Wrestling-12.

Class: Spirit (Extradimensional).

Notes: Affected by anything that influences spirits (as for *Astral Thing*, *Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 42) but *not* by things that specifically affect undead (it's a being of thought, not a true ghost). All psionic abilities are at -3 against material targets. Mind Stab, Mind Reading, and Psychic Sensitivity are alternative abilities of each other, as are Telekinesis and Psychokinetic Lash.

* Includes -3 to affect the material world.

ASTRAL SPIDER

Resembling large (6' long) spiders made of translucent crystal, astral spiders are servants of some cosmic force that maintains the structure of reality. They're drawn to rips and portals in space and time which they bind up with their webs. As psionics damage reality, active powers aggravate the spiders. Fortunately for them, creatures that have been marinating in psionic energy (like a psi's entire party) taste delicious!

Like the astral ghost (above) and the astral thing (*Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 42), they are difficult for substantial creatures to combat. However, to feed on substantial creatures, they must first drag their prey into the Astral Plane, which allows potential food to fight back.

Where astral spiders nest – perhaps in the yawning mouth of a portal they are industriously sewing shut – they cover the area (in the astral plane) in webbing. Anyone without Terrain Adaptation (Webs) that steps on the webbing must win a Quick Contest of ST vs. 16 or be stuck.

ST: 16	HP: 16	Speed: 6.00
DX: 12	Will: 14	Move: 6
IQ: 12	Per: 14	
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: +0
Dodge: 10	Parry: 12	DR: 6

Dispel Psi (17 vs. Will): Targeted psionic effect is canceled. Reach C. Costs 1 FP. See *Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 5.

Odic Bite (16): 1d+1 impaling + 2 points toxic follow-up. Reach C, 1. Follow up damage ignores DR other than Psychic Armor.

Webbing (16): Binding ST 16. Ranged Attack (Acc 3, Range 10). Webs are *Sticky* (see p. B40). After binding a target, the spider can take a Ready maneuver to drag the victim into the Astral Plane. Roll a Quick Contest of ST; the victim becomes insubstantial for minutes equal to the spider's margin of victory. Once a victim is insubstantial, subsequent attacks with the webs have the *Engulfing* enhancement (p. B40).

Traits: 360° Vision; Astral Entity (Insubstantiality has Affects Substantial); Combat Reflexes; Clinging; Dark Vision; Dispel Psi 1; Extra Legs (Eight Legs); Fragile (Unnatural); High Pain Threshold; Horizontal; Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (Unliving; No Neck); No Fine Manipulators; Psi Talent 3; Psychic Sensitivity 2; Terrain Adaptation (Webbing); Temperature Tolerance 10 (-25° to 150°); Transdimensional Sight; Unfazeable; Unusual Background (Psionic); Vacuum Support.

Skills: Brawling-16; Innate Attack (Projectile)-16; Stealth-12.

Class: Elder Thing/Spirit (Extradimensional).

Notes: Affected by anything that influences spirits (as for *Astral Thing*, *Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 42). Webbing is the only attack that affects substantial and does so at full skill. Unwilling to negotiate.

BRAINWORMS

These terrible alien parasites are attracted by mental energy, because they feed on brains! They are purplish spiny segmented worms a few inches long, with complex mouth parts.

A swarm consists of several hundred worms. They crawl (and can burrow through the ground) at Move 3. They bite for 1 HP per turn and are dispersed after losing 10 HP. Ordinary clothing protects completely for two turns, after which the worms are inside and cannot be evaded (only dispersed).

After the fight, roll to resist Brainworm Fever (see below).

Class: Animal (Swarm).

Notes: Despite insect-like intelligence, they can sense sapient minds and use **Psight** (*Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 9).

CHAOS OOZE

Created as slaves by mindwarppers in some forgotten epoch, these shapeless masses of glowing, iridescent slime are 15' in diameter. Since their creation, some have rebelled and are driven by a fanatical hatred of anything that uses psionics. Others still serve loyally.

They're capable of forming limbs and organs to suit specific purposes. In combat, they typically form a few pseudopods for strikes and grapples, as well as myriad eyes facing all directions.

Chaos oozes are among the Elder Things' most terrible creations and are nearly unstoppable engines of destruction. Fortunately for delvers, they have a serious weakness – their masters used hypnotic suggestion and psionic conditioning

to “program” them. This has left them weak-willed and vulnerable to suggestion and mind control. They are susceptible to Hypnotism, bardic Enthrallment Skills, the psionic Mind Control ability, and Mind Control spells (although spells are offset by the creature's innate Magic Resistance). They can't be controlled for long because they can change the structure of their minds in order to escape. Each minute an ooze is under mental influence, it may roll a new resistance roll or Contest at a cumulative +3 per minute. Once it succeeds, that ooze is immune to that specific method, from that character, permanently.

ST: 100

DX: 10

IQ: 8

HT: 12

HP: 200

Will: 8

Per: 10

FP: 15

Speed: 6.00

Move: 3

SM: +4

Dodge: 9

Parry: 10

DR: 8

Absorb: As a free action, can roll a Quick Contest of HT 15 vs. the opponent's ST to absorb a victim in contact with the main body that is grappled or trampled. Once absorbed roll a Quick Contest of ST 100 vs. the highest of the victim's ST or HT each turn and do margin of victory points of crushing damage. The victim also takes 1d-1 corrosion each turn and will eventually start to suffocate (p. B436) – if he lives that long!

Corrosive Surface: 1d-3 corrosion. This harms anyone in physical contact with the ooze.

Maddening Chant (Resisted by Will-5): While active, the ooze constantly chants words in the maddening language of the Mindwarppers from hundreds of obscene siphons. Everyone within earshot must make a Fright Check at -5.

BRAINWORM FEVER

Vector: Brainworms.

Resistance Roll: HT-(damage done by swarm).

Delay: 24 hours.

Damage: 1 point toxic.

Cycles: 25; daily cycles.

Symptoms: -1 IQ after losing 1/3 HP; -1 IQ and Chronic Pain (Severe, 2 hours, 9 or less) after losing 1/2 HP (severe headaches); -2 IQ and Chronic Pain (Severe, 4 hours, 12 or less) after losing all HP. The symptoms remain even if the cycles are stopped and all injury has been healed; only surgery to remove the worms is effective!

Contagiousness: If someone dies while still suffering symptoms, a number of swarms equal to 1/4 IQ bore out of the skull and seek new hosts.

Diagnosis and Treatment: A successful **Diagnosis** roll can identify the disease. **Cure Disease (GURPS Magic**, p. 91) or a day's treatment with **Esoteric Medicine-4** will stop the cycles (at which point healing is effective), but it won't cure the symptoms. **Surgery** (see *Horrible Grubs*, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 13) is required to remove the worms, at an additional penalty of -3 (for head surgery).

It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train – a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and un-forming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us, crushing the frantic penguins and slithering over the glistening floor that it and its kind had swept so evilly free of all litter.

– H. P. Lovecraft, *At The Mountains of Madness*

As per Heeeeeeeere's Spawny (*Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 38), Unfazole gives +7 (for a net +2) and the +5 for "heat of battle" doesn't apply.

Slam (14): 6d+12 crushing (at Move 3) + Corrosive Surface (above). Can trample (p. B404) foes of SM 2 or less (SM 3 or less if prone) for 11d+11 crushing + Corrosive Surface (above).

Strike (14): 11d+11 crushing + Corrosive Surface (above) (x4). Reach C-4.

Torso Grapple (14): Damage from Corrosive Surface (above) and on subsequent turns can squeeze (see *Choke* or *Strangle*, p. B370) with ST 97 or win a Quick Contest of ST 102 against the best of opponent's ST, DX, Judo, or Wrestling to pull him into contact with the body for absorption. Reach C-4.

Traits: 360° Vision; Amphibious; Arms (Two, Long, +1 SM); Dark Vision; Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Absorption); Doesn't Sleep; Double-Jointed; Extra Arms 2; Extra Attack 3; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous; No Head; No Neck); Invertebrate; Magic Resistance 6; Morph (Improvised Forms; Appendages and Organs Only); No Fine Manipulators; No Legs (Slithers); Pressure Support 3; Slave Mentality; Temperature Tolerance 20 (-115° to 240°); Unfazole; Universal Digestion.

Skills: Brawling-14; Sumo Wrestling-14.

Class: Elder Thing/Slime.

Notes: This is a typical battle form. Also common: a *rooted-tree-like form* with No Legs (Sessile), two additional arms (for a total of six), and +2 DR; and a *sphere* with no Extra Attacks, No Legs (Rolls), No Manipulators, and Move 6/24 (which does 48d+96 on a full speed slam!). Torso Grab assumes two arms. Each additional arm used gives +2 to skill and +2 to ST. Renegade oozes have Fanaticism and Obsession (Kill all psis!) instead of Slave Mentality. Remains yield 2d oozing doom (\$100 each) and 4d acid (\$10 each) grenades. Too alien to negotiate.

TENTACLES!

Some vast Thing That Man Was Not Meant to Know in a higher spatial dimension sticks its mouthparts into three dimensional space when attracted by yummy mental energy. These greenish tentacles are roughly one yard long, 5" in diameter, and covered with toothed sucker-mouths. They seem to

emerge in pairs from flat surfaces near the intended morsel (ceiling, walls, floors, tables . . .) with no apparent regard for spatial orientation.

ST: 16	HP: 8	Speed: 6.00
DX: 12	Will: 24	Move: 0
IQ: 24	Per: 12	
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: -2
Dodge: 9	Parry: 9	DR: 5

Grab and Tear (12): No damage but on subsequent turns will attempt to pull victims to the ground and then rip them apart. Roll a Quick Contest of ST 16 against the highest of ST, DX, Judo, or Wrestling to pull the victim down. Once the target is prone, the tentacles grapple with an additional pair of appendages for +2 to both DX and ST. On following turns, roll a Quick Contest of ST 18 against the higher of ST or HT; the tentacles inflict their margin of victory as crushing damage. Reach C.

Sucker-Mouths: Victims grappled by at least one tentacle lose 2 FP per turn (ignoring DR).

Traits: Blindness; Deafness; Dependency (Mana; Constantly); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Sleep; Double Jointed; Fragile (Unnatural); Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Psionics; Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (No Blood; No Vitals); Magical Resistance 10; Temperature Tolerance 5 (-15° to 100°); Pressure Support 3; Vibration Sense (Air); Unfazole.

Class: Elder Thing.

Notes: The physical attributes are for individual tentacles. The mental attributes are for the larger being. Unwilling to negotiate with lesser beings.

VOID WYRM

These dragon-like creatures sail between the stars carrying out inconceivable missions in the service of primal cosmic forces of balance. They resemble "ordinary" dragons except that they are luminescent green, with transparent wing membranes, and deep black eyes in which the depths of the starry void are visible. While they eventually grow large enough to consume entire worlds, this one is just a baby, at 45' long. At this age, they act as emissaries to mortals, commanding adventurers to complete tasks or face the very personal wrath of this servant of impersonal forces.

ST: 40	HP: 42	Speed: 7.00
DX: 14	Will: 16	Move: 10/20 (Air)
IQ: 16	Per: 18	
HT: 15	FP: 15	SM: +5
Dodge: 14*	Parry: 15*	DR: 10

Abyssal Breath (20): 3d corrosion in a 1-yard cone; Acc 3, Range 5/25; affects insubstantial. This is a blast of pure *nothingness*. It can “power-parry” attacks, even if insubstantial or energy-based, with Parry 17*; if successful, roll 3d, subtract that from the basic damage, and *apply* it as damage to the weapon or unarmed attacker! Costs 2 FP to attack or parry.

Bite (16): 4d+4 impaling. Reach C-5.

Claw (16): 4d+4 cutting or impaling. Reach C-5.

Dispel Psi (22 vs. Will): Target psionic effect is canceled. Ranged (uses *Size and Speed/Range Table*, p. B550). Costs 1 FP.

Traits: Bad Grip; Bad Temper (12); Battlesense 3; Combat Reflexes; Danger Sense; Dark Vision; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Dependency (Mana; Daily); Dispel Psi 2; Elder Lore; Fear; Horizontal; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Indomitable; Intuition (Psionic); Magic Resistance 10; Mind Reading (Psionic); Mind Shield 10 (Psionic); Mr. Universe; Nictitating Membrane 2; Pressure Support 3; Psi Talent 6; Psychic Sensitivity 3; Second Nature 2; Sense of Duty (Cosmic Balance); Speed of Thought; Telesend; Temperature Tolerance 10 (-105° to 100°); Transdimensional Sight; Unfazeable; Unusual Background (Psionic); Vacuum Support; Your Tongue Is My Tongue.

Skills: Brawling-16; Hidden Lore (Psi)-15; Hidden Lore (Elder Things)-16; Innate Attack (Breath)-20.

Class: Elder Thing.

Notes: Enjoys two free mental maneuvers. Can use mental abilities before anyone else can act (thanks to Second Nature 2 and Speed of Thought). Affected by anything that specifically affects dragons and reacts to dragon-blooded at +3.

* Includes Battlesense 3.

PSIONIC MONSTER PREFIXES

These prefixes work like the ones in *Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1* (pp. 36-38).

Astral

This creature is a native of the Astral Plane. Unlike normally harmless astral life, this one has the ability to injure substantial creatures.

Statistics: Add Astral Entity (Insubstantiality has Affects Substantial). Any supernatural attacks can affect substantial at -3, and any normal physical attacks ignore DR (other than Psychic Armor or other DR that protects the soul).

Psionic

Some creatures are naturally psionic or have been altered by Elder Things to be so (often with *distorted* and *chaos*).

Statistics: Add +2 to IQ or set IQ to 12, whichever is *higher*, and increase FP by 20%. Add Psionic Talent 2 and Unusual Background (Psionic). Add one of Battlesense 1 and Mindreading; Fear and Telesend; Levitation 3 and Psychic Armor 6; Ergokinetic Shield 4, Innate Attack (Gaze) at DX+4, Psychic Sensitivity 1, and Pyrokinetic Bolt 2; or any set of psionic abilities worth 45-55 points.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cole M. B. Jenkins lives in the mystical land of central California where he has spent thousands of hours trying to kill things with his mind. He would like to thank Kevin Hosford's mentalist character, “Ignacio,” for inspiring such terrible things. He would also like to thank Pyramid Write Club, but the first rule of Write Club is . . . No, it isn't even safe to *think* it.

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RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

THE THREAT OF THE UNKNOWN

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Imagine that you know nothing about the landline telephone system. (If you're under the age of 22 or so, that may not be terribly difficult.) Now imagine that you're a post-apocalyptic explorer who finds the pieces of a rotary phone: the handset, the base unit, the cord that connects handset to the base, and a cable that connects the base to the wall. (I'm really showing my age talking about rotary phones, aren't I?)

What would be required to make sense of that device? Assembling the thing would be tricky – especially considering how similar all of the plugs and cords look – but not insurmountable. But assuming you got it together, how would you use it? The sequence of events needed to get the device to work is nontrivial.

- Take the handset off the receiver.
- (Optional) Hold the device to your ear, so the transmitter is oriented to your mouth and the receiver is oriented to your ear.
- (Optional) Listen for a dial tone.
- Put your finger into the hole of the digit you wish to use.
- Rotate the dial until you get to the metal tab.
- Pull your finger out when you hit the tab, and let the wheel spin back to start.
- Repeat that number-selection process until you hit an appropriate number of digits (in the United States, that's seven or 11 numbers).
- Wait.
- If you've done *everything* correctly and the unit is hooked to a live telephone circuit, the receiver part of the handset will emit a warbling chirp sound. It will continue to emit a warbling chirp sound until someone on the other end *picks up their phone*.

Again, approach this from the point of view of someone with no knowledge of phones. Even if you figure out everything correctly, you could easily walk away with the conclusion that this device is designed to emit a uniform chirp sound when an appropriate sequence of seven digits is entered.

Now think about how much of *all of that* is designed specifically for your human body and human experience. The transmitter and receiver on the handset are spaced roughly

the distance between your ear and mouth. The holes for the numbers are about the same size as your fingers. Even if you were a Renaissance merchant, you are familiar with the 10 digits you can dial (which correspond to the number of fingers you have, and the numbering system you use day to day). Keep all of that in mind.

One of my favorite classic *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* adventures is *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*. That's probably due to hitting the preteen mind's sweet spot of "fantasy heroes on a *spaceship!*" One of the elements I most enjoyed about it was the extensive system it presented to figure out alien technology. It provided illustrations for many of the devices – most of which aren't obvious or intuitive – and describes them in the ways that medieval minds would perceive them. For example, keycards used to access doorways become "heavily leaded panes of colored glass."

However, I'd argue that author Gary Gygax didn't go far enough (at least, for the kinds of adventures I like to run). While many players excel at separating player and character knowledge, it's still difficult to pretend you *don't* know something about how the universe works. In this case, the *players* will know what a colored keycard does because most of us have seen appropriate science-fiction or spy movies. We know that those devices resembling grenades or rayguns are *probably* something akin to grenades or rayguns.

What does all of this have to do with fantasy encounters? A crucial element to most fantasy campaigns is a feeling of wonder – that sense you're seeing something no one has ever seen before. This is usually shortchanged in movies or books because the heroes always figure out what is going on; it's unsatisfying to have the good guys stare in slack-jawed amazement at some wondrous element, only to have them continuing to scratch their heads as the end credits roll. But in games – like in the real world – it's perfectly acceptable *not* to figure out what something amazing does. For example, there's a millennia-plus debate over what Stonehenge was supposed to do or mean, and it's almost certain that won't be completely resolved anytime soon.

So how can you instill this sense of wonder into a game? It's easier than you may think.

OBLITERATE ASSUMPTIONS

In many fantasy gaming worlds, most wonders come from some kind of precursor entities. (This also applies to many space-opera and cinematic science-fiction worlds.) It can be enormously enlightening to realize these precursors *need not be human* – or even terribly humanoid.

For example, imagine a large wall-set device that looks like it has – what the players realize to be – a viewscreen. All the heroes need to do is push the buttons and turn the dials, and it's all set, right? Well, what if the precursors were a race of four-armed entities, and the controls were such that someone with the same genetic sequence needed to push four separate buttons *at the same time*? Such a contraption would defy casual attempts at sorting it out, perhaps requiring further adventures and information. Imagine the triumphant cries from the heroes when they discover a tome and realize, "They have four arms! *They have four arms!*" The viewscreen would require some clever ideas to get it to function even if they did figure out what was going on, perhaps looking like a weird game of *Twister* as the scholar tries to push the four buttons with his hands and feet. (To make this even trickier, make the precursors distinctly nonhuman scale – "four-armed and 12' tall" means those four buttons could be *really* far apart.)

When designing something unusual for heroes to figure out, see what happens when you pare away preconceived notions. Maybe the ancient ones' heads were larger than "modern" humanoids, so that to make the odd helmet work, the wearer needs to place his hands on his head to ensure the sides of the headpiece make full contact with the wearer. Maybe their senses of time were wildly different, so that the buttons to activate them need to be held for *loooooong* periods to register, or need to be tapped with lighting-quick precision. (Again, notice how a rotary dial didn't register a number right if you dialed it too fast or too slow . . .)

To be surprised, to wonder, is to begin to understand.

– José Orega y Gasset

TIERS FOR FEARS

Once in the middle of an unexpected blackout in my pitch-dark apartment, I used my Gameboy and its attached light – the only light source within arm's reach – to find my higher-powered flashlight, which I used to find my emergency lantern. Obviously "light source" is not the purpose of a Gameboy (or a cell phone/camera/wristwatch/etc.), but it could be *used* for such. Thus another way to instill wonder in a fantasy encounter is to have tiers of applications. Maybe the use the heroes find for something isn't what it was intended for. (Did you know you can use a microwave to smelt metal if you're careful?) Perhaps the enigma isn't *really* doing what the heroes think it is. Each tier of utility could be something that the heroes unlock through discovery or research (see *Science Rules!*, below). As an example, say the heroes find an ornate archway in an otherwise nondescript structure. As they investigate, they come to some conclusions.

SCIENCE RULES!

Many games (including *GURPS*) have rules for figuring out what weird bits of the unknown do. Although that works for a lot of settings, if part of the point is to have wonders that are deliberately impenetrable – or at least reveal their mysteries slowly – then it's good to make sure everyone at the gaming table is on the same page.

One way to stay true to rule systems is to allow for successful rolls to indicate that headway is being made on understanding the enigma. Most gamers are understanding if (after a successful roll) the GM says, "You definitely feel like you're making progress, but this could take weeks or months to fully unravel. You might want to give your mind time to ponder it further by getting a change of scenery or looking into another mystery."

Another way to allow for actual game mechanics to influence the mystery's flow is to permit each successful roll (or series of rolls) to unlock the next tier of its secrets; see *Tiers for Fears* (below).

1. The archway was used for some kind of ceremonial function – perhaps marriage, or something else involving bringing people together?

2. The archway can be compelled to glow, and it causes a tingling sensation for those who walk under it. Perhaps the builders believed it had health benefits (similar to a modern-day tanning booth)?

3. With an increase in the archway's power, stepping through it causes clothing to instantly dry. It also seems to clean the wielder, removing dirt and odors.

4. Increasing the archway to full power causes it to *disintegrate* someone who is under it, reducing them to ash.

5. Actually, it's not disintegrating them; it's *teleporting* them to somewhere unknown. (The ash is actually a layer of singed hair and epidermis that's left behind from the energizing process.)

Keep in mind that each of those tiers could come with months (or even decades!) between their discovery – if they're *ever* discovered. Imagine if a society only discovered the power of the archway up to its fourth application, and used it as a way to "execute" its worst criminals for decades (when they were actually teleported to lands unknown). And now those evildoers have banded together to make the long, arduous journey back, ready to exact revenge on a society they hate. And presuming the heroes manage to overcome this fantastic threat, they still have the option to step into the archway themselves in search of adventure . . .

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.

ODDS AND ENDS

THE SPIRALED BLADES

For those using the idea of tiered revelations from *The Threat of the Unknown* (pp. 36-37), here is another example of a strange device that heroes might encounter.

This contraption – about the size of a breastplate of armor and made of an orb with five blades sticking out from the center; the orb is mounted to an arm, which is mounted to a base. The orb can rotate, causing the blades to circle.

1. This device could be some kind of weapon, but it's awfully awkward to carry.

2. If successfully activated, the blades seem to spin. It *could* still be a weapon – and would no doubt hurt to be struck by – but its purpose seems elsewhere.

3. When the blades are oriented accordingly, the contraption seems like it could serve as a reasonably effective cooling mechanism. (In modern terms, it's similar to a table-top fan.) However, it would still be very dangerous to get near.

4. When the blades are properly oriented (akin to a fan) and the device is rotating at maximum power, it has a chance of severing the physical ties to anyone's *soul*, provided the target is within one yard of the device. (In game terms, the device will – when set to maximum speed – sever the target's soul on a roll of 18 on 3d; that number decreases by 1 every full five minutes spent in front of the device.) The soulless body is ripe for takeover by outside entities that become aware of its husk-like nature. (What becomes of the soul is up to the heroes to determine . . .)

5. If properly calibrated, the device can also be used to sever the ties of a supernatural entity that is in *possession* of a person's soul.

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND

Crowbars

Is there anything they can't do?



IN *PATHFINDER ADVENTURE CARD GAME: RISE OF THE RUNELORDS* (Paizo Inc.), YOU CAN RESOLVE YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH THE SHOPKEEPER'S DAUGHTER BY USING A CROWBAR.

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The game-term mechanism is the same as in the previous tier. If the device was from an era with lots of supernatural

possession, this would seem to be the contraption's "designed" function.

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