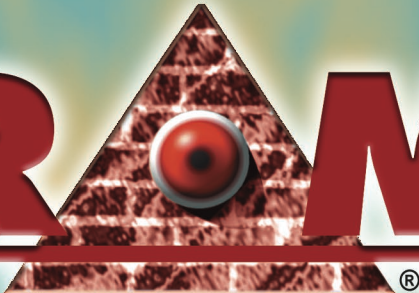


# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/102 April '17

## EPIC



**CRAFTING IMBUEMENTS**  
by Christopher R. Rice

**DUNGEON FANTASY  
GOES TO WAR**  
by Matt Riggsby

**THE HARVEST**  
by David L. Pulver

**GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG**  
by William H. Stoddard

**MANY LIVES, ONE ADVENTURE**  
by J. Edward Tremlett

## STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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### ARTICLE COLORS

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

*Pale Blue:* In This Issue

*Brown:* In Every Issue

*Green:* Columnist

*Dark Blue:* **GURPS** Features

*Purple:* Systemless Features

### COVER ART

Abrar Ajmal

There's something awesome about those times in gaming where all the players take a moment to lean back, smile, and say, "Wow; that's *amazing!*" This issue of *Pyramid* is devoted to epic gaming: ideas, additions, and expansions that provide fuel to the fire of fun.

We all have stuff . . . but now our belongings can serve double-duty by doing the impossible, thanks to *Crafting Imbuements*. Building on the foundation of **GURPS Power-Ups 1: Imbuements**, this article by Christopher R. Rice – co-author of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic** – lets you add special powers or abilities to items. The impossible has never been easier!

Usually, crypt-crawling heroes solve their problems one-on-one . . . and other times, *Dungeon Fantasy Goes to War*. **GURPS Low-Tech** co-author Matt Riggsby shows how you can add **GURPS Mass Combat** to **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, allowing for even more epic struggles against the forces of evil.

The whole world is in danger, and only stalwart heroes can stop *The Harvest: Invasion Earth*. This month's Eidetic Memory offering from David L. Pulver – author of **GURPS Spaceships** – presents an epic modern-day campaign that pits incredibly powerful human vessels against an alien conquest. With six new vehicle designs detailing both sides of the conflict, it's a perfect time to take advantage of the fact that **Spaceships** is now available as a CreateSpace print-on-demand release!

The future's not what it used to be, and that's never been truer than in the world of *Götterdämmerung*. William H. Stoddard – author of **GURPS Powers: The Weird** – presents an alternate timeline where reality can shift underfoot like sand, bringing in a super-powered setting the likes of which you've never seen. It's the perfect reason to use *The Weird*, **GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier**, **GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers**, and **GURPS Powers** in a **GURPS** setting that's super-powered but decidedly different.

Most adventurers have but one life to give for their feats of derring-do . . . but others live by the mantra of *Many Lives, One Adventure*. This systemless article takes a detailed look at how reincarnation might radically change a fantasy campaign, with insight into society, campaign ideas, and new ways to shake up the world. When death is just a setback, it's sure to be epic!

This issue of *Pyramid* also includes a Random Thought Table that shows how to keep over-the-top elements relatable while still maintaining that sense of wonder. Let's face it: This issue of *Pyramid* is . . . well . . . *epic!*

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## “SUDDENLY,” IN ALL CAPS

The very idea of “epic” is something that can find a home in so many campaigns. I was reminded of this fact as I reflected on (curiously enough) *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, the film-mocking cult TV series currently enjoying a Netflix-airing revival. The original premise of the show was about as low-stakes as it could get (“a guy and two robots make fun of cheesy movies”). But – during the original series’ run of 10-ish seasons – they managed to embrace the epic a surprising number of times: skirting to the edge of the galaxy, blowing up planets, saving the universe from pod people, traveling through time and space . . . and that was all within the context of several-minute “buffer” segments that *weren’t* part of the mandate to quip over films. So I find myself thinking, “Y’know, if a show like *Mystery Science Theater 3000* can be epic, then so can just about any gaming campaign.”

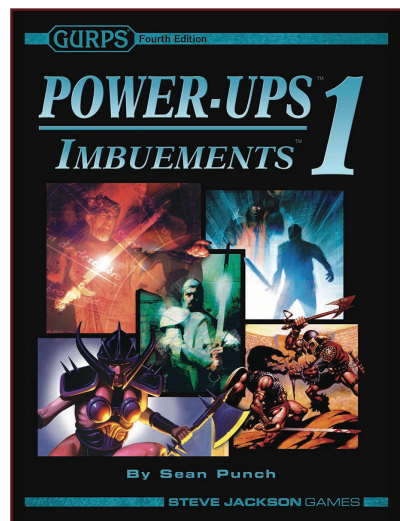
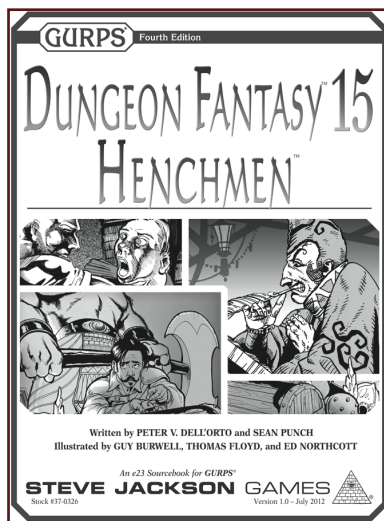
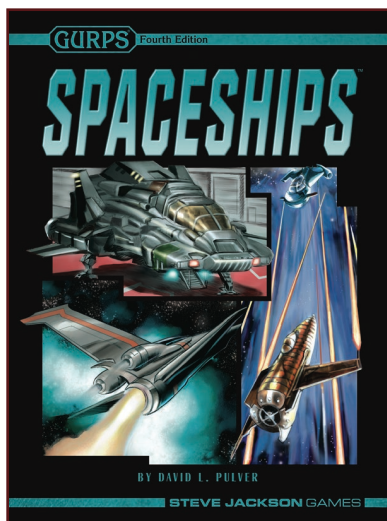
Fortunately, **GURPS** is a system that’s particularly well suited to epic gaming. Unlike systems that (say) use a single die to resolve most actions, **GURPS’** bell curve does a good job of ensuring that skills and abilities can be ramped up to high-power levels without leaving the sliver of a possibility of

failure or setbacks. (Heroes in high-octane films always seem to rely on those one-in-a-million possibilities to save the day; maybe they have **GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys** . . .) Plus, ironically, **GURPS’** reputation for lethality helps it here; when the best defense is “don’t get hit,” that advice applies equally well to a mook’s handgun bullet or the Everburning Flame of Ra Incarnate.

Of course, **GURPS** has enough tweaks and knobs to enable it to work great for standalone epic campaigns (of which we proudly present a couple here in this issue), as well as elements that might only be touched upon briefly in an otherwise more down-to-earth campaign. Whether you’re looking to craft a long-running epic campaign or just want to shake things up in the heroes’ neighborhood for a bit, hopefully this issue will give you inspiration to embrace the epic!

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Whether this issue stoked your inner awesome or you think we shouldn’t have tried to turn the knob past 11, we love to hear from you! Write to us privately at [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or join our epic community at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



*Additional Material:* S.A. Fisher, Michael Hurst, Sean Punch, Phil Masters, and Hans-Christian Vortisch

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# CRAFTING IMBUEMENTS

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

Imbuements can make your weapon fiery, trick out your ride, or make your armor more bullet resistant . . . but what else can they do? **GURPS Power-Ups 1: Imbuements** suggests imbuements can also be used for “noncombat” skills and gives a few examples (**Power-Ups 1**, p. 12).

This article expands the possibilities even further – to *creation* skills that permit you to make objects with special powers or abilities. With these new skills, you can craft a Masamune katana or forge impenetrable armor. These specialized Imbuement Skills (called “Crafting Imbuements”) allow the creation of equipment or gear that is far beyond what others could make. This comes with a downside – the crafter must have a personal hand in making the item in question. Chapter 5 of **GURPS Low-Tech Companion 3: Daily Life and Economics**, or a similar set of manufacturing rules, are required to use this article, though the GM may simply specify how long the base item takes to make.

## USING CRAFTING IMBUEMENTS

Unlike normal Imbuement Skills, Crafting Imbuements (pp. 7-10) are based on IQ, not DX and can only be used on an object that the imbuer has personally created or helped to create. (He may choose to treat a suit of armor, a weapon and scabbard, etc., as one object.) Once the object is finished, he must begin the imbue process immediately, which requires a roll against every Crafting Imbuement to be applied to this piece of equipment. For each, apply the following.

**Modifiers:** Any modifiers specific to that Imbuement Skill (e.g., -4 to Agile Weapon for an extra +1 Parry). -2 if you *helped* in the creation process but were not the main crafter (e.g., you worked the bellows and drew the steel, but were not the bladesmith). If multiple Crafting Imbuements are being used, -1 for every skill past the first.

Unless specified differently by the skill description, success on a Crafting Imbuement skill roll results in the object being imbued normally. Failure allows further tries, but at a cumulative -2 to skill and +20% to total FP cost. Critical failure destroys the crafted object. Critical success adds an additional +X CF worth of free imbuements (or mundane benefits) of the GM’s choice, where X equals the better of (half the total CF)

or 3 × (margin of success on the original *craft* skill roll). See the various equipment books for mundane gear modifiers and their associated cost factors.

## Cost Factor

Every Crafting Imbuement generates a *cost factor* (CF) – a measurable improvement in the quality of the object. This serves two purposes. First, it acts as a way to gauge the value of the upgraded object; multiply its value by (1 + total CF), including CFs from mundane and imbued sources. (This assumes a “common magic” world; for value calculations *only*, multiply the imbue-derived CF by 5 if magic is rare, 3 if uncommon, or 0.5 if very common.) Second, the CF is used to determine the FP cost necessary to imbue the item; see below.

The *base* CF is listed in the description of each Crafting Imbuement; this is how much that skill adds if used at no penalty. Any penalized use raises this CF. To determine by how much, reduce the skill penalty by -1, look up that “Speed/Range” value on the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550), reference the “Linear Measurement” column, and treat “yards” as “CF increase.”

*Example:* Using Agile Weapon (p. 7) to add +1 Parry requires a skill roll at no penalty, and adds +9 CF. But Youko wants to add +2 Parry, which requires a skill roll at -4. So she looks up Speed/Range -3 (one less than -4) on the table, which corresponds to 7 yards, and thus adds 7 to the CF. This +2 Parry is worth +16 CF.

## Fatigue Cost

Once the total CF is determined, look up that value on the table below to figure out the required FP expenditure. Round fractional values up. Then, for projects involving multiple Crafting Imbuements, add another 1 FP for every skill past the first.

This burden can be reduced; each -5 taken to *any* of the skill rolls gives -1 (or -10% if better) to the FP cost, to a minimum of 0.

The crafter may spend HP instead, at the rate of 1 HP for 3 FP.

Multiple identical objects may be made at the same time (e.g., arrows or sling stones), as long as you crafted *all* of them. This doesn’t penalize skill but adds +1 to the FP cost (or +10%, whichever is *more*; round up) for every item past the first.

*I made dis.*  
– Internet  
meme



<i>Total CF</i>	<i>Required FP Expenditure</i>
1-3	2 FP
4-6	4 FP
7-9	6 FP
10-12	8 FP
13-15	10 FP
16-18	12 FP
19-21	14 FP
22-24	16 FP
25-27	18 FP
28-30	20 FP
etc.	+2 FP

## Time Required

It takes (30 × total FP cost) minutes to imbue a piece of equipment, regardless of type or base cost of the item. The only exception is Infuse Gear (see p. 8), which adds (much) more time. See *Faster, Blacksmith!* (below) for shortening or lengthening this time. If total duration is over eight hours, the process can be done over multiple days, so long as no more than eight hours of imbue are done per day and the days are consecutive; the GM may change this schema to fit the campaign. All FP is spent at the end of this time.

## SUGGESTED IMBUE SOURCES

Crafting Imbuements should have an Imbue advantage with a power modifier – even if the GM doesn't normally require one. It might not make sense to have a *flaming* sword created by even the most extraordinary mundane artisan – but it could be plausible if great skill created great durability or the keenest edge. In some cases, such as Racial or High-Tech sources, this is a consequence of the person himself instead of special techniques; he's of the appropriate race or from the appropriate background. However, if the campaign's version of the Imbue advantage has a power modifier, then that is the required source. Perhaps all Crafting Imbuements are alchemical! Perhaps some are divine. It depends on the setting.

At the GM's option, certain power modifiers may switch the controlling attribute for craft imbuements. "Physical" power modifiers may be HT-based (if physicality is the prime factor) or DX-based (if agility is). The GM may even wish to look into *Calculated Bases* (*GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 30). For example, if "forcing mystical energies into a container" is how magic is explained in a campaign, then Crafting Imbuements might be based on (Will/2) + 5.

Typical costs of each power modifier are listed with the descriptions. Adjust these as necessary to suit the campaign.

**Alchemical** (-10%): The imbue's effects are the result of alchemical procedures done to the materials or during the process of creation. It's related to magical skills, but not usually affected by mana levels, dispel magic, etc.

**Chi** (-10%): The imbue's effects are thanks to the crafter's ability to unlock his inner chi and invest it in other objects. It takes time to become familiar with Chi-sourced gear. Including an imbue adds a Familiarity Penalty (p. B169) for using the object equal to 1/5 of the gear's CF from imbuements, rounded up. Total the CF of

all imbuements and treat that as the number of hours needed to practice with the item to unlock its full abilities. Chi Talents reduce this time normally.

**Craft Expertise** (-0%): The imbue's effects are the result of extraordinary *mundane* skill, not anything supernatural. This has two downsides: your required creation skill level must be 15 or higher, and if the item grants a bonus, it cannot be higher than your Imbue advantage's level *plus* the level of your best "crafter" Talent (e.g., Artificer or Master Builder). It does grant one benefit: if your margin of success exceeds what you need, the GM assigns useful imbued effects with CF equal to *half* of your best leftover margin.

**Divine** (-10%): The imbue's effects are the result of prayer, clerical magic, or innate holiness. The properties granted by the Crafting Imbue(s) are affected by Sanctity (p. B242). This also suits those with the Moral power modifier (*GURPS Powers*, p. 26).

**High-Tech** (-0%): The imbue's effects result from access to bleeding-edge technology, superscience, a better understanding of the underlying physics (or chemistry, etc.) than most, or living in a culture with higher technology than the campaign's TL. This results in a more expensive *base* cost of the object. Determine the extra cost by first deciding what "TL" the Crafting Imbue is and what the setting's TL is. Each TL of difference cumulatively doubles the base cost in addition to the added cost factors. This source may require you have the High TL advantage (p. B25) and possibly an Unusual Background!

**Magical** (-10%): A standard magic item created using nonstandard spells or by innate ability. The GM should wax vague on the details: "Analyze Magic reveals an enchantment unknown to thaumatology." Or maybe, if imbue is known to mages, "This enchantment was created by secret techniques, presumed to be known only by the Eidolon Enchanters." Mana levels affect it as usual (p. B235), and the item has a Power (*GURPS Magic*, p. 17) equal to the *lowest* Crafting Imbue used to create it.

**Materials** (-5%): The skill's effects are the result of a material that must be combined with the other materials during the creation process. Such materials can be just about anything: powdered dragon's teeth, "sky iron," etc.

## FASTER, BLACKSMITH!

At the GM's option, *Time Spent* (p. B346) can be applied to Crafting Imbuements, but at a special cost. Each -1 to the skill roll reduces the time needed by 10%, but *also* increases the FP cost by 1 or 10% (whichever is higher).

The opposite (taking more time) can reduce fatigue: spending 2x as long reduces FP by 1, 4x gives -2 FP, 8x gives -3 FP, 15x gives -4 FP, 30x gives -5 FP, 60x gives -6 FP, 120x gives -7 FP, 240x gives -8 FP, 500x gives -9 FP, 1,000x gives -10 FP, 2,000x gives -11 FP, and 4,000x gives -12 FP. Multiply the reduced FP by 5% if better. Total FP cannot be reduced below 0 (that is, you cannot *gain* FP in this way!)

The player can also use the *Time Spent* modifiers on the creation of the actual object, if he wishes. The costs for a hasty imbuing do not impact the normal crafting, and vice-versa.

**Nature** (-20%): The imbue's effects are the result of natural processes, or spells known only to a few worshippers of Nature itself. Creations are nearly always made of stone, wood, bone, teeth, etc. and the item must make HT rolls when used anywhere that's not pristine wilderness. They're at -1 to rolls in a despoiled wild place such as a clear-cut forest, -3 in a city, -5 in ordinary pollution, and -10 in a poisoned wasteland. Failure by 1 or 2 results in a breakdown requiring minor repairs, while failure by 3+ requires a major repair. Critical failure results in the object's destruction!

**Psionic** (-10%): The imbue's effects are the result of psionic abilities used in the item's manufacture. This could require "setting up quantum resonance frequencies within the object's molecular structure" or "causing a standing subnucleonic field effect tied to the physical matrix of the device." Antipsi can nullify any granted abilities normally. For campaigns with special rules for psi powers (like **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**), use those rules instead.

**Racial** (-5%): The imbue's effects are the result of secrets known only to a specific race or races. This lets them create weapons, armor, and other equipment that seems supernatural (or actually is!), but is really just based on principles other races cannot understand. In order to use this source, the crafter must be of the appropriate race or have been taught by them (a hefty Unusual Background!). Double effective CF when bought by members of another race.

**Spirit** (-25%): The imbue's effects are the result of binding a spirit into the equipment. This can be an angel, demon, nature spirit (unless the GM prefers to keep nature-related things under the Nature source), ghost, or any other type of insubstantial being the GM likes. Such gear can have its spirits unbound by those who know how. It can be repaired by someone with the appropriate skills, but is effectively a major breakdown. If spirits and magic are intertwined, mana levels also affect such items.

**Super** (-10%): The imbue's effects are from the crafter's metahuman ability. They can be shut down normally by anti-powers or weird-science devices.

## ADVANTAGES

In addition to the required Imbue advantage (**Power-Ups** 1, p. 4), here are a few other traits that craft-imbuers might find useful.

### Altered Time Rate

see p. B38

**GURPS Powers** introduces the Super-Speed modifier (**Powers**, p. 42), which allows characters to complete non-combat tasks more quickly. In addition to speedsters or time-manipulators, this trait is *highly* appropriate for cinematic inventors! The GM might permit the purchase of one or two levels for those with Gadgeteer. If it only applies to tasks involving invention or creation, add a -40% Accessibility modifier.

### Blessed

see p. B40

This new version of Blessed is appropriate to inventors, artificers, and similar people in an *extremely* cinematic game. It costs 25 points per level, to a maximum of three levels.

**Inspired Crafter**: Once per session, when beginning a crafting project, you may choose one of the following benefits (these *can* affect Crafting Imbuements). The GM may veto any nonsensical use.

- **Enhanced Skill**: At level one, add 4 to your crafting skills for *all* purposes. Level two adds 8, and level three adds 12!

- **Infallible Crafting**: You don't even make a roll! For level one, your margin of success is (skill level - 3). At level two, margin becomes (skill level + 1). At level three, it's (skill level + 5).

- **Speed**: At level one, divide the total time required for a given project by three. Level two divides the total time by five, and level three divides it by seven.

At the GM's option, you can mix and match benefits as long as the total adds up to your Blessed (Inspired Crafter) level. For example, if you had Blessed 3 (Inspired Crafter), you could gain the benefits of one level of Infallible Crafting plus two levels of Speed for a project.

## Gadgeteer

see p. B56

Those with Crafting Imbue skills will want Gadgeteer if it's allowed in the campaign. Reliable can be added to Gadgeteer, but never grants an actual bonus to skill rolls. Instead, it offsets penalties for building a gizmo "on the spot."

For crafting imbuements, reconvert the CF into a skill penalty and use that as the penalty to rolls to change it from one Crafting Imbue to another.

## New Special Enhancements

**Thaumaturgic Tinkerer**: Your gadgeteering skills extend to magic items! You can adapt existing enchantments to serve as similar ones or add or remove a limitation (e.g., Bane). The resulting enchantment must, *in the GM's opinion*, be related to the initial one in either magical college or direct effect on the world. For example, in the standard magic system, you could adapt a Fireball wand into a Shape Fire item, since both spells are Fire spells. You could even tweak it into a Lightning wand, as both are burning Missile spells. However, you couldn't arrive at Seek Water at all, because, although that's a minor spell, the spells have nothing in common thematically.

The desired enchantment cannot require more magical energy than is contained in the one being changed. Use the *enchantment's* cost in \$ to approximate this. Thus, the price to have the final spell on an item cannot exceed that of the initial spell.

Reworking an enchantment takes 1d×20 minutes (for Quick Gadgeteer) or 1d days (for Regular Gadgeteer) and requires a roll against Thaumaturgy or an appropriate skill, at -1 per (Average Starting Wealth/2) of *initial* enchantment value, regardless of how costly the final item is. Any success permanently adapts the magic. An ordinary failure wastes time and means the inventor cannot try to alter *that* enchantment on *that* item again. Critical failure permanently dispels the enchantment.

Multiple enchantments can be altered (or merged), but each is its own task. If the underlying item is to be physically changed as well, that's a *separate* use of Gadgeteer, which obeys the usual rules for transforming things. This may be done before or after altering spells, but critical failure ruins the item and destroys *all* of its enchantments. +50%.



## New Special Limitations

*Alchemical Only:* You can use your ability only for *Alchemical Gadgeteering* as found in **GURPS Thaumatology**, p. 103. -50%.

*Slower Invention:* Quick Gadgeteer allows *rapid* creation times (at most a day), which might not suit all campaigns – even the extremely cinematic ones. Each level (maximum of four), shifts “minutes” to “hours,” “hours” to “days,” “days” to “weeks,” “weeks” to “months,” and so on. -10%.

*Thaumaturgic Tinkerer Only:* As above, but your ability *only* works to transform magical effects. -25%.

## Versatile

see p. B96

At the GM's option, Versatile can become a leveled trait, much like Daredevil or Higher Purpose in **GURPS Supers**, p. 26. This gives a bonus to all listed tasks under Versatile equal to its level. This bonus only applies to crafting *skills*, not Crafting Imbuements!

## CRAFTING IMBUEMENT SKILL CATEGORIES

Crafting Imbuement skills are divided into four categories. Within this group, there are four distinctions:

- *General:* The skill will work with Armor, Weapon, and Equipment specialties.
- *Armor:* Crafting Imbuement (Armor) skills can only be used on equipment that protects its wearer or is worn like clothing; e.g., chainmail, hats, tank armor, or horse barding. This also includes shields of all types.
- *Weapon:* These skills are for weapons of all type; e.g., bows, catapults, swords, or throwing axes.
- *Equipment:* This catchall group works on anything not covered above, but is not quite a general skill; e.g., backpacks, rations, or tools and tool kits.

For instance, Melee Weapons and Missile Weapons are valid specialties for the Agile Weapon skill (below), but Body Armor is not correct for a weapon-only Crafting Imbuement!

Specialties of a Crafting Imbuement skill default to each other at the same penalty as their associated skills. For example, if you know Durable Gear (Melee Weapons), you can attempt Durable Gear (Missile Weapons) at -4. There is no default for completely unrelated skills.

## CRAFTING IMBUEMENT SPECIALTIES

The various Crafting Imbuement skills require specialization by repair skill specialty. For example, Durable Gear (Melee Weapons) is a valid specialty, but Durable Gear (Armoury) is not.

Use the specialties listed for Armoury (p. B178), Artist (p. B179), Carpentry (p. B183), Engineer (p. B190), Electrician (p. B189), Electronics Repair (p. B190), Leatherworking (p. B205), Machinist (p. B201), Masonry (p. B207), Mechanic (p. B207), Sewing (p. B219), and Smith (p. B221). The GM might also allow other skills that can be used to create things,

such as Alchemy, Cooking, Counterfeiting, Farming, Forgery, Gardening, Herb Lore, Jeweler, Metallurgy, and Writing.

## CRAFTING IMBUEMENT LIST

The following use the term “gear” interchangeably to refer to armor, weapons, and other equipment.

### Weight Adjustment

Some skills also affect an item's weight; in such cases, all effects multiply together. Weight may not be reduced below 0 lbs. (weightless).

### Large Vehicles

If you are using vehicles in D- or C-scale (p. B470), convert their statistics back to the normal scale and apply a given skill's effect (rounded up). For example, a D-scale battlewagon might have a dST/dHP statistic of 20 but uses 200 to determine the bonus received from using the Fortified Gear skill. For the purposes of DR or similar traits granted by Crafting Imbuements, add either the listed amount of +10%, whichever is better.

### Agile Weapon

Weapon; IQ/VH

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 3.

This skill increases the Parry statistics by one. This adds +9 CF.

*Modifiers:* -4 per additional +1; -5 to add an “F” to the Parry statistics or remove a “U”; -10 to remove a “U” and add a “F” to the Parry score.

### Channel Weapon

Weapon; IQ/VH

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 1 and a power modifier on Imbue.

This “aligns” a weapon with the power modifier of the crafter's Imbue advantage. This allows the weapon to function as a weapon of that specific type for certain traits. Other effects depend on the power modifier itself. For example, a shortsword that has been turned into a channel by a crafter with Imbue (Magical) would affect beings with Vulnerability (Magic Weapons) normally and functions as a magical staff (p. B240) in the hands of a mage. This adds +1 CF.

Those who have Cosmic on their Imbue advantage can add any power modifier permitted in the campaign.

*Modifiers:* -5 per additional, *related* power modifier (GM's call).

### Durable Gear

General; IQ/VH

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 2.

This skill gives the crafted item +1 to its HT, allowing it to last longer than normal. This adds +4 CF.

*Modifiers:* -2 per additional +1 to HT (up to HT 20).

## Faultless Gear

**General; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 2.

This skill increases the Malfunction number (p. B407) by one. For items without a Malfunction statistic, this doubles the time the equipment can go without having any maintenance done. This adds +2 to CF.

*Modifiers:* -1 per additional increase of the Malfunction number or doubling of time between maintenance periods; -5 if the item needs never be maintained (e.g., a sword that doesn't ever have to be sharpened).

## Fortified Gear

**General; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 2.

This gives the item 5 points of protective traits – almost always Damage Resistance, but possibly Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction), Radiation Tolerance, etc. This adds +3 CF.

*Modifiers:* -2 per additional 5 points of protective traits.

## Infuse Gear

**General; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 3 (see below).

This “catchall” Crafting Imbue-ment is meant to simulate the creation of items whose abilities are not covered elsewhere. Determine the character point cost as if the ability were an advantage. A crafter may add up to 2 character points of advantages that directly affect the gear being modified at no penalty. For example, you could increase how much a backpack can carry by adding two levels of Payload or add a linked Burning attack to a shortsword.

Each character point added via Infuse Gear counts as +0.5 CF *only* for the purpose of determining the FP cost (pp. 4-5) and required time (p. 5). Unlike other Crafting Imbuements skills, Infuse Gear adds a fixed cost to the final price of the gear based on the traits that it adds. This cost is equal to 10% of the Average starting wealth for the campaign's TL (p. B27) per character point. In addition, the abilities increase the required time by 200 hours per character point added; for those using the *Daily Life and Economics* crafting rules, these extra hours should be factored into the labor cost.

An object may be *suffused with energy* instead of adding an advantage. If this suffusion of energy is temporary and acts as

an Energy Reserve (*GURPS Powers*, p. 114) for abilities with the same power modifier as the crafter's Imbue advantage, then each effective character point gives 25 points worth of reserve. These points do not recharge over time and once used are gone. (For one that *can* recharge, add Energy Reserve as an advantage instead, using the rules above.)

Optionally, the GM could use the rules for *Enchantment Through Deeds* or *Enchantment Through Deeds* (*GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 110, 112) and “charge” the weapon with a number of points that can be used later.

*Modifiers:* More than 2 points can be added. Look up the *total* number of character points to be added in the “Linear Measurement” column (treat in-between values as the larger value), read across to the “Speed/Range” column of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550), and then use that as the penalty to the Infuse Gear skill roll.

## Insulated Gear

**General; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 1.

This skill makes the item resistant to extreme high or low temperatures. Add its HT to both the high and subtract it from the low end of its optimal temperature range. This adds +1 CF.

*Modifiers:* -1 per additional factor of HT added to the range (or double at either the high end *or* the low end); -3 for a worn item (like clothing or armor) to not impose extra FP costs when *Fighting a Battle* (p. B426); -5 if the item is totally immune to thermal shock of all kinds. Optionally, you can turn conductive items (e.g., metallic armor) into nonconductive items for -4 to skill.

*Using a magical  
forge, Osius made three  
horns that gave him  
mastery over serpents.*

– Lou Anders,  
*Nightborn*

## Lighten Gear

**General; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 1.

Lighten gear reduces the weight of the item by 5%, down to a minimum of zero pounds (“weightless”). This adds +0.25 CF.

*Modifiers:* -1 per 5% reduction in weight, up to -19 for weightless gear.

## Long-Range Gear

**Equipment or Weapon; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 1.

This skill gives +10% to the Range of a thrown or projectile weapon. This can also be applied to the range of sensors, telescopes, and so on. This adds +2 CF.

*Modifiers:* -1 per +10% to the Range; -10 if the gear uses one category better of range modifiers (e.g., normal range modifiers become long-distance modifiers).



## Ostentatious Gear

**General; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 1.

This skill gives the crafted item +1 to reaction rolls from collectors and potential buyers, and to Merchant skill rolls made as Influence rolls (p. B359) on such people. This adds +1 CF.

*Modifiers:* -2 per additional +1 reaction bonus. The GM may choose to limit the reaction bonus to no higher than your best crafting Talent (e.g., Artificer) plus Imbue level.

## Penetrating Weapon

**Weapon; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 3.

This skill gives the crafted weapon armor divisor (2), allowing it to better penetrate armor. This adds +19 CF.

*Modifiers:* -4 for (3), -8 for (5), -12 for (10), -16 for (100), and -20 to bypass DR completely.

## Precise Gear

**Equipment or Weapon; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 3.

This skill gives the crafted item +1 to operation rolls (for most types of gear), +1 to skill rolls to hit (for melee weapons, thrown weapons, and projectiles), or +1 to Accuracy (for muscle-powered weapons or firearms). This adds +4 CF. It is recommended that the GM allow at most a bonus equal to  $[(\text{setting's TL})/2 + 1]$  for bonuses to skill rolls or (setting's TL + 1) for Accuracy.

*Modifiers:* -2 per additional +1.

## Resilient Gear

**General; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 2.

This skill gives +1 or +10% to HP (whichever is better), allowing it to take more damage before it needs to be repaired. This adds +2 CF.

*Modifiers:* -1 per +1 or +10% to HP, up to +30 HP or +300% HP.

## Self-Healing Gear

**General; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 1.

This gives the crafted item the ability to repair itself slowly over time, thus negating the need for repairs. This adds +2 CF. On an unmodified roll, the object regains 1 HP every day (modified by *High HP and Healing*, p. B424).

*Modifiers:* -4 allows the object to regain 1 HP per hour, -6 for 1 HP per minute, -8 for 1 HP per second, or -10 for 10 HP per second. For an additional -4 penalty, it can also regrow quillons, straps, braces, and other small bits. For an additional -8, the entire thing can regrow from even the smallest piece!

## Strong Weapon

**Weapon or Armor; IQ/VH**

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 2.

This skill adds +1 to the base damage of the weapon or shield (not armor or clothing). This also gives -1 to the odds of breakage (p. B375). Alternatively, just breakage may be modified, in which case it gives -2 to odds. This adds +2 CF for projectiles, and crushing- or impaling-only melee or thrown weapons; +3 CF for Fencing weapons, knives, or swords; or +9 CF for other cutting melee or thrown weapons. Halve the CF if just the breakage rolls are modified.

*Modifiers:* -3 per additional +1 to damage and -1 to odds of breakage or -1 per additional -1 to odds of breakage; -5 if the weapon or shield is indestructible except under rare circumstances, -10 if it's completely indestructible.

## PUTTING YOUR SOUL INTO THE STEEL

Crafting Imbuements can be *very* powerful. This is why the imbuer must make (or assist in the making) of an item to imbue it in the first place as well as spend FP. The GM who thinks this is too easy can opt to *require* HT rolls (or HT-based Crafting Imbuement if better) during the imbue process in addition to the skill roll. Make the HT roll with the following modifiers at the start of the imbue process.

- -0 for an item with CF +1 to +9, -1 for +10 to +19, -2 for +20 to +29, etc.
- -0 for an item with Imbue 1 as a requirement, -1 for Imbue 2, and -2 for Imbue 3.
- Add *half* the modifier you took for decreasing or increasing time to use your Crafting Imbuement (p. 5) as a modifier to this roll.

Critical success on this roll gives you +2 to your imbue-skill roll *and* reduces required FP by 1 (or -5%). Success means you spend the FP normally for your skill. Failure means you must spend 1 HP per 10 required FP (in addition to the FP cost). Critical failure means you must spend 1 HP per 3 required FP! If this inflicts a full multiple of your HP (p. B420), make an unmodified HT roll; failure by 1 or 2 leaves you mortally wounded, while failure by 3 or more means you *die*.

## Transmogrify Object

General; IQ/VH

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 1.

This skill allows the crafter to turn one object into another. On an unmodified roll, you can change one object (and all of its enchantments, special attributes, etc.) into another similar one whose cost is within 50% of its own (e.g., if a weapon cost \$100, the value couldn't be more than \$150 or less than \$50); it must use the same skill to wield or operate (e.g. a shortsword into a long knife) or be of similar shape (e.g., a halberd to a quarterstaff). Unlike most Crafting Imbuement skills, Transmogrify Object does not require that the imbuer be the one who created the item to be transformed. Instead, he must pay a one-time cash cost (in materials) equal to twice the absolute value of the difference between the cost of the original item and the cost of the new item.

*Modifiers:* -1 per full 10% of absolute difference in cost, to a maximum of 50%.

## Transmute Object

General; IQ/VH

*Default:* Specialty for related skill at same penalty as skill default.

*Prerequisite:* Imbue 1.

This allows an object (almost *always* a weapon) to function as if it were another material. For example, a sword made of steel could be remade to function as if it were silver. This adds a cost factor equal to 1/50 of the material's cost per pound. For gemstones and jewels, this weight is for approximately seven carats. Organic materials like wood, bone, horn, or teeth may

be used. The GM sets the cost for any organic materials that cannot be easily gathered; see *GURPS Low-Tech*, pp. 71 and 106, for price suggestions. Once the CF, is determined, read that number in the "Linear Measurement" column of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550), look across to the "Speed/Range" column, and use that number as the penalty to rolls to this skill. If the CF falls between two values, round up to determine the penalty.

Optionally, for materials that already have a CF, add 10 to the base listed cost factor and determine the penalty as above.

*Modifiers:* +2 per step if the material's effectiveness is reduced (see *Silver Weapons*, p. B275); minimum damage multiplier is x1.

## EXAMPLE

Youko decides she wants to create a spyglass (*Low-Tech*, p. 42) for her lord. She wants to reduce its weight (Lighten Gear), improve its accuracy (Precise Gear), and give it the ability to overcome darkness penalties (Infuse Gear).

First, she creates it using the rules from *Daily Life and Economics*, pp. 22-24. A spyglass costs \$100 and weighs 4 lbs. and is mainly constructed of a soft metal (brass) and glass (lenses). The GM decides it's about 90% brass (3.6 lbs.) and 10% glass (0.4 lbs.), so the materials cost is \$0.84 for the glass and \$15.48, the total cost is \$16.32. This means the labor cost is \$12.24, as the GM rules that grinding lenses is high-performance work. A glassblower at TL4 makes \$610 (adjusted for margin of success or failure), so the *hourly* rate for this would be  $(\$610 \times 0.75)/200 = \$2.29$ . Therefore, the spyglass takes  $\$12.24/\$2.29 = 5.35$  man-hours of effort.

Once created, it's time for Crafting Imbuements. Youko wants to reduce its weight by 25%, which requires a roll against Lighten Gear at -6 (-4 for the effect, -2 for using a total of three Crafting Imbuement skills) and adds +7.25 CF. She also wants to increase the accuracy by 2, which requires a roll against Precise Gear at -4 (-2 for the effect, -2 for three skills) and adds +7 CF. Finally, she adds Night Vision 9 using Infuse Gear at -6 (-4 for adding 9 character points, -2 for three skills), which adds +4.5 CF for FP and time calculations *only*; when determining resale value, it instead adds 90% of TL4's Average starting wealth, or a flat \$1,800.


The effective CF for FP and time calculations is +18.75, requiring an expenditure of 14 FP and 7 hours of labor. The use of Infuse Gear adds another 1,800 hours, for a total of 1,807. It weighs 3 lbs. If it matters, the resale value of the spyglass would be  $\$100 \times (1 + 7.25 + 7)$ , or \$1,525, plus \$1,800 for the Night Vision, for a total of \$3,325.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice is a sometimes whittler and wood-carver. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's spinning words and whimsy into gold. Of course, if he's not writing about *GURPS*, he's blogging about it. Visit his site "Ravens N' Pennies" ([www.ravensnpennies.com](http://www.ravensnpennies.com)) for more *GURPS* goodies. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group (the Headhunters); Antoni Ten Monrós; Beth "Archangel" McCoy, the "Sith Editrix"; Douglas Cole; Merlin "GodBeastX" Avery; Emily "Bruno" Smirle; and Blake Chapman, for being most excellent sounding boards.

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# DUNGEON FANTASY GOES TO WAR

BY MATT RIGGSBY

While the great heroes of fantasy usually go into dark tunnels on their own, it's not uncommon for them to lead bands of warriors or even armies once they emerge. Conan, Aragorn, and Elric, just to name a handful of examples, fought wars at the head of large numbers of troops. Even fantasy games acknowledge this in some ways. Rules for more experienced adventurers gathering bodies of competent followers go back to some of the earliest roleplaying games.

Naturally, **GURPS** has a framework for this. Rules for Allies let a character have an underling or two, or even more. Potentially, lot more. In theory, it can be enough to register on the scale of a battlefield.

This article, then, looks at having lots and lots of Allies for **Dungeon Fantasy**, enough to fight anything from a friendly little brawl to a real battle. The groups considered

here (some pure fantasy, some historical – though considerable liberties have been taken) are discussed in terms of types of members outlined in **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies** and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 15: Henchmen**, as well as their value as Allies and, for use on a very large scale, their TS value and associated classes for **GURPS Mass Combat**.

*For dungeon fantasy-worthy armies described with Mass Combat stats, see Pyramid #3/67: Tools of the Trade – Villains, pp. 4-13.*

## THE OFFICER CORPS

Many successful dungeon delvers could plausibly acquire a group of useful followers as power-ups: martial-arts disciples, a crowd of apprentices and familiars, a network of criminal associations, and so on. Groups of fighters are a natural choice for several adventurer types. That's particularly the case for knights and holy warriors. Not only is it thematically consistent for them to run around with other fighters, knights and holy warriors also have Strategy skill on their templates, making skills for actually leading people into battle relatively accessible for them. Wizards have access to Strategy as well. Martial artists at least have Tactics available to them, which will do for small combats.

Beyond that, the GM may allow other types of adventurers to purchase appropriate leadership skills if they're also making a large investment in Allies. Certain variants of the barbarian and swashbuckler templates (see, for example, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Denizens: Barbarians**, p. 7 and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Denizens: Swashbucklers**, p. 6) already have Strategy available, and it's reasonable to imagine a cleric, martial artist, or other adventurer of the right mindset picking it up. For example, Chinese armies

sometimes employed academic, noncombatant strategists to advise battlefield commanders, so there's precedent for scholars to specialize in using armies rather than tomes and potions.

Regardless of who buys huge sets of Allies, it's worth thinking in advance about how they're likely to be used. In the literature, heroes sometimes undertake adventures with bodies of allies. For example, Conan runs into the occasional friendly barbarian horde or pirate crew but mostly works solo, and Aragorn clearly has the Rangers as allies but only calls on them from time to time. Indeed, if adventurers do have friendly armies on hand at all times, having a military body in tow becomes the focus of the campaign rather than the subject of the odd crusade or climactic battle. The GM should strongly consider allowing low frequencies of appearance for large groups of Allies, as opposed to assuming by default that they'll always be available, and players should be aware that they should use their Allies sparingly. Most soldiers are simply mooks you're responsible for, and sending an army of regular troops against a huge demon or dragon is a good way to lose your allies.

# THE TROOPS

Here are a variety of bodies of troops presented as elements for *Mass Combat*, as lists of characters fitting specific templates from *Allies* and *Henchmen*, and as Ally groups. (Some henchmen have limits or slightly variant builds, particularly if their role requires them to use expensive equipment.) Costs as Allies are *base costs* (that assume 250-point PCs), including group modifier but not yet modified for frequency of appearance.

Sets of allies are arranged thematically by historical style so adventurers can pick followers with the right look and feel for the campaign, but an adventurer with a lot of allies can mix and match as needed. Someone with the trappings of an Indian raja, for example, might have a company (p. 13) representing an assortment of troops common across societies, plus an arvat (p. 13) or two and a war elephant (below).

## Shield Bearer

It was common in historical warfare for warriors to have someone following behind to hand them a new shield or weapon in case the one they were using broke. *Henchmen* very nearly gets there with the torchbearer template (*Henchmen*, p. 25), and only a little modification is necessary for a plausible battlefield alternative. A shield bearer uses the torchbearer template except he has no access to any torch or fire-related perks and advantages, he does have access to Sacrificial Block, Sacrificial Parry, and Shield-Wall Training perks (*Henchmen*, p. 21), and he may select any Shield skill as a primary skill rather than just buckler as well as Fast-Draw skill for any weapon instead of a torch.

## CLASSICAL WARRIORS

These allies have the trappings of the Bronze Age (so they're good for heroes hailing from the fictional equivalents of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and early Persia, India, and China) and the Classical Mediterranean.

*Emanti*: This is a group of 10 lightly armed warriors in Bronze Age style. They include two skirmishers (*Henchmen*, p. 16), seven guards (*Henchmen*, p. 21), and a shield bearer (see above). They fight primarily with spears and swords, carry small to medium shields, and wear armor no heavier than leather. Some may sport slings or short bows, but in mass combat, they only function as an element of medium infantry. An emanti is worth 11 points as a set of Allies.

*Kisru*: A moderately sized army of Bronze Age spearmen, a set of 30 emanti, for a total of 300 troops. It provides six elements of good-quality medium infantry (TS 27), 18 elements of average-quality medium infantry (TS 54), and one element of bowmen (TS 2, class F). A kisru is worth 50 points as an Ally group.

*Chariot Detachment*: This group, a small contingent of vehicles which might accompany a small garrison or patrol of infantry, consists of three archers (*Henchmen*, p. 8) who fire arrows from a position at the back of chariots, three

guards who serve as drivers, and three laborers (*Henchmen*, p. 22). The archers may only spend 15 points on advantages (the remainder goes to pay for the chariot and horses), while the drivers have Driving (Chariot) as a background skill. They operate as a light chariot element in mass combat. A chariot detachment is worth 12 points as a set of Allies.

*Chariot Kisru*: This is a sizable battlefield force of chairantry, consisting of 120 vehicles, or 40 detachments. They operate as 40 light chariot elements (TS 80, class Cv, F). A chariot kisru costs 56 points as an Ally group.

*Hoplite File*: A hoplite file represents a single line of spearmen with heavy bronze armor and long spears: two squires (*Henchmen*, p. 17) with Shortsword, Spear, and Shield skills, six guards with similar skills, and two laborers. All have three fewer points to spend on advantages (those are spent on equipment) and all must buy the Shield-Wall Training perk. A hoplite file acts as an element of pikemen and is worth 12 points as a set of Allies.

*Phalanx*: This formidable pincushion of spears is made up of 60 hoplite files. They constitute 12 elements of good-quality pikemen (TS 72, class (Cv)) and 48 average-quality ones (TS 72, class (Cv)). It is worth 58 points as an Ally group.

*Contubernarium*: The contubernarium is the Roman equivalent of a squad. Its composition is identical to that of a hoplite file (see above), and they have the same reduction to advantage points, but they're equipped with iron armor and javelins rather than bronze armor and long spears. The contubernarium acts as an element of heavy infantry and is worth 12 points as a set of Allies.

*Cohort*: This is a combination of 60 contubernaria. They make 12 elements of good-quality heavy infantry (TS 72) and 48 average-quality ones (TS 192). It is worth 58 points as an Ally group.

*Legion*: A full-sized army of 10 cohorts (about 5,000 warriors and a large crew of supporters), with 120 elements of good-quality heavy infantry (TS 720) and 480 elements of average-quality heavy infantry (TS 1920). It is worth 82 points as an Ally group.

*War Elephant*: A single elephant or similar beast (giant war-rhino, immense fighting turtle, etc.) and its crew. These include a mahout (treat as a guard, but with Riding (Elephant) as a background skill), three bowmen (guards with Bow skill), and two laborers with Animal Handling (Elephant). All have five fewer points to spend on advantages; those pay for the elephant and related gear. This acts as one war beast element and is worth 6 points as a set of Allies.

## KNIGHTS IN SHINING ARMOR

These allies are suitable for someone who wants followers with a medieval European look. Dressed appropriately, they could be used for armies reminiscent of Asian empires as well, since all troop types are fairly common across cultures.



**Lance:** The medieval equivalent of a modern squad was the lance, a semi-standard group of fighters who would accompany a knight into battle. A lance consists of one mounted man-at-arms (treat as a squire), two less-armored mounted serjeants (treat as brutes, *Henchmen*, p. 9), two bowmen (guards with Bow skill), three pikemen (guards with Polearm skill), and two shield bearers. The squire and brutes have five fewer points to spend on advantages; those are spent on equipment. Despite its disparate capabilities, the lance counts as an element of heavy cavalry in mass combat. A lance is worth 13 points as a set of Allies.

**Company:** This is something closer to an actual army, consisting of 50 lances, or about 400 soldiers plus a number of noncombatant supporters. This is enough people to arrange into units of different types, offering a range of capabilities. The company can be divided into 10 elements of bowmen (TS 20, class F), five elements of good-quality heavy cavalry (TS 37, class Cv), 10 elements of good-quality medium cavalry (TS 60, class Cv, F), and 15 elements of pikemen (TS 60, class Cv). A company costs 82 points as an Ally group.

## BARBARIAN HORDES

These bodies of troops are certainly suitable for barbarians as well as other outdoorsy types like scouts and druids.

**Arvat:** This is a small body of fast but lightly armored horsemen from the wild steppe. It consists of two archers and eight guards, all with Bow and Riding (Horse) skills; the guards have Riding instead of one of their other background skills. Each member also has two fewer points to spend on advantages; those go toward equipment and a horse. An arvat is worth 12 points as a set of Allies.

**Minghan:** It's not quite a barbarian horde, but a minghan consist of 100 arvats, or 1,000 members in total. It counts as 20 elements of good-quality horse archers (TS 60, class Cv, F, Rec) and 80 elements of average-quality horse archers (TS 160, class Cv, F, Rec). A minghan is worth 46 points as an Ally group.

**War Party:** A small group of barbarian warriors, wearing little if any armor and carrying shields and spears; all have Stealth as well. It includes three skirmishers, six guards, and a shield bearer. It acts as an element of light infantry and is worth 13 points as a batch of Allies.

**Impi:** A disciplined low-tech army, an impi is composed of the equivalent of 40 war parties. It constitutes 12 elements of good-quality light infantry (TS 36, class Rec) and 24 elements of average-quality light infantry (TS 48, class Rec). It is worth 54 points as an Ally group.

## EXOTICS

These allies are more fantasy-themed than pseudo-historical. They are most suitable as allies for magic users such as clerics, druids, summoners, shamans, and wizards, but should not be limited to them. Holy warriors are just as likely as clerics to be backed up by angelic hosts, and bards are known for their ability to call up impromptu batches of allies (such as the Pied Piper of Hamelin or several Disney princesses).

**Angelic Host:** Some clerics (along with some druids, wizards, summoners, and so on) get a lot of support in the form

of angelic hosts. These are batches of minor divine servants; use the divine servitor template from *Allies* (p. 12), but with the angelic host lens (below). Exactly what angelic hosts do in **Mass Combat** depends on what divine-servitor element lenses they use. For any given **Mass Combat** element of hosts, combine the effects of their divine servitor elements indicated here:

**Armor:** Earth

**TS 2:** Air, Chaos, Disease, Evil, Good, Nature, War

**TS 2, class F:** Fire, Water

**Neutralize Recon:** Beauty, Darkness, Deception, Fear, Peace

**Recon:** Order, Wisdom

**T1:** Travel

**Nav:** Water

For example, an angelic host of avenging spirits with Good and War elements would have TS 4, while a host of demonic oxen with Evil and Travel would have TS 2, class T1. The Life element provides no battlefield abilities, but each element offers benefits indicated under *Super-Healing and Force Replacement*, **Mass Combat**, p. 14. Do not use the Death lens for angelic hosts; see zombie horde (below) to gain zombie followers.

A host of 10 spirits makes a single **Mass Combat** element and costs 12 points as an Ally group, a host of 100 makes 10 elements and costs 24 points, and a host of 1,000 spirits makes 100 elements and costs 36 points.

### Angelic Host Lens

This lens, at -125 points, brings the divine servitor template down to a cost low enough to buy in bulk. Members of an angelic host are swarms of very minor divine servitors, capable of taking corporeal form and fighting, but they're still the divine equivalent of cannon fodder. -1 ST [-10], -1 DX [-20], -1 IQ [-20], -1 HT [-10]. Remove one element slot [-50], Blessed [-10], and Hidden Lore [-2]. Adjust skills to Theology-9 [1]. Remember to reduce skills in element lenses appropriately.

**Plague of Locusts:** A sky-darkening cloud of stinging insects. Treat as the insect swarm on *Allies*, p. 9, but much, much larger. A 10-hex swarm costs 18 point as an Ally, while a 100-hex swarm costs 36 points, and a 1,000-hex swarm costs 54 points. They count as one, 10, and 100 elements of flying beasts respectively, but they lack the T1 class.

**Wolf Pack:** A pack consists of nine wolves (use the hound template from *Allies*, p. 8) led by one alpha wolf (the hound template plus the timber wolf lens from *Allies*, p. 9). They act as one beast element and cost 15 points as a set of Allies.

**Zombie Horde:** The dead have risen from their graves, and they're following your orders. Treat as horde zombies (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 24), but without the Infectious Attack or Uncontrollable Appetite. Since they don't need to breathe, they can act as amphibious warriors, but they're inferior quality. A group of 10 counts as a single element and costs 6 points as an Ally group. A group of 100 (TS 100, class Nav) costs 12 points, and a group of 1,000 (TS 1,000, class Nav) costs 18 points.

## MONSTER ELEMENTS

All those armies have to fight somebody. Most races in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level* can make up regular elements of just about any non-fantasy type for heroes and their friends to fight. A group of orcs, for example, may be pikemen, light infantry, artillery, or anything else depending just on their training and equipment, though there's a tendency for dwarves to be engineers and elves to be bowmen. Winged elves, gargoyles, and some celestials and infernals can make up flying infantry; pixies might be flying infantry as well (and probably no other type of element), though an element of pixie warriors may include 20 or 30 individuals. Ogres (*The Next Level*, p. 14) do qualify for ogre elements, while wildmen are essentially limited to making up Stone Age warrior elements.


Few of the monsters of the *Dungeon Fantasy Monsters* series are likely to work together in sufficient numbers to register on the scale of mass combat, but dinomen may be light infantry and gladiator apes as something between heavy infantry and beasts. Siege beasts are big enough to act as ogres. And here's a monster suitable for service in an element of giants.

### Hill Giant

There are many different kinds of giants. Hill giants are among the most common, but they're on the small side as such things go, with an average height around 22 feet. They wear ragged garments made from entire animal hides stitched

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### More Swarms

At the level of resolution of *Mass Combat* and even, to some extent, *Allies*, the insect swarm can stand in for a great many other swarms. A huge flock of ravens or bats, for example, would have essentially the same traits. A one-hex flock would simply be composed of a dozen or so animals rather than hundreds or thousands of tiny insects. A plague of rats would have the same stats except for a lack of the Flight advantage, which may be replaced by Tunneling with a Move of 2 for the same cost, while a plague of spiders might have Binding 12 (Engulfing +60%) for 39 points instead of 40.

together and wield clubs made from fallen trees. In their natural habitat, they're a bit solitary, living alone or in small family groups. However, they can be convinced to band together if it gets them loot. Evil magicians are, for some reason, really good at getting giants to work for them.

Hill giants like fresh meat and aren't picky about its source. They hunt other sentient beings and either kill and eat them on the spot or take them back to a cave lair for later cooking. Hill giants are rarely willing to negotiate, but captive adventurers have been known to trick them into making mistakes.

<b>ST:</b> 45	<b>HP:</b> 45	<b>Speed:</b> 6.25
<b>DX:</b> 12	<b>Will:</b> 11	<b>Move:</b> 8
<b>IQ:</b> 9	<b>Per:</b> 10	
<b>HT:</b> 13	<b>FP:</b> 13	<b>SM:</b> +3
<b>Dodge:</b> 9	<b>Parry:</b> 10	<b>DR:</b> 3

**Club (15):** 7d+5 crushing or 5d+4 crushing. Reach 1-3.

**Kick (13):** 5d+5 crushing. Reach C-3.

**Punch (15):** 5d+4 crushing. Reach C-2.

**Thrown Boulder (15):** 5d+5 crushing. Range 27 yards.

**Traits:** Appearance (Ugly); Bad Temper (12); High Pain Threshold.

**Skills:** Broadsword-15; Brawling-15, Throwing-15.

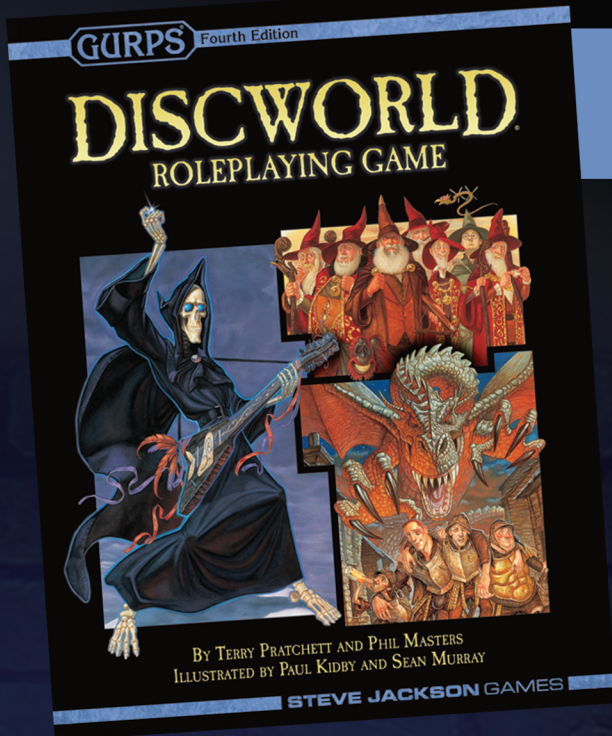
**Class:** Mundane.

**Notes:** This is a typical hill giant, though there's some variation in ST between individuals, some have Berserk rather than Bad Temper, and a handful have managed to get their hands on appropriate-sized axes, spears, and even metal armor. Range and damage are for the thrown boulder are for a 405-lb. rock. Smaller rocks (75-100 lbs.) only do 5d-5 crushing, but can be flung twice as far (54 yards) before they don't do enough damage to be worth throwing.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby has been playing roleplaying games since the only game in town came in three poorly typeset tan booklets in a white box, using cheap dice which slowly converted themselves from icosahedrons to spheres. Having been educated in the lore of lost civilizations, he still kills things and takes their stuff while working a day job for loremasters of healing. The marching order for the rest of his party includes a sorceress, an eighth-level rogue, and a pack of dogs.





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# EIDETIC MEMORY

## THE HARVEST – INVASION EARTH

BY DAVID L. PULVER

*"... We do not have full understanding of the nature of the enemy or its objectives, but the exotic combat robots you engaged and learned to defeat during the so-called Blue Sky portion of your training regime are based on extrapolations of enemy capabilities. We had hoped to have another five years to develop Vector Valentine to its full potential, but no plan survives contact with the enemy.*

*"The so-called meteor swarm that resulted in loss of the International Space Station and more than two dozen satellites was in fact enemy action. The enemy has begun to move against us. Ladies and gentlemen, Earth is being invaded. The Harvest has begun.*

*"It is up to us to stop it."*

This article presents the outline of a present-day setting in which Men In Black confront the consequences of their own arrogance: an invasion by the aliens they had previously worked with. You can use the setting as is, or just extract some of the background or technology for use in an existing **GURPS Black Ops**, **GURPS Monster Hunters**, **GURPS Space**, or **GURPS Supers** game.

### PROLOGUE

"We'd had unconfirmed reports dating back to the 1940s – though as you all know, Roswell was just a nuclear surveillance balloon. But it wasn't until 1981 that special communication assets assigned to the Stargate Blue team attempting to detect possible Soviet long-range remote viewing instead discovered we were being surveilled by an extraterrestrial agency and they had inadvertently entered into communication with it.

"These extraterrestrials had been performing low-observability operations in and around Earth for several years, monitoring our space program, among other activities. Thanks to Stargate Blue, we had definite proof of their existence . . . but they knew we knew.

"The result was intense negotiations at the highest levels, culminating in the Grey Protocol, a covert diplomatic agreement to exchange information, technology, and resources. It was aimed at minimizing negative consequences of contact while maximizing strategic gain, and was highly one-sided

in terms of benefits. We had little choice. The demonstration that the Greys and their allies possessed nuclear-damper technology capable of neutralizing our strategic arsenals left us virtually defenseless. Later attempts in the 1980s to develop conventional defense and orbital systems came to nothing, and we were forced negotiate away our space-defense programs and largely abandon interplanetary manned space flight.

"Covert exchanges with the aliens – they called themselves something that translated to the Communion – intensified during the 1990s but due to our position of technical and intelligence disadvantage, the balance of trade was not in our favor. For three decades we maintained a posture of overt cooperation, even subservience, to the Communion, effectively granting them free reign to engage in various operations within our airspace, while covering up their activities.

"However, in the last decade it became increasingly apparent that the extraterrestrials were not a monolithic entity, and despite our cooperation, factions within them posed an existential threat to humanity as a whole . . . a final program whose name we were only recently able to translate: The Harvest."

### The Origin of the Conflict

"Uh, anyone not cleared for Ostrich code-word material, please leave the room. Do you have the projector?"

"Ultimately, this conflict is about control of resources that are vital for interstellar commerce and travel."

*Image: A strange negative space, weirdly distorted.*

"This is Gilman-Mason hyperspace, the deep levels that exist around a planetary system, accessible by the weird substrate of hyperdrive known as the exophase system. It's the same dimension that, uh, ghosts might occupy. The outer levels, far from a planet, are used by the XT ships for superluminal travel."

*Image: A thing like a serpentine coil of iridescent rope undulating through a negative space. The view widens to show several Dradens, strands coiling in and around each other in an intricate dance, circling a branching cluster of drifting, glowing polyhedral crystals that flicker in a complex pattern. Some stretch out into long rods before darting away.*

"These are Dradens. Schools of Dradens are natives of Gilman-Mason hyperspace. Here they are feeding off bleed crystals, a crystallized tear in space/time. It was while prospecting for bleed crystals that the Dradens were discovered. But something else has noticed these Dradens."

*Image: An indescribable thing composed of multiple pulsing iridescent bubbles takes form, materializing next to the Dradens.*

"This is what our friends call a Mophod, another denizen of the hyperspatial deeps. A predator. Until now, it was cloaked. Probably lying in wait by the crystal."

*Images: Tentacles extend out from it with lightning speed, snatching up Dradens, pulling them inside the bubbles. The Dradens thrash, vibrate, then dissolve. The Dradens try to flee, but four other Mophod materialize, surrounding them.*

"But the Dradens soon evolved defenses of their own."

*Images: As the Mophods grab Dradens, two surviving Dradens join together to form a hoop or Mobius strip. It starts spinning. To escape the Mophod trap, other Dradens start flowing through the hoop, and as they do so, vanish. The last of the Dradens departs and then the hoop itself disappears. The Mophods cruise the area, but find no more Dradens to devour.*

"Dradens are capable of rapid movement through hyperspace and realspace. In fact, these Dradens just appeared, briefly, in our dimension, before reappearing in hyperspace at a different point. It is this capability that has made them so important to the Communion."

*Images: A saucer-shaped craft moves through hyperspace, its underside flickering chameleon-like, pulsing in the same frequencies as the bleed crystals the Dradens were earlier attracted to. Suddenly, a school of Dradens materializes next to it, obviously curious. A dark portal beneath it opens, and the Dradens vanish inside.*

"This is a Mantis prospecting ship."

*Image: The projector shows what seems to be an alien engine room. A spinning, vaguely turbine-like device is in the center of a cluster of strange, pseudo-organic machinery. The central device is surrounded by iridescent coils of shimmering energy.*

"The drive coils of a Communion stargate. These are literally coils, braided from a dozen trapped and living Dradens. Given the proper stimulus, the Dradens will teleport the engine, and the engine – I suppose you might think of it as a sort of harness – pulls the starship along with them, with greater efficiency and speed than any conventional gravimechanical stardrive. But the Dradens need a way to know where to go."

*Image: A humanoid figure wearing a complex helmet, the body pierced with multiple electrodes, floats in a tank. Around the larger figure are smaller gray-skinned, big-eyed aliens, operating controls in the drive room.*

"A telepathic navigator, surrounded by lower-caste drive techs – indentured laborers sold to the Mantis. One of them is an agent, the source of the data feed. That poor telepath's only job is to mentally link with the Dradens – and transmit coordination and stimulus images. Usually they just send the

Dradens a terrifying image of a hyperspace predator such as a Mophod coupled with imagery of a safe place to flee to . . ."

*Image: A saucer-shaped ship blinks out of space. In the interior, several smaller gray-skinned, big-eyed aliens are unhooking the telepath from the pool and removing the helmet. The telepath is dazed, bleeding from her eyes and nose, and slumps to the floor of the ship's chamber. In the shadows, a 7'-tall figure with a bizarre insect-like head resembling a giant grasshopper or mantis directs them with angry gestures.*

"What little minds the Dradens possess are shockingly inhuman. The stress of guiding a bound Draden school through hyperspace burns out telepaths. The Communion once used their own people, but they started to run out . . ."

*Image: Zoom in on the telepath. She is obviously human.*

"Then they discovered they could get resources from other worlds . . ."

## THE COMMUNION

The Communion was a loose alliance of three powerful but mutually suspicious alien races: the scientifically inclined Greys, the ravenous Mantis hives, and the expansionist Snakes. All possessed advanced superscience, especially in the areas of hyperspatial and psi-tech. In particular, the Communion's second-generation symbiotic hyperdrive technology, based around Draden-telepath symbiosis, gave it faster ships than any rival interstellar polity. Unfortunately, the Draden drive burned out the brains of its psionic navigators, and after attempts to engineer synthetic telepath brains failed, the Communion turned to exploiting those subject species who possessed appropriate psi talents. Races with these talents, or even latent abilities, were abducted and enslaved as navigational components aboard Communion starships. Psi-slavery became one pillar of the Communion's economy.

Psi-talents proved to develop poorly in captivity, so the Communion relied on harvesting "wild" stock. Each of the Communion races developed its own battery of tests and scanners intended to identify races or individuals with useful talent. Due to the complex nature of telepathic hereditary, this was a labor-intensive process. In many species, fewer than one in a million individuals had suitable latent abilities that could be trained up to the point necessary to become a telepathic navigator. The Communion's exploration ships were always hoping to locate new races with higher potentials . . .

Grey scout ships were the first to discover Earth. Experiments on abducted humans revealed a very high latent psi potential, with superior aptitude for developing telepathic power when given proper stimulus. Over several decades, the Greys covertly acquired human specimens and performed human, animal, and plant fertility experiments. They also worked behind the scenes to boost terrestrial population size and agricultural capacity, since the bigger the Earth population, the greater the psi talent pool available.

The other dominant races of the Communion – the Snakes and the Mantis – accepted Grey hegemony over Earth (and several other similar worlds that the Grey scouts found). The Snakes were busy expanding their empire elsewhere, and in exchange for regular shipments of human latent or active telepaths, they agreed to support Grey stewardship.

The Mantis also accepted it, but under protest; they were simply outvoted by their two rival powers, and reluctantly chose to bide their time instead. But Mantis observers and scientists increased their covert terrestrial presence, and in violation of treaty agreements with the Greys, often abducted humans for their own invasive experiments (which usually left the survivors terrified or broken in mind).

With Earth's growing population increasing the number of potential latent psis, it was not surprising that more psionic breakthrough incidents occurred. Human government agencies began to take note of these special talents. A great deal of effort was expended to keep the effectiveness of telepaths secret from the general population, the better to avoid panic and use them in covert operations. Although many of the higher-level psi talents were in fact "poached" by alien slavers, during the Cold War several Earth nations and non-state actors established nascent covert psi programs, some of them even incorporating crude psychotronic technology. As a result, it was inevitable that their burgeoning powers would detect Communion surveillance, which happened in 1983.

With their cover blown, the Greys changed tactics and began making deals, often using shadowy human pawns ("Men in Black") and implant-controlled meat-puppets as go-betweens. The human agencies that interacted with them were offered limited access to alien technology in exchange for looking the other way, or even actively cooperating, as the Greys experimented on and abducted psi-latent humans. The success of these measures gave the Greys further economic and political clout within the Communion, but also attracted jealousy, especially from the Mantis, who coveted their access to "human resources."

## THE MANTIS

*"So, giant man-eating slaver bugs with a bad attitude are coming?"*

*"Basically, yeah. We need to saddle up and shoot them."*

The Mantis were another faction of the Communion. Their actual name is unpronounceable to humans but Kepigharaphutwip is a rough approximation. Humans sometime call them the Twip, but "Mantis" or "Bugs" are more common.

Vaguely resembling humanoid insects (witnesses refer to them as giant grasshoppers, mantises, or fly-men), they are a predator culture with an insatiable desire to expand lest they begin fighting among themselves. Their civilization is less advanced than the Greys (TL10 vs. the TL11 Greys) but their numbers are greater.

Although natural telepaths, only their ruling caste can actually project thoughts, and these greatly preferred to have other races burn out their brains dealing with the Draden. The Mantis are among the most enthusiastic mind-slavers in the Communion, but lack the patient approach to husbandry demonstrated by the Greys. When the Mantis discovers races with psi potential, they prefer to conquer them. Valuable latent psis are then identified by processing the entire population via highly invasive quick-and-dirty psi-scan "agony booths" that subject the specimen to several minutes of excruciating mental bombardment. Psis erect natural shields; non-psis go insane or brain-dead. The Mantis are happy to destroy 10,000 or even 100,000 minds in order to detect and enslave a single valuable

talent who could be hooked up to Draden as a navigator. Their brutal methods have left entirely populations lobotomized, but this does not bother the Mantis. A depopulated world was a world ready to colonize . . . and lobotomized "zeros" provided plenty of food stock for the new Mantis colonists.

## The Doom That Came to Terra

The triumvirate of the Greys, Snakes, and the Mantis was for many years dominated by an internal alliance of the former two species, as the Greys provided significant scientific knowledge, while the Snakes were engaged in extensive trade, conquest, and colonization of primitive worlds on the outer periphery. However, many parsecs from Earth, the Snakes encountered a new race of starfaring machines, the Externals, who were a lot tougher than the low-tech species they'd previously exploited. War broke and the Snakes found themselves hard-pressed. Their Grey allies, with little inclination for interstellar war, offered to sell the Snakes additional weapons, while jacking up the price of navigational slaves. What they didn't provide was what the Snakes really wanted: more fighting ships and troops.

The aggressive Mantis saw its chance at changing the balance of power. The Mantis proffered their battle swarms in exchange for the Snakes changing their votes in the Communion, a deal that proved irresistible to the hard-pressed reptoids. The Snakes then supported a surprise Mantis vote to strip the Greys of their position as stewards of several psi-rich worlds, including Earth. These were reassigned to the Mantis – who intended to harvest them in their own fashion, splitting the bounty equitably with the Snakes.

Faced with a fait accompli, the Greys were forced into a precipitous withdrawal from Earth. The Mantis mustered their forces. Conquest would be followed by a swift winnowing of Earth's billions to a few hundred thousand; these psi-latents would end up in alien bondage as navigators aboard Communion starships – while their brains lasted.

## Adversaries

Unlike the Greys, the Mantis are physically aggressive and maintain sizable military forces, both for conquest and use in internal feuds. However, many of these are currently busy assisting their Snake allies against the threat of the Externals (a hostile but highly advanced machine intelligence created by a now-vanished gas-giant species).

As a result, the Mantis forces deployed to invade Earth and the other worlds it took over from the Greys, while powerful by human standards, are not first-line combat troops. Rather, they are colonial soldiers protecting what amount to commercial interests, and suitable for dealing with "natives." The Mantis were under the impression that humans had been effectively domesticated by the Greys. The fact that human agencies had instead been working as de-facto partners, and that the Greys had poisoned the well by secretly shipping them the latest in Communion weapons technology, may come as a painful surprise to them.

The Mantis have allocated the reduction of Earth to the Red Orchid Hive (a translation, but one of 27 Mantis hives, equivalent to megacorps). They have deployed a Harvest Fleet under the command of the Red Orchid Queen, a powerful mantis overlord.



## Meat Puppets

After humans have been scanned, most of those who are not a psi-high will have been effectively lobotomized even though their bodies are intact. Some (such as the elderly, sick, injured, fat, or children) are sent to the food pens, or eaten as snacks immediately. Others are packaged as exotic food delicacies to be shipped off to distant hives. Those who still have some brains left are fitted with crude psi-receivers that can pick up signals from the Mantis' mass mind and sent into action as zombie troops. While some may be used as infantry, a more useful tactic is to have them to crew human vehicles such as tanks or fighter jets, or even warships. Many human fighting vehicles were captured intact due to Mantis use of psi-bombs and mind blasts. The aliens are quite willing to turn human hardware against their original owners, often using a few platoons or companies of meat-puppet armored vehicles as an outer defense. The Mantis may also use meat puppets as covert infiltrators; although not initially impressed enough by humans to try anything too sneaky, they are quite capable of doing so if taught to respect human capabilities.

## GREYS

The Greys have had lengthy covert dealings with the U.S. government under the code name Lavender Starfish, as well as with other nations. Their own name for themselves translates as "humans" and Grey speech is telepathic, so there is no native pronunciation. They have a TL11 civilization, but breed slowly and, while widespread, have a relatively small population.

## Human Relations

The Grey leadership was affronted that their century-long plans for orderly long-term exploitation of Earth were being disrupted for a quick fix. They were even less happy to find that Mantis and Snake "supervisors" were arriving to ensure the Greys did not take matters into their own hands and begin a premature Harvest of their own during the seven-year transition period they had been granted to remove their Earthside operations.

Although they could not openly oppose the takeover, lest that trigger actual war with the more militant Mantis, factions within the Greys had seen which way the wind was blowing and decided to sabotage the expected Mantis takeover. They achieved this by leaking information and technology to human "Men In Black" agents in organizations such as the U.S. Air Force advanced research laboratories and the CIA. These people were gradually led to understand the importance of the psi-latents, the Mantis-Grey rivalry, and the existence of the Harvest. They arranged for sanitized examples of key elements of Communion ultra-technology to fall into their

## Mantis Warrior

85 points

These frightening aliens vaguely resemble 8'-tall praying mantises, although aside from bulging bug eyes, a wedge-shaped head, and big mandibles, the resemblance is only superficial; they are certainly not insects in any terrestrial sense, although they do have a hive-like social system. Unfortunately, they like the same sort of planets that humans enjoy, and have a similar sense of entitlement.

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST +3 [30]; IQ -1 [-20]; HT +2 [20].

**Advantages:** Damage Resistance 3 [15]; High TL 2 [10]; Racial Memory (Passive) [15]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Silence 2 [10]; Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%) [39].

**Disadvantages:** Hard of Hearing [-10]; Sadism (12) [-15]; Sense of Duty (Colony) [-10]; Short Lifespan 1 [-10]; Unattractive [-4].

## Grey Explorer

209 points

These 3'- to 4'-tall, slender, big-headed, large-eyed, hairless, gray-skinned aliens were the stewards of Earth prior to the Mantis takeover. They are masters of implant technology and cunning scientists. Their positive emotions are patience and curiosity (the "pulling the wings off a fly to see what happens" type). Although utterly ruthless, they prefer to methodically study and exploit human beings, and detest the Mantis' wasteful strip-mining approach to the sapient raw material. This makes them the best allies that Earth's natives have at this moment.

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

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

**Advantages:** Acute Vision 2 [4]; Affliction 1 (Based on Will, +20%; Extended Duration, 100x, +80%; Malediction 1, +100%; Telepathic, -10%; Unconsciousness, +200%) [49]; Detect (Psionics; ESP, -10%) [9]; DR 2 (Flexible, -20%) [8]; Extended Lifespan 4 [8]; High TL 3 [15]; Mind Reading (Telecommunication, -20%; Telepathic, -10%; Universal, +50%) [36]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Photographic Memory [10]; Telepathy Talent 2 [10]; Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Telepathic, -10%; Universal, +50%) [57].

**Disadvantages:** Callous [-5]; Cowardice (12) [-10]; Curious (12) [-5]; No Sense of Humor [-10].

hands through deniable means such as "starship crashes" into oceans and dreams of "new breakthroughs" fed to abducted and implanted researchers. In a subtle move, the Greys actually ensured that some of the designs being transferred were technology of Snake-specific manufacture, in the hopes that if the Mantis discovered this, they would suspect their new allies of a possible double cross . . .

Greys prefer to avoid combat. As the Mantis prepared their assault, most have left Earth to get out of the crossfire, but two covert bases with eight cloaked starships remain behind as observers. They may act in emergencies to subtly assist humans in the fight, and have secret contacts in human intelligence agencies and technology corporations.

Human agencies who worked with the Greys had, of course, long suspected there was something rotten in space, and knew more than the Greys suspected they did.

# HARDWARE

"Our friends are not, themselves, soldiers. The Greys are psychologically adverse to physical confrontation, which is why they previously relied on using the Snakes as mercenaries. But now that we have a shared enemy, they have been willing to quietly smuggle in the tools we need, as long as we're doing the dying. Fortunately, they are ever bit as cunning and inventive as they are ruthless and pusillanimous, and now that we have been promoted from lab specimens to pawns, we get to play with their toys.

"As the Greys moved out, the Mantis moved in – and they were watching. If they suspected the Greys were planning on double crossing them, they would have moved forward their invasion plans. So the Greys focused on smuggling vital parts or knowledge. Abductees were implanted with specific compulsions – I remember this one farmer from upstate New York, the poor guy who couldn't stop drawing plans in chalk – or in blood – on the floor of his padded cell until he got it out of his head. The circuit diagrams for a megawatt-level plasma beam weapon . . .

"To fool Mantis and Snake surveillance, we had to hide some of the weapons in plain sight, or at least inside existing weapons programs. Our space program was closely monitored, obviously. So all our weapons had to look like the stuff we used on each other. We couldn't start building grav tanks or battle striders, but the Army was set to receive an "upgraded" version of the standard M1 Abrams tank. No flying saucers – but the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter got a few upgrades. We didn't set up any starports, even retired the space shuttle – but while we were at it, we made some very special, very expensive refits of the Sea Wolf and Virginia submarines, and tested them deep underwater . . ."

**GURPS Spaceships** statistics of hardware are provided below. All prices are **Spaceships** costs; the U.S. government often paid an order of magnitude more. These are only some examples of Vector Valentine program in the United States. Other nations who were dealing with the Greys may have their own examples of "special" hardware.

## M1A5 SUPER ABRAMS (TL8/9^)

In contrast to the *Super Virginia* (p. 21), this design is far more conservative. By the time of the Harvest, several companies of tanks were operational. The innovations involved adding psi-shielding, upgrading the DU armor inserts with nanotube-reinforced titanium, and replacing the 120mm smoothbore tank gun with a 12cm railgun. The latter drew on human

technology but incorporated energy systems based on Grey designs, and would prove a nasty surprise to the aliens, who had never developed electromagnetic kinetic energy weapons. Grey intel also indicated that Mantis infantry were likely proofed against human small arms, so the tank's 7.62mm machine guns were replaced with alien 100-KJ very rapid-pulse plasma guns, while the .50 machine gun was replaced with a remote mount for a 25mm chain gun.

The tank retains its four crew: driver, loader, gunner, and commander. In practice, advanced control consoles allow all crew members to exchange duties and control of the vehicle's weapons or sensors as needed.

### Front Hull System

[1-4]	Metallic Laminate Armor (total dDR 40).
[5-6]	Advanced Metallic Laminate Armor (total dDR 28).
[core]	Control Room (two control stations, C3 computer, comm/sensor 3).

### Central Hull System

[1-4]	Metallic Laminate Armor (total dDR 40).
[5]	Major Battery (12cm electromagnetic gun with 100 shots).
[6!!]	Tracks.
[core]	Control Rooms (two control stations).

### Rear Hull System

[1-4]	Metallic Laminate Armor (total dDR 40).
[5]	Gas Turbine Engine (two Power Points, four hours fuel).
[6]	Medium Battery (2.5mm very rapid fire conventional gun with 1,400 shots; two 100 KJ very rapid fire lasers [!], all in turrets).

Built with psi shielding (**GURPS Spaceships 7: Divergent and Paranormal Tech**, p. 21).

*For many of the special systems in this section, see **GURPS Spaceships 7: Divergent and Paranormal Tech**.*

TL	Vehicle	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost	Locations
8/9^	M1A5 Super Abrams	30	-3/6	13	2/20	100	0.4	+5*	4	180/30*	160	\$3.31M	2CT3t

\* DR: Front 180, Right/Left 30, Back 22, Top 20, Underside 14. Underside armor also protects the tracks. Armor was designed with the *Armor by Facing* and *Armor and Volume* rules (see *Pyramid* #3/34: **Alternate GURPS**). The vehicle is built as a SM +6 design, but this is reduced to an effective SM +5 for targeting purposes due it having 14 armor systems.

## SUPER VIRGINIA SSN (TL8/11^)

In order to quickly build covert space warships, Vector Valentine used an existing source of pressurized nuclear-powered vessels and crews: the U.S. Navy's submarine fleet. Under the guise of refitting them for special underwater operations, six *Sea Wolf*, *Ohio*, and *Virginia*-class nuclear boats that were undergoing refits were covertly modified with Vector Valentine technology.

The *Super Virginia* class uses a 377' (SM+10) nautical hull. It is crewed by 140 sailors, plus 20 passengers (typically a SEAL team, several telepaths, and some CIA or naval intelligence "Men In Black" with alien-contact experience). A contragravity generator was installed in place of ballast trim tanks, and its torpedo and missile tubes were modified to fire the new King Cobra anti-spaceship missiles (TL10 **GURPS Spaceships** missiles provided by the Greys). The lockout trunk for divers was modified into a space airlock. The powerful active sonar suite in the bow was modified into a phased array laser battery. The side-mounted sonar arrays were removed and replaced with a force screen generator. The power and drive systems were gutted, with reactionless thrusters replacing the pump jet propulsion system and the fission reactor replaced by a psychotronic psi-powered stardrive. A team of latent telepaths – many of them civilians "recruited" through covert Men In Black agencies – were assembled to operate the power source for the psi-drive, which used 10 Draden coils paired with 10 telepathic translators.

### Variant

To approximate the original *Virginia*-class submarine, replace the main battery with a tactical sonar array; replace the fusion reactor and psychotronic power plant with a two-system fission reactor; replace the light force screen with another passive tactical sonar array; replace the contragravity lifters with a submarine ballast tank; replace the standard reactionless thrusters with screw propellers. Remove the

artificial gravity. Mass of the original sub was 7,800 tons submerged; the alien tech added additional mass.

### Front Hull System

[1-2]	Steel Armor (total dDR 14).
[3!]	Major Battery (3 GJ phased array laser turret).*
[4]	Secondary Battery (10 fixed 32cm missile launchers).*
[5]	Medium Battery (three fixed 40cm torpedo tubes).*
[6]	Tactical Comm/Sensor Array (comm/sensor 12).*
[core]	Control Room (C5, comm/sensor 10, 10 control stations).

### Central Hull System

[1-2]	Steel Armor (total dDR 14).
[3]	External Clamp (can haul one M1A5 or F-35D).
[4]	Habitat (40 bunkrooms, two cabins, sickbay, 85 tons steerage cargo).*
[5!]	Light Force Screen (dDR 150, adjustable, velocity).*
[6]	Psychotronic Power Plant (two Power Points, 10 psis).*
[core]	Fission Reactor (one Power Point).*

### Rear Hull System

[1-2]	Steel Armor (total dDR 14).
[3!]	Contragravity Lifter.*
[4]	Stardrive Engine (Psi-Powered, FTL-1).*
[5-6]	TL11 Standard Reactionless Thruster (1G acceleration each).*

\* 10 workspaces per system.

Design features and options are artificial gravity, lacks automation, nautical hull, psi shielding, and underwater stealth hull (gives -4 to be detected by sonar).

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost	Crush Depth
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### SHIPHANDLING/TL8 (SUBMARINE)

8/11^	<i>Super Virginia</i> -class SSN	150	-2/5	11	2G/c	10,000	101.4	+10	164ASV	14*	1x	\$978M	370 yd.
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\* Plus dDR 150 adjustable force screen.

Top air speed is only 700 mph (due to the poorly streamlined nautical hull) but Hnd/SR is 0/5 due to contragravity lifters. Top underwater speed underwater is 70 mph.

The boat's HT has been arbitrarily reduced from HT 14 (thanks to Lack of Automation) to a mere HT 11 due to maintenance difficulties from operating systems that are three TLs more advanced and the hurried conversion from sub to starship.

## F-35D DARK LIGHTNING II (TL8/11^)

"Now you know the real reason the F-35 really went over budget."

The three variants of the F-35 (A for the Air Force, B for the Marines, C for the Navy) are publicly known. The fourth

is the F-35D Dark Lightning, a radical ultra-tech variant of the Marines' F-35B. Augmentations included the removal of some jet fuel tank capacity in favor of a Grey-designed vectored thrust system that replaced the original lift fan (there weren't enough ready to fully replace the jet engine) and the installation of an adjustable force screen grid generator, both powered by a vacuum energy power plant, and modifications to the life support system to allow vacuum operations.



Weapon systems were fairly mundane and mostly Earth technology: a 10-missile load, the original 25mm autocannon, and an experimental laser system for point defense. For space operations the missiles were, however, upgraded.

The most exotic hardware was an exophase generator, allowing the F-35 to make a stealth run by phasing into beta-level hyperspace, becoming temporarily intangible until it reaches its targets. This also allows stunts such as flying through a mountain.

When using the jet engines, the fuel tanks provide five hours fuel in atmosphere, but with the Grey reactionless thruster in use it can operate it indefinitely (but at only 1G). (The jet engine thus now functions as a booster for the thruster.) The sensors and ECM system were upgraded to TL10 standards to allow functionality vs. Mantis technology, although the primary control systems are the familiar late TL8 hardware.

<i>Front Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (dDR 1).
[2]	Tactical Array (comm/sensor 7).
[3]	Control Room (C2, comm/sensor 5, one control station).
[4]	Major Battery (2.5cm very rapid fire conventional gun).

<i>Front Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[5]	Defensive ECM.
[6]	Maneuver Enhancement.
<i>Central Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (dDR 1).
[2]	Medium Battery (two 16cm missile launchers with five missiles each; 3 MJ laser turret [!]).
[3-4]	Fuel Tank with jet fuel.
[5]	Defensive ECM.
[6!]	Light Force Screen (dDR 20, adjustable, velocity).
[core!]	Exophase Field.
<i>Rear Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (dDR 1).
[2-4]	Fuel Tank with jet fuel.
[5!]	Standard Reactionless Engine (1G).
[6]	Jet Engine (1G in atmosphere).
[core]	Vacuum Energy Power Plant (de-rated, two Power Points).

The F-35D has emergency ejection, psi shielding, stealth, and winged features. It is operated by a single pilot.

<i>TL</i>	<i>Spacecraft</i>	<i>dST/HP</i>	<i>Hnd/SR</i>	<i>HT</i>	<i>Move</i>	<i>LWt.</i>	<i>Load</i>	<i>SM</i>	<i>Occ</i>	<i>dDR</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Cost</i>
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#### PILOTING/TL11 (HIGH-PERFORMANCE SPACECRAFT)

8/11^ F-35D	20	0/4*	13	2G/c*	30	0.1	+5	1SV	1†	1×	\$25.335M
Dark Lightning II											

\* In atmosphere, Hnd/SR is +5/5 and top speed is 3,500 mph when augmented by the reactionless thrusters.

† Plus dDR 20 adjustable force screen.

*We're animals to them,  
little more than lab rats.*  
– **GURPS Black Ops**

## GREY SAUCER (TL11^)

This saucer-shaped vessel is used by the Greys for scientific research, surveillance, and abductions. It has a streamlined 300-ton (SM +7) hull 50' in diameter. It is silent and stealthy, using an exophase field generator to allow it to avoid trouble by becoming insubstantial (and -8 to be detected by passive sensors and no detection by active sensors).

<i>Front Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Nanocomposite Armor (dDR 10).
[2]	Science Array (comm/sensor 9).
[3]	Habitat (two cells).
[4]	Habitats (two cabins).
[5]	Habitat (lab).
[6]	Cargo Hold (15 tons).
<i>Central Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Nanocomposite Armor (dDR 10).
[2!]	Light Force Screen (dDR 50, velocity).

<i>Central Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[3!]	Hidden Medium Battery (turrets with 30 MJ improved particle beam, turret with 30 MJ mind disruptor; turret with a 30 MJ tractor beam).
[4]	Habitat (two-bed automated sickbay).
[5]	Habitats (two cabins).
[6!]	Exophase Field (psi-powered).
[core]	Control Room (C8 computer, comm/sensor 7, and three control stations).
<i>Rear Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Nanocomposite Armor (dDR 10).
[2!]	Standard Reactionless Engine (1G acceleration).
[3]	Engine Room (one workspace).
[4!]	Contragravity Lifter.
[5]	Psychotronic Power Plant (one psi, one psi Power Point).
[6!]	Psi-Powered Stardrive Engine (FTL-1).
[core]	Vacuum Energy Power Plant (de-rated, two Power Points).

It has artificial gravity and gravitic compensators.

Usual crew are three control crew, two scientists, one telepath, and one technician, with room for a pair of passengers (usually a landing party) and up to eight captives.

**PILOTING/TL11 (HIGH-PERFORMANCE SPACECRAFT)**

11^	Grey Scout Ship	50	-1/5	13	1G/c	300	16.6	+7	16ASV	10*	1x	\$55.05M
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\* Plus dDR 50 force screen.

Top air speed is 2,500 mph.

*Patricia Whitmore: Why are they screaming?*

*Dr. Brakish Okun: They're not screaming. They're celebrating.*

**– Independence Day:  
Resurgence**

## HARVEST HIVE (TL10^)

These pyramid-shaped ships vaguely resemble giant wasp nests the size of aircraft carriers. Approaching from deep space, they use their contragravity systems to slowly descend through the atmosphere, escorted by Egg ships, hiding themselves by generating a low-level cloaking effect by electrostatically manipulating weather conditions to create an enshrouding cloud formation several miles in diameter.

The Mantis do not intend to launch a conventional invasion of Earth. Instead, they are hunters and predators. At night, each Harvest Hive will descend upon a single Earth city. As the Hive ship approaches, its anomalous weather zone coalesces into a chill pea-soup fog that falls over the target region. This limits vision to about 10-60 yards, also affecting infrared vision and ladar (though not radar or sonar).

While the target city is shrouded in a chill fog, the Harvest Hive lands – often crushing anything immediately beneath it. The Mantis Warriors fan out, gathering confused humans, driving them like cattle into the Egg ships or herding them toward the Hive itself. All resistance is brutally crushed.

Once a few hundred people are inside the ship, the Mantis technicians begin orderly processing and testing procedures: the agony booths winnow out the psi-positive, who are stored in hibernation units; the remainder are eaten, or go into the life-support recycling units . . . hundreds of humans can be “processed” each hour.

**Front Hull    System**

[1-2]	Organic Armor (dDR 60).
[3!]	Major Battery (3 GJ rapid pulse plasma beam turret).

**Front Hull    System**

[4!]	Weather Control System (30-mile radius).
[5]	Habitat (100-bed “hospital” for psi-scanning, large psi-tech lab, 400 cells, 300 hibernation chambers, office, 20 tons steerage cargo).
[6]	Tactical Comm/Sensor Array (comm/sensor 13).

**Central Hull    System**

[1-2]	Organic Armor (dDR 60).
[3!]	Contragravity Lifter.*
[4!]	Secondary Battery (eight turrets with 300 MJ rapid pulse particle beams; two turrets with 300 MJ rapid pulse mind disruptors).*
[5]	Habitat (230 cabins, 20 luxury cabins, five briefing rooms, five offices, two 10-bed sick clinic sickbays, 250 tons steerage cargo, 1,000 hibernation chambers).*
[6!]	Light Force Screen (nuclear damper, 300-mile radius).*
[core]	Control Room (C10, comm/sensor 11, 10 control stations).*

**Rear Hull    System**

[1-2]	Organic Armor (dDR 60).
[3]	Hangar Bay (3,000 tons; carries five Egg craft and 50 mech troopers).*
[4]	Psychotronic Power Plant (two Power Points, 100 enslaved psis).*
[5!]	Psi-Powered Stardrive Engine (FTL-1).*
[6!]	Standard Reactionless Engine (0.5 G acceleration).*

\* 10 workspaces each.

Design features include artificial gravity and self-healing (recover 3 dHP/day). Each ship is crewed by 80 Mantis technicians, another 20 indentured drive-techs (lower-caste or disgraced Greys sold into bondage, one or two of which might be spies), and 100 psi-latent drive-slaves (humans or other non-Mantis aliens). The remaining 400 crew are Mantis warriors, led by a “queen” who is the ship’s captain, and her bodyguard-consorts.

In this setting, nuclear-damping screens are TL10^.

**SHIPHANDLING/TL10 (HIGH PERFORMANCE SPACECRAFT)**

10^	Harvest Hive	300	-3/5	13	0.5G/c	100,000	3,320	+12	500	60	1x	\$11,100M
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Air speed is a stately 180 mph (with Hnd/SR -1/5); it takes the craft just under an hour to descend or ascend between the surface and low orbit.

## MANTIS EGG CRAFT (TL10<sup>+</sup>)

These 40'-diameter egg-shaped spacecraft are used by the Mantis as combat vessels and assault craft. They fly silently using a reactionless thruster. During electrical storms the craft is surrounded with a flickering aura, but normally the drive field is invisible. Unlike the smooth-skinned steel-gray saucers used by the Greys, these craft are mottled shades of green, with a blistered surface that bulges with veins, blisters, and complex fractal patterns. Each vessel has a 300-ton (SM +7) hull equipped with a chameleon system that can blend it with surrounding terrain. Egg ships, like most Mantis vessels, incorporate pseudo-alive bioplas technology. The hull and many components are self-healing. Their surface appears featureless until eye-like sensor blisters and laser ports, landing legs, ramps, or door orifices appear. When landed, the ship's eight retractable legs are disturbingly insectoid. Each Egg will often carry a Mantis mech-trooper in its hangar bay (and sometimes captured humans as well).

*Ladies and gentlemen, Earth is being invaded. The Harvest has begun.*

### Front Hull System

[1-2]	Nanocomposite Armor (dDR 30).
[3]	Tactical Array (comm/sensor 8).
[4!]	Major Battery (100 MJ plasma beam).
[5]	Defensive ECM.
[6]	Passengers (20 seats).
[core]	Control Room (C7, comm/sensor 6, three control stations).

### Central Hull System

[1-2]	Nanocomposite Armor (dDR 20)
[3!]	Major Battery (10 MJ rapid pulse improved laser).
[4-6]	Hangar (total capacity 30 tons).

### Rear Hull System

[1]	Nanocomposite Armor (dDR 10).
[2-5!]	Standard Reactionless Engine (0.5G acceleration each).
[6, core]	Fusion Reactor Power Plant (two Power Points each).

The ship has the self-healing (recover 1 dHP every two days), stealth (-8 to sensor detection), dynamic chameleon (-4 to Vision rolls), and gravitic compensator features. Usual crew are a pilot, gunner, and officer.

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

10 <sup>+</sup>	Mantis Egg Craft	50	-1/5	13	2G/c	300	32.3	+7	3+20SV	20/20/10	-	\$27.22M
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## ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid science-fiction fan, he began role-playing 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.



# GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

BY WILLIAM H. STODDARD

During Infinity Unlimited's ventures through the Quanta, it has encountered several parallels that resemble the settings of fantastic fiction – for example, the dieselpunk Gernsback and the historical fantasy Yrth. On the first visit, Götterdämmerung seemed to be another such world, inhabited by superpowered adventurers like those in comics and blockbuster movies. After a few years of cautious investigation, though, paratemporal physics researchers began to suspect that there was more to it than that.

Where did those people with unusual abilities come from? Their origins were mysterious, but their actions revealed skills and technologies that weren't part of the timeline's known history. Parahistorians debated whether this was evidence of a hidden conspiracy with advanced technology (the "secret history" theory of David Nomura) or of visits by paratemporal travelers from still another, more advanced timeline (Catarina Almeida's "cargo" hypothesis). Both were superseded when physicist Daniel Harel proposed the "reality shards" hypothesis: that mysterious devices or places from which supers gained their power were fragments of an alternate timeline that *no longer existed*, having been submerged beneath the current history of Götterdämmerung, but leaving behind pieces of anomalous history to baffle the world.

Harel's speculation was supported by Infinity's researchers, including some such as Almeida, whose original goal was to falsify it – but not in its original form. Examination of publicly visible supers identified several distinctive groups, or *clades*, whose abilities had various common features. Harel went on to propose the "supercontinent reality" model, in which multiple timelines had somehow been forced together into a single history – but one where relics of several other histories emerged far more often than in normal timelines, producing a history filled with anomalies and paradoxes. One of Harel's students, Zhao Lili, advanced the "metamorphic hypothesis," according to which reality shards are altered by the tectonic forces of interacting histories, somewhat as sedimentary limestone changes into metamorphic marble in the earth's interior. This would account for their historical improbability – the extraordinary agency shown by single individuals.

Current research supports the existence of four *substrate realities*, each with its own peculiarities. This unusual situation makes Götterdämmerung far less stable than most histories; researchers who accept posting there face the risk of the entire history suddenly being transformed, moving to a different Quantum, or even being annihilated entirely.

## SUBSTRATE ALEXANDER

This substrate combines elements of two utopian visions: the preservation of ancient Greek values and the attainment

of advanced science and rationality. Its divergence appears to have begun with Alexander the Great's survival past his 32nd year and his continuing support for Aristotle's school, the Lyceum. Reconstructive historians are still debating the likely political history that resulted, with models ranging from a still surviving world-spanning empire to one that gained only a decade or two. But the Aristotelian focus on the natural sciences seems to have gained more influence, countering much of the Platonic impulse to mysticism. In addition, the cross-fertilization of Greek geometry with Hindu numerals and computation inspired rapid advances in mathematics, astronomy, and mechanics. However it came about, the substrate produced a clade of heroes with access to technology more advanced than Homeline's.

Another aspect of the substrate was its emphasis on human perfectibility through education. Education is sometimes combined with improved nutrition, selective breeding, or genetic modification. However, Alexandrian values oppose any major alteration of the human form, though occasional villains create such beings as servants.

Finally, Substrate Alexander saw the cross-fertilization of the Buddhist "middle way," Persian moral dualism, and Socratic dialectic to inspire sophisticated ethical theories. Several traditions have taught the use of ethical ideals as a basis for self-empowerment.

### *Supers . . . but Not "Super"*

The heroes and villains of Götterdämmerung can have a variety of power modifiers, reflected in diverse sources for their special abilities. But *Super* isn't one of those modifiers. Being "super" in Götterdämmerung is a level of ability that transcends normal human limits, but not a special type of ability. Every super's abilities come from a specific source. Each source has its own particular countermeasures that don't work for other sources. Some of these sources can be countered by advanced technologies or by anti-powers, but not all of them.

### *Power Modifiers*

*Futuristic:* The ability is granted by an extremely advanced device that is closely fitted to the user and requires minimal maintenance. It can be countered by other advanced technology (-5%). -5%.

In addition to the basic limitation, futuristic abilities receive various Gadget limitations (pp. B116-117). Some of them are subject to mundane countermeasures (-10%); for example, those based on light can be blocked by smoke or mirrors.

*Ideal:* The ability is a result of a person's full commitment to a value, principle, or ethical standard (such as the Persian "ride well, shoot straight, and tell the truth"). It requires a -15 point self-imposed mental disadvantage (-15%). Faltering in the required behavior results in rapid loss of the ability (+0%), and restoring it requires a week's activity, a minor quest, or suffering minor harm (+0%). The ability is also subject to mundane countermeasures that create external conditions making the ideal unrealizable: chaining the wrists of a devotee of freedom, exposing the true face or name of a servant of The Lie, or compelling a believer in purity to eat unclean food, for example (-10%). These abilities are usually enhanced secondary characteristics or advantages that augment normal human physical or mental functioning. -25%.

*Trained:* Many heroes have abilities that come from good heredity, improved nutrition, intensive training, and/or superior education. Each such ability must be maintained by an hour of supervised training a week, or twice as much time on self-study (-5%); failure to adhere to this results in gradual loss of abilities (+5%), but they can be regained with a week of full-time training (+0%). +0%.

## Emergences

Trained adventurers can emerge from nearly anywhere in the world, as beneficiaries of little-known traditions or students of obscure manuscripts. Futuristic and ideal heroes are much less common. Scattered through Götterdämmerung are remote, isolated city-states or temples that preserve Alexandrian philosophy, technology, or both – mostly in a territory extending from Greece to India and up into Central Asia, but a hidden city with advanced technology might be found anywhere on Earth. It's also possible for an inventor to gain understanding of high-TL engineering principles and contrive to make them work with lower-TL equipment, not necessarily reliably. Such devices can include fully sapient automata, typically recognizable by having as much fine art as engineering in their design. Some of these may even become adventurers in their own right.

*Weird science is comparable  
to cinematic martial arts. It's made  
possible by special advantages and skills  
that ordinary scientists lack.*

– *GURPS Powers: The Weird*

## SUBSTRATE EDISON

Substrate Edison is the "newest" timeline to have been subducted beneath Götterdämmerung – that is, the one whose historical divergence from Götterdämmerung, and from Homeline itself, took place most recently, probably around the time of the American Civil War. Reconstructive historians believe that the North set out to leverage its industrial advantage by funding innovative technological projects and recruiting talented inventors to come up with them. The first-generation projects mainly involved steam power and metallurgy, but electricity soon followed, and then radio and

electronics. Edisonian engineers seem not to have turned their attention to digital electronics or computation; such computers as they designed were largely analog.

Supers derived from Substrate Edison mostly rely on gadgets, ranging from pocket-sized or smaller to body armor up to huge vehicles. Most such equipment operates at high power levels able to inflict physical damage or exert massive forces. Other devices act as sensors or communicators. Over time, such equipment has grown steadily smaller and has gained the ability to store energy more efficiently.

These brilliant inventors often exhibit specialized intellectual gifts that amount to minor powers, such as lightning calculation or the ability to visualize complex designs. But these are only part of the spectrum of intellectual and perceptual gifts. Seemingly normal, if talented adventurers might possess subtle powers useful for criminal investigation, military tactics, or psychological insight at the level of virtual mind-reading.

## Power Modifiers

*Invented:* The ability is actually granted by a machine or other device. Inventions require specific environmental conditions to work properly, making them subject to mundane countermeasures akin to those for elemental powers; for example, steam engines don't work in vacuum or underwater, and electrical circuits can be shorted out (-10%). Furthermore, they're subject to specialized technological countermeasures (-5%). In addition to the basic power modifier, an invented power should have one or more Gadget limitations (pp. B116-117). -15%.

*Savant:* Using the ability requires a state of intense concentration, amounting to a trance state where the mind is almost wholly focused on a single task. This imposes two Temporary Disadvantages (-5% each): Incurious (12), making it hard for the person to focus on anything not part of the task, and Oblivious, hindering interactions with other people. -10%.

## Emergences

The common origin for this substrate involves inventing something. Typically, the invention takes place in an emergency, and without the benefit of the usual resources such as large staffs or costly facilities. Some inventors are Gadgeteers or even Quick Gadgeteers, capable of upgrading their creations or coming up with new ones; others may have a single extraordinary breakthrough, perhaps representing a critical success. Those who aren't Gadgeteers may have high levels of a Talent such as Artificer (p. B90) or one or more savant abilities (see below), letting them do advanced work with relatively little education or training. Some are self-taught, seemingly emerging out of nowhere to change the world. However, some are technological entrepreneurs on the model of Thomas Edison, Tom Swift, or Tony Stark, supported by research staffs (which can be defined as Allies).

A few supers, especially in recent years, have been *created* beings, usually mechanical or electromechanical. Such constructs have the Machine meta-trait (p. B263) and may have other advantages and disadvantages, such as Electrical. If they have built-in weapons, sensors, or other special purpose devices, give them the Invented modifier, but not Gadget modifiers, as it's part of their bodies rather than "equipment."

*What the Chinese meant by “element” (xìng, pronounced roughly “sheeng”) was not an indestructible basic substance, but a phase that matter passed through.*

### – GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers

The abilities of savants are often inborn, as peculiarities of the way their minds and nervous systems work. As children, they may show exceptional talents or be socially isolated by their peculiarities; their educations, in childhood and later, are likely to be eccentric. Some adventurers gain savant abilities through obscure mental disciplines or even through drugs (which they may have invented).

## SUBSTRATE KUNG

The age of Substrate Kung is uncertain. It appears to go back to the era of *xia*: legendary Chinese adventurers with amazing combat skills and often with miraculous skills or powers, said to have been active in the Spring and Autumn Period (771–465 B.C.). The tradition continued throughout the substrate’s history, in which China may have risen to worldwide empire – or led a worldwide struggle against imperial ventures. Most powers from this substrate are an expression of *qi*, an esoteric energy that flows through living beings and the natural world. The benefits of *qi* go beyond the martial arts; they can take the form of control of the elements, or of skill in noncombat arts such as alchemy or Taoist medicine, which in turn can give rise to bodily enhancements or alchemical weapons. See **GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers** and *Elemental Xia Champions vs. the Shenguai* in *Pyramid #3/70: Fourth Edition Festival*.

Behind this, though, lies an even deeper history: remnant populations of an elder race, the *lung* (translated as “dragons”), sapient archosaurs who survived the K-T extinction event of 66 million years ago in refuges in what is now Eastern Asia. Largely aloof, they acted as Patrons to occasional talented humans, and passed on some of their understanding of *qi* to human alchemists and physicians.

### Power Modifiers

Not all adventurers from this clade rely on powers. Some are martial artists with esoteric skills for which Trained by a Master or a similar advantage is a prerequisite. The advantage Harmony with the Tao (**Chinese Elemental Powers**, p. 15) allows mastery of peaceful esoteric skills, of which Fortune-Telling (Feng Shui) can identify disturbances in the natural order, while Alchemy and Herb Lore can provide a basis for granting powers through esoteric science.

**Alchemical:** Your powers come from taking elixirs or herbal compounds that alter your internal flow of *qi*. Preparing these takes you or an esoteric scientist an hour a week per ability (Temporary Disadvantage, Maintenance, -5%), and the effects can be disrupted by specialized countermeasures: other preparations, acupuncture techniques, or Pressure Points or Pressure Secrets attacks (-5%). -10%.

**Biological:** As in **GURPS Powers**. Abilities with this source are usually the result of intervention by a *lung*. -10%.

**Chi:** As in **Powers**. Can grant either control of one or more Chinese elements, or enhancements of natural functions of the body and senses. -10%.

**Elemental:** Chi-based elemental powers are divided into *internal* and *external* (see **Chinese Elemental Powers**). The external ones are subject to mundane countermeasures involving the other elements; for example, wood (plants) can cover or penetrate earth or absorb water. -10%.

**Nature:** As in **Powers**, but based on your attunement to the flow of *qi* through the natural environment. You can use the esoteric form of Fortune-Telling (Feng Shui) to divert the negative effects of anti-natural environments; apply the penalty that you are offsetting to your Fortune-Telling skill roll. This takes a day to set up and an hour each week to maintain. -20%.

**Trained:** Many heroes have abilities that come from good heredity, improved nutrition, intensive training, and/or superior education. Each such ability must be maintained by an hour of supervised training a week, or twice as much time on self-study (-5%); failure to adhere to this results in gradual loss of abilities (+5%), but they can be regained with a week of full time training (+0%). +0%.

### Emergences

The usual origin story for a super from the Kung clade involves being trained by a secretive master, often in some remote place, whether in martial-arts skills, esoteric sciences, or elemental disciplines. After a time of retreat, students return to the world with extraordinary abilities. Often they conceal these behind an unassuming surface, guided by the Taoist concept of the Three Treasures: mercy, frugality, and “daring not to put oneself first” (in **GURPS** terms, a Minor Vow).

Some supers are transformed by arcane science: the bio-modification skills of the *lung* (which could be represented as the Ontogenetics style from **GURPS Powers: The Weird**), alchemical elixirs, herbal preparations, or meditative control of their own inner energies.

## SUBSTRATE UTNAPISHTIM

Utnapishtim may not be the oldest substrate – the dragons of Kung could be older – but in important ways, it’s the most divergent: a relic of a history where humans were never the dominant race. Rather, they were created as servants by the true sapients, the Anunnakku, dimly remembered in Sumerian legend. Originally the function of their brains was split, with one hemisphere attuned to perceiving the masters and hearing their orders, and the other to robotic obedience to those orders, including little self-awareness.



But as their numbers grew, and some of them took on the function of coordinating others' labors, their speech became a medium for contagion – the virus of self-awareness and free will.

The resulting collapse swept away the old history, leaving a chronological chaos, now remembered as the late Bronze Age collapse. New, humanly led civilizations emerged after 900 B.C., speaking languages that embodied a stronger sense of agency – and as a result, helped stabilize the new history. The old history was almost forgotten, until the late 18th century saw the emergence of comparative linguistics and mythology and of literary romanticism, followed by archaeological investigation of ancient civilizations. Scholars mostly settled on a conventional timeline, but some discoveries granted new access to forgotten powers, while others led to the emergence of new threats to civilization and humanity.

Note that this is a different and earlier collapse than the one described in **GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier**, representing the point where the two histories diverged.

## CONNECTIONS

At the GM's option, the various substrates may have interacted with each other before colliding with Götterdämmerung.

In Substrate Edison, experiments with communicating with the dead technologically, such as Edison's necrophone (see **GURPS Horror**), could have made contact with spirits from Substrate Utnapishtim, or even with dormant Anunnakku.

In Substrate Edison, some adventurers might have not only savant abilities, but also psionic abilities derived from Substrate Utnapishtim.

The martial-arts schools of Substrate Kung might include some traditions derived from combat arts of Substrate Alexander, such as pankration.

In Substrate Alexander, the Homeric heroes might have been early human supers who emerged after the submergence of Substrate Utnapishtim . . . and Alexander himself might have been another such.

It's also possible to account for the startling inventions of Substrates Alexander and Edison as created by a power derived from Utnapishtim, a Cosmic version of Gadgeteer that can violate natural laws (discussed in **GURPS Powers: The Weird**). Such devices would be unique, as defined for gadgets (pp. B116-117).

## Power Modifiers

**Cosmic:** Some hints survive that the civilization of the lost timeline was based not on technology, but on direct control of reality by the will. At the GM's discretion, similar powers may be available to a few supers: reawakened Anunnakku, or human beings who have gained true knowledge of themselves. Suitable abilities can be found in **GURPS Powers: The Weird** under *Logos* and *Noumena*. These powers are not subject to the constraints of mundane reality or human perceptions of

it; they come from a part of the mind that sees beneath the illusion of the world. +50%.

**Psionic:** As in **GURPS Powers**. Grants more specialized abilities, comparable to the *siddhis* of Hindu thought, without full awakening. The abilities described in **GURPS Psionic Powers** are suitable. -10%.

**Spirit:** As in **GURPS Powers**. The "spirits" can be psychic traces of higher beings, tulpas (spiritual entities created by visualization), or dissociated personality elements. The abilities gained are often comparable to psionic abilities, but they may take the form of channeling spirits or becoming a spirit vessel (see **GURPS Thaumatology**). -25%.

Spirits may be bound to physical objects, particularly to reality shards that survive from Substrate Utnapishtim. In this case, the abilities they grant also have gadget modifiers (pp. B116-117).

**Weird:** Applies to beings created by the Anunnakku as more potent servitors, or to humans transformed into such beings by encounters with certain relics. The Metamateriality and Mutation powers in **The Weird** suggest typical effects. Weird abilities are less potent than true Cosmic abilities, but more so than abilities of other powers; see *Powers*, *Great and Small* in **Powers**. +25%.

## Emergences

The initial supers of this clade mostly gained their powers by finding ancient artifacts or deciphering ancient texts. Some of them were mentally transformed in ways that gave them psychic gifts; others acquired the ability to call on spirits. Rarely, some of them gained deeper insights that gave access to cosmic powers, though such insights didn't always leave them sane.

During the same period, psychical researchers began to identify people with low-level psi abilities. It's speculated that some of the linguists and archaeologists who found relics of the old history may have been guided by such abilities. Later supers manifested more potent psi abilities, which prompted the scientific research that created experimental anti-psi devices.

Rarely, transcendental beings break out into mundane reality. Some look more or less human, though they may be mind-shatteringly hideous or beautiful; others are true monsters, unique creatures that violate the order of nature. So far, all of them seem to have been contained. Lesser "unnatural" creatures with weird physical or biological abilities are more common, along with occasional human supers who have gained such abilities.

## SUPERSTRATE

The surface reality of Götterdämmerung has elements that derive from its substrates – not only individual heroes and villains, but lost cities, hidden wilderness areas, remote islands, and other places of origin. How long this has been true is unsure; legendary heroes such as the Argonauts, the Knights of the Round Table, or the 108 Stars of Destiny might represent early emergences of supers. But the TL5 era (1750-1880 A.D.) saw the widespread appearance and public recognition of men and women with extraordinary powers. This may have been partly a matter of their becoming better known as a result of scientific investigation and global exploration.

However, more of them seem to have appeared, as results of European and American visits to distant realms, uncovering of relics of the mysterious past, and radical new scientific inventions.

The American Civil War brought a number of these unusually gifted adventurers to visibility, including the teenage inventive genius known as the Electrician; the Witness, a woman whose psychic gifts let her speak with the slain; and Sting, whose remarkable skills in woodcraft and archery made her a terror to Confederate forces. Over the following decades, more appeared in areas ranging from the American West to the late Chinese Empire to the capitals of Europe. The Great War saw an upsurge in their numbers, and also in the levels of power they commanded: physical combatants able to disregard small arms fire, or mentalists who went beyond ordinary psychic gifts to alter the basic nature of reality. In the Second World War and afterward, such beings were systematically sought out by the belligerent powers: Doktor Rune, in Germany, and Stalina, in the Soviet Union, were major assets to their respective governments.

## Guest Stars

Since this is an alternate history, it's natural to ask what becomes of known historical figures from Homeline. One option is to turn them into supers. For example, the Electrician might be the secret identity of a teenage Thomas Edison. Other potential supers could include the visionary poet William Blake, who wrote of cosmic conflicts that ended in the emergence of Jerusalem in the Near East; Thomas Edison's great rival Nikola Tesla, perhaps as a mad genius ruling a small Eastern European state; the visionary antislavery activist Harriet Tubman; the 19th-century Chinese martial artist Wong Fei-hong; the occultist Aleister Crowley, with his claims to superhuman powers gained through ritual magic (or "magick"); or his American disciple, the rocket scientist Jack Parsons.

The postwar era diverged much further from Homeline's history, as supers began to have a major impact on human events. Some of the most powerful could pose a significant

threat to national governments; they might even take them over, whether for ambitious or altruistic motives, and resisting such attempts became a concern for all the world's nations. And in this chaotic historical terrain, still more supers were able to emerge, and the stability of the entire timeline was imperiled more than once. This was the state of Götterdämmerung when an exploratory team from Infinity Unlimited first made contact with it, in local year 1960.

## Campaigns

As a campaign setting, Götterdämmerung offers several options. Adventurers could be researchers from Infinity, cautiously probing into the truth about its unstable history and emergent weirdnesses – or natives of the timeline doing the same thing. They could be local supers trying to keep a major city safe. Or they could bestride the world like colossi, preserving it against the most powerful supers, perhaps as agents of the United States or the Vatican, perhaps as an independent force defending ordinary human beings – and face the question of how far they can go before they themselves become the kind of threat they seek to oppose.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William H. Stoddard began playing roleplaying games in 1975, and published his first book, *GURPS Steampunk*, in 2000. He's an active roleplayer and Game Master in the San Diego area; many of his games have been pulp, supers, or cosmic horror, and have featured strange inventions or exotic powers. They called him mad at the university.

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# MANY LIVES, ONE ADVENTURE

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Some belief systems hold that the soul makes not one but several journeys through terrestrial existence. While the details differ from faith to faith, a general idea is that we are all stumbling through what we call “life” in the hopes of achieving a higher state of being. The choices we make in a lifetime decide if we go forward or back. If successful, we may be reincarnated into other humans, other life forms, or even other worlds in the pursuit of transcendence.

If not, we may stay right where are, or go backward instead.

*This ain't the first time you've  
been here. You boys die more  
than anyone I've ever met.*

– Ash,  
*in Supernatural* #5.16

While many fantasy-game settings have religious components to them, the concept that characters might reincarnate after their death and – most importantly – have progressed in their spiritual path by doing so has not been directly applied all that often. Having reincarnation as a tangible and regular force within a setting could help give the game an inherently personal mythic dynamic.

In such a game, PCs could be spiritually evolved individuals, possessing certain powers, duties, advantages, and disadvantages. Their personal goals could stretch across lifetimes, and a final, epic achievement may allow them to transcend the flesh – perhaps becoming a more powerful creature, or else escaping this reality altogether.

At the very least, such a setup can explain why this band of misfit adventurers stays together in spite of it all – they've done this before and will most likely do it again!

With that in mind, this article discusses having reincarnation be a significant part of any epic fantasy-game setting, and raises important questions for the GM to answer about how it will affect various aspects of that setting. It gives a systemless method for reincarnation that could be adapted to almost any campaign world – so long as there's some kind of higher,

driving powers at work – and contains a broadly applicable, metaphysical explanation for its existence. It also explains how reincarnation could affect character creation, starting powers, and the overall campaign; provides a sample higher power for the PCs to be tied to; has thoughts about dealing with the dead, undead, and spell-based resurrection; and provides some campaign ideas.

## NO ONE HERE GETS OUT ALIVE

The fictional faiths of most fantasy RPG settings can often be little more than background noise, except to character types dependent on a deity for their powers and purpose. However, that doesn't mean that there isn't some kind of design at work.

One proposed truth: *all* living beings have a divine purpose. For most, it's to eat or be eaten, to hunt or to evade. Some fly and some swim, some spread regal plumes and soar, and some sting and scuttle away. All these small things are great and sacred, bound within the web of life spun by the gods.

Another proposed truth: sapient creatures are a step above most, for even the dumbest among them can dream and imagine. They can envision things that don't exist and create them, endlessly improving on their conditions. Within their minds are the seeds of greatness and the secrets of conscious magic, which give them a special place within the web.

Why is this? Let us also propose a secret: *only the sapient can leave the web.*

Almost every god and spirit has an explanation for this, but the simple fact is that every sapient being has a personal, spiritual escape plan – a “Soul Journey,” marked on the spirit itself. Any soothsayers worthy of the gift can usually determine the broad strokes of it, and those who expertly handle spiritual matters – be they clerics, priests, or wandering “madmen” – can usually see it clear as day.

Sadly, not a lot often comes from such discoveries. As the will of the gods is not writ large upon the world for each person to see and heed, the majority of beings are content to live their lives in the moment. They may have a special destiny, but they do not consciously act upon it. They live and die without tending their true purpose, only to be reborn with the exact same Soul Journey – doubtless to be ignored yet again.

However, there are noteworthy exceptions.

## A FACE FROM THE ANCIENT GALLERY

Every so often, someone pays attention when they're told of their purpose, and considers it the most precious thing in the world. Or perhaps they accomplish their life's purpose on accident, by finding it feels *right* to do certain things. Or else some hidden hand nudges them in the right direction, as there's a destiny to be fulfilled.

However it happens, these people are reborn spiritually advanced. They may have more ability than others, or perhaps better circumstances of birth. They might remember bits of their past lives, or have a sense of the importance of certain things and people, and an idea of how they all fit together.

Most importantly, as they're a step further along their Soul Journey, they bear a physical mark because of it – one so obvious that anyone versed in the ways of the gods would know what it means. Those born with these signs are often gathered for special training, and may even be fought over by one or more interested parties. But even those not discovered may find out the truth and set out to seek their calling accordingly.

### THEY KILL US FOR THEIR SPORT

The existence of the Soul Journey suggests yet another proposed truth, and a terrible one at that: we are *not* the masters of our own destinies.

If sapience is a divine gift, then all sapient beings owe their ability to say “I am” to divine beings. As the gods don't tend to ignore debts, this has led to souls becoming the currency of the gods. They use our being to purchase favors and services, pay restitution for slights and outrages, and be offered up in sacrifice or fealty to greater gods or other pantheons.

Indeed, one deity might hand an entire kingdom over to another for some reason – condemning those there to death, disaster, or conquest by their new god's earthly forces.

Who decides who owns a soul? Theoretically, certain gods could have claim over certain kinds of souls, such as people born on their high holiday or in other auspicious circumstances. It may also be a matter of which god is primarily worshipped in the location where the soul was last incarnated. The gods can take automatic possession of those who *choose* to worship them, if they care to, and if they're traded over, then so much the better.

Normally, when mortals die, their god judges their progress and sees to their reincarnation. But the gods can take as much time as they like to send people back, and may keep a number of the less remarkable ones in their “cashbox.” In this way, many old souls are lost to the ages – condemned to wait for rebirth in the limbo of a god's coin purse.

That this buying and selling of the self most likely disrupts a person's spiritual progress is not a concern to the gods – that's what it means to be a slave. But this servitude is, perhaps, the reason the Soul Journey exists in the first place: a trade-off for the cosmic joke that has been played on all sapient beings.

Thus begins the true cycle of rebirth, as allowed by the gods. A blessed child is born – a hero to some, a nightmare to others – and lives an extraordinary life. Such individuals who manage to advance in their Soul Journey are reborn with an even greater blessing. But should they fail, they'll most likely be reborn as they were – usually given another chance to advance.

The path is never easy. With each step, the duties grow in equal measure with the power. This makes it increasingly difficult to continue to advance, as it soon becomes all too easy to fail in one's responsibilities, become frustrated with expectations, or simply become unable hold onto one's true self.

Worse than that, the further along one is, the more likely failure causes one to go *backward* – reborn a step or two from where one last started out. Sometimes mistakes or failures from one life must be atoned for before continuing on. There is also the possibility of being cursed or blasted by some horrendous occurrence, so that one must spend a whole other lifetime lifting this burden upon the soul.

Those who can manage to hold to the increasingly perilous path may travel it, lifetime after lifetime, and eventually come to its end. What lies there is up for debate. Is it divinity or nonexistence? Do they join with their deity or the universe itself?

Only the gods can say for certain, as they're the keepers of these paths and the final judges of all who walk upon them.

### THIS SNAKE, HE'S OLD

If the PCs are tapped by a deity or force to live for an extraordinary reason, then their having been chosen gives them the power to accomplish it. But such power doesn't come without its price; gods invariably want things done in their name, and demand certain codes of behavior and decorum – both of which become more demanding from lifetime to lifetime. It's a delicate balancing act, but one hopes the reward is worth the work.

To reflect this spiritual reality, each player character starts out the game with at least six extra aspects.

*Patron Deity:* The god, force, or cosmic principle that owns the PC's soul and therefore authored his Soul Journey. Ownership could change or be replaced by something else from one lifetime to another; should that happen, the PC most likely receives a new Soul Journey from his new god (which might reset everything completely, or might continue from a previous level of ability but with new duties and restrictions). Protagonists can also convert to a new god's religion, but doing so means they *immediately* lose all their spiritual progress with the previous god and may be hunted or cursed for having done so.

*Soul Journey:* The reason the PC exists, boiled down to one sentence. Often it requires that the person acts in accordance with the deity that holds dominion over him, even if its connection is not immediately evident. For example, a person commanded to “Protect the weak from the strong” by Ignis, the god of fire (see p. 33) probably does so in order that the weak might live long enough to transform themselves into stronger beings.

## PATRON DEITY 101: IGNIS

As an example of a god who could own a PC's soul, and author his Soul Journey, we present Ignis, the god of fire.

Ignis comes across as a stern and greedy fire god – ever-desiring to lick across the world and burn it down. But, as his priests teach, the deity is the embodiment of transformation. Some go into the fire and burn, while others are tempered and come out stronger for their pains. But no one knows their true potential until they take the Test of Fire, hopefully to uncover their own Puzzle of the Flames.

*Soul Journey:* Ignis charges the souls he oversees to transform: ideas, objects, entire cities – even themselves. Some will create, others will tear down, and some will protect those who do it. In the process, all will work together to solve the Puzzle.

*Powers:* The control of fire is the gift of Ignis – to light the way, to burn through obstacles, to shape and sculpt. At the earliest reincarnations, one can create and direct small fires with a wave of the hand, becoming better at doing it as one gains experience in that lifetime. At later

incarnations, great symphonies of flame and smoke can be written upon the world with nary a thought.

*Duties:* As fire feeds, so must the word of Ignis be spread. His champions must always have a flame upon their person and be willing to explain his ideas to others whenever possible. In later lifetimes, adherents must see to the welfare of his temples, and spare no expense building new ones where they do not exist.

*Prohibitions:* Ignis believes that we are what we were, and the labors of the past should show upon the skin. He abhors cleanliness and the cool washing away of water. His adherents must increasingly avoid washing or bathing, and drink only as much water as they need to survive.

*Signs:* The hand of Ignis smolders and burns. Those who have been walking his Soul Journey for some time seem to have been through the furnace. The hair turns jet black, the skin and eyes darken. Scars from previous lives show up as burn-like birthmarks. More powerful reincarnations seem to smoke or steam in the cold, and sparks may crackle in the air about them when they toil or fight.

*Power:* A special ability the PC has access to, provided he fulfills his Duty on a regular basis. This Power usually reflects the nature of the Deity, but not always, and increases in ability within one lifetime. As the PC advances in his Soul Journey, his Power becomes more complex.

*Duty:* A task the PC must do at certain intervals in order to remain in favor with his Deity, and therefore maintain his Power. This usually reflects the needs of the Deity, but not always. As the PC advances in his Soul Journey, his Duty will become more time-consuming and complex. Failure to do these things incrementally decreases the ability to use the Power until the Duty is made up for.

*Prohibition:* A thing the PC must do, or *not* do, in order to stay on the path of his Soul Journey. This almost always reflects the nature of the Deity in question. The earliest levels are slightly inconveniencing and/or time-consuming, while the highest levels may be embarrassing and/or truly difficult. These Prohibitions may be cumulative, requiring an old master to do the same things as a novice. If the PC dies without having fulfilled them, and fails to make restitution, he most likely will not advance.

*Sign:* Those whom the gods take an interest in are always marked by their divine favor. Often it's purely cosmetic – the color of one's hair, skin, or eyes – but, as one's Soul Journey progresses, more interesting signs manifest. None of these ever rise to the level of a "power," per se, but it can be quite intimidating to encounter a bone-white person with ice-rimed hair whose presence chills the room, and whose breath is full of snowflakes.

## TAKE A CHANCE WITH US

Setting up a game in which reincarnation becomes a central dynamic could be quite a challenge to a GM. However, this approach provides a number of opportunities that can

provide a richer gaming experience for all involved, and even perhaps make it easier to explain personal and group motivations for the campaign. If the players want their characters to have a real, personally tailored challenge that could extend across several "lifetimes," then this could achieve that.

*Instant Bonus Power:* A recurring motif in certain types of games is the notion that every PC gets some kind of extra something for just showing up to the party. This approach provides an in-game reason for that bonus, and promises more to come, while tempering it with other factors – giving an extra incentive for conscientious roleplaying.

*Central Reasons:* Why is this PC out adventuring? The answer to that question can be the Soul's Journey. It should be a burning need within the PC, taking predominance over all other concerns, at least to start with. Should the PC prove ultimately successful in fulfilling that concern in this lifetime, spiritual advancement may result, leading to a greater challenge in the next life.

*Getting Together:* Why have three to six complete strangers – from different walks of life – become willing to go into life-or-death situations together? In truth, if the players are actually roleplaying, there's bound to be at least some token friction between certain character classes, professions, races, and social levels. But if the characters all have the sense that they *knew* these people, before, and are drawn to them from a sense of curiosity, or a kinship that lasts from lifetime to lifetime, the campaign can begin rather seamlessly. It also adds a certain grandeur to the first meeting, as friends, lovers, and allies from another time meet up in their current incarnations, knowing they'll have a lot to talk about – when they're not being attacked anyway.

*Always Something Happening:* Speaking of being attacked, the PCs are never going to have a dull moment. They each have Duties to attend to, and broken Prohibitions to atone for.



They may be called upon to teach others what they know, or seek out those who know more than they do in order to learn. At the very least, they should be looking out for one another, as friends across lifetimes should. Only by doing these things can the PCs hang onto their place in the Soul Journey. If the players fail to take this into account, they'll soon see their powers vanish and their fortunes abandon them.

*Whom the Gods Love, They Destroy:* As the PCs are spiritually advanced beings on a personal quest, the gods that own their souls will be constantly watching and testing them. They may provide clues, or make sure they're hard to find. They could tilt the odds for or against them, throwing things in their way or holding them back until they're ready. This gives the GM a lot of opportunities to present odd challenges to the PCs: rival priests with monster armies, old codgers with cryptic puzzles, "helpers" who suddenly betray them, and the like. It also provides an in-game explanation as to why a poisoned arrow just *happened* to fly out of the forest and hit the group's leader, or was luckily intercepted by a hapless bird at the last moment. The gods are nothing if not capricious and fickle.

*A Cure for Boredom:* Ideally, when a group of PCs comes together, they adventure and advance until they're as powerful as they can get, and then call it a day. However, this is a long and involved slog, and it's more likely that the players will

become tired of playing those characters, or the GM will run out of ways to properly challenge them.

With the reincarnation approach, the game doesn't have to suffer because of the group's attention span. The GM can decide on a good stopping point, either before or during the campaign, and work toward that climax. Once it's reached, the PCs' personal progress is tallied up, and the players can decide what their characters did from there out. Then the players create new characters with the GM's assistance, and they return to the game world in a generation or two – ready to meet up for an even greater challenge.

Of course, the road to reincarnation may not be a smooth one. Did they all level up, or did some of them stay where they were? Did a powerful curse place a complication upon one or more of them? Is a friend now an enemy, or is an old enemy now coming aboard as an ally?

Such spiritual triumphs and tragedies will have to be resolved in play, adding a sense of chance and mystery to every new beginning.

## NIGHTS WE TRIED TO DIE

Before the campaign starts, the GM will have to make some very important decisions about overall mechanics, the party, and worldbuilding.

### VEX NOT HIS GHOST

And then there's the 1,000-gold-coins question: how do you determine if a PC advances in his next lifetime?

Ideally PCs should die with a clean slate to advance. Broken Prohibitions must be made up for, and they should have acted in accordance with the spirit of their Soul Journey. Whether they were behind in Duties is often immaterial, though some deities are strict about that.

If the GM wants the campaigns to go in a steady, solid line, then he should be forgiving of most Prohibition-breaking, as long as the PCs earnestly attempt to make up for it. But if the GM wants the players to feel like they've accomplished something – or wants to keep them on their toes – he can be ruthlessly legalistic.

If it's a matter of roleplaying, the GM can set a few secret challenges for each character. If he gets the sense the PC has understood what this life's portion of the journey encompassed, that could weigh higher in the eyes of the gods than whether he purposely avoided bathing. Being willing to risk it all for the right reasons could be worth a lot, too (unless the player has a habit of having his characters go out with a "bang.")

However, if it's a matter of mechanics, the game's normal chance engine could be used for a final result. After the climax, add up everything done right, subtract everything done wrong, and then roll. Success means going forward, failure means staying where one was, or possibly going *backward*.

But what about what happened *after* the campaign ended? If there's a concern about whether a PC continued to do well, the GM could use some random means to add or subtract from that roll. The GM could also add everyone's successes and failures together to make a group roll, so that the party stays at or around the same power level.

### Mechanical

In addition to the issues raised in previous sections, the GM has to decide how many steps the Soul Journey is (ideally) going to take. This decision will lend structure to the overall campaign, as well as aid in deciding what the PCs will get in the first lifetime, and how much more will be added on with each successful reincarnation.

Also, what happens when one of the PCs dies in the middle of the campaign and can't be brought back, for whatever reason? In a normal game, the player would just roll up a new PC, but that might not work so well, here. So can these PCs reincarnate laterally, perhaps into the body of someone who died nearby at the exact same moment? Or is there some other outré, divine option that would provide the player with something meaningful to do?

### Party

The GM needs to decide how many Patron Deities the group is going to have. Having one god at work makes things very simple, but it might make things a little boring if everyone has the same Powers, Duties, Prohibitions, and Signs. Conversely, more than one god at work makes things more interesting, but also requires more work, and could lead to inter-party conflict if one god's needs are at odds with another's.

Another consideration – which could be an answer for the dilemma of having PCs die in such a game – is how much of a support group the party will have. If they have a "B-Team" of henchmen, apprentices, mercenaries, and the like along, one of these lesser characters could take the place of a lost character. They might also be charged to take care of some of the PC's Duties while they're off in a dungeon, far from the temple, provided their god lets them subcontract out Duties that way!

## THE DEAD, THE UNDYING, THE RETURNED

The existence of universal reincarnation creates a question for a fantasy world: what do you do about things connected with death?

Zombies, mummies, skeletons, and the like can always be said to be animated by a spell or a curse, but actual ghosts pose a logistical problem. Excising Necromancy altogether is an option, but you could also say that the soul has a “husk” left behind at death – some kind of protective agent that holds onto the strong memories and emotions of that life and stays with the body to protect it. The husk, then, is what becomes a “monster,” haunts locations, is summoned by necromancy, and so on. Imagine the fun of a PC having to seek out his own ghost to answer questions about his past. Worse, imagine being forced to exorcise or destroy a remnant of your own past life!

Another byproduct of this approach makes certain kinds of undead truly terrifying. If the Soul Journey requires one to die and be reborn, then vampirism represents the ultimate insult to the spirit’s progress.

Imagine being trapped in dead flesh for an eternity, and possibly destroyed with the body when release finally comes. On such a world, who in their right mind would want *that*?

From that perspective, the self-inflicted undeath of lichdom would be the ultimate “step off” to the gods, and would be an incredibly blasphemous undertaking. Perhaps the gods are quite keen to send their champions off to destroy such affronts to the way of things, and stamp out any information on how such an undertaking would be done?

As for casting resurrection spells – would they be harder or easier to do? If the PC has yet to accomplish his or her main goal in this life, would the gods make it less strenuous to bring that person back to life? Or would they be divinely punished for failing to achieve it, and be packed off to the next stage of their existence so quickly that such spells would be impossible? Such questions should be resolved well before they become relevant.

### Societal

How has reincarnation shaped this world? Are most people aware that it exists, or do only a few really understand what it means? Are some areas, bloodlines, social levels, professions, and races more engrossed in it than others? If so, how do they relate to those who aren’t as involved?

What happens to children who bear the sign of a “foreign” or disfavored god from birth? Are they sacrificed or left to the elements? Are they sent to a corresponding temple, or sold into slavery? Would their parents get into serious trouble for hiding them?

Are those advanced in their Soul Journey automatically members of a higher social status than those who are not? Do they have to earn their rank, or is it given to them from the beginning? If they falter with their Prohibition, or slacken their Duties, do they suffer some kind of additional, social penalty?

What sort of social support structure exists for those engaged in their Soul Journey? Are there established temples and schools ready to accept those who are destined for great

things? Are there handy teachers who take a helpful interest in the PCs before they fall into error? Is finding and/or instructing fledgling souls a fairly common Duty?

## CAMPAIGN IDEAS

This approach to fantasy gaming readily lends itself to starting off a group of PCs from zero, and then moving forward, level after level, lifetime after lifetime. However, there are a number of other approaches this tweak lends itself to, which could lead to some really interesting campaigns.

### *The Eternal Enemy*

Just as friends, family, and lovers seem to keep coming back, so do those you’d rather not see again. One foe in particular seems destined to be a continuous thorn in their side. With each new lifetime, this blackguard is there – watching, waiting, and all too aware of their past dealings. Worse, the opponent seems to be advancing in time with them, so that when their paths cross, the meeting is always a challenge.

How can the PCs find a way to rid themselves of this forever villain? Can they stop him from incarnating? Can they curse him, so he’s nowhere near as powerful in a subsequent life? Or can they, over the course of the ages, turn him from an enemy into an ally, maybe even a friend?

### *We Built This City*

The PCs were there when the town was settled, and they were reborn into the city it became in their next life. Since then, their Soul Journeys have been hopelessly intertwined with it: witness to feast and famine, war and peace, collapse and renewal. So now that it has been ceded to another god, they remain true to their deity, and are charged with liberating it, either from within or without.

*You are just as beautiful  
in this life as any other,  
Priestess Chay-Ara.*

– Vandal Savage,  
in *Legends of  
Tomorrow* #2.8



## We Were What?

The PCs are all starting out on an adventure together, and as far as they know this is the first time they've worked together. Over time, however, they come to understand that they did know one another, once. They also get the sense they are much more powerful than they were now – if only they could remember more!

Eventually, they learn they *have* fought side by side before, and for many lifetimes. But they all had the misfortune to all die at the worst possible time – at the epicenter of a long and costly war of the gods. Their souls were caught up in the ensuing conflagration, and, after being passed around to pay war debts, were ultimately forfeited to the winning side, and reincarnated several generations after their demise, at the start of a whole new Soul Journey.

What to do? Do they continue this new journey, or try and find some way to resume the path they were knocked off of? Can they even accomplish this without some kind of divine intervention, or higher magic? Will their new gods try to stop them? Will their old ones help them out?

## At the End of Things

The PCs are immensely powerful beings, all at the last step of their Soul Journey, and so weighed-down by Duties and

Prohibitions that they've retreated from the day-to-day world. They exist in semi-seclusion at temples or holy sites, balancing their power with their responsibilities, and dealing with issues far removed from the perceptions of ordinary people.

But then comes the day that these august beings feel a deserve to gather together once more, in the face of a world-shaking, final call to action – a call they cannot and must not ignore. Should they fail, they will not only lose what they've learned in this lifetime, but several others as well.

Do they dare risk escape from the world just to save it, one last time?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid*, has been the editor of *The Wraith Project*, and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's the author of the fictional blog *SPY GOD's Tales* ([spygod-tales.blogspot.com](http://spygod-tales.blogspot.com)) and writes for Op-Ed News. He currently lives in Lansing, Michigan, with two cats and a mountain of Lego bricks.

*For those who believe in resurrection, death is inconsequential. It's not an ending, but rather a new beginning . . . a second chance. A reunion. But the very idea of resurrection is so seductive a concept, it's easy to forget, before you can rise from the dead . . . you have to spend a few days in hell.*

– Emily Thorne, in *Revenge* #2.2

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# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

## THE SENSE OF AHHH

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

I remember picking up the *Epic Level Handbook* for the *Third Edition* of *Dungeons & Dragons* in 2002. Instinctively, I turned to the section on magic; since this book's mandate seemed to include the most amazing, jaw-dropping magic ever available to player characters, I was curious to see what was "epic" about this campaign. In its list of epic spells, it handily sorted them by difficulty, so I could immediately satisfy my power-lust by turning to the mightiest spell listed – indeed, perhaps the mightiest spell ever envisioned in *Dungeons & Dragons*. There it was: Vengeful Gaze of God! Eagerly, I turned to its description: It deals 305 six-siders of damage to one target, and deals the caster 200 six-siders of damage as well. That was it; the mightiest spell . . . dealt a bunch of damage.

I was disappointed.

I mean, yeah, it's a bunch of damage, but . . . well, that was it. Where was the snap? The sizzle? The . . . *epic*?

Fortunately, we're here to help. Here are some tips for how to retain that sense of "Ahhh!" in a campaign.

*The city is flying and we're fighting  
an army of robots. And I have a bow  
and arrow. Nothing makes sense.*

– Hawkeye, in *Avengers:  
Age of Ultron*

### THAT'S NO MOON!

Imagine a clash of untold billions battling to the death against opposition of roughly equal proportions. Each successful offensive thrust results in the death of millions, falling to the ground like droplets. An unsuccessful feint could prove disastrous, as billions are cut off from their peers, destined to die. Both sides are guided by superior intelligence, unfathomable to the soldiers on the front line of the conflict; for all but the smallest cluster of commanders, theirs is but to obey orders and die. No one participant can understand even an inkling of the larger war; how could they? It's all so

unfathomably vast, so impossible to conceive. Even if one side emerges victorious – if it's feasible to imagine such a thing – millions or billions will still have died without having ever understood what it all meant.

Now reread that paragraph with the understanding that it's talking about the cells of two humans who are fighting to the death.

The thing about "epic" is that it doesn't just mean "big." Rather, to me, it means "big from the point of view that we can understand the scale of what is transpiring." Envision the Godzilla film franchise. Without the point of view of humans on the streets fleeing in terror, without the understanding of what "buildings" are, without establishing shots of giant rockets becoming tiny toothpicks bouncing unnoticed off the conflicting kaiju, the pre-CGI Godzilla films are really just wobbly actors in rubber suits crushing balsa-wood boxes.

It's helpful, then, to continue to relate elements that the heroes are undergoing to a perspective they can relate to. West End Games' classic *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* offered the perfect example in this vein, suggesting the GM draw a giant triangular wedge filling up a piece of paper, saying, "That's the Star Destroyer you've approached," then putting a tiny pencil dot just off to the side: ". . . and that's your ship."

This technique can be used to great effect for any larger-than-life scene. Giving the players something they can wrap their minds about can make the moment *really* hit home. For example, if the heroes are atop some impossibly tall building, casually mention that an NPC tosses a penny over the side, and it takes 10 minutes to hit the street. Or note that the supernaturally charismatic god on Earth has never had a paparazzi photo taken where he looks less than stunning; even with photos of mussed hair, eating ice cream, or yawning, he just looks *right*.

Remember that anything quantifiable can be expressed in exaggerated terms. You might describe a magical gem's source of energy as equal to every power plant's output from the industrial revolution to today; or how the mega-computer's ability to solve "impossible" equations means that it can randomly generate "lost" episodes of television programs by remixing and extrapolating extant episodes of the show's run. (Such quantifications are often just *weird* . . . see p. 38).

## DESIGNED BY HUMANS, FOR HUMANS

Roleplaying games are traditionally targeted at human beings (shout out to the lizard people who rule the world). To achieve the epic, it's incredibly useful to continue to relate things to human perspectives. One of the reasons that *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* was so effective was because its opening scenes depicted a situation that we thought we understood – Stormtroopers invade a planet – but kept the focus on a specific human element. That made the larger scope of the conflict that much more relatable. Similarly, in *The Fifth Element*, the galactic conflict is viewed entirely through the lens of a cab driver.

In many games, the players themselves will provide the human element. Thus, in a campaign that follows the template of 2014's *Godzilla*, the players might be regular humans, experiencing the epic through their own eyes.

But what if the heroes are gods, world-crushing powers, or similarly epic individuals themselves?

Well, it's useful to *provide* the human viewpoint. This doesn't mean you need to remain zoomed in at the level of one random mook getting crushed by Planet Eater X, but providing a point of reference can make its fate more personal, more real for the heroes unleashing (or enduring) epic powers. And if the focal point is the sort that you continue to check *back* in with, it can give the players an especially potent hook. In *Doctor Who* – especially the new series starting in 2005 – human companions are often the focal point to help drive home the awe-inspiring nature of the universe. In the Thor movies of the Marvel cinematic universe, Dr. Jane Foster provides a human perspective to the Asgardian antics.

How can you do this in a roleplaying game? Well, ideally there's an organic connection. (Many players can sense if you're trying to foist off a "care about me!" character.) If the players have taken any kind of disadvantages or advantages that tie into Earthly connections, then that can manifest as a human connection. For example, maybe the giant robot collective the PCs are part of has ties to a planet-bound maintenance force. As a subplot, one well-detailed NPC may inadvertently stow away aboard the giant robot, perhaps needing rescuing (or even just staying out of the way but panicking as he relates his experiences aboard the interplanetary adventurer).

Again, don't force the connection; if the players aren't feeling it, there's no reason to make them, and reassure them that their 20-point police-force Ally will still remain even if the one named person they have as a contact doesn't survive first contact with the epic threat you're spotlighting. (Batman has retained ties to the Gotham City Police Department even if Commissioner Gordon is out of the picture.)

## EPIC IS WEIRD

As a final tip, remember that "epic" doesn't just mean "bigger."

For example, consider nuclear weapons. Sure, they're big bombs, and it's tempting to reflect upon them – or even stat them in a game – in the same way you might a big bomb. Only, y'know . . . bigger. But that's not what nuclear weapons *do*. When one is deployed, they do more than just make a big hole. They disrupt electronics. They etch nuclear shadows into

walls. They create atmospheric and geologic disturbances that can be detected thousands of miles away.

In my opinion, this was the big mistake for the Vengeful Gaze of God spell from the *Epic Level Handbook*: It just wasn't *weird* enough. In contrast, the Old Testament is full of incidents where encounters with the almighty result in something that's just . . . odd. For example, Uzzah was struck dead by God because the mortal tried to steady the Ark of the Covenant after the oxen carrying it stumbled.

For truly epic effects or situations, consider the collateral damage and odd effects that result from encountering it. Some ideas include:

- The Earth's close shave with the Sol Eater has permanently altered the course of the moon, meaning it's now on a 25-day cycle around the Earth instead of 28 days.
- Those who have been touched by the Psychic Singularity will only dream of themselves in the third person for the rest of their lives.
- The legendary energy blades of the Dead Republic seem to be detectable as powerful gamma radiation, but their "radiation" doesn't seem to have any of the deleterious effects on organic matter that regular gamma radiation does.
- The mana wave that enveloped the world seems to have permanently altered how humans see color; it's now impossible to see violet or higher frequencies in areas of normal mana, blue or higher in areas of high mana; and green or higher in very high mana regions. Weirder still, the very *notion* of those colors is impossible in those areas . . . meaning that someone can't (say) carry a green-colored square with them to detect very high mana areas, because the square would just look dark yellow to them, and they'd never remember that it was any other color.

With enough forethought and creativity, you can enhance any epic situation by tying it more to the heroes' situations and the players' experiences – which should go a long way toward ensuring you're not just rolling hundreds of dice and calling it "epic."

*Dr. Ichiro Serizawa: We call him  
. . . Gojira.*

*Vivienne Graham: The top of  
the primordial ecosystem. A god,  
for all intents and purposes.*

– *Godzilla* (2014)

## 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.

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