

GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

DUNGEON FANTASY SETTING[™]

COLD SHARD MOUNTAINS[™]



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*Your bones, taken
from your living limbs,
are our wood to burn
forever.*

– Xuchlazek
Inscription

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INTRODUCTION

The forces of history don't just make complex societies. They also create the conditions for heroic deeds. The great magicians of the past made the powerful artifacts today's delvers search after. The unfathomable thaumaturgy of those early magic users both shaped the landscape and led to their powerful creations being lost, which allows today's adventurers to find those items. Long traditions of craftsmanship and local specialization mean that delvers can tell by looking at a pile of treasure that *this* sword is likely of very high quality while *that* enchanted item is not to be trusted. And an unresolved conflict between nations and various cultural movements and professional organizations results in a lot of people who are willing to hire competent agents to take on risky missions. The Cold Shard Mountains are layered deep with unfinished battles, riddled with tunnels filled with ancient monsters, and littered with lost treasures. Every inch of the region is full of history, so adventure is never farther away than a step out of the front door.

RECOMMENDED WORKS

While the whole of the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series could be used with this setting, some are more immediately useful than others. This book makes several references to *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level* (particularly for coleopterans and dwarves), and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures*, and they are strongly recommended. Likewise, several enchanted items and other treasures refer to *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 4: Sages* or *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables*. Other useful works include *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 7: Clerics*, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 17: Guilds*, and the entire *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters* series.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby has been playing RPGs 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 eleventh-level rogue, and a pack of dogs.

ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. We can be reached by email: info@sjgames.com. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. *GURPS* continues to grow – see what's new at gurps.sjgames.com.

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Pyramid (pyramid.sjgames.com). For 10 years, our PDF magazine *Pyramid* included new rules and articles for *GURPS*, plus systemless locations, adventures, and more. The entire 122-issue library is available at Warehouse 23!

Internet. To discuss *GURPS* with our staff and your fellow gamers, visit our forums at forums.sjgames.com. You can also join us at facebook.com/sjgames or twitter.com/sjgames. Share your brief campaign teasers with #GURPShook on Twitter. Or explore that hashtag for ideas to add to your own game! The web page for *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Setting: Cold Shard Mountains* can be found at gurps.sjgames.com/coldshardmountains.

Store Finder (storefinder.sjgames.com): Discover nearby places to buy *GURPS* items and other Steve Jackson Games products. Local shops are great places to play our games and meet fellow gamers!

Bibliographies. Bibliographies are a great resource for finding more of what you love! We've added them to many *GURPS* book web pages with links to help you find the next perfect element for your game.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Errata pages for *GURPS* releases are available at sjgames.com/errata/gurps.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

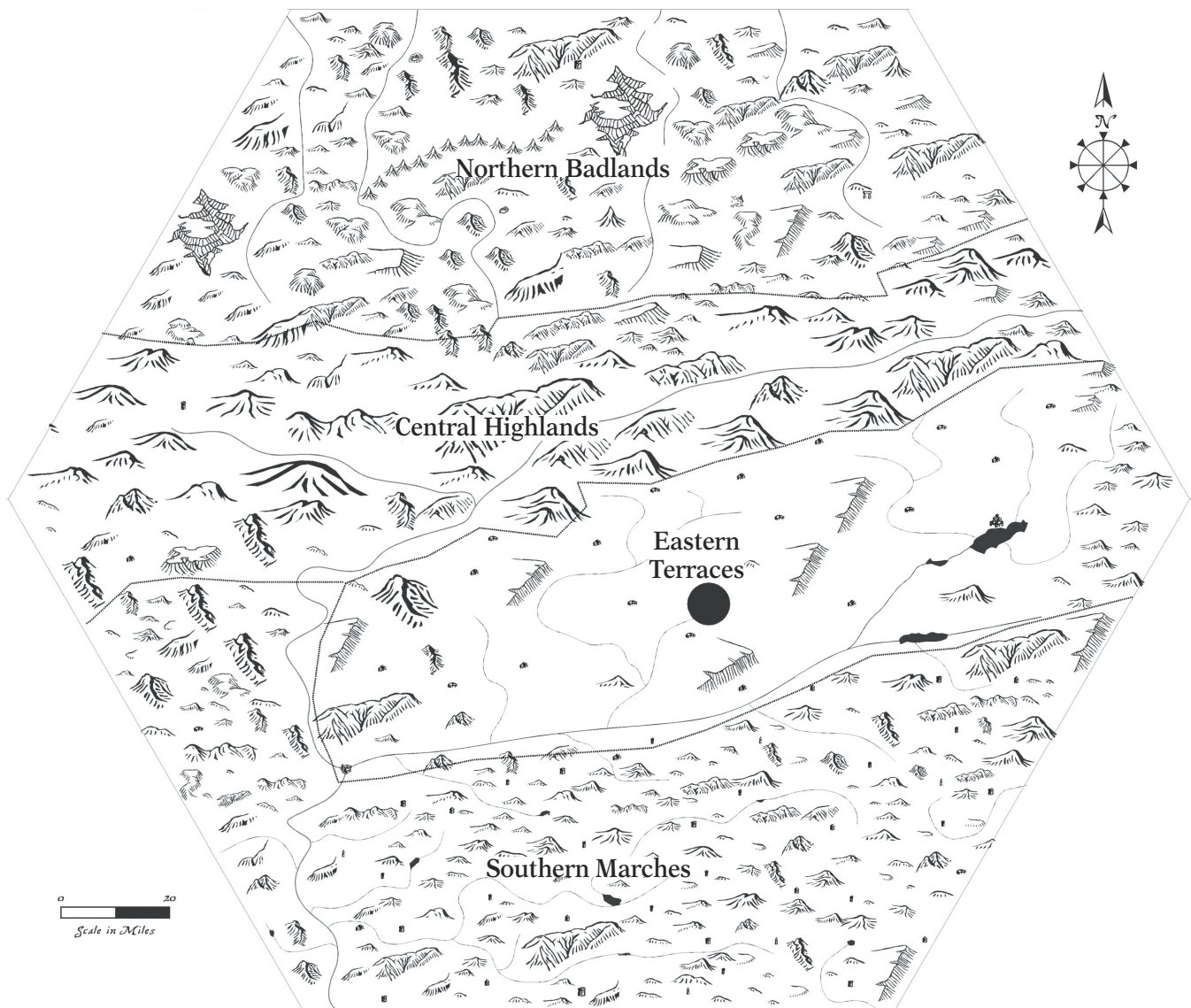


The lower, warmer slopes of many mountains are home to thick stands of wild *kasban*, a tree which produces both high-quality hardwood and hard-shelled nuts which are often ground into a meal. However, local distrust of trees (see *Forests*, p. 30) means that they're rarely cultivated in large numbers.

Other parts of the Cold Shard range are occupied by farming villages where possible, towns and small strongholds of various kinds where suitable, and the dwellings of individuals or extended families engaged in wilderness-related trades elsewhere. Herding animals adapted to the mountains is common. The Cold Shard goat is hardy and has a thick coat which turns into good wool thread, though herders must choose between risking the wooded lower slopes or appeasing the Wise Raptors (pp. 15-16) who rule the better pastures above the tree line. Dwellings are usually built into slopes on the sides of valleys to preserve valuable crop land and for protection against a greater threat of attack. Homes in villages

are frequently tightly packed together, with irregular rows of homes facing zigzagging lanes going up the slope. Alternatively, the entire village may be built as something like a single large, sprawling building.

Fortified towers are a frequent sight throughout the entire region, constructed with a combination of conventional masonry and earth magic to move stone. They can provide defense for a population in need of it, a center for local rulers, surveillance on critical locations, and so on. Freestanding towers, sometimes in clusters of nearby fortifications, have been more popular than castles with curtain walls (which provide little protection from airborne attacks). Square towers are preferred in the Cold Shard range, though a few – notably, rare coleopteran surface structures – are round, and some fortifications built by demons have been triangular, pentagonal, or hexagonal. Some towers built by magicians have more exotic shapes. A handful – constructed from pillars mined from Skystone Field (p. 30) – don't touch the ground.



MAP OF COLD SHARD MOUNTAINS: REGIONS

A more-detailed and larger version of this map is on pp. 49-52.

By about 3,000 years ago, the Zaa'kee had tunnels under most of the region. These tunnels were quite deep, with shafts leading to the surface in only a few dozen places. Hives occupied major intersections in the sprawling tunnel network. These hives shared many aspects of culture, such as traditions of wall art (the Zaa'kee were known for elaborate combinations of relief carving and mural painting) and alchemical practice (somewhat at odds with Zaa'kee magical practice elsewhere). Their exact political structure is undetermined. However, modern belief is that these various settlements were nominally under the governance of a far-off council of rulers but were on their own in actual practice, retaining ties of kinship and trade with ancestor hives up the line.

The Zaa'kee traded with humans and likely some goblin-kin living on the surface and with dwarves living at relatively shallow depths under it. The commerce attracted enough people to establish a handful of permanent trading

posts near Zaa'kee portals. Modest as they were, these were the first aboveground towns in the mountains. Dry Triangle was first occupied late during this period. It wasn't associated with any Zaa'kee portals directly, but was in a good position to coordinate trade in and out of the region.

As the Zaa'kee expanded, their ties with their homeland became tenuous and were disturbed by internal unrest. Nominal allegiance to a common center wasn't enough to keep local conflicts over territory and resources from flaring up. The use of particularly sophisticated weapons and armor among the Zaa'kee became more common during this period, as did the use of offensive and defensive magic. Many valuable Zaa'kee artifacts found today date to this period. Expansion efforts also became more fragmented as more and more of the tunnels in resource-rich areas filled up, and some groups were forced into less desirable areas. This inadvertently set the stage for the tragedy of the First Demon War.

FIRST DEMON WAR

As several surface towns were established and coleopteran settlements began to expand south even beyond the mountains, a Zaa'kee hive broke into a vast chamber deep beneath the mountains in search of a suitable place to establish a new community. This chamber held an apparently bottomless (and likely extradimensional) rift; see *Demon Rift*, pp. 31-32. Magical emanations gave the Zaa'kee a bit of advance warning, but they could not prevent the emergence of waves of demons.

The resulting conflict has come to be known as the First Demon War. The open rift attracted more powerful and intelligent creatures. The Zaa'kee engaged in ongoing efforts to isolate the tunnels and seal off the rift through which demons were advancing, but to no avail. The monsters overcame the Zaa'kee defenses and burst into the surface.

Some sages have characterized the conflict as an infestation as much as a war. Tunnels around the region saw mostly

bestial demons seeking to kill and devour, but following very little in the way of strategy. (See *Third Circle Bull Demon*, p. 42, for one example.) More intelligent demons sometimes whipped up herds of demon beasts to further drive back resistance, but mostly they just followed after the chaos. Once paths to the surface opened up, the intelligent demons established a sparse network of temples and palaces and encouraged the influx of beasts.

War or infestation, many died. Many communities were destroyed, and others greatly reduced. The eastern terraces were all but depopulated. In the remainder of the region, survivors retreated into increasingly fortress-like villages, hoping that stone walls would keep the demonic threat at bay. They were only sometimes correct, though that style of architecture has remained in use throughout the region ever since.

EMPIRE OF KERENK

The First Demon War was mostly local to the Cold Shard Mountains. Between the fragmented coleopteran colonies, scattered aboveground settlements, and fiercely independent Wise Raptors, there were many battles but little in the way of a coherent defense. Eventually, the expanding sphere of the demon threat ran into an also rapidly expanding dwarven empire up the chain of mountain ranges. This was the empire of the legendary dwarf ruler Kerenk (pp. 20-21). Kerenk and his two companions, according to tradition, united their three feuding clans and put an end to centuries of rivalry. This newly unified kingdom was almost immediately threatened by the growing demon incursion from the nearby Cold Shard Mountains.

Kerenk is a figure who looms large in local legends. Many stories about him are likely false, but it is generally agreed that he and his companions marched up the tunnels into the Cold Shard Mountains to end the demon threat. Kerenk himself and perhaps his army in general were clearly blessed

with remarkable divine favor. Many demons fled from him, and those who did not were defeated in (if the poets are to be believed) epic battles. While Kerenk is himself not considered a god or even a demigod, many dwarven temples in the region have a black granite image of him somewhere.

Kerenk and most of his armies withdrew to Overlook Kap, his capital some hundreds of miles to the southwest, but his empire was firmly established in the Cold Shards. The empire's first concern was with the mines and underground regions. The demon war had been won, but there were still mopping-up operations and ongoing efforts to secure the Demon Rift. A massive effort was made to survey the tunnels of the region and catalog potential sources of useful materials and possible sites for new settlements.

But the empire took firm control of the surface as well, which was still chaotic once the demons had been driven back. Banditry was put down by frequent patrols, and taxes and tolls were collected with a remarkable thoroughness.

THE AUDITORIUM

This greatly eroded rock structure is in the northeastern part of the badlands. The Auditorium is a hollow partial dome eroded from an ancient hill rising above a slightly dished ground surface. The dome is about 80' high at its tallest point and 150' wide. The structure's acoustics are remarkable on their own, but they are also *magically* perfect. Any sound within the Auditorium can be heard with clarity everywhere in the structure. Any utterance, even a whisper, can be heard intelligibly. Moreover, the structure captures sound from far away and from across time. Voices constantly whisper, and a listener who concentrates can potentially hear something to their advantage.

The Auditorium counts as very high mana for Sound spells. The area also has powerful and unpredictable effects on Bard-Song abilities. Typically, spells cast with Bard-Song affect *everyone* in the Auditorium, including the caster. Other abilities often have stronger effects, but failures on activation or other such rolls count as critical failures. In short, bards take their lives in their hands there.

Visitors can also pay attention to the echoes of the past and present for possibly meaningful words. For each day of focusing on the voices, roll 3d to discover what the listener hears:

- 3-4** – Something misleading. The listener hears a convincing lie or something taken out of context which gives a false impression.
- 5-8** – Nothing of apparent importance.
- 9-10** – Something interesting, but not necessarily important (for example, someone with a good voice singing an entertaining song or a snippet of conversation involving a famous person).
- 11-12** – Something important, but without any useful context (for example: “Don’t pull the third lever!” or “We shall kidnap the princess at midnight.”). The listener might file this information away for future reference, but there’s no guarantee that it will come up again.
- 13-16** – Something important in a context which makes some sense but lacks key details (for example, an enemy discussing plans, or someone communicating an important secret in enough detail to get a general idea of what’s being discussed). Treat this as a successful use of Oracle (p. B72), giving information which needs to be interpreted. In this case, it might provide leads for investigation as well.

Marsh Fires

The fiery breezes of the Burning Marsh are a bit like the weather. Narrow bands passing through in a second or two sweep any given area at least once every three or four hours. In a particularly active times, the wind can happen every five or 10 minutes, sometimes coming in thick bands lasting 10 seconds or in several thinner bands each lasting less time but hitting repeatedly over the course of a minute or less. They have the same effect as walking through an area on fire (1d-3 burning damage per turn; see p. B433), save that the fire is moving through the target rather than vice versa. Vegetation and animals in the Burning Marsh have at least DR 3 against fire and flame attacks, but outside visitors need to worry about both flame damage and the additional risk of catching fire.

17-18 – Something important in a context which makes some sense. As **13-16** above, but it requires no further interpretation.

BURNING MARSH

The Burning Marsh is a shallow dish-shaped formation at the confluence of several streams. It empties into a small river, but the accumulation of silt over the years has led to the formation of what’s essentially a deep pool of thick mud. The mud has been fertile ground for huge quantities of vegetation and all kinds of animal life (including venomous reptiles, venomous spiders, venomous amphibians, and merely carnivorous birds and mammals).

At the end of the First Demon War (p. 11), the difficult, dangerous swamp provided countless places for the last demonic beasts fleeing their hunters to hide. Some of them interbred or otherwise mixed with the beasts and plants already there, providing the wildlife with a variety of demonic traits. During the Xuchlazeck Diabolism, a minor demon lord, Charred Xassakak, found it congenial and built a palace there. Xassakak is dead now – indeed, his skull is a prized trophy at the nearby temple of a militant order – but significant remnants of his hellscaping remain.

Notably, waves of fire pass through the area like winds. This is not the mere ignition of swamp gas. Rather, the marsh creates its own unnatural flames which sweep over the surface of the slowly draining streams and muddy ground. The remaining plants and animals are highly resistant to fire or simply spend a lot of time under the surface. This has gone some way toward keeping anyone from locating the ruins of Xassakak’s palace and following up on tales of rich treasures kept there.

GREAT DRAGON RIDGE

One of the more impressive but least seen features of the Cold Shard Mountains is the Great Dragon Ridge, the fossilized remnants of the skeleton of a vast dragon. Though partly covered with vegetation and the accumulated dirt and decayed matter of thousands of years, this series of about 14 closely set peaks is clearly different from the surrounding mountains. The stone is paler and doesn’t have their banded appearance. It’s also pitted in places where the outer surface has worn away, revealing a semi-hollow interior structure.

The interior of the Great Dragon Ridge is, for lack of a better word, “foamy,” shot through with networks of smooth, round passages and hollows.

The Great Dragon Ridge is even worse than usual for agriculture than the rest of the northern badlands, so it’s particularly devoid of villages and individual freeholds. Draconic members of the high clans (pp. 15-16) avoid it out of respect. However, it has become the home of a great many subterranean creatures. Bandits and mystic hermits also find the extensive cave networks full of places to stay.

One of the great treasures to be found along the ridge is called “old dragon ivory.” Even now, the bones of the old dragon aren’t completely fossilized, and small veins of unmodified ancient dragon bone can still be found.

COMMON MONSTERS

In addition to the monsters here which are, if not unique to the area, then at least most likely to be found in the mountains, a wide range of monsters can be found throughout the region. Some appear particularly often or in specific locations.

Demons of every description can be found throughout the deeper caves in the region. They are relatively rare on shallower levels. Most are bestial demons – like doom-children (*Dungeons*, p. 22) – filtering up from beneath. Smarter demons like Demons of Old (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1*, p. 10) are aware of the dangers of roving bands of holy warriors, Lightbringers, and the like, and the creatures proceed with caution.

Ample tunnel space means bugbears (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1*, p. 6) have an embarrassment of

riches when it comes to hiding spaces. Flame lords and rock mites (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1*, pp. 15 and 25 respectively) are quite common in deeper spaces.

Foul bats are sometimes encountered underground, particularly in large tunnels and chambers. However, they're rarely seen on the surface. Wise Raptors do *not* like them, and killing them is regarded as particularly prestigious.

Dire wolves (*Dungeons*, p. 22) appear here and there on the surface and are more comfortable underground than mountain wolves. There are rumors of dire/mountain wolf cross-breeds. Frost snakes (*Dungeons*, p. 24) are also found on the surface, notably on high peaks in the central highlands.

They lurk in fungus-infested corners of the underground, using the already dangerous environment as cover to leap on passers-by to devour at their leisure, preferably while the victim is still alive. While their armor-piercing tongue is a formidable attack, they prefer to slap their enemies with layers of sticky slime to immobilize them and dispatch them at leisure later.

ST: 11 **HP:** 11 **Speed:** 6.25
DX: 14 **Will:** 12 **Move:** 6
IQ: 12 **Per:** 12
HT: 11 **FP:** 11 **SM:** +0
Dodge: 10 **Parry:** 12 **DR:** 3

Claw (15): 1d cutting + linked Binding (see Notes). Reach C.
Tongue (15): 1d+2 (2) impaling. Reach C-2.

Traits: Binding 4 (Melee Attack; Sticky; Unbreakable); Combat Reflexes; Dark Vision; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Injury Tolerance (No Brain, No Vitals); Obscure (Vision) 4; Sadism.

Skills: Karate-15; Stealth-15; Tactics-14.

Class: Demon.

Notes: Red rot demons are naturally covered with layers of a red, sticky fungal substance which drips from their claws, from which they get their name. When they score a successful hit with their claws, they splatter the target with a layer of it. Treat this as a successful Binding attack (p. B40) with ST 4; additional layers give +1 to this ST. Red rot demons are willing to negotiate only because it gives them an opportunity to later betray their victims.

RIVERSPEAR

The rivers and lake of the Cold Shard range hold a variety of aquatic life, some more docile than others. The riverspear is definitely on the less docile end of the spectrum. The riverspear is a long, narrow fish (resembling, ironically, the pike) with a long, rigid, and wickedly pointed beak of almost supernatural sharpness. A series of bony plates protects the head.

The fish is capable of quite shocking if very limited bursts of speed. Riverspears generally live quietly in small groups (rarely fewer than six or more than 12) in the deeper parts of rivers and lakes, but react violently if disturbed.

ST: 10 **HP:** 10 **Speed:** 6.50
DX: 14 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 6 (Water)
IQ: 3 **Per:** 10
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** +0
Dodge: 7 **DR:** 1/5 (head)

Stab (14): 1d-1(2) impaling. Reach C, 1.

Fast Stab (14): 2d-1(2) impaling with modified Slam attack (see Notes). Reach C.

Traits: Bad Temper; Ichthyoid; Striker (Horn; Cannot Parry).

Skills: Brawling-14; Sumo Wrestling-14.

Class: Animal.

Notes: Normally, the riverspear stabs at attackers with its beak/horn. However, it can move up to *triple* its usual Move at a cost of two FP per turn. The fast stab above is essentially a slam attack, but since it strikes horn-first, it does impaling damage. It may also become stuck after a fast stab attack: If the attack successfully penetrates the target's DR and causes damage, the fish is stuck. On the next turn, the fish must make a successful ST roll to free itself and does half again the amount of damage it did when first impaling the target. (See *Picks*, pp. B405-406, for additional, general rules.)

STONE MOLD

Stone mold isn't quite a mold, though it acts like one. It's a rocky growth which actively breaks down the stone it grows on. However, it can also affect living tissues. Worse yet, it's far more durable than regular mold and not subject to the usual methods of cleanup. While it acts in many ways like typical squishy biological molds, it's actually an elemental entity.

It has a number of unpleasant additional properties. It's much tougher than regular mold, for a start. Its crystalline nature causes it to resonate to uncanny frequencies.

FEARLESS MONSTER HUNTERS

Monster hunting is a lot like a recovery campaign, in that it involves going underground in a targeted, purposeful fashion. But while a recovery campaign is about infiltrating ruins for fun and profit, monster hunting is about keeping people safe. All of those holes in the ground are full of aggressive hazards from virulent fungi to giant carnivorous insects to nests of demons. Somebody has to push those threats back, and nobody is better suited for that than a band of dungeon-delving heroes.

Basic monster hunters, like basic explorers, can start pretty much anywhere if they want to find monsters, but

skills like Current Events and Area Knowledge give much better pointers to what and where the biggest threats are. Once in the dungeon, skills like Hidden Lore (most specialties become useful sooner or later) and Naturalist provide ideas about how best to deal with what delvers find there. Again, any type of adventurer can find something to do most of the time. While the primary goal is to keep peaceful people from being eaten by ravening beasts, there's likely to be a certain amount of loot gathered as a by-product. These missions can also provide a steady supply of monster parts, which can be sold to alchemists as raw materials!

PICKING A SIDE

While a campaign can be built on episodic dungeoneering, dungeon delving and related adventuring can be part of a broader story. Dungeon-crawling heroes can be out for more than just loot. They may go underground for the sake of their country, their gods, or the survival of the mortal world.

CHEVALIERS

The crown of Penet (p. 26) employs a number of chevaliers to protect the kingdom. While they are primarily warriors (and, indeed, started out as a knightly order), they have developed to encompass a variety of adventuring types. The organization habitually maintains a staff of skilled retainers and assistants.

The primary duty of chevaliers is to defend the territory assigned to them, usually a village or other lightly populated bit of the eastern terraces. Inevitably, something terrible comes out of the ground to ravage the countryside. Chevaliers are the ones who ride out to stop it. Indeed, chevaliers go down the holes those terrible things come out of and clear them out, making sure that nothing else comes from that direction. Occasionally, they are called on to undertake special missions beyond the borders of the kingdom, depending on Tennen's (pp. 23-24) whims.

Chevalier characters may have the Patron advantage and the Duty disadvantage, not usually found among footloose adventurers. Since they're noblemen, they may have up to Status 3 if *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 17: Guilds* is being used. Claim to Hospitality might represent the lodgings they are provided by the crown. They must face dangerous situations regularly and may be sent to recover specific valuable items, but beyond that, they can typically keep any loot they find. Tennen in his palace at Penet is a textbook example of a noble court (*Guilds*, p. 20).

DEATH TO DEMONS

The crusade which brought the Lightbringers (p. 18) to the Cold Shard Mountains never quite ended. Certainly, the Diabolism which ruled a substantial part of the world is no more, but countless demons still lurk in the tunnels under the mountains, plotting their return. For centuries, a small cadre of Lightbringers has remained to stop them.

The Lightbringers are very focused monster hunters. Their goal is to find and destroy demons. Intelligent demons capable of plotting against mortals get priority, but demonic beasts are on the menu as well, as are demonic artifacts and magical weapons and locating tools to fight demonic creatures.

Given their fanaticism, the Lightbringers are not as highly regarded as they may once have been. They're not *persona non grata*, since they are still reasonably effective in fighting demons, but they don't get along well with many established powers (who have their own agendas). They are, therefore, treated like an unpleasant relative, to be tolerated but no more than that. The Lightbringers in turn will work with anybody who appears capable so long as they don't appear associated with demons themselves. Ruthlessness and loyalty are prized beyond all else.

HOLY WAR

The wars between Unifiers and Polyphysites aren't over. Indeed, they're going on right now, only covertly. Suitably skilled individuals could be valuable in the cause (either cause, of course), undertaking special operations: recovering relics in the hands of rival temples, taking out opposing leaders, clearing out dangerous heterodox cults, and preventing them from returning the favor.



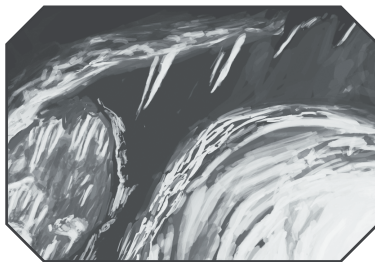
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Enough duty for today. Wine!
– Tennen the Short

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