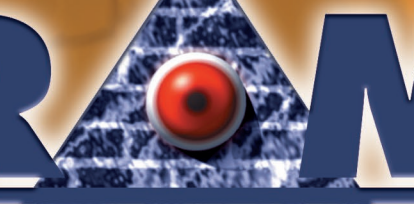


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/81 July '15

HORRIFIC CREATIONS



IRAQI IRRUPTOR BLUES
by Jason "PK" Levine

TOO SIMILAR, TOO DIFFERENT
by Michele Armellini

ALTUS BRAT
by Nathan Milner

HELLBLADE
by David L. Pulver

BELL, BOOK, AND CANDLE
by J. Edward Tremlett

**ANATOMY OF
A CROSSROADS BARGAIN**
by Jon Black

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Secrets can lurk in any shadows, waiting to be uncovered . . . or waiting to strike. Do you dare risk tapping the power of horrific creations? Do you dare *not* to investigate? This issue of *Pyramid* has a plethora of possibilities for all dabblers in darkness.

What happens when you discover teammates have gone missing and history is about to be literally rewritten? You get the *Iraqi Irruptor Blues*. Let Jason “PK” Levine – *GURPS Monster Hunters* mastermind – lead you on a thrilling adventure for *GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier* as you chase down monsters unleashing toxic memes and psychotronic munitions upon the world.

Worse than any gory, life-sucking Thing Man Was Not Meant To Know are those monsters that seem somehow related to humanity and yet are *Too Similar, Too Different*. From Michele Armellini – author of *GURPS Locations: St. George’s Cathedral* – learn about methods for creating human hybrids, relevant *GURPS* traits, and four new templates, including the predator in disguise and the tragically tainted.

It’s easy to lose yourself when mastering a new weapon. That threat takes a very literal twist with the temptation of the *Hellblade*. *GURPS Bio-Tech* author David L. Pulver reveals the secrets of this mysterious weapon in this month’s *Eidetic Memory*, including the abilities it grants its wielder and what it does to the souls of those it kills. Included are *GURPS* stats for the sword’s demonic inhabitants and a map of its pocket dimension.

A surge of creativity. Revenge. The wishes of those who would bargain with darkness are varied, as you’ll learn once we unpack a classic superstition and examine the *Anatomy of a Crossroads Bargain*. Discover a brief history of temptation, key *GURPS* traits (including how to add “escape clauses”), and tips for adding bargains into any campaign.

Mysteries unfold as you call upon the dead, using the power contained within the classic triad of the *Bell, Book, and Candle*. You can add these enigmatic (yet systemless) tools to any campaign involving modern occult or monster hunting, or set during any high-magic quasi-historical world’s Renaissance or Age of Reason.

If you decide to use the *Altus Brat* to bring back someone from the dead, are you willing to deal with the consequences? Find out what magic dealers don’t want you to know about this special bread, including *GURPS* stats for its three forms.

This issue seals its dark secrets with a Random Thought Table that fully unleashes the laboratory of ideas to help devise horrific creations. Whether you’re creating a hybrid army, selling your soul, swinging a sword, or raising the dead, this issue of *Pyramid* harbors some of our most horrific creations yet!

ARTICLE COLORS

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

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

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: *GURPS* Features

Purple: Systemless Features

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FROM THE EDITOR

I WILL SHOW YOU FEAR IN A HANDFUL OF DICE

Perhaps the great thing about horrific creations is that they can be added to just about any campaign world – even if there is *no desire* to turn it into a horror campaign. Perhaps the best example is the One Ring, which I talk a bit about in my column this month (pp. 36-37). It's a terrifying object, and it has truly scary effects on one's soul, but it doesn't really infest the underlying flavor of the rest of the setting. Even with Peter Jackson's slime-orcs, I don't think Middle Earth would top most people's top 10 list of Most Horrifying Settings.

If horrific items, beings, and even *places* can be included in a campaign without radically altering the overall feeling of the setting, then that makes them good choices for a change of pace in a more sedate campaign. After all, "horror" isn't a genre so much as a *flavoring* for other genres. If you're looking to add a new challenge for those meddling heroes, feel free to insert a scrap of spookiness, a scary adversary, or someone who made a deal with darkness. It even works in a

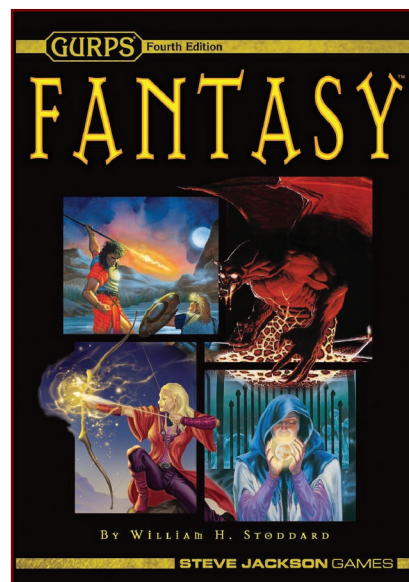
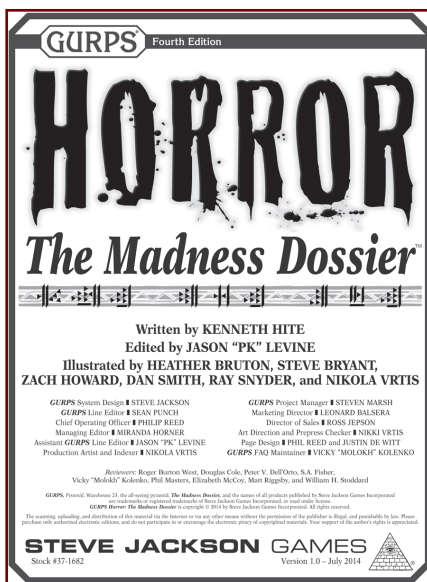
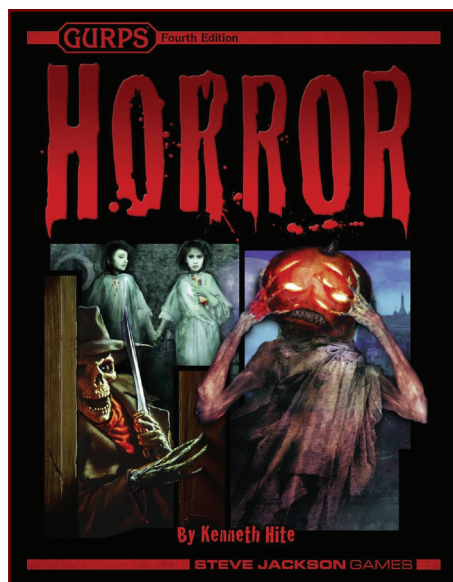
setting without explicit supernatural darkness; heart-stopping aliens could lurk around the darkest corners in a science-fiction campaign. Even in a "realistic" world, unsettling realities could lurk anywhere. (The orphan-mangling contraptions of the Industrial Revolution are examples of the corruptive possibilities of tempting devices.)

Of course, if you have a bona fide horror campaign, then it has a limitless appetite for new and terrifying wonders. (The battle depicted in the pages of *GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier* seems never-ending.) In that case, this issue of *Pyramid* should be even *more* applicable to your interests.

Regardless of how you unleash your inner demons, we recommend reading this issue of *Pyramid* with the lights on . . .

WRITE HERE, RIGHT NOW

So how unsettling was this issue? Did our scientists seem more disgruntled than mad, or did any of our experiments seem even creepier than you expected? Tell the gremlins privately at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the unusual suspects who gather publicly at forums.sjgames.com.



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IRAQI IRRUPTOR BLUES

BY JASON “PK” LEVINE

A SANDMAN team just went dark and the PCs are the closest backup. When they arrive, everyone is either missing or dead. To save the survivors and shut down the irruptors' horrific invention, they'll have to travel into the heart of a subduction zone, deal with a toxic meme that's spreading at a terrifying rate, and fight through a war zone that nobody else can even see.

This adventure for *GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier* makes a few assumptions about the path the PCs are *likely* to take, but includes enough information about what's going on for the GM to tackle things in any order. Statistics for Sandmen, cultists, araddin zombies, and irruptors can be found in *Madness Dossier*; treat random civilians as having attributes of 10 and skills in the 8-12 range.

Players can safely read “The Mission,” “The Hillah Team,” and the full “Chaldean Babylon and Etemenanki” box. Everything else is intended for the GM only.

THE MISSION

The PCs are urgently summoned to the nearest military base with a SANDMAN presence. The highest-ranked Project officer (here assumed to be Air Marshal Artimus Felt) will explain the situation to the team.

Project SANDMAN keeps a rotating team of personnel permanently stationed in Hillah, Iraq (53 miles south of Baghdad), monitoring the nearby subduction zone. Felt will summarize *Chaldean Babylon and Etemenanki* (p. 5) – or the GM can hand the information to a PC with good Archaeology and History skills and let *him* explain it. Felt emphasizes how stubborn the Chaldean subduction zone is: They close it, only to see it open again within months.

The current Hillah team is a detachment of nine commandos, all attached to a nearby U.S. Army base as consultants. They keep an eye on the Chaldean zone – using a mix of satellite imaging, local news, clandestine foot patrols, and sitting on their hotel roof with binoculars – in three shifts of three. As well, a handful of other Sandmen (mainly anthropologists and archaeologists) typically are present, taking measurements and trying to figure out how to destabilize the zone.

Two days ago, an unexpected reality temblor occurred in Karbala, 35 miles west of Hillah. The two reality archaeologists took three of the commandos with them to recon and contain the temblor. The two teams touched base hourly via radio, but one hour ago, all radio transmission from the

Hillah team (below) ceased. It could be technical difficulties, but the Project considers this an emergency. The Karbala team is still hard at work and cannot get away to check on the others.

Regardless of their actual distance from Hillah, the PCs are *effectively* the closest backup team, thanks to the fueled-up BAe 125 fast-transport jet (522 mph) waiting for them. If they're more than 1,000 miles away, the Project has even arranged for an emergency mid-air refuel over a friendly country so they can make it there in one trip. The jet has a secure connection to SANDMAN's data cloud. The team will find that local maps, personnel records, intel on the zone (*The Truth Will Subduct You*, p. 5), and tach-scripts for Area Knowledge (Hillah) and the Arabic and Akkadian languages have already been pushed to their mobile devices.

“Head into Hillah, find out what happened to the eight Sandmen there, and get us answers. Keep in contact and keep any Anunnaki techniques you use *local* and *focused*. That clear?”

THE HILLAH TEAM

With part of their team in Karbala, the eight Sandmen below were left stationed on the third (top) floor of the *Sayf-Rih* hotel, in northern Hillah. The plan was for the commandos to switch to just *two* shifts of three soldiers each (Derek/Mort/Lars and Faustine/Lillian/Paul), with the two “civilians” alternating schedules to spot them as needed.

- Faustine Herman, Sfc. (29, F)
- Derek Alberts, Sgt. (31, M)
- Lillian Navarro, Sgt. (26, F)
- Mort Forde, Cpl. (26, M)
- Lars Lindsay, Cpl. (24, M)
- Paul Amos, Spc. (24, M)
- Margaret Stoltz, applied anthropologist specializing in Babylon history (31, F)
- Henry Buck, neurolinguist specializing in modern Arabian memes (55, M)

The six commandos are all American citizens and members of the U.S. Army, with cover stories as military advisors to the Iraqi forces; miles of red tape keep anyone from realizing that they have no commanding officer. Margaret and Henry are British civilians, with covers as husband and wife here to assist Islamic Relief (a local humanitarian group).

Most hybrids should have at least one level of this disadvantage, so that people, sooner or later, will realize that it's not human.

Unusual Biochemistry

see p. B160

This disadvantage is common with this kind of creature. The weirder the mix, the more likely it is that ordinary drugs won't work correctly.

*The creatures I had seen were
not men, had never been men.
They were animals – humanised
animals – triumphs of vivisection.*
– H.G. Wells,
The Island of Dr. Moreau

RACIAL TEMPLATES

The best way to treat various possible archetypes of the dangerous human-animal crossbreed in **GURPS** is by way of racial templates.

The Predator in Disguise

29 points

A cross between a human and a carnivorous predator, this type of hybrid is presumably the result of an experiment gone awry, and it's out there, free and dangerous.

It can pass as a dull human, if clothed and hiding its teeth, fingers, fur, and vestigial tail. However, it's actually more like a ghoul, with a marked preference for human flesh, even though it can eat any kind of fresh, raw meat. It lives at the fringes of society, as a homeless man doing occasional, menial jobs at night. Its baggy, secondhand clothes notwithstanding, it can look very dangerous.

This crossbreed is suitable for any setting, being conceivable as the creation of an evil wizard, mad scientist, or foolhardy genetic engineer.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+2 [20]; DX+2 [40]; IQ-2 [-40].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+1 [2]; Will+2 [10]; Per+3 [15]; Basic Move+1 [5].

Advantages: Acute Taste and Smell 2 [4]; Claws (Blunt) [3]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Enhanced Dodge [15]; Fearlessness 3 [6]; Night Vision 3 [3]; Perfect Balance [15]; Teeth (Sharp Teeth) [1].

Perks: Fearsome Stare; Fur; On Alert. [3]

Disadvantages: Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Callous [-5]; Loner (12) [-5]; Local Language (Accented/None) [-4]; Odious Personal Habit (Eats sentient beings) [-15]; Restricted Diet (Fresh raw meat) [-10]; Secret (Man-eating abomination) [-20]*; Stress Atavism (Mild) (12) [-10]; Unnatural Features 1 [-1]; Wealth (Poor) [-15].

Quirk: Alcohol Intolerance. [-1]

Features and Taboo Traits: Sterile; Vestigial tail; Taboo Traits (Cowardice, Pacifism).

Skills: Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Climbing (A) DX [1]-12†; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-10; Jumping (E) DX [1]-12; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Tracking (A) Per [2]-11.

* If the Secret is revealed, it should be replaced by Social Stigma (Monster) [-15] and one or more Enemies.

† Includes +1 from Perfect Balance.

The Genetic Danger

123 points

This creature is a monumental failure of genetic engineering. Especially in a small space colony, it might be a significant threat to the gene pool of the main species. It can easily appear human, it can sway humans, and it's fertile. Its driving motive is to perpetuate its own genes.

What's more, its astounding genetic instability means that it can slowly morph a feature it needs – to escape from detention, for instance. Let it rest at the bottom of a well overnight, and

by morning, it will have developed bodily mutations to overcome the challenge. Clinging? Flying? Burrowing? It's impossible to predict what it will be able to do. A GM can be really creative with such a being!

Attribute Modifiers: DX+2 [40]; IQ-1 [-20]; HT+1 [10].

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

Advantages: Appearance (Beautiful) (Accessibility, Only when considered human, -10%; Androgynous) [11]; Cosmic Power 15 (Limited, Advantages Only, -10%; Physical Only, +50%; Preparation Required, 8 hours, -60%) [120]; Hermaphromorph (Preparation Required, 8 hours, -60%) [2]; Indomitable [15].

Perk: Perfume. [1]

Disadvantages: Enemy (To be defined by the GM; Hunter; 9 or less) [-10]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Increased Consumption 1 [-10]; Local Language (Accented/None) [-4]; Obsession (Reproduction and survival of its own gene pool) (12) [-10]; Short Lifespan 2 [-20]; Stress Atavism (Mild) (12) [-10]; Unnatural Features 1 [-1*]; Unusual Biochemistry [-5].

Quirk: Nosy. [-1]

Features and Taboo Traits: Shorter Gestation; Taboo Traits (Sexless).

Skills: Acting (A) IQ [2]-9; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Sex Appeal (Human) (A) HT+2 [1]-13†.

* Unnatural Features may be worth more points depending on how radical the change is from a standard human appearance, after having used the Modular Abilities.

† Includes +3 from Appearance.

The following disadvantages warrant additional comment or offer new variations pertaining to crossroads bargains.

Compulsive Warding [-5*]: The individual is obsessed with protecting himself against the bargain's consequences. The character may cover every available surface with icons of saints, pour salt and goofer dust behind all doors and windows, constantly recite from the Quran, or whatever his culture believes keeps dark powers away.

Cursed [-75]: Must be mitigated to exclude benefits explicitly contained in the terms of the bargain. The GM should determine the mitigation percentage based upon the bargain's specifics.

Delusions [-5 to -15]: In a secular age, an individual claiming to have sold his soul to the Devil will be treated as delusional. Even if true, the person will experience the disadvantage's consequences. For an interesting twist, a character in a mundane world could suffer delusions of having made an infernal bargain while actually succeeding through hard work and talent.

Destiny [Varies]: As long as they don't explicitly conflict, a crossroads bargain may contain Destiny as both an advantage and a disadvantage. Someone destined to become the generation's greatest martial artist may also be fated to ruin the lives of loved ones.

Enemies [Varies]: One Enemy of special note is the hellhound, an infernal minion often charged with collecting on deals. For a worthy challenge, hellhounds should be built on at least 150% of points [-20].

Secret [-5 to -30]: Based on the time, place, and specifics of a campaign, any value of Secret is appropriate for making a bargain. In Robert Johnson's 1930s South, for example, it is worth -5 (for a musician or ne'er-do-well) or -10 (for a minister or pillar of the community).

Reputation [Varies]: An individual who is open about having sold his soul may acquire one or more Reputations. Again, these depend on time, place, and specifics. In the 1930s South, -2 among respectable folks and +1 among music fans, thrill seekers, and Bohemians is reasonable.

Terminally Ill [-50 to -100]: Putting a very final time limit on bargains is common in contemporary fiction. The Terminal Illness disadvantage models this perfectly. If preferred, the name can be changed to something more thematic, such as Borrowed Time.

Removing Advantages

To ensure players truly feel the impact of character bargains, buying off an advantage or two may be more effective than adding disadvantages. Jealous Allies may desert the bargainer, Acute Smell may be compromised by the constant aroma of brimstone, and so on. The discretion of the GM is important to avoid removing advantages fundamental to player enjoyment of the character.

Sample Crossroads Bargain #1

0 points

Guitarist Jackie Terraplane is tired of playing small clubs for drinking money. Remembering her blues history, she hops down to the nearest crossroads.

Advantages: Charisma 1 [5]; Musical Ability 2 [10]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages: Alcoholism [-12]; Enemy (Hellhound; Hunter; 6 or less) [-8]; Reputation -2 (Corrupter of youth; Parents; All the time) [-4]; Uncongenial [-1]. All bargain-related disadvantages have Mitigator, Escape Clause, Defeat Supernatural Agent in Contest, -20%.

Sample Crossroads Bargain #2

0 points

Godoric the Dwarf's family stronghold has been overrun by a dragon. Swearing vengeance, rather than rounding up some cousins and a diminutive burglar, he cuts a quick deal with dark forces.

Skills: Axe/Mace (A) DX+5 [20]; Occultism (Dragons) (A) IQ+1 [4].

Advantages: Damage Resistance 5 (Limited, Burning, -40%) [15]; Language: Draconic (Native) [6]; Luck [15].

Disadvantages: Callous [-5]; Frightens Animals [-9]; Obsession [-5]; On the Edge [-14]; Secret (Made a deal with the Dark One; Possible Death) [-27]. All bargain-related disadvantages have Mitigator, Escape Clause, Atonement and Piety, -10%.

Sample Crossroads Bargain #3

0 points

Streetwise tough Mickey Miller encounters a problem fists can't solve - his nephew, and dependent, has been diagnosed with a rare disease and given less than a year to live. Mickey is at a loss, but he recalls the rambling tales of an old man down at the bar . . .

Advantages: Buy off dependent's Terminally Ill (Up to one year) [75].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Unattractive, Sallow complexion and bags around the eyes) [-3]; Destiny (Die with his deeds unrecognized) [-4]; Nightmares [-4]; Terminally Ill (Up to one year) [-53]; Weirdness Magnet [-11]. All bargain-related disadvantages have Escape Clause, Defeat Supernatural Agent in Combat, -30%.

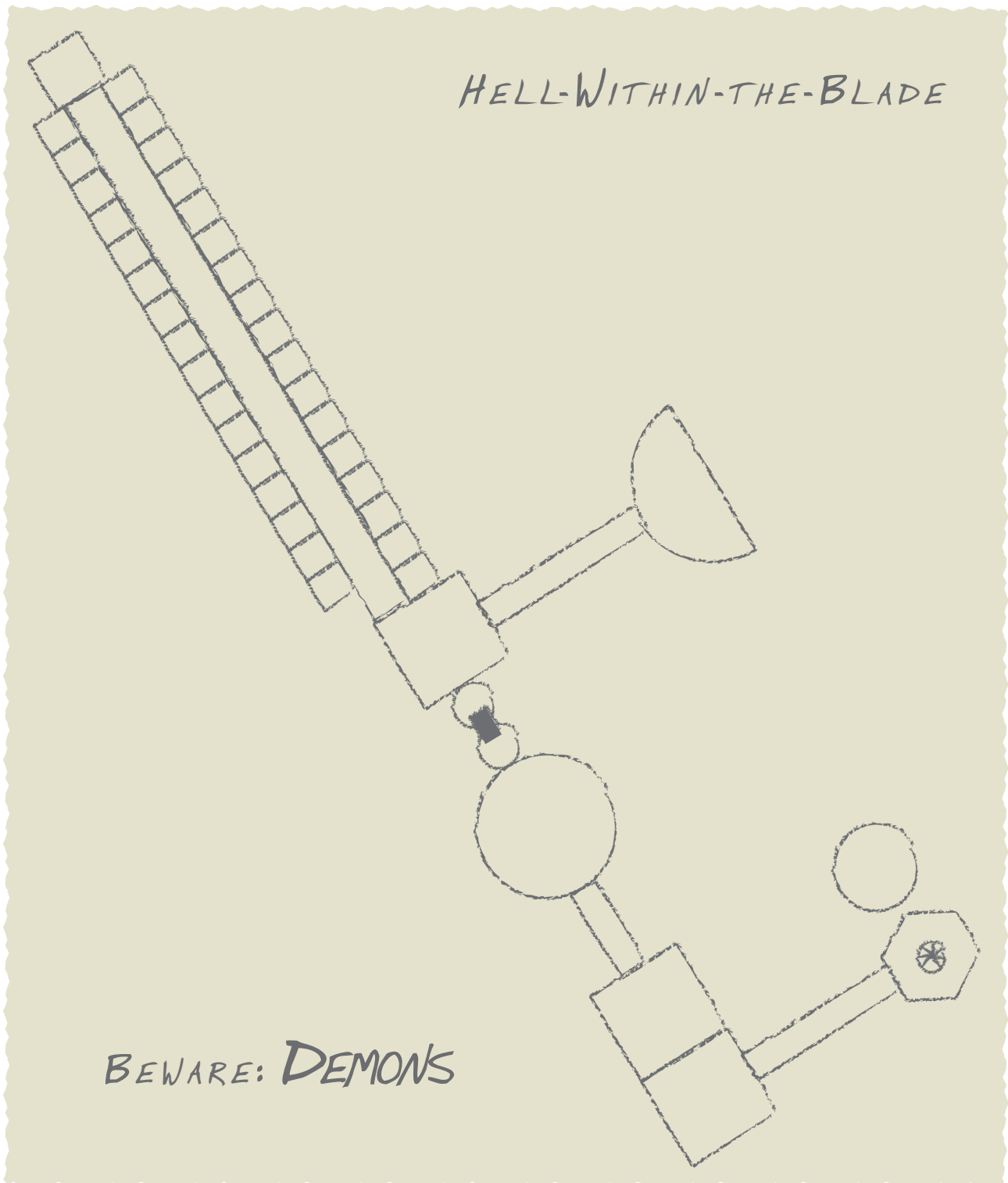
Escape Clauses:

Fire on the Mountain, Run, Boy, Run

In fiction, the true joy of a crossroads bargain is typically not the deal itself but a protagonist's struggle to escape its consequences. In roleplaying, many players delight in weaseling out of agreements with NPCs. Crossroads devils should be no exception. *How Very Tempting* provides a straightforward and flexible mechanism for dealmakers who rethink their decision (see *Pyramid* #3/67, p. 18). But the folklore and genre conventions of crossroads bargains offer several other mechanisms for petitioners to get out of the terms of the deal. These *Escape Clauses* could be treated as Mitigators to the cost of a bargain's disadvantages. The GM will need to assign the mitigation value based on specifics, but suggested percentages are provided below. Escape Clauses fall into four general categories.

ODDS AND ENDS

This unlabeled, "hand-drawn" version of the Hell-Within-the-Blade map for *Eidetic Memory: Hellblade* (pp. 15-20) can be used as an in-game prop or as a tactical aid for the players or GM.



ABOUT *GURPS*

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Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

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.

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