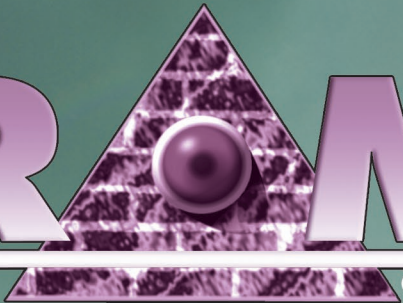


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/99 January '17

NECRO-PSI

by Christopher R. Rice

THE SLAUGHTERREALM

by J. Edward Tremlett

SOUL REAPERS

by David L. Pulver

WHAT DOESN'T KILL ME MAKES ME STRONGER

by Scott Rochat

DEATH AND BEYOND



STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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I expect to pass through life but once. If therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again.

– William Penn

Death isn't just the end; it can be the beginning of an untapped realm of adventure! This month we look at various aspects of the great beyond, and figure out ways to bring its greatness to the adventuring table.

Necromantic magic isn't the only game in town to deal with the dead; try using your mind as a *Necro-Psi*. New abilities that add to the *GURPS Psionic Powers* framework let the mental master unleash the power of the hereafter! Communicate with spirits, animate corpses, and control shadows and darkness. *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* co-author Christopher R. Rice describes the Necrokinesis power and its three divisions, including techniques, perks, and guidelines for building further abilities.

With a new way to look at the deaths of their foes, adventurers will discover *What Doesn't Kill Me Makes Me Stronger*. Let your *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* heroes gain immediate bonuses for downed enemies with this new system for track-

ing opponent difficulties. In addition to explaining the optional rules and variants, you'll get a table of monsters – and the Kill Points you can get by defeating them – spanning the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* line.

Make death more *personable* in your *GURPS Monster Hunters* campaign with *Soul Reapers*. In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* – offers new *GURPS* psychopomp templates to unleash personified servitors of

death. It also showcases a new necro power, stats for a spectral steed, and suggestions for using reapers as enemies and allies in *Monster Hunters* adventures.

When your fantasy adventurers really want to challenge their fighting skills, take them to *The Slaughterealm*. This systemless extended adventure outline describes the cruel game, its patrons, and its organizer, plus offers tips for using it with both low- and high-level delvers.

This issue wraps up with a Random Thought Table that looks at how permanent and problematic the very *idea* of death might be for various campaigns, from our own unforgiving world to soap-opera settings where *no one* ever seems to stay dead.

With this month's *Pyramid*, the “undiscovered country” has never been so accessible and ready to be discovered. If you're looking for the hereafter, then this issue is what you're here after . . . and it's *to die for!*

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

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FROM THE EDITOR

AN ISSUE TO DIE FOR?

In a tarot deck, the Death card is associated with endings and beginnings, the end of the old and the beginning of the new. In popular culture, it's often associated with the Grim Reaper, skulls, and other things painted on the sides of cool vans. But no matter how you cut it, death is an often-unexplored opportunity for roleplaying games, outside of being a "gift" you're sometimes trying to bestow upon the bad-dies you're facing before they try to do the same to you.

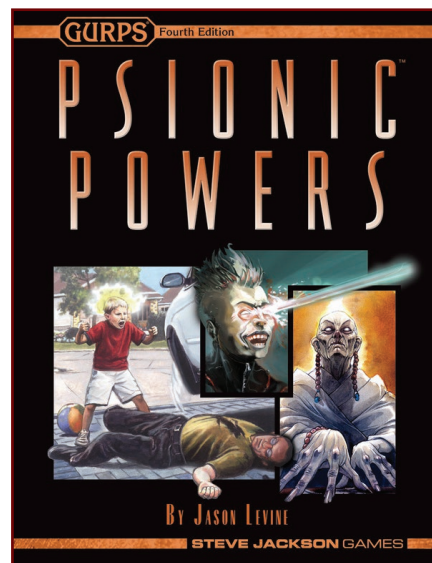
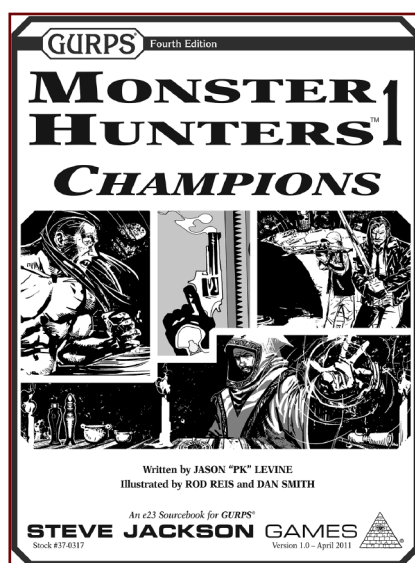
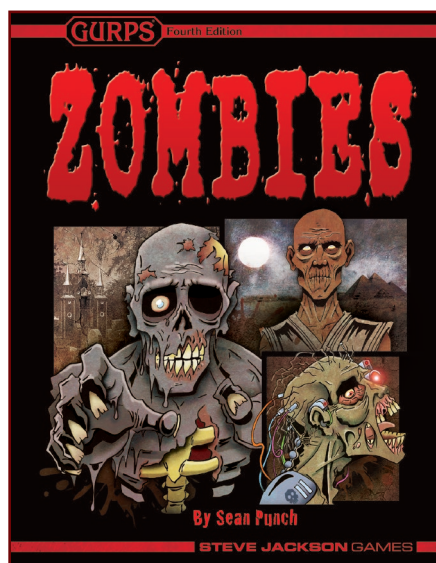
And that's a shame! Death is more than just the end of life, especially in myth and legend. The descent into the underworld is a common trope of the mythic journey. The personification of Death features prominently in Terry Pratchett's Discworld series (and, of course, that same cloaked figure can feature as prominently as you'd like if you're playing in the world of the just-released *Discworld Roleplaying Game*). Necromancy and strange powers that bend reality make for a great hook.

Allowing the veil to be thinned slightly between the worlds of the living and the dead can be the source of adventures. And if you haven't given much thought to the role of death in your game, doing so can open up more possibilities (see pp. 36-37 for food for thought).

GURPS has always been a game of possibilities, changes, and whole new opportunities with each campaign. (We've even started bringing print books "back from the dead" with eagerly awaited new printings of *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, *GURPS Thaumatology*, and *GURPS Magic!*) Don't fear the reaper; invite him to the table and get ready for the game of your life!

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of beginnings and endings, each issue of *Pyramid* is a beginning and ending of its own. . . and we love to know your thoughts! Was this theme to die for? Let us know by dropping a line at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the lively group online at forums.sjgames.com.



Additional Material: Jason "PK" Levine, Phil Masters, and William H. Stoddard

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NECRO-PSI

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

Why should magic-wielding necromancers and mystics have all the fun with reanimated corpses? Some stories portray *psychic* abilities as a way to animate and manipulate

the dead. This article presents a new form of psionic powers, Necrokinesis, that does all that and more.

NECROKINESIS

Necrokinesis is part psychic vampirism, part psychokinesis, and part ESP. Like Ergokinesis (*GURPS Psionic Powers*, pp. 30-37), it's split into three separate, but related powers. *Animakinesis* is the direct manipulation of the soul or spirit (or whatever passes for it in the campaign). *Thanatokinesis* is the ability to animate, communicate with, and control the dead. *Umbrakinesis* allows the manipulation of shadows and darkness. In some campaigns, these three divisions may be completely separate powers – ask the GM.

Power Modifier: Every ability in this power has the limitation Necrokinesis, -10%. This reflects that it is part of this power and uses the rules under *How Psi Works (Psionic Powers*, pp. 6-11).

ANIMAKINESIS

Animakinesis abilities allow the necro-psi to interact with the spirits of the dead. It also helps with manipulating whatever passes for the soul in the campaign setting. In some worlds, Astral Projection may be a part of Animakinesis or vice versa. Regardless, Spirit Communication (*Psionic Powers*, p. 43) and Aura Reading (*Psionic Powers*, p. 46) are both Animakinesis powers.

Soul Sight

7/14/21/25 points for levels 1-4

Skill: Soul Sight (IQ/Hard).

Deeper than merely reading an aura, this ability allows you to see into the depths of a target's *soul*. This only works

on beings who have a soul (GM's judgment; by default, living beings of IQ 6+ can be affected). Roll a Quick Contest of your skill vs. the subject's Will. Success gives you +3 on Detect Lies, Fortune-Telling, and Psychology against the subject. This bonus also applies to skill rolls of a spiritual nature (e.g., Exorcism for helping a possessed subject or Religious Ritual for confession) *instead* of detecting impostors (p. B51).

This ability can tell you if the subject is possessed or under any sort of mental control. You can also determine the person's current general spiritual state (e.g., any major sins or trespasses) and identify mental disadvantages. Success reveals appropriate quirks or disadvantages, up to -5 points per point of success; e.g., a success by 3 could identify one -15 point disadvantage, or multiple disadvantages totaling -15 points, such as Bully (15) [-5] and Bad Temper (12) [-10].

The GM can add other effects to this ability to suit the campaign.

At level 1, Soul Sight requires a touch *and* you must lock eyes with your target. At level 2, you need only see his eyes. At level 3, you can use it at range, but you suffer a skill penalty of -1/yard. At level 4, you use normal range penalties (p. B550).

Statistics: Detect Souls (Link, +10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Necrokinesis, -10%; Requires IQ vs. Will roll, -10%; Vision-Based, -20%; Vision-Based, Reversed, -20%) [4] + Empathy (Link, +10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Necrokinesis, -10%; Requires IQ vs. Will roll, -10%; Vision-Based, -20%; Vision-Based, Reversed, -20%) [3]. *Notes:* Empathy trades the bonus to notice impostors for a similar bonus to assist with spiritual rolls. Further levels remove Vision-Based, Reversed from both traits [8 + 6]; then replace Melee Attack with Short-Range 1 [12 + 9]; then remove Short-Range [14 + 11].

You Can Necromance If You Want To

Necromantic spells from *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Magic: Death Spells* may provide inspiration for creating new Necrokinesis powers. For example, Death Vision might be an Affliction bestowing the subject with "Visions (Overwhelming Aspected)" (*Psionic Powers*, p. 39). When magic-based necromancy and Necrokinesis abilities interact, treat Magery as Necrokinesis Power Talent and the activation or spell skill roll as a psionic skill roll.

Show Me Your Soul

Hard

Default: Soul Sight-8. Cannot exceed Soul Sight.

You see the acts, deeds, and past actions that shaped the target. This gives you +2 on Influence skills, Tactics, and Strategy rolls in situations where knowing what your target would do is useful.

The GM who wants to add this twist may give adventurers a 10% KP bonus when they slay a “mortal foe.” This must have a justification beyond “kill all monsters!” Suitable motivations can include an Enemy, Intolerance, a Higher Purpose, an Obsession, or even just a bit of predetermined campaign color (“The Thulid Barbarians of the North have long been tormented by ice snakes and bring a trophy home from every one they destroy”).

The GM determines whether a given opposition qualifies for the mortal-foe bonus, but flexibility is appropriate. If the necromancer’s guards are armed with blades forged from demonic iron, maybe the party’s holy warrior *should* be allowed to ignite his righteous anger and have at them.

Again, a hero must finish off the monster to claim the bonus. So don’t let anyone stand between you and your well-earned retribution!

Traps

All this may be fine and dandy for the kill-jockeys, but what about the more elegant problem-solvers? A hail of poisoned darts from the stonework can put down an adventurer as surely as the Forgotten Golem of Wang the Magnificent – “killing” the trap should be worth something, too. Reward your “lovable rogues” and curse-breakers for doing what they love most by using a similar method to determine KPs for their favorite dangers:

- *Damage:* As with a slain monster, a defeated trap has a starting Kill Point value equal to the maximum amount of damage it does. So, a spring-loaded 1d+5 crossbow has a base value of 11 KPs.

- *Inaccuracy:* If a trap requires a “to-hit” roll, use the same inaccuracy modifiers as on p. 14. Traps that *automatically* affect the first person to trigger them are treated as a skill of 16+ and take no inaccuracy penalties.

- *Extras:* If a trap has more than one attack or its main attack has a follow-up effect, add 10% of the base value for each “extra.”

- *Defense/Infirmity:* Traps normally lack the special defensive powers and weaknesses of monsters, so this is instead reflected by the modifiers to perceive or disarm the trap. Every -1 adds a point; every +1 subtracts a point.

- *Effectiveness:* As with monsters, a GM can decide that shutting down a particular trap is especially crucial or inconsequential to the story. Since the usual labels may not feel quite right (“Man, that trap was really boss!”), go ahead and change them to joke (×1/10), nuisance (×1/2), ordinary (×1), danger (×2) and deathtrap (×3) instead.

Example: If Sneaky Joe spots a suspicious floor tile (-2 to Per rolls) and shuts down the trigger (-3 to disarm) that would have sent Krigshen’s Deadly Ice Axe swinging down (13 or less to hit, 3d damage), Joe gets to collect 18 KPs, assuming that the trap is an ordinary threat.

Getting Sneaky

Not every trap deals damage so directly, though. What about vents that issue a Sleep pastille, or bracelets that shrink the wearer to 3” high, or guardian statues whose eyes freeze a trespasser in place?

Run the same formula, but assign a damage value of 6d for any effect that’s the equivalent of instant long-term coma or death (such as Flesh to Stone), 4d for any effect that’s the equivalent of immediate unconsciousness or incapacitation (such as Sleep, Ecstasy or Great Hallucination), or 2d for effects that leave the adventurer able to act on his surroundings, though at reduced capacity (such as Shrink or Transform Other).

Extra-potent traps, of course, are worth more KPs! For every -1 to an adventurer’s resistance roll, add 1 to the trap’s value.

“WE MEET AGAIN, SIR MORDRED.”

Even in the dungeon, “opponent” doesn’t always mean “monster.” There’s a long tradition of filthy brigands, scheming necromancers, and dark knights ready to do battle at the drop of a die. It’s recommended that these be worked out with the DIE-DIE formula in advance, but the “simple way” *can* give a value worthy of the effort, so long as all of the character’s damage dice are accounted for. The stereotypical barbarian, for example, would add the dice for a 1d+2 unarmed blow, a 1d+4 long-bow, and 3d+2 Big Mutha Axe, while a knight might have seven different weapons to add (including that bashing shield!), and a wizard will need to include the damage from her Lightning Bolt, Fireball, and other bursts of magical devastation.

So, when the party finally has it out with the mighty Gilkrak Skullcrusher (built on the barbarian template from *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*, p. 4, and armed as above) and lays his oversized body on the cavern floor, how much is the Monstrous Marauder of the North worth? Take his best combat skill (Two-Handed Axe/Mace-17) times 5 total dice of damage and divide it by 2 to get 42 points. But Gilkrak’s mighty frame had 22 hit points, so double that base value for a total of 84 KP . . . and since he’s the boss of the scenario, double *that* for a total of 168 Kill Points!

Note that well-armed characters and battle-master mages can get very high values this way, compared to skulkers and “support characters.” Life ain’t fair in the dungeon, but the other party members might want to be sure those supporters get compensated in other ways, to encourage them to stick around.

Say What?

Even in dungeon fantasy, there always seems to be that one party member who wants to *talk* to the monster, guard, or undead polar bear . . . or at least keep it busy while their fatigued, battered teammates slip out the back. Those who use the *Negotiation*, *Trickery*, or “*Good (Three-Headed) Doggie!*” options on p. 10 of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons* to successfully neutralize a threat can score half the KPs that would normally have been generated by a kill, if the GM is sufficiently impressed with their weaseling.

Its abilities are bought with the Reaper power modifier. Add the user's Reaper Talent level where appropriate when rolling to use abilities. This power can be justified in various ways.

First, some humans are born with reaper powers. Often this is due to early exposure to ghosts, e.g., a child born or raised in a haunted house. It could instead be a family gift ("grandma could see spirits, your mother was a medium, and now that power's grown even stronger in you"). It might instead come from a taint of inhuman blood (an ancestor or parent was a faerie, angel of death, grim reaper, etc.), or a death-haunted maternity, like being born from a dead mother by cesarean section, or being conceived while one parent was ghost-possessed. Such natural-born reapers often start with the ability to sense ghosts (the Medium advantage) as children, and grow up being thought spooky, morbid, or goth-like by those around them. By the time they're young adults, a full-fledged Reaper ability set may have materialized, leading to a monster-hunting profession. Sometimes, a particular trauma triggers the transformation (see *Reaper Triggers*, p. 26); other times, this may come after being recruited by other reapers or monster hunters.

Second, certain priests, exorcists, shamans, voodoo practitioners, crusaders, mediums, or spiritualists may form an intimate connection with death itself. Their faithful and regular performances of last rites and exorcisms, or possibly séances and spirit channeling, eventually blossom into full-fledged reaper powers. These individuals normally view their psychopomp abilities as coming directly from whatever god or tradition they follow. They typically possess advantages such as Blessed or True Faith. Again, full realization of their power may be triggered by a traumatic encounter (e.g., with a powerful ghost or evil spirit) or through recruitment and mentorship by other reapers.

Third, inhuman reapers can possess a range of Reaper abilities that can be chosen as part of their racial templates (and, unlike purely racial traits, are subject to the restrictions of the Reaper PM). A god with domain over death might grant these abilities to those servants who function as supernatural psychopomps.

Power Modifier: Reaper

-10%

Reaper abilities function both in the material world and in the spirit realm where ghosts and similar entities exist when insubstantial (*Monster Hunters* identifies this with the outer astral plane). However, Reaper powers may cease to work entirely in a particular dimension where the concept of death does not exist, such as in a heaven or hell that is entirely peopled by immortal souls who cannot be destroyed.

Reapers often have a Code of Honor [-10] that requires them to act in certain ways, typically to risk their lives to help troubled souls and ghosts cross over to the afterlife and banish evil spirits of the dead. The sanction for failing this code will either be a loss of those abilities with the Reaper PM (if the power came directly from a superior god), or -10-point Enemies (Other reapers) if the code is enforced by the dictates of a reaper organization.

Reaper Talent

5 points/level

Each level adds to rolls to use Reaper abilities. Add the Reaper Talent to skill when performing exorcisms on ghosts and other undead vulnerable to exorcism; this does not work against entities (like demons) who aren't spirits of the dead.

Reaper Abilities

In some settings, all reapers may have the same abilities. In others, reapers with different origins or ability sets may exist. All reapers should have some ability to sense or communicate with ghostly beings. Inhuman reapers are not limited to the Reaper abilities chosen during character creation; they may add more using earned character points.

Possible Reaper abilities also include Eyes of the Dead [20], Ghost Weapon [14], Spirit Communication [14/24], and Spirit Empathy [9] (but *not* Spirit Channeling!), detailed for Mysticism in *Monster Hunters (Monster Hunters 1, p. 44)*; use identical statistics.

Death Sense

8 or 18 points*

With a second of concentration and a Per roll (minus normal range penalties), you can sense the presence of the nearest death that occurred within the last three minutes.

REAPERS AND COSMOLOGY

To have reapers, one needs to posit the existence of souls and life after death. Given the presence of ghosts – and often demons, angels, and similar entities – that should fit most *Monster Hunter* campaigns.

The GM should decide if reapers are certain of whatever afterlife they're sending souls, can travel to such realms, etc. In modern fantasy, reapers are often presented as capable of assisting souls to their reward, but being unable to enter themselves (until their number is up). That's convenient if the GM wishes to avoid having any particular religion "correct" in the setting. Of course, they may *believe* they are sending souls to Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, or the next reincarnation; perhaps reapers can even glimpse this by peering through Death's Gate (p. 24).

If reapers work for a specific god or organization, it will likely have particular beliefs or traditions regarding why they're responsible for guiding souls and what happens to them. Whether these are true is another matter! Of course, the GM is also free to firmly connect reapers with a particular real-world religion or mythology that fits the flavor of the campaign, invent a unique cosmology, or decide the soul's final destination parallels the beliefs each individual held in life.

Or, perhaps reapers are driven solely by an instinct or calling to function as psychopomps, their power innate or driven by primal but impersonal forces such as Death or Order. If so, any "heaven" or "hell" the soul is transported to may be a purely subjective experience assembled from their life experiences, and a formal organization of reapers, should one even exist, may be based on the reapers' own philosophies (rather than those of a god or pantheon) for mutual support.

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