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Fourth Edition

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BY PHIL MASTERS AND JONATHAN WOODWARD

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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By Phil Masters and Jonathan Woodward Edited by Janie Murphy and Steve Jackson

Based on GURPS FANTASY by Steve Jackson, Kirk Tate, and Janet Naylor

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Phil Masters: To my players of the last 25 years, who suffered while I learned. Jonathan Woodward: To Annie Webber, ever a shelter from the storm.

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## About GURPS

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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.

# INTRODUCTION

*This world to me is like a lasting storm . . .*

– William Shakespeare, *Pericles*

Welcome to Yrth – the world of the Banestorm. Here humanity and a dozen other races, orphans and authors of the storm alike, wield swords and spells in a struggle for survival and glory. Although trolls and dragons lurk in the dark places, the worst dangers of all may be found in the verdant forests and great palaces . . .

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

*GURPS Banestorm* is a guide to fantasy RPG adventures on the world of Yrth, particularly the continent of Ytarria. Yrth largely resembles our own world save that magic works there and none of its original sapient or semi-intelligent races are human. However, an ancient dimensional vortex known as the Banestorm has periodically transplanted humans and others to Ytarria from Earth . . . and elsewhere.

This book is a supplement for *GURPS Fourth Edition*, and Yrth-based games can be run with nothing more than this and the two volumes of the *GURPS Basic Set*. However, many gamers may wish to mine the extensive list of spells and rule guidelines in *GURPS Magic* as well as the general campaign concerns found in *GURPS Fantasy*.

Most of *GURPS Banestorm* is intended to be read by both GMs and players. However, GMs may ask players not to read Chapter 3, which details Ytarria's cultures; there *are* one or two secrets revealed there. On the other hand, some GMs might prefer to treat some of what's said there as old wives' tales, uncorroborated rumors, or complete falsehoods, just to keep players who "cheat" uncertain and off-balance. We definitely encourage such stratagems. Chapter 6 is mostly aimed at GMs but provides suggestions and outlines rather than details. Players may find this section useful when constructing their characters' backgrounds.

## Publication History

The *GURPS* fantasy world of Yrth is actually older than *GURPS* itself. It first appeared in 1985 as the setting for *Orcslayer*, by Warren Spector and Steve Jackson; this adventure focused on the region of Caithness and worked with the core combat system for *GURPS*, published the following year.

In 1986, a larger world-rendering appeared in the first edition of *GURPS Fantasy*, by Steve Jackson. A general guide to running fantasy games in *GURPS*, it also outlined Yrth as a sample setting, still focusing on Caithness. That land reappeared in 1988 as the location for Aaron Allston and J. David George's *GURPS Fantasy: Harkwood*, a campaign setting and scenario based on a feudal fief. In 1989, Alexander von Thorn's *GURPS Fantasy: Tredroy* looked at the "City of Three Laws." Kirk Tate and Janet Naylor wrote a completely new 1990 edition titled *GURPS Fantasy: The Magical World of Yrth*, which plumbed the mysteries of Ytarria even further.

Yrth was the official "default" setting for *GURPS* fantasy games, but after 1990 it was only lightly developed, notably in the 1991 anthology *GURPS Fantasy Adventures*, which featured scenarios by Chris W. McCubbin, David Dunham, Walter Milliken, and David L. Pulver. *Pyramid* authors continued to discuss Yrth;

it also received passing mentions in various "generic" fantasy-oriented *GURPS* supplements over the years.

This book returns to Yrth, advancing its history 15 years from its last substantial depiction and bringing game mechanics in line with *GURPS Fourth Edition*. We've broadened the general scope in some spots, explored more detail in others – and taken the opportunity to change a few things.

## Ytarria

This book, like its predecessors, focuses on the continent of Ytarria. Located in Yrth's northern hemisphere, Ytarria spans roughly 3,000 miles. Local climes range from parched deserts and subtropical forests in the south to chilly subarctic regions in the north. Humans have settled a number of outlying islands but maintain contact with mainland cultures. Some nonhuman races dwell under the waves themselves.

Although other continents exist on Yrth, ocean travel is difficult. Ships are likely to be beset by powerful currents, wild storms, monsters, and supernatural strangeness. GMs may view the lack of development of Ytarria's neighbors as an invitation to design and populate these places themselves; however, *GURPS Banestorm* is explicitly written to provide plenty of adventuring opportunities as it stands.

## About the Authors

Phil Masters has been playing RPGs since 1978; his first professional writing appeared in 1980, his first RPG book in 1990, and his first work for Steve Jackson Games (*GURPS Arabian Nights*) in 1993. Since then, he's worked on many more *GURPS* books, including the *Discworld* and *Hellboy* RPGs (the latter also with Jonathan Woodward). He's also written for White Wolf, Guardians of Order, and Eden Studios, among others. He lives in the U.K., runs a biweekly game, and sometimes helps organize RPG conventions.

Jonathan Woodward, a freelance writer and computer professional, is the author or co-author of *GURPS Ogre*, *GURPS Magic Items 3*, the *Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game*, and *Transhuman Space: In The Well*, all for Steve Jackson Games. He has also co-authored several books for White Wolf Publishing. In addition to roleplaying, he collects books and deconstructs maps. He lives in Massachusetts, with a summer home in Sahud.

# THE BANESTORM

The Defenders counted many powerful mages among their members. Together they assembled a spell to bring a merciless bane down on the orcs. The intended nature of this bane is not clear; judging by the results, the spell was designed either to send all the orcs to another world or to summon creatures hostile to orcs. Perhaps it was just a generalized “wish” for something that would deal with the orc problem.

Their strongest mages conducted the primary spellwork at a high-mana site near the western edge of the Ytarrian Forest, close to what is now the center of the Great Desert. Other sorcerers and allies performed supporting ceremonies in communities across the continent. The spell built over weeks, coming to a climax on June 26th, 1050 A.D.

It backfired. Calamitously. The massive spell unleashed a torrent of magical wildfire that scorched much of the western forest and drained mana from hundreds of thousands of square miles. The effect cascaded into the supporting ceremonies, reducing many elven communities to cinders. Then it jumped to other high-mana spots, not all in elven territory. The sorcerous flames devastated the land, burning away woods and creating new deserts.

If that had been the full extent of the catastrophe, it still would have been the greatest blight of Ytarrian history. But the Defenders got their Bane as well. The spell snatched thousands of beings of various races from their worlds, depositing them on Yrth. These newcomers usually regarded the orcs with hostility, but often they were nearly as offensive to everyone else. Unnatural storms always heralded these dimensional breaches, and the Bane thus became known as the Banestorm.

Yet, despite the cataclysm, the Defenders survived. Their descendants continue to pursue their original aims, albeit in secret. See the sections on the Blackwoods (pp. 16, 99), *Dark Elves* (p. 18), and “*The Genetics of Magery*” (p. 29). GMs may wish to bar their players from reading the second section on the Blackwoods.

The disaster gave the Defenders the two names which Yrth knows them by today. Only among themselves are they called the Defenders now. Other elves call them “Bringers of the Storm,” or “Storm-Bringers” for short. The other races simply call them the Dark Elves.

## EARLY CHAOS

Humans were by far the majority of the newcomers. Ships lost at sea found haven on unfamiliar shores, if not necessarily *safe* haven. Entire villages arrived on Yrth intact; travelers caught in sudden tempests never reached their intended destinations. Most of this occurred between the years 1050 and 1200 A.D., the approximate time of the Crusades on Earth.

Many immigrants died, but more survived and banded together. Some founded small villages, while others took to banditry. For most, day-to-day survival outweighed any desire or need to consider what had happened. Those few who had time for curiosity looked at the strange moon overhead and the stranger creatures abroad and concluded they were a very long way from home.

## First Contacts

Some of the newcomers went years without meeting nonhumans; others encountered them quickly. The dwarves had retreated to their caverns, and met no humans for centuries. Some of the elves avoided the new beings, while others tried to help them. The orcs, inevitably, attacked.

Apart from the humans of Earth, the Banestorm also brought goblins, hobgoblins, kobolds, and reptile men from their homeworld Gabrook; centaurs, giants, halflings, and minotaurs from Loren’dil; merfolk and shark men from Olokun; and other, rarer creatures. The wilder newcomers like hobgoblins and minotaurs adapted quickly, resuming their savage hunting and scavenging with little interruption. The goblins and halflings, who had civilized parts of their homeworlds, struggled to adjust, but they were no less adaptable than mankind, and where they appeared in numbers, they thrived.

The first interracial encounters were usually marked by violence. Each saw the other as monsters, and even when the strangers were obviously intelligent, the struggle to survive encouraged hostility.

## Gaming the Banestorm

The default setting for a *GURPS Banestorm* campaign is present-day, but equally exciting games can take place in the 11th century, when the Banestorm was at its peak. The players should create characters native to Earth: probably medieval Europeans, though PCs from the Middle East, Asia, or even other worlds like Gabrook are also valid. Life on their home world seems to be proceeding as expected until a strange storm spills over the horizon . . .

Some adventurers may arrive on Yrth with nothing but the clothes on their backs, but it’s possible for whole buildings and small villages to come through. Regardless, the transition will deprive newcomers of most of their social structure. In the new world, they must band together with other immigrants if they want to survive. Great leaders can create safety for their people and possibly found their own empires, reshaping the history of Yrth as presented here. See *Out of the Storm* (p. 234) for more ideas.

For more Banestorm details to exploit, see *Banestormed Ideas* (p. 32) or examine how the storm works underground (p. 158) and underwater (p. 180). Also, three spells have been developed for detecting different aspects of the cross-dimensional vortex (p. 25).

# CAITHNESS

The youngest of Ytarria's kingdoms, Caithness is sparsely populated, underdeveloped, and wracked by civil war. In truth, the "kingdom" today is little more than a handful of feuding baronies scattered across hundreds of miles of nearly empty territory.

Because they live so far apart, Caithness' nobles have enjoyed great autonomy. Historically, their loyalties have been held by a series of strong rulers. Matters have gone downhill. The current king, 35-year-old Conall VI, came to the throne too young. In

the early years of his reign, many lords paid little attention to matters outside their own lands, enjoying the lack of oversight. Ten years ago, this disregard grew into unrest and then outright rebellion. Today, Conall is fighting to reunite his kingdom.

## GEOGRAPHY

Caithness is bordered by the Great Forest to the south, Megalos to the east, the mountains of Zarak to the north, and the Great Desert on the

west. By treaty, which the Megalans violate every few years with a minor invasion, the Caithness-Megalos border is set where the mana level drops from normal to low. Because of the poor soil and climate – and the occasional invasion – these borderlands are mostly uninhabited. Caithness also borders al-Haz and al-Wazif, but thanks to the badlands and the Great Forest, those areas remain largely unexplored and quite poorly mapped; there is no reason to care exactly where the borders lie.





**Racial Skill Bonuses:** +1 to Bow [2].

Any elf could easily have Intolerance toward orcs. Many have Animal Empathy, Perfect Balance, Plant Empathy, higher levels of Magery and Appearance, or a more-encompassing Sense of Duty.

## Dark Elves

31 points

“Dark elves” are not a separate race; they are a xenophobic offshoot of elven culture. They think orcs in particular, and non-elves in general, represent an aberration, a crime against nature, and a threat to the future of the world and the elven race. Therefore, other races must be tamed or destroyed. Many dark elves live in the Blackwoods (p. 98-99) but they are found elsewhere as well.

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST-1 [-10]; DX+1 [20]; IQ+1 [20].

**Advantages:** Attractive [4]; Magery 0 [5]; Unaging [15].

**Disadvantages:** Callous [-5]; Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Obsession (Destroy or totally control all non-elves) (12) [-10].

**Racial Skill Bonuses:** +1 to Bow [2].

This template represents a typical dark elf. Many have higher levels of Magery or more antisocial mental disadvantages. A few lack Callous or Obsession, but their Intolerance is essentially universal. Some still have the Gifted Artist or Musical Ability talents, but generally their embittered obsession effectively suppresses those.

Older dark elves can also have peculiar supernatural disadvantages such as Lifebane – lingering remnants of the Banestorm backfire. Quite a few are lycanthropes (p. 200); this can be a hereditary curse or something they inflicted on themselves deliberately.

## Half-Elves

27 points

Relations between humans and elves are occasionally fertile, producing half-elves. They typically have thin features and a mild point to their ears. They are welcome in any elf village, except among dark elves and in all but the most intolerant human lands. Half-elves can be found wherever humans and elves



live in proximity, though they are not common anywhere.

**Attribute Modifiers:** IQ+1 [20].

**Advantages:** Extended Lifespan 1 [2]; Magery 0 [5].

## GIANTS

122 points

Most giants look much like humans, only nine or more feet tall. However, they vary remarkably, and some giants have only one eye, two heads, or other unusual features.

Yrth’s giants are generally private, preferring the solitude of their homes. They can be unexpectedly dangerous if roused. Most giants have very “human” personalities but are uncomfortable in human lands, where all the furniture is built for midgets.

Giants resent being compared to ogres. They react very poorly to that race, and to anyone who mentions them in any but the most disparaging terms. Unfortunately, many smaller beings mistakenly believe the biggest difference between the two races is that giants aren’t as ugly.

For PC giants, calculate height based on ST before adding the racial +15, and then increase it by 60%. Weight is 4 times that of a man of the

same ST (again, before the racial bonus).

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST+15 (Size, -20%) [120]; DX-1 [-20]; HT +2 [20].

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** SM +2; Speed -0.25 [-5].

**Advantages:** Acute Taste/Smell 3 [6]; Damage Resistance 2 (Tough Skin, -40%) [6]; Enhanced Move (Ground) 1 [20]; High Pain Threshold [10].

**Perk:** Penetrating Voice [1].

**Disadvantages:** Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Shyness (Severe) [-10]; Social Stigma (Oversized Barbarian) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5].

**Quirks:** Hates ogres, and being compared to ogres [-1].

Some giants are even taller than portrayed in this template, with a larger Size, more ST, more levels of Enhanced Move, and possibly higher DR. Others are unusually different from the human norm, including cyclops with the One Eye disadvantage and giants with Extra Heads or Extra Arms. A few giants have Intolerance toward some or all other races; others lack one or more of the racial mental disadvantages.

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