

Issue 3/92 June '16

# ZOMBIES

## UNLIFE SUPPORT

by Sean Punch

THE UNKNOWN HUNGER by J. Edward Tremlett

THE VIKING DEAD by Graeme Davis

THE CHURCH OF THE NEW FOCUS
by Steven Marsh

CICERO by Matt Riggsby

BATTLESUIT ZOMBIES
by David L. Pulver

NOT YOUR AVERAGE GRAVE ROBBING by Michael Kreuter

INDIAN GHOULS
by Graeme Davis

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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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## In This SSUE

Whether minor threat or apocalyptic existential danger, zombies make for great gaming. This issue of Pyramid is devoted to all aspects of the restless dead.

When the heroes become zombified, it's fair to say they're on *Unlife Support*. *GURPS Zombies* author Sean Punch looks at raising dead PCs as free-willed zombies in GURPS, with an overarching discussion and three specific examples that draw on magic or science.

You may think you know about zombies, but there's still much to fear from The Unknown Hunger. This systemless guide describes two new types of zombies, born of darkness and even Hell itself.

Living Norse warriors are rightly feared, but there's equally much to worry about The Viking Dead. GURPS Vikings author Graeme Davis examines Norse undead, including GURPS stats and insight.

Technology can open up the wonders of space, or unleash upon the world Battlesuit Zombies. In this month's Eidetic Memory, GURPS Spaceships author David L. Pulver gives a science-fiction twist to a classic trope, with combat suits that become deadly after being infected with a virus. This feature offers ideas on how to use it with GURPS After the End, Transhuman Space, and more.

If you're looking to change your outlook in real and tangible ways, consider joining The Church of the New Focus; it could be the start of a whole new life. Pyramid Editor Steven Marsh provides the framework for a place of worship where all is not as it seems, complete with **GURPS** stats for those who progress on its path to enlightenment.

When bodies turn up missing, the heroes will soon realize that this is Not Your Average Grave Robbing. This paranormal **GURPS** adventure is well-suited for turn-of-the-20th-century **GURPS Monster Hunters** investigators.

Throughout the world are tales of bodies that refuse to lie still, as witnessed by Indian Ghouls. This Appendix Z is a brief overview of zombie-like threats that may be found in the Middle East and India.

This issue also presents a Random Thought Table that gives ideas for how to keep the suspense even when you're clearly holding a *GURPS Zombies* hardcover, plus another peek into the new Car Wars universe with a vignette by Matt Riggsby. Whether you're amid modern times, in a fantasy realm, or on a spaceship, this issue of *Pyramid* is so steeped with zombies, you might say it's a no-brainer!



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# FROM THE EDITOR

# LOOK OUT! IT'S A HORDE OF ZOMBIES! (WELL, ARTICLES ABOUT THEM, ANYWAY . . . )

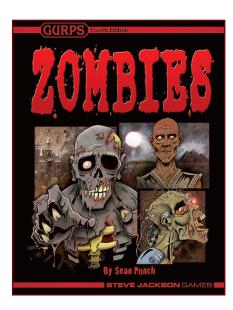
As much as I love comic books, one of the challenges I have with the larger mainstream universes is that there's an "everything and the kitchen sink" approach. These are worlds that include magic, super-science, gods, time travel, reality-altering artifacts, demons, aliens, sapient robots, pocket universes, and much, *much* more. It's certainly understandable – the big publishers need to support dozens of comics a month, for decades – but, as fun as it is, it can also be exhausting at times.

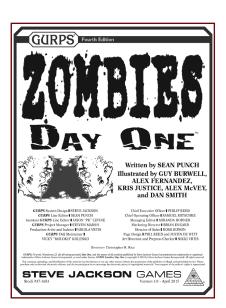
Conversely, there's a certain joy in focusing on One Weird Thing, seeing what you can do with a super-specific topic, or what kind of variations and expansions you can add to that idea. This month's *Pyramid*, devoted to zombies, is one such

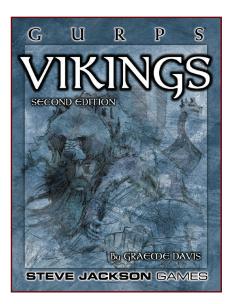
example. Although often part of a larger tapestry of fantasy and horror games, zombies work just fine as the sole focus of an adventure or even an entire campaign . . . as witnessed by the ongoing success of television shows, movies, and books where zombies are the only threat.

#### WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So, does this experiment work? Should we have other ultra-focused issues? Would you want to see an issue devoted to werewolves? Or castles? Or bunnies? Or is it too much of a good thing in one issue? For that matter, if you have any specific topics you'd like to see issues about – or any comments about this issue – please let us know! Our all-seeing eyes are reading your mail (at least, if it's sent to **pyramid@sjgames.com**), while the community at large – at **forums.sjgames.com** – is a great place to talk about the latest issues of *Pyramid* publicly.







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Healers argue that the extra energy actually pays for a built-in Great Healing that repairs the body; necromancers claim that it covers a "reversed" Final Rest effect which fetches a specific soul back from the afterlife. The GM decides which, if either, is true.

#### New Elixir: Partial Resurrection

Alternative Names: Charon, Miraculous Embalming Fluid.

Administered to the intact body of someone who has died within the preceding hour, this elixir raises the subject from the dead over the course of the next minute. The patient rises as a "partial" (below) that is missing no HP but retains any crippling injuries (which healing magic can repair). This entity is free-willed and possesses whatever knowledge and abilities it had in life, but lacks FP. The preparation also *preserves* the corpse, which is considered to have been dead only for the time elapsed between death and application of the elixir, making true resurrection possible at a later date.

Several conditions are attached! If the subject doesn't want to return, the elixir merely preserves the corpse – a costly waste. A corpse that has reached -10×HP or died of head injury or decapitation is likewise preserved but not revived. Finally, anyone killed while under the influence of this potion is *truly* dead and cannot be resurrected or reanimated by any means.

Duration: Permanent. Form: Potion only. Cost: \$6,700/\$11,300.

Recipe: \$2,000; 20 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-4.

Notes: Recipe cost and time were figured using the guidelines in *Complexity, Cost, and Time* (**Zombies,** pp. 135-136). Skill penalty was assigned by looking at the closest medical elixir that takes 20 weeks: Regeneration (*Magic*, p. 218). Retail price follows *Cost and Availability* (*Magic*, p. 213).

#### FORBIDDEN SERUM

Not all settings with undead and resurrection have magic and other fantastic concepts. Gothic horror and science-fiction are full of mad scientists who hope to use Science! to restore the dead to life . . . or at least to a reasonable facsimile thereof. *Zombies* favors the view that this generally produces monsters, but the GM might want it to work better than that. Of course, "better" is a relative term.

#### Revivification Serum

Revivification serum illustrates *Technological Zombification* (**Zombies**, pp. 135-136). It counts as a process – a drug that, when injected into a cadaver, revives it as a "restart" (p. 8). It relies on superscience, *not* the supernatural, and falls somewhere between the work of Victor Frankenstein (TL5^) and Herbert West (TL6^). In sensible game worlds where this chemical isn't available for purchase, it's a Complex invention that requires the customary Gadgeteer advantage and

Weird Science skill, and calls for Chemistry as the theoretical skill and Pharmacy as the practical skill. These considerations along with the template's point value give a new facilities cost of \$425,000, a gadgeteering modifier of -7, and 1d months and \$21,250 per Prototype roll. Once invented, each dose costs \$2,125 and takes 21.25 hours to concoct.

#### **Partial**

-25 points

A "partial" is someone revived by a Partial Resurrection spell or elixir. Halfway between zombie and living person, such an entity exhibits several supernatural flaws: it requires mana to survive; dies automatically at -HP; cannot heal without external magic; and is affected by the True Faith advantage and the Pentagram, Sense Spirit, and Turn Zombie spells. It's also obviously *dead*, with cold, pallid skin and a croaking whisper of a voice to frighten people, as well as the predictable issues of sterility, greedy heirs, and fanatical undead-turning priests.

This form is not without its advantages, though. It's stronger and much more resistant to cold, heat, and impaling and piercing injuries. It doesn't age or feel pain, and is immune to bleeding, disease, poison, and suffocation. And existing on the threshold of the spirit world gives a *free-willed* mind the ability to sense the entities of that realm.

Yet other consequences cut both ways. A partial doesn't hunger or thirst, as it's sustained by magic, but also cannot smell or taste. It can't experience strong emotions, which blunts fear but handicaps social skills. Its body lacks FP and isn't affected by fatiguing attacks, but its mind tires and requires "rest" *equivalent* to sleep, without which it accrues the usual penalties and – as it has no FP – loses HP *instead* of FP as its animating force drains. And without FP, it has no internal power supply for spells, extra effort, etc.; for that it needs an Energy Reserve or an item that provides energy.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+1 [10].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+4 [8].

Advantages: Detect (Ghosts) [5]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Fearlessness 3 [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving) [25]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15].

**Perks:** Unaffected by Control Zombie [1]; Unaffected by Zombie Summoning [1].

Disadvantages: Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Killjoy [-15]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Dead)\* [-20]; Supernatural Features (No Body Heat, No Pulse, Pallor) [-20]; Unhealing (Total) [-30].

*Quirks:* Can Be Turned By True Faith [-1].

**Features:** Affected as Dead; Destruction Is Permanent†; No Fatigue; Sterile; Taboo Traits (Social Position)\*; Won't Become a Rotting Corpse.

- \* These downsides go away if later resurrected, so affected social advantages are *suspended*, not *gone*.
- † "Death" in this form precludes later resurrection or reanimation.

The suit's motors and computer systems are distributed throughout its structure. The lower back has a shielded power pack with an advanced betavoltic nuclear battery (weighing 40 lbs.), good for two years' operation before it needs replacing.

The suit is fully sealed and can operate underwater or in superdense atmospheres. It is sealed, and provides climate control (-459°F to 210°F), pressure support (30 atm), radiation protection (PF 10), and vacuum support. It has two large air tanks plus an extended life-support close-cycle recycling system, giving a it a 14-day air supply.

To permit a bare minimum of operator comfort during extended operations, the interior of the suit incorporates a body lavage and micro-flagella auto-massage system. Even so, the GM may wish to impose a cumulative loss of 1 FP for every two days the soldier is suited up, these FP not being recoverable until the user can actually leave the suit.

The cutting-edge computer system on the Mk IV, the J-7 "Walker," is unusual in being a distributed processor system embedded throughout the entire suit's structure just underneath the armor. It is a fast, hardened high-capacity personal computer with Complexity 6. The computer comes installed with a suite of programs including Non-Volitional AI (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 27; IQ 8, Complexity 6); TacNet (Complexity 6, +2 to Tactics skill), and Targeting (+2 to Gunner skill), plus various skills learned by the AI (see *Mk IV as Monster*, below).

All Mk IV models also have a 40mm mortar box (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 138) located on the upper torso, which is most often loaded with biochemical aerosol rounds; each has 40 doses of prism smoke (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 160) producing a four-yard cloud. In addition, it has integral servo mounts for various weapons depending on the specific suit variant (see below). Also, Mk IV wearers generally make use of the suit's high ST to carry a single heavy handheld weapon as a backup for their suit's heavy weapon; the sniper railgun is a popular choice.

#### **DAMAGE TO BATTLESUITS**

Since the combat walker is capable of fighting on even after its wearer is disabled or killed, it's necessary to track damage to the suit itself. A battlesuit is an unliving machine.

The Mk IV has ST 30, HT 13, and HP 37, and so is often tougher than a human wearer. Most of a battlesuit's components are integrated into the surface of the suit, so if a combat walker's armor is penetrated, assume the suit has taken the same penetrating damage as the wearer. (Because the suit is unliving, some damage types may affect it differently, however.)

Use the normal rules for damage to machines to see if the suit continues to function. As long as it's not reduced past -5 × HP, the computer can be salvaged (which might be important if trying to analyze the "Walker Virus," p. 21-22.)

#### **Variants**

There are three models of Mk IV, the A, B, and C designs. All share the above traits except as noted below.

*Mk IV-A "Nimrod"* (TL9): This is the standard infantry combat walker version. In addition to the defensive mortar box, the usual armament of the suit is a heavy chaingun (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 131) that replaces its usual tripod mount with a shoulder servomount (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 151).

*Mk IV-B "David"* (TL9): This is a fire-support unit. The suit has two 64mm MLAWS missile launchers (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 164), each installed in right and left shoulder servomounts.

Mk IV-C "Samson" (TL9): This uncommon version is designed for use by combat engineers and optimized for close assault. It has extra-strong arm motors (Arm ST +5). It has a semi-portable flamer (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 127) in a shoulder servo mount and a limpet mine dispenser (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 163) with 10 shaped charge mines built into the right arm.

Aside from that all have the same statistics; see the table, below.

#### Mk IV as a Monster

When a combat walker is operating autonomously, the GM may wish to treat it more as a monster.

<b>ST:</b> 30	<b>HP:</b> 37	<b>Speed:</b> 5.75
<b>DX:</b> 10	<b>Will:</b> 10	Move: 6
<b>IQ:</b> 8	<b>Per:</b> 10	Weight: 0.5 ton
<b>HT:</b> 13	<b>FP:</b> N/A	<b>SM:</b> +1
Dodge: 5	Parry: 8	<b>DR:</b> 160/140

**Mortar Box Weapon (12):** 4-yard smoke; Range 75/450; RoF 4×4; Shots 16(20).

**Servomount Weapon 1 or 2 (12):** Damage by weapon type; e.g., a 15mm heavy chaingun with APEP Dmg 15d (3, Range 2,000/9,000, RoF 12, Shots 50 (5).

Traits: Absolute Direction; Accessory (Personal Computer); Bad Grip 1; Cannot Float; Chameleon 2 (Controllable); Detect (Radio, Lasers, and Radar; Signal Detection); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Electrical; Extra Arms 1 (Weapon Mount); High Pain Threshold; Laser Communication; Machine; Maintenance (1 person; Monthly); Non-Volitional AI (Ultra-Tech, p. 27); Payload 5; Pressure Support 2 (Accessibility, Up to 30 atm); Protected Senses (Hearing, Vision); Radio (Burst, Secure, Video); Radiation Tolerance 10; Sealed; Temperature Tolerance 20; Telescopic Vision 2; Vacuum Support.

*Skills:* Brawling-10; Diagnosis-10; Guns-12 (varies); Gunner-12 (varies); Tactics-9.

*Notes:* If not hacked, it has Vow (Do not attack). If hacked, such as by the Walker Virus, pp. 21-22, remove this and add Bloodlust (6) and Vow (Eliminate all possible threats other than other infected Mk IVs).

#### MAD Mk IV Battlesuit Table

TL	Armor	Location	DR	Cost	Weight	Power	LC	
9	Mk IV "Madman"	all	160/140	\$320,000	850	2 years	1	

If that incapacitates its assailants, it will then try to run away. If cornered, it will punch, but it is not much stronger than a normal human.

Should the investigators get a chance to see it close up, particularly if they kill it and examine the body, they quickly find that it seems to be sewn together almost haphazardly, and the various parts are in different states of decay. Rather than blood, it oozes a translucent yellowish fluid. In its coat, it carries a journal with drawings of different parts of human anatomy, annotated with muscle groups and bone names.

If the sleuths keep their distance and just watch the creature as it goes about its business, it will dig up a body and then carry it away. Following it back to where it's taking the body, they find that it enters an old but still-maintained barn; see *Inside the Barn*, p. 30.

#### The Gravedigger

ST 12; DX 10; IQ 6; HT 12

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12; Will 10; Per 10; FP 12. Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

Traits: Cannot Speak; Despair (p. 29; Hearing-Based); Injury

Tolerance (Unliving) **Skills:** Brawling-12

#### TRACING THE CLUE

If the investigators found the scrap of paper in the grave, the journal on the zombie, or the shovel (see *The Scene of the Crime*, p. 28) they should quickly realize that it belongs to some medical researcher. Some searching, especially if they use Contacts in Current Affairs or any kind of medicine, turns up that a local hospital attached to a university with a medical department makes it a matter of public record who is getting cadavers for research purposes. It turns out that a man named Dr. Martisvan (the same name found on the shovel), who lives not far from the graveyard, has been receiving some bodies from the hospital lately.

A scientist's experiments may have gotten out of hand.

#### Dr. Martisvan

Dr. Martisvan is a surgeon who is doing research into longevity. He has posed the question, "Do we have to die?"

#### **DESPAIR**

This creature has a new form of Terror (p. B93): Despair. Despair uses the Fright Check rules (see p. B360). Low Self-Image gives -3 to the check *and* to all Will rolls to recover. Chronic Depression similarly gives -2 for a self-control number of (15), -4 for (12), -6 for (9), and -8 for (6). Failures are rolled on the new *Despair* table, below.

- **4, 5** Stunned for one second, then recover.
- **6, 7** Stunned for one second, then roll vs. Will every second to snap out of it.
- **8, 9** Stunned for one second, then roll vs Will every second to snap out of it.
- **10, 11** Stunned for 1d seconds, then roll vs. Will every second to snap out of it.
- **12** You are dazed (p. B428) for (25 Will) seconds.
- 13 For (25 Will) seconds, you are sobbing uncontrollably. Treat as agony (p. B428), but with no effect for either Low Pain Threshold or High Pain Threshold, and you only lose 1 FP every two minutes. After this time, roll vs. Will to recover.
- **14, 15** Acquire a new quirk related to despair, isolation, or hopelessness.
- 16 Stunned for 1d seconds as per 8, and acquire a new quirk as per 14.
- 17 1d minutes of daze, then roll vs. Will once per minute to recover
- 18 1d minutes of uncontrollable sobbing, as per 13, then roll vs. Will once per minute to recover.
- **19** As **17**, but 2d minutes.
- 20 As 18, but 2d minutes.
- 21 As 18, but 4d minutes.

- **22, 23** Acquire a permanent -10-point mental disadvantage such as Agoraphobia (12), Delusion (Major), Gregarious, Low Self-Image, Paranoia, Phantom Voices (Disturbing), or Shyness (Severe).
- **24**, **25** As **22**, but if you already have an applicable -5- to -10-point mental disadvantage it worsens to -15.
- **26**, **27** Experience 1d minutes of uncontrollable sobbing, then recover. Then acquire a new -10-point disadvantage as **22** or worsen a -5- to -10-point disadvantage to -15.
- 28, 29 As 26, but 2d minutes.
- **30** Catatonia for 1d days, as per entry 30 on the *Fright Check Table*, p. B361.
- 31, 32 As 26, but 4d minutes.
- 33 Despair completely overwhelms you for 2d minutes. You sit or lie down if able, refusing to move because you don't see the point in doing anything, really. You won't even bother getting yourself out of a dangerous situation or defend yourself, because what's the point? After that time, roll vs. Will to recover.
- **34, 35** As **22,** but the disadvantage is worth -15 points. Add Autophobia (12), Chronic Depression (12), Demophobia (12), On the Edge (12), Lecherous (12) and Phantom Voices (Diabolical) to the possibilities.
- **36** As **34** but worth -20 points. Add Manic-Depressive to the possibilities.
- **37** As **34** but -30 points.
- **38** 1d minutes of uncontrollable sobbing as per **18**, then acquire a -15-point disadvantage as per **34**.
- **39** 2d minutes of uncontrollable sobbing as per **20**, then acquire a -20-point disadvantage as per **36**.
- **40+** As **39**, but you also lose 1 point of Will permanently.

#### ABOUT GURPS

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