



PYRAMID[®]

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**WHAT FOOLS
THESE MORTALS BE?**
by Phil Masters

**THE HOUSE OF
10,000 SOCK MONKEYS!**
by J. Edward Tremlett
and Christopher R. Rice

THE MONSTER MASH
by David L. Pulver

ANIMATING YOUR LIFE
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COMEDY IS HARD**
by Matt Riggsby

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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ABOUT GURPS 37

Whether a central need of a campaign or a welcome respite from more-serious affairs, humor can liven up just about any game. This issue of *Pyramid* is devoted to drollery, with tips, tools, and add-ons to get your funny's worth.

When players devise characters for a humorous campaign, one central question they must tackle is *What Fools These Mortals Be?* Phil Masters – author of the *Discworld Roleplaying Game* – looks at what's useful to keep in mind to craft GURPS protagonists in a comedic game, including traits and design decisions that open up the most potential for yuks.

No matter how humor is trying to come to the gaming table, it's a truism that *Dying Is Easy; Comedy Is Hard*. Matt Riggsby – co-author of *GURPS Low-Tech* – discusses some of the fundamentals of humorous gaming, including an exploration as to why comedy games have something surprisingly in common with cosmic-horror settings.

If you're looking for new threats for crypt-crawling heroes to encounter, consider *The Monster Mash*. David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* – provides three complete "rooms" suitable for dropping into any GURPS *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign when the hack-and-slash antics could use a bit more hilarity. Discover how faith, necromancy, and customer service can form the foundation of memorable encounters. It includes GURPS stats for a half-dozen dangers that can be used as is . . . even without humor.

To include more fun to your campaign, consider *Animating Your Life*. Add cartoon characters to your real-world-style GURPS game, with a new template, powers, and insight into using your powers for maximum mayhem.

Unleash your inner meddling kid and uncover the secrets of *The House of 10,000 Sock Monkeys!* This standalone one-shot adventure presents an enigma for teen investigators to unravel – with GURPS stats for the titular threat. You also get tips for using this in other types of campaigns.

This issue also includes a Random Thought Table that presents more ideas for interjecting humor into your game, including ready-to-use ideas you can drop into your own campaign. With this issue, your funny bone is sure to be tickled . . . and maybe even tackled!

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

COVER AND INTERIOR ART

Aaron Panagos

Hey, where I come from, an anvil to the head is a flesh wound.

– Peter Porker, The Spectacular Spider-Ham, in Spider-Verse Team-Up #1

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FROM THE EDITOR

THE BEST MEDICINE

One of my earliest memories of *GURPS* is from the description for the Pyromania disadvantage: “You like fires! You like setting fires, too.” (I was delighted when this wording was retained in the Fourth Edition.) This phrase became a standard call and response at our tabletop whenever someone would do something flame-related. **Player:** “Okay, I get ready to fling a fireball at this guy.” **Me:** “You like fires!” **Other Players:** “You like setting fires, too!” There’s something we all found deeply amusing about those lines, and it helped cement *GURPS* for us as a setting that – though steeped in realism – still contains a lot of humor. (Not unlike the real world, actually . . .)

With the recent releases of the supremely humorous *Discworld Roleplaying Game* and the (potentially) darkly humorous *GURPS Mars Attacks*, the continued success of the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* line (which also has a not-entirely serious streak), and our in-the-works standalone *Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game*, it’s a great time to be a fan of the *GURPS* system. But it’s also a good opportunity to take a look

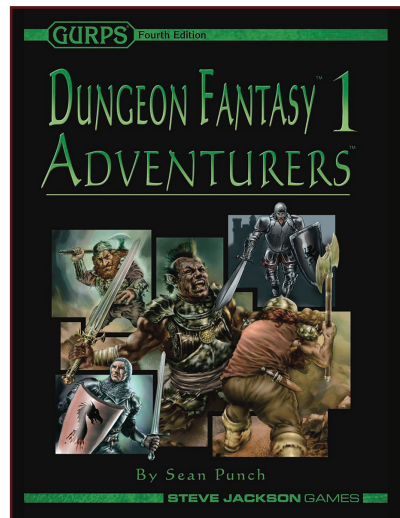
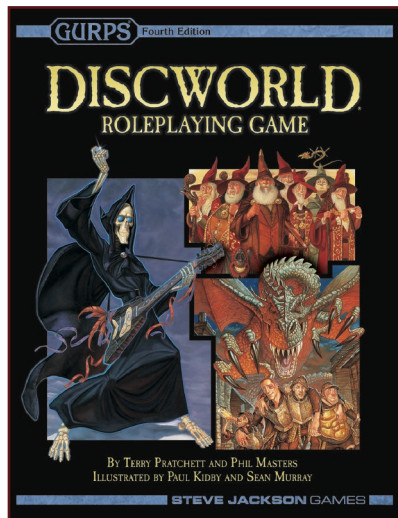
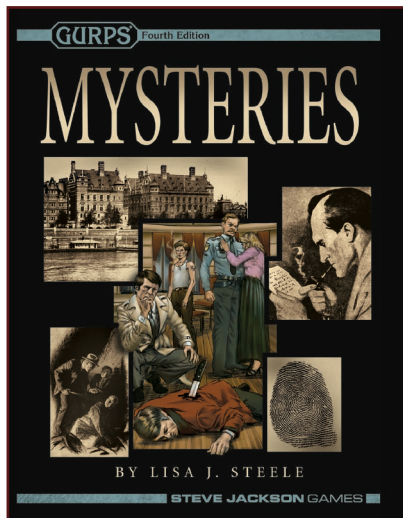
at humor in our games. And this issue examines funny stuff from a bunch of different angles.

There’s something antithetical to humor to explain the joke, so I not going to explain *too* much about this issue here. Perhaps the biggest meta-fact I’ll note is that – if everyone in the gaming group is happy – there’s not much of a *wrong* way to do humor in a game. If quoting Monty Python or *The Princess Bride* brings smiles to everyone’s faces, then go for it! If it’s better when the humor stays in-game, great.

Yet there’s a certain magic that’s happened in our own gaming when – instead of importing other humorists’ quips into the game – we’ve found *our* humorous efforts spilling out into the real world. And it’s a magic I hope can be part of your game.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So was this issue a harbinger of ha-ha, or do we need to go back to the joke mines? Should we do another humor issue someday, or is one enough? Let us know your thoughts via email at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the fun online via forums.sjgames.com.



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The Joker

Not all comedy characters are there to provide deliberate humor. In fact, if too many players are trying too hard to bring the funny, the humor may well be overstretched. Good comedy is, very often, about ridiculous things happening to reasonable people.

The joker, however, is the person who tests that principle. This is a type which exists in real life as well as in comedy, after all; the person who keeps trying, deliberately, to be funny. In comedy, though, the joker has the useful role of guaranteeing a certain working minimum of humor – assuming that he hits a minimum level of competence. It's possible for the joker to be shown as not really very good at deliberate humor; in that case, the humor lies in incompetence and the reactions of others who have to put up with this nonsense. If the joker attempts practical jokes, the audience may enjoy the sight of him being foiled and humiliated by other people, who have more genuine wit but who don't try so hard. Players who try to make their characters jokers should be sure that they genuinely can be that sharp themselves, or they may end up in this "incompetent joker" role, despised by the other party members.

In a classic vaudeville-style comedy ensemble such as the Marx Brothers, every character may serve as a joker, at least some of the time, providing both verbal and slapstick comedy. This is a high-intensity approach to comedy, requiring considerable skill and energy; it would take an exceptional group of players to manage it in an RPG. Somewhat similarly, in classic Hollywood "screwball" comedies, comedy musicals, and Shakespearean comedy, almost everyone may display a formidable line in quick-witted repartee and word-play, enabling anyone to play the joker when the plot permits; this is a convention of the form, and doesn't imply that the participants are all *really* clever and quick-witted, any more than someone who gets an aria in an opera has to be thought of as a professional-grade singer (with their own orchestra) within the setting.

The Casanova

This is a person whose defining feature is an interest in sex – or "romance" in a more family friendly story. In fact, just what this character is after, how considerate he is of potential partners' feelings, and how successful he is in the pursuit, are generally strongly determined by the mood and tone of the story and setting. A cast consisting mostly or entirely of Casanovas makes the story a full-on sex comedy.

In some older stories, such a character may be given to flagrant leering, and apparently *wants* to be an amoral seducer, but doesn't seem to have a clue *how*, leading to a string of

comic failures. (Meanwhile, all the other, more sympathetic characters are probably honorably monogamous or celibate by nature, though they may engage in some harmless flirtations.) This type tends to be older, and may be a classic "dirty old man." In a few cases, a "romantic" character may actually be prepared to commit to a respectable long-term relationship, but be too comically dedicated to finding one, or prone to misinterpreting casual flirtations from less obsessive characters too seriously.

In more "sophisticated" stories, lecherous people may openly pursue casual flings, albeit with partners who understand the nature of the game. If the story has a moralistic tone, these seductions often will be unsuccessful, leading to a lot of comic misunderstandings, uncomfortable confrontations with jealous rivals, and so on. More amoral sex comedies may feature *successful* seducers, with the comedy lying in the ensuing complications, the problems they have juggling multiple relationships, and perhaps in the jealous reactions of their friends and acquaintances.

In darker comedies, seducers may be unpleasantly uncaring about the consequences of their actions and willing to lie to get what they want. However, ruthless heartbreakers will *usually* be treated as villains rather than protagonists, and too many broken hearts may make the laughs dry up.

(Incidentally, "sophisticated sex comedies" don't have to be modern, although Hollywood has perhaps shifted to a less moralistic approach over the past few decades. Sex comedy is probably as old as any other form of humor, and even in the "respectable" 19th century, French playwrights produced a string of brilliantly constructed farces which were all about characters of both genders quite openly pursuing sex rather than romance.)

The Braggart

Lastly, a lot of classic stage ensemble comedy features a roaring braggart, such as the stock figure of the "Captain" in the old-time *Commedia dell'arte* – a type resurrected in modern sitcoms such as *The Office* as the boastful, arrogant colleague or neighbor. Indeed, the obvious attributes of the type are that boastfulness and arrogance. These may be associated with gross overconfidence and practical incompetence, or with a smarter self-awareness which leads the braggart to disappear somehow whenever their boasts might be tested – or, most annoyingly of all, with actual competence, forcing others to put up with the braggart because he can deliver. The TV series *House*, while not presented as comedy, actually extracted a lot of humor from the fact that everyone had to endure the lead character, because he was just as competent as he thought he was.

*Most universities would find the sight of a group of students playing Frisbee – in mid-air – at least **slightly** unusual. Practicing witches, budding telepaths, illegal aliens from Betelgeuse V and novice supers are all welcome at Illuminati University, as long as they (or their parents) have good credit ratings. The University is truly an equal-opportunity institution.*

– GURPS IOU

Flame Breath (14): 2d+2 burning. Treat as a jet spell with reach C-3. Five-second recharge between shots.

Glaive (14): 1d+5 impaling. Reach 1, 2*. Fine weapon. When wielded by a dragon man it becomes a Flaming Weapon, doing 2 extra HP of injury.

Tail Strike (11): 1d+2 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Disturbing Voice; Flight (Air Move 12); Nictitating Membrane 2; Odious Racial Habit (Eats other sapient beings, -3 reactions); Peripheral Vision; Temperature Tolerance 5 (Heat).

Skills: Brawling-13; Glaive-14; Stealth-11; Wrestling-12.

Class: Mundane.

Class: Glaive, \$100, 8 lbs.; belt pouch with 1d gold and 3d silver pieces.

Grumpf the Ogre

This hulking brute works as a heavy for some of the dungeon orcs. He heard good things about the kitchen and wants his spiced wyvern tail.

ST: 20 **HP:** 20 **Speed:** 5.75
DX: 11 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 5
IQ: 7 **Per:** 9 **Weight:** 800 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** +1

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 11 **DR:** 2 (DR 6 on skull)

Bite (13): 2d-1 cutting, Reach C.

Morningstar (13): 3d+6 crushing. Reach 1, 2*.

Kick (11): 2d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Punch (13): 2d crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Appearance (Hideous); Fearlessness 3; High Pain Threshold; Magic Resistance 2; Night Vision 5; Odious Racial Habit (Eats other sapient beings; -3 to reactions); Resistant to Disease 3; Resistant to Poison 3.

Skills: Brawling-13; Flail-13; Intimidation-12.

Class: Mundane.

Equipment: Morningstar (\$80, 6 lbs.); oversized pot-helm (\$200, 10 lbs.); belt pouch with \$170 in copper coins.

*If you cannot get rid of
the family skeleton, you may
as well make it dance.*

– George Bernard Shaw

THE DUNGEON DETECTIVE (LAIR OF ZABRINA THE LICH)

This encounter may be used if the same party have been raiding a single dungeon over a period of multiple weeks, killing and looting monster lairs.

The party will come upon an ordinary dungeon door. If anyone listens, there are some noises within that vaguely sound like *washing*.

This is a complex of two connected rooms: Zabrina's outer chamber and inner sanctum. The outer chamber connects via its own door to her inner sanctum and office.

Zabrina, the master of this complex, is only in her rooms about half the time. The rest of the time she's working in the dungeon. It's up to the GM whether to have Zabrina present when they first visit her rooms; it is probably more amusing to let them hack through the skeleton guards, then try to make sense of what they find there, only to have Zabrina show up later, perhaps half-way through their ransacking of her lair.

Outer Chamber and Laundry Room

This is a plain stone room (perhaps about 6 × 7 yards) with two doors, one of which leads into the corridor the party entered from (and the other to the inner sanctum). The room contains three large tubs filled with soapy water.

Busy in the room are five undead skeletons, doing laundry – squeezing out water, scrubbing stains from clothes, etc. Already hanging up or in the tubs are six very wet hooded black robes, several cute little indigo socks, four black cloaks, and five black slippers. The skeletons wear black robes and helms and have swords or hammers slung on their back (there's no reason for them to take them off; unlike humans, they don't get sweaty. . .)

These are Zabrina's guards, pressed into service as servants. The lich is fastidious about her personal hygiene (one reason she prefers skeletons to icky zombies) and once a week insists her guards do her laundry. They will, however, put down their work to defend her lair.

Zabrina's Skeleton Guards

The skeletons Zabrina has attending her were the result of animating some ancient bones (the Knights of Zor) in a crypt she found. She outfitted them with some salvaged armor and weapons from their burial chamber. Half are armed with war-hammers, the other half with greatswords. All have weapons sheathed while going about their laundry or cleaning tasks, and wear black robes and boots along with their mail.

ST: 12 **HP:** 12 **Speed:** 8.00
DX: 13 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 8
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 12 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0
Dodge: 11 **Parry:** 10 **DR:** 6 (see notes)

Bony Claw (14): 1d crushing. Reach C.

Weapon (14): Greatsword (1d+5 cutting); Reach 1-2; or Warhammer (1d+5 impaling; Reach 1-2).

Traits: Appearance (Monstrous); Automaton; Brittle; Cannot Float; Cannot Learn; Dependency (Loses 1 HP per minute in no-mana areas); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Disease; Immunity to Mind Control; Immunity to Poison; Indomitable; Mute; No Blood; No Brain; No Eyes; No Sense of Smell/Taste; No Vitals; Reprogrammable; Single-Minded; Skinny; Temperature Tolerance 5 (Cold); Temperature Tolerance 5 (Heat); Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Unliving; Unnatural; Vulnerability (Crushing ×2).

Skills: Brawling-14; Two-Handed Axe/Mace-14; Two-Handed Sword-14.

Indefatigable

30 points

This trait is essentially Immunity to FP Loss from Physical Exertion. A character with it is immune to losing fatigue from any sort of physical exercise; they can run all day, swim for hours, etc. It doesn't prevent FP loss from *deliberate* expenditure, such as Extra Effort, and doesn't block loss from other sources, such as missed sleep, suffocation, and so forth. (This trait is based on the zombie feature No Fatigue described in *GURPS Zombies*, pp. 67-68).

Perfect Comic Timing

See the description of this ability on p. 24.

Weirdness Magnet

see p. B115

For animates, this functions as "Funny Magnet." The situations they find themselves in are still inconvenient and cause others to react to them poorly, but the circumstances are always comedic. Note that animates don't react negatively to each other because of this. After all, that's just their life!

ANIMATE MORTALITY

Animates' weakness to the chemical mixture has been included to add additional drama. If there's absolutely *no* chance of death, it may be hard to care about such characters. But this isn't absolutely necessary. A hero who isn't an animate full time, but only transforms into one, is vulnerable when he isn't transformed. In some settings, the GM may just feel like animates should be totally unkillable. Removing the weakness to paint remover increases the cost of Regeneration, Regrowth, and Unkillable to [40], [32], and [80] respectively, and removes the Weakness disadvantage entirely, for a final template cost of [253]. Conversely, in a setting where animates' weakness is well-known, or expanded to any mix of such chemicals, the degree of rarity should be reduced, making the limitations and disadvantage larger.

Alternatively, a different substance or condition can be substituted for the chemical. If animates are really a species of faerie, for example, iron would be an appropriate replacement, or the "removing drawings" theme could be retained with something like erasers (giving a whole new meaning to "rubber bullets"). Or animates could be vulnerable to other conditions, such as "children crying."

ANIMATING CHARACTERS

Besides the traits on their template, there are some advantages and disadvantages that are common to many animates.

Compulsive Comedy

-5 points*

You want to make people laugh! You try to do an impromptu or formal comedy routine at least once a day, occupying at least 15 minutes. You must also make a self-control roll whenever an opportunity to deliver a punchline or complete a classic "bit" presents itself. If you fail, you do so, even if that would compromise stealth or a disguise.

Cursed or Unluckiness

see p. B129, B160

These are remarkably common disadvantages among animates. Schadenfreude makes it funny to see characters have bad things happen to them. Some animates experience this constantly; others have the Karmic limitation, below.

New Special Limitation

Karmic: Bad things happen to you, but *only* when you deserve them. You only suffer the effects of Cursed or Unluckiness when you do something bad first. On Unluckiness, this means that you get one bout of bad luck for each bad action you take. Do three misdeeds in succession, and you can look forward to three sessions of Unluckiness. Similarly, the more nasty actions you take, the longer the effects of Cursed will persist. Each evil deed gives you one hour of play time where Cursed applies.

The GM decides what counts as a "bad" action. He should make it fairly clear what counts ahead of time, but there's no need to warn the player each time the character seems about to transgress. The strength of the disadvantage's effects can also be tailored to how bad the triggering action was – a minor

sin results in a small inconvenience like spilling coffee on your dress shirt, while a serious crime could lead to crashing a car into a dynamite factory. A series of smaller, related bad actions is best treated as a single worse one, to make a short, memorable punishment, rather than a prolonged series of annoyances. -50%

Delusion

-10 points

"Humans are just like animates": This Major Delusion means that you don't recognize any difference between humanity and . . . animanity? You treat them both the same. This can be *very dangerous*, because a human cannot take the sort of punishment an animate can. Drop a save on them, and they don't get back up!

Higher Purpose

see p. B59

"Make people laugh": You have a goal – comedy – and the skill to pull it off. You get a +1 to any rolls deliberately intended to amuse at least one person watching you.

Talents

see pp. B89-91 and *GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents*

Many animates are natural entertainers. Talents such as Born Entertainer (*Talents*, p. 6) or Musical Ability (p. B91 or *Talents*, p. 13) can represent this. Other animates are skilled in fooling their opponents, which can be represented by Craftiness (*Talents*, p. 9) or Talker (*Talents*, p. 16). Smooth Operator (p. B91 or *Talents*, p. 15) covers both these areas and is very appropriate.

ABOUT GURPS

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