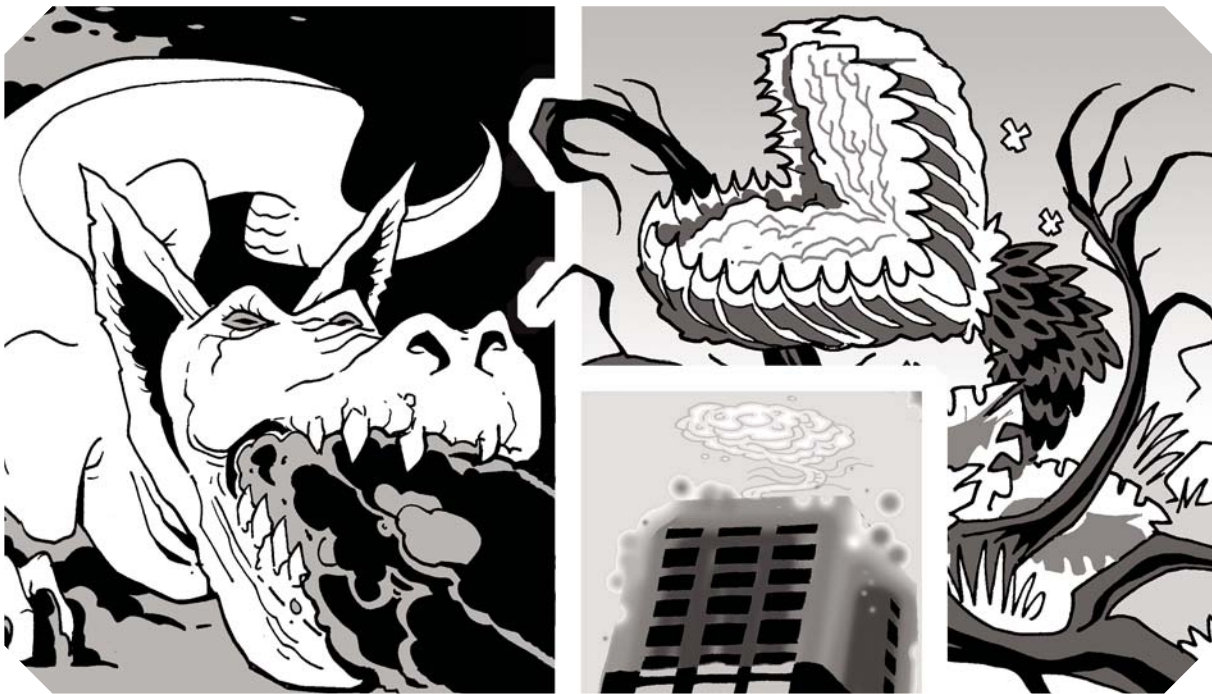


GURPS

Fourth Edition

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT™

VOL. 5



Written by SCOTT MAYKRANTZ and JASON "PK" LEVINE

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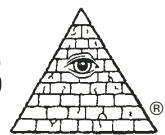
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AN E23 SOURCEBOOK FOR *GURPS*®

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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

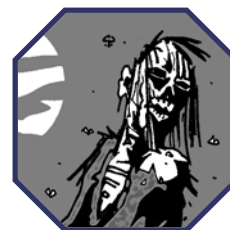
These new creatures will test the wits and skills of any hero. Some hide beneath the water and muck, emerging when no one sees. Some hide in plain sight – as an innocent plant, or suit of armor, or even a "normal" building. All are suitable for adventures, as either the focus of an entire campaign or as a quick and simple encounter to surprise a party of heroes.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Scott Maykrantz lives in epic splendor in Eugene, Oregon. For over 20 years, he has avoided the real world by staying

home, typing strange ideas into his computer, and selling those ideas to people. This is called "freelance roleplaying game design."

Jason Levine, better known to most as "Reverend Pee Kitty," has been a gamer for most of his life and a die-hard **GURPS** fan since the release of Third Edition. He enjoys making music, collecting Transformers, and praying to "Bob" for eternal salvation through alien intervention.



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DREADSTALK

The dreadstalk is a top-heavy plant that stands 10 feet tall. Its roots look like wrinkled tentacles, colored green and brown.

When humans or animals approach, the creature's giant mouth bursts open. Two dozen long spines peel away from the trunk and lash out. It can attack with up to three spines at once for 1d impaling damage each. The dreadstalk then bends over to bite its impaled prey, swallowing the victim whole.

The creature's body is made of dense but flexible vegetable material. Projectiles such as arrows and bullets stick in it without causing serious harm. Attacks with blunt or bladed hand weapons have full effects, however.

A carnivorous plant with a giant mouth and impaling spines.

If the dreadstalk is attacked from a distance, it returns fire with its spines. It reserves this tactic for desperate situations, because each spine requires one week to grow back. It typically waits until it has been reduced to 1/2 HP or worse by ranged attacks before launching its spines at the source. The plant can shoot up to three spines at once, but it always reserves at least three or four for close combat defense.

The plant has two sensory organs, at either end of its body. Its roots can detect the passive tremors caused by hooves, boots, and wheels. At the top of its "head," it uses a fat lump to sniff the air. This olfactory organ has a very acute sense of smell, enabling the dreadstalk to differentiate between familiar and foreign animals in the area. Its sense of smell also is used to determine the nutritional value of prey wandering nearby – it can sense the number of animals, their basic diet, and whether they are warm- or cold-blooded.

TREASURE UNDER THE ROOTS

The dreadstalk digests its food slowly, dissolving soft tissue from bones. All hard materials are deposited under the roots, into a pit created by a secretion of its acidic fluid. If the dreadstalk stays in the same location for weeks, it

accumulates a cache of bones, jewelry, weapons, and other undigested materials.

Once the cache fills up, the dreadstalk slowly and laboriously crawls away. Its roots carry it at one yard per minute along the ground to a new location. (As this is exhausting for the plant, it travels no more than 200 yards per day.) Before leaving, the creature covers the pit. The undigested objects become hidden treasure.

PLANT COLLEGE SPELLS

A mage who knows spells from the Plant College can use his talents to injure, manipulate, or heal the carnivorous plant. For example, a mage who casts Shape Plant can inflict 2d of damage per strike, and Wither Plant kills the creature if it fails to resist with HT. Blight doubles the time it takes for spines to grow back and makes it impossible for the plant to move.

The Seek Plant spell can find the nearest dreadstalk in range. Plant Vision allows the mage to see what sort of meal it is currently digesting; on a critical success, the top layer of the cache is visible as well. The mage can enslave the dreadstalk by casting Plant Control, force it to move using Animate Plant, or speak to it with Plant Speech.

Bless Plants doubles the speed at which spines return and gives the dreadstalk Move 1 for as long as it remains in the area of effect. Heal Plant instantly brings the dreadstalk back to full HP; this does not regenerate any spines, but a casting of Plant Growth can do so instantly. Rejuvenate Plant returns a dead dreadstalk to life (unless it was reduced to -10xHP) with -HP.

REPRODUCTION

A cluster of small seeds is embedded inside each spine. After missing a target (or falling out of the decomposing corpse of a victim), the spines shed their seeds. There is a 1 in 6 chance that the cluster takes root, survives, and grows into a new dreadstalk.

Newborns are thus usually found within firing range of the parent (or where their parent used to stand). The exceptions are those seeds from spines that stick into a wild animal without instantly killing it. The animal's wounded run can carry the seeds miles away, allowing new dreadstalks to find a different type of terrain.

The Better to Eat You

The dreadstalk can be described as "a SM +1 creature with a SM +3 head." Attacks against its head are thus only -2 to hit. While it does not have a brain, such an attack (if successful) calls for a knockdown roll (p. B420) as usual.

If the creature successfully bites a foe, the opponent takes 1d+1 cutting damage and is considered grappled. He can attempt to break free (p. B371) on his turn, but the plant is at +5 in the Quick Contest of ST. On subsequent turns, the dreadstalk can *either* do its full biting damage again (this

does not require an attack roll) or attempt to engulf the opponent completely. Treat the latter as an attempt to pin (p. B370); the plant is at +6 in the Regular Contest of ST, assuming the foe is SM 0 and has at least one hand free. Success means the foe is trapped, continues to take biting damage, and can only attempt to break free (as above) once every 10 seconds!

See *Teeth* (*GURPS Martial Arts*, p. 115) for more details.

USEFUL SKILLS DURING ENCOUNTERS

To identify a dreadstalk while it is waiting with its mouth closed and spines pulled in, roll against Observation (to notice something “off”) or Naturalist (to recognize that this is no normal plant). If a person knows what a dreadstalk is (from personal experience or second-hand information), he can roll against Gardening or Herb Lore as well. To locate a hidden cache that was left behind, use Prospecting or an appropriate version of Survival. One can sneak past a dreadstalk with a Quick Contest of Stealth versus its Per; Light Walk always adds its bonus here.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

Dreadstalks can be found just about anywhere, in any genre: the barrens of a post-apocalyptic world, in the laboratory of an Atomic Age mad scientist, a swamp on the edge of a fantasy kingdom, on a distant planet, or in the garden room of an abandoned spaceship.

Before they are used, decide how many dreadstalks are encountered. Cinematic PCs optimized for combat may be able to handle two or three dreadstalks each, while more realistic adventurers call for one plant for every two to three heroes, instead! When in doubt, the GM can use fewer dreadstalks, but set the encounter in an environment where more can be hiding if the fight is going too easy.

Brown's Greenery (20th-Century Horror)

The PCs visit a plant store located at the bottom floor of a medium-sized building in the city. It is run by a rotund and red-faced man named Cleveland Brown. He has two assistants, his daughter (Goldie) and Dewey Howe. Dewey is a cringing young man with thick glasses.

The characters are exterminators, called in by the landlord to clean out the building. They find strange creatures hidden inside the walls, the attic, and the cellar – for some reason, the building is packed with mutant rats, little gremlins, and other supernatural pests. On the ground floor, where Brown's Greenery is located, they discover a dreadstalk. Brown has been feeding customers to the plant.

Throughout the investigation, Goldie and Dewey are underfoot. Dewey wants to help, but he gets in the way most of the time. Goldie acts dumb, but she is quite intelligent once the party gets to know her.

The adventure ends that night when the group is trapped inside the store. Cleveland knows they might find out what he has been doing, so he locks them in with the dreadstalk. If the heroes are in danger of being killed, they could be saved by Goldie or Dewey.

The Grassland Guild (Fantasy)

While traveling through a field, the adventurers find some townsfolk on their way to destroy

Cache Contents

If someone find a dreadstalk cache, what's inside? Although mostly bones fill the hole, the debris hides several items.

In a fantasy world, the pit could hold coins, gemstones, a magic ring, jewelry, small knives, arrowheads, scraps of chain-mail, gauntlets, an axe blade, horseshoes, stirrups, or belt, pouch, boot, or shoe buckles.

In the modern day, one might find bullets, damaged cell phones, keys, eyeglasses, a gold tooth, a compass, dog tags (either for a dog or a soldier), nails, small tools, wristwatches, a radio or MP3 player, a digital camera, a pocketknife, handcuffs, a hearing aid, a garden trowel, or belt or purse buckles.

In the near future (including post-apocalypse campaigns), the cache may contain hand-held sensors, robot limbs, ultra-tech medical instruments, bionic body parts, a brain implant, a radiation scanner, or belt or satchel buckles.

half a dozen dreadstalks. The villagers' cows were eaten by the creatures when the livestock wandered away.

If the heroes accompany the angry mob, they meet a trio of mages dressed in green and beige robes, decorated with leaves. They are masters of the Plant College. They use the local fields and forests as their outdoor guildhall. Although they understand the concerns of the villagers, their devotion to the vegetable world forces them to protect the giant carnivorous plants.

The heroes can choose sides or try to find a compromise. If the villagers are not satisfied, they plot to kill the mages along with the dreadstalks. The mages defend themselves with spells and magic weapons if attacked. Any confrontation should take place near the dreadstalks – the source of the conflict. If the PCs attempt to maneuver the clash away from the dreadstalks, some of the mages may use Plant Form to *become* dreadstalks! Every two spines fired translates to -1 FP when the mage returns to human form.

DREADSTALK

ST 15; **DX** 9; **IQ** 4; **HT** 12.

Will 10; **Per** 12; **Speed** 5.25; **Dodge**: 3; **Move** 1/60.

SM +1; 350 lbs.

Traits: Blindness; Deafness; Dependency (Soil/Water; Constantly); Discriminatory Smell; Extra Attack 1 (Bite); Impaling Attack 1d (Can be used ranged or as melee C-2 attacks; Limited Use, Special; Rapid Fire, RoF 3); Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood, No Eyes); Invertebrate; No Manipulators; Semi-Sessile*; Sharp Teeth; Universal Digestion; Vibration Sense (Air); Wild Animal (with Mute).

Skills: Brawling-15; Innate Attack (Projectile)-15.

* A new option for No Legs (p. B145), worth -30 points: For the most part, you are *Sessile*, but you can transport yourself very slowly when necessary. You can move one yard per minute; this is considered paced running – roll HT every minute or lose 1 FP.



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