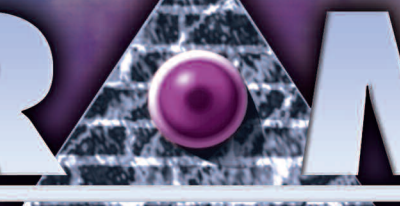


# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/38 December '11

## THE POWER OF MYTH

### THE GOLDEN GENIZA OF EZKALI



by Matt Riggsby

#### BABA YAGA

by David L. Pulver

#### THE BEAR MYTH

by Alan Leddon

#### BABYLON RISING

by J. Edward Tremlett

#### SEVEN MYTHICAL ARTIFACTS FOR DUNGEON FANTASY

by Antoni Ten Monrós

#### THE JOURNEY OF THE DEAD

by Kyla Ward

#### ART OF PROPHECY

by Megan McDonald

# STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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### Article Colors

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

- Pale Blue*: In This Issue
- Brown*: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)
- Dark Blue*: *GURPS* Features
- Purple*: Systemless Features
- Green*: Distinguished Columnists

**COVER ART**  
Rowena

**INTERIOR ART**  
Greg Hyland

Facets of ancient legendary tales continue to touch our language, outlook, and lives. Observe, fleeting mortal, as we unleash the power of myth within this epic *Pyramid*!

We start our journey by asking: Which narrative did you hear? That fundamental question leads to *Dungeon Fantasy* action, with *The Golden Geniza of Ezkali*. Scribed by Matt Riggsby (author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables*), this adventurous locale highlights four traps – complete with maps – and an underlying conundrum that makes survival a challenge. A vast storehouse of knowledge awaits the heroes . . . if they can get their facts straight.

We continue our wondrous plundering with *Seven Mythical Artifacts for Dungeon Fantasy*. Using the format established by *Dungeon Fantasy 6: 40 Artifacts*, it offers several myth-informed pieces of gear, including variations and *GURPS* stats.

Viewed with modern eyes, myths let us ask, “How can we spin that into something even *more* fantastic?” David L. Pulver, creator of *GURPS Spaceships*, uses this month’s *Eidetic Memory* to detail the witch-goddess Baba Yaga and her ultratech vessel, both of which come with *GURPS* stats.

*The Journey of the Dead* is made by all souls. Some adventurers even get a head start and brave it while still alive. This systemless article provides ideas for foreshadowing PC death and for using the “final journey” as one more obstacle to overcome.

When you think of myths, do you think of bears? You should. *The Bear Myth* describes the tropes of this surprisingly common legendary type, plus how you can use it in your settings as background flavor and a source of gaming possibilities.

While disturbing to the earthly world, the Middle Eastern conflict has also stirred the immortal realm. *Babylon Rising* reveals a standalone systemless urban-fantasy campaign outline that can serve to augment *The New Kingdom* from *Pyramid* #3/7: *Urban Fantasy*. You’re a returning Mesopotamian god; what’re you doing today?

Discover what you’re doing tomorrow as well with the *Art of Prophecy*. The omens reveal this to include prediction sources, how to phrase revelations, and other useful tips. The next time a hero uses a Divination spell or wants to learn about his death journey, you’ll be prepared.

This month’s *Random Thought Table* looks at ways to mine myths for every ounce of adventure potential. *Odds and Ends* expands that idea with more tips and specifics, and features a *Murphy’s Rules* tribute to the holidays. The power of myth is yours to command!

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## THE POWER OF MYTH . . . IN YOUR HANDS

When I was putting this issue together, I couldn't help but realize that Wikipedia completely changed how this issue was created.

When I sought articles for this issue, I was fairly insistent that submissions shouldn't consist solely of material that is common-knowledge . . . or is only a few mouse-clicks away. For example, an encyclopedic detailing of the Egyptian deities was right out; anyone who wants to know about them can find ample information freely available online.

The public availability of such information is also why this issue is devoted to the *power of myth*, and not (say) mythology. Any well-stocked library has numerous resources on mythology; however, insight into how to use that common information in new and interesting ways for gaming is nowhere near as prevalent.

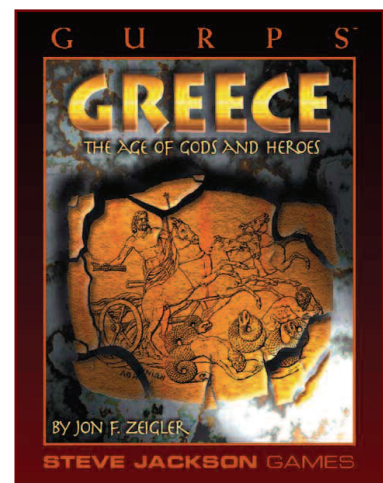
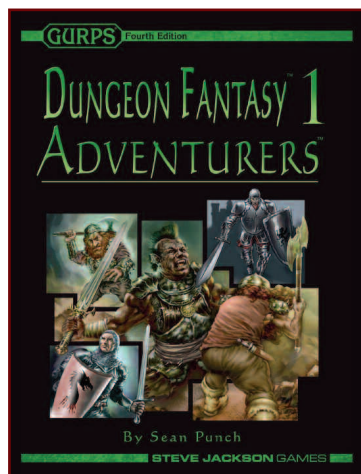
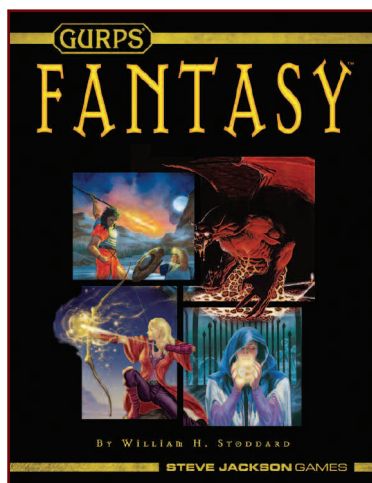
For perhaps the most striking example of how much the Internet has changed what this issue could have been 20 years ago, check out *Odds & Ends* (p. 38). In only a few hundred words, it offers tips into how to tap the gaming potential of the

sword in the stone, a famous Cyclops, and a forgotten biblical artifact. The default premise of the feature is that anyone who wants more details on the specific examples could readily find it online. It's easy to imagine an article from a 1980s gaming magazine expanding that concept to a few pages, since the audience would be assumed not to have quick access to the underlying background info.

Our goal was to fill this issue with insight and ideas that lets you use Wikipedia (and similar sources) to its full potential in the gaming world. We strive to fill *Pyramid* with good stuff you can't get easily elsewhere . . . and hopefully our efforts will be the stuff of legend for eons to come.

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

How did we do in our goal of trying to augment the power of the Information Age in your gaming? Are our efforts worthy of songs sung for generations? Or was there an element where we should go back to the *drawing bard*? (Ha-ha-ha-ha! *Ahem.*) You can send us private feedback at [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or make your epic thoughts known throughout the realms at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



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# SEVEN MYTHICAL ARTIFACTS FOR *DUNGEON* *FANTASY*

BY ANTONI TEN MONRÓS

Mythology has always been one of the most important sources of inspiration in fantasy roleplaying. In *Dungeon Fantasy*, it is a time-honored tradition to steal the *cool* aspects of mythology without regard to whether they're appropriate or anachronistic for the game world! This article presents seven artifacts from myth, viewed under a *Dungeon Fantasy* lens. This is not a treatise on mythology, though; corners were cut, and myths changed, in order to provide more interesting items for your games. The items' descriptions reference the original myths, however, and curious readers can research the actual stories behind them.

For more information on how to read the item entries (including details on suggested origins), see *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 6: 40 Artifacts* (pp. 3-4).

*A collection of wondrous items  
inspired by mythology.*

## AEGIS

**Power Item: 34 FP**

*Suggested Origins:* Cosmic, Divine, or Magical.

Forged by Hephaestus and polished by the Cyclopes, this round shield is property of Zeus, king of the Olympian gods, though he sometimes lends it to his daughter Athena. It looks

like a large Homeric buckler, made of layered ox hide, with a burnished orichalcum facing. Instead of the usual boss, it has the petrified head of the Gorgon Medusa. The rim is decorated with 100 tassels of gold thread, but no matter how roughly the shield is used, the tassels never fall off. The shield provides great powers of defense not only to the wearer, but also to anyone who fights by his side.

### *Properties*

- *Head of the Gorgon Medusa:* Instead of the customary boss in the shape of a mythological monster, this shield has the real thing! The petrified head of the Gorgon Medusa is affixed to it. Once per day, it can be awakened by the shield's owner, by taking a Concentrate maneuver. Anyone seeing the revived head must make a HT-5 roll or be turned to stone. This costs the wielder 10 FP.

- *Shield Others:* Once per turn, the wielder of Aegis can block an attack against an ally behind or beside him. Use the holder's normal Block score, including the shield's DB 3, as the shield leaps to protect others. This doesn't count as the person's normal block for the turn.

- *Shield Quality:* Aegis is a large balanced orichalcum buckler. As such, it provides DB 3. Its relative lightness and agility, however, mean that it doesn't negatively impact the wearer, negating the usual -2 penalty to attack for using a large shield.

- *Sword-Breaker:* Any weapon that strikes the Aegis, either intentionally, or by being blocked, breaks on a roll of 3 or less (on 1d), modified by the weapon's quality, as if it had parried a weapon weighting four times its own weight.

*Weight:* 18 lbs.

Now the gods are back, and the Scorpion Men will have their revenge. Disguised by powerful magic, the warriors stalk and kill those gods who seek congress with mortals. This is mostly out of jealousy, for the Scorpion Men are barren creatures, but by leaving Council gods alone, they drive a stake of suspicion between the two factions.

Scorpion Men appear as muscular male humans with the lower bodies and long, poisonous stingers of desert scorpions. They can grow up to 10 times the size of a man, shrink down to “normal” size, and fold their many legs and tail into two legs, so as to walk among mortals. Their stingers can kill a god, yet leave no wound or trace of poison behind.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid*, has been the editor of *The Wraith Project*, and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He’s also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.

## The Law of the Divine

Much like their Egyptian counterparts, the gods of Mesopotamia walk the line between what they were, and what they are. They are immortal but not invulnerable; powerful but not all-powerful; far-seeing but not omniscient. They have access to amazing magic and divine abilities, but can still be brought low by too much damage, certain magic, or mortal will.

The Mesopotamian gods do not have the same level of “staying power” as the Egyptian deities do. Once a soul is in Nergal’s domain, he can only fully leave if another takes his place. All tenants of the Big Land can temporarily escape as unseen, intangible, and mostly powerless spirits, but that’s as much leeway as the God of Death is willing to give.

To fully escape the Underworld, a god must make a spiritual bargain with another, conscious soul to swap places. The other need not know all details – if they’ll do “anything” to get out of death, it’s enough. The bargain creates a connection between the two souls, the spirit comes up, and the other soul takes its place.

The gods regain their magic, immortality, and divine power, but do not gain the knowledge of their borrowed bodies. They can wake up the sleeping souls to answer questions, or help perform unfamiliar tasks. But whenever a god does this, he risks the soul retaking the body. The soul can also try if the god’s severely weak, or badly damaged.

The soul’s initial “escape” might be brief – just enough time to do or say one thing. However, every time the captive soul succeeds, a chance occurs to be free for even longer, maybe permanently. It depends on how strong the minds of the human and the god are, and what advantages and schemes each can bring to bear.

Once in flesh, the gods wholly own it. So long as they have power, they can change it, heal it, and keep it from aging. If the body is harmed beyond their power to heal, the bargain ends, the god falls back to the Underworld, and the soul goes to its proper rest. The god may be so badly damaged or weakened by the body’s demise that he’ll fall asleep. Waking up from such trauma could take months, years, or possibly centuries.

The bargain has a drawback: Once in flesh, the gods are trapped within it. They can no longer walk the land in spirit, or inhabit their consecrated statues or well-kept

temples. Likewise, summoning them is no longer the great and portentous affair it once was; the god hears the call, but must physically travel there.

Certain spells allow the gods to travel in spirit, but there’s a danger of the body’s soul – or another ghost – repossessing the body while they’re gone. Such trauma would hurl the god back to the Underworld, there to sleep for quite some time. Wise gods leave their bodies protected by many spells when they do this.

All gods have at least one thing that they are god of: their dominions. They gain power from these things, can use magic based on them, and can use them to sense the world around them. They must tend these things as a farmer does his fields; when they prosper, so do their gods, but when they falter, the gods are deprived of power.

For example, Utu is the god of the sun, lawgiving, and fertility. So long as they are unimpeded, he is well-stocked with energy. His magic is based on heat and light, justice, and the giving of life. He can see anything the sun can see, or that is within range of a court of law or a fertile field. If other gods who share his dominions are using them, he knows it, though not why or how.

Like their Egyptian cousins, the gods’ true names are immensely important. However, where the True Names of the Egyptians were singular, the Mesopotamians have *dozens* of names, all of which would have to be known for anyone, god or man, to truly command them. These were written on special Tablets of Destiny, and hidden in each god’s chief temple, never to be shown to anyone. Most of the names have been lost to the ages, and not even the gods remember all their names, but to knowingly hold even a sliver of another’s Tablet of Destiny is to have illimitable power over that god. To purposefully destroy it is to cast that god down into spiritual destruction that only millennia in the Underworld could repair.

Unlike their Egyptian counterparts, the Mesopotamian gods are not overly affected by the presence or aspects of any Abrahamic religion, *including* Islam. They can walk into mosques and Islamic graveyards without fear, and pretend to worship and pray without being struck down. Why they enjoy this freedom is unknown.



# ODDS AND ENDS

## HOW TO GET MYTH ADVENTURE

We've discussed elsewhere the advantages of "zooming in close" on a mythological idea to mine it for adventure potential (see pp. 36-37). Here are some specific areas to examine for inspiration.

### Time

Every mythological story deals with a specific moment in time. Questions of what happened before and after are hardly ever considered. When looking at an interesting story, ask what happened *before* or *after* that event.

*Example:* Polyphemus is the Cyclops blinded by Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. What if the heroes encounter him sometime after that blinding? Polyphemus might be an oracle, a sightless criminal mastermind, a humbled diplomat, or something else. In this example, the heroes (and players) will have claim to something not even Odysseus possesses: knowledge of how Polyphemus' story turns out.

### Parts of the Whole

Any object is comprised of parts. (So are *people* – see the Medusa on p. 37!) Look at any item, and decide what parts it's composed of, or where its elements could have come from. Try to figure out what properties those elements might have on their own.

*Example:* The Arthurian sword in the stone (which may or may not be Excalibur) is a sign of sovereignty: whoever can pull the sword from the stone is the true king. Since many people want to be king but can't, and since we as humans generally know how to deal with stones, it could stand to reason that the stone is indestructible in some way. (Otherwise, some unscrupulous cad could chisel his way to the throne.) Regardless of the era, postulating the existence of a hunk of indestructible rock opens up all kinds of adventure possibilities . . . even if it has a sword sticking out of it!

### Forgotten Pieces

Similar to the two preceding ideas, often pieces of legends are known but simply forgotten. With a critical eye on the elements of a story, ask, "Whatever happened to that person/place/thing?"

*Example:* In *Genesis 31*, Rachel stole her father's household idols when she left with her husband.

The father – Laban – chased down the travelers, searching all their possessions. During this investigation, Rachel hid them under her seat, then claimed to be during her monthly cycle so she wouldn't be searched. The father never discovers the location of his household gods and leaves empty-handed (after the husband unwittingly asks the heavens to take the life of whomever stole them). Scripture doesn't say what happened to those idols after that. What became of them and what powers they held could form the basis of a memorable adventure.

## MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



Got a Murphy's Rule of your own? Send it to [murphy@sjgames.com](mailto:murphy@sjgames.com)

## ABOUT *GURPS*

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*Errata.* Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases are available on our website – see above.

*GURPS* rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book.

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