

G U R P S[®]

D[®]ragons[™]



WRITTEN BY PHIL MASTERS  ILLUSTRATED BY ALEX FERNANDEZ

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Fang ...

Ancient and primal, with reptilian scales, poison blood, and furnace breath, dragons stalk our nights. They wrap gleaming coils around us, and sleep on beds of gold and gems, waiting for the hero who will slay them. In our dreams we feel the sun gleaming from polished scales. We ride the winds and summon the storm cloud. And with pearls beneath our jaws, we ascend to heaven.

...and Claw ...

This book is about myths, dreams, and nightmares. It looks at dragons from all around the world, East and West, Old World and New. It tells their stories, and presents the hard facts in **GURPS** terms. *Dragons* includes one extended campaign setting and several shorter ideas, focused on dragons in all their variety – from a world suddenly devastated by monsters, to an interstellar empire where dragons serve as starships.

...and Fiery Maw!

There is no monster more central to the idea of heroism. Fighting a dragon can be a supreme adventure; roleplaying a dragon can be a supreme challenge. Come on in, and meet your dreams and nightmares. But remember what happens when you play with fire.

GURPS Dragons includes an appendix that converts the game material to **GURPS Fourth Edition** rules – this is the first preview of *Fourth Edition* anywhere!



STEVE JACKSON GAMES
www.sjgames.com



GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised and **GURPS Compendium I** are required to use this supplement in a **GURPS** campaign. The information in this book can be used with *any* game system.

THE GREAT WYRMS:

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, dragons have captured the imagination. Legends from every inhabited continent have described forms of dragons. They have been gods, elementals, sages, ravening monsters, demons, messengers, guards, terrifying adversaries, or all of these at once.

The dragon is a part of all our dreams. He stalks our nights, wraps his gleaming coils around us, and sleeps on a bed of gold and gems, waiting for the birth of the hero who will slay him. In the draconic parts of our subconscious, we breathe fire and poison. We feel the sun gleaming off our polished scales. We ride the winds and summon the storm cloud. We clench our iron-hard talons and find purchase in solid rock. And with pearls beneath our jaws, we ascend to heaven on dragon wings . . .

In plain **GURPS** terms, dragons are powerful beings that easily weigh in at vast point totals. But that does not preclude using them in many ways. When encountering dragons, human PCs must understand what they face – which may not be obvious at first. Likewise dragon PCs must understand the uses and also the limitations of power. This book explains dragons in all their aspects – their history, their nature, and their uses in games.

What Is a Dragon?

Dragons are mythical creatures, often possessing features from several natural species.

That is not very specific, but then, “dragon” is a flexible word. Folklore refers to dragons as giant serpents, sea snakes, and all manner of flying or fire-breathing creatures. These monstrous hybrids are fearful in nature, but does that make them draconic?

Despite the wide variety, “dragons” worthy of the name do share common traits. The reptilian features are universal. Also, it is unusual for any creature described as a dragon not to have at least one of the following: a highly supernatural nature, unnatural size, an association with water or the weather, guardian duties, a treasure hoard, or the ability to breathe fire or poison. This book uses this definition, but also assumes that, if a casual observer calls something a dragon, it deserves discussion here.

Third and Fourth Edition GURPS

This book was initially created as a supplement for the Third Edition of the **GURPS** rules. However, it will appear around the same time as the new Fourth Edition rule set. For agreement with both editions, we added an appendix, converting all the necessary rules-related material for the Fourth Edition. See pp. 144-156.

About the Author

Coiled in his lair, Phil Masters contemplates what he has wrought. His place in secret lore is secured by **GURPS** works such as *Arabian Nights* and *Atlantis*, along with work on the *Discworld* and *Hellboy Roleplaying Games* and *Transhuman Space* line. He regularly matches wits with bands of adventurers – strictly as the GM of role-playing sessions, which, admittedly, seems safest to him.

He prefers not to sleep on a bed of gems and gold, though (a decent modern mattress is so much better for the back). His scales remain unformed – he has seen a mere 45 years, young for a dragon.

About the Illustrator

Alex like to draw pictures. Alex no like word things.

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the **GURPS** system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources include:

Pyramid (www.sjgames.com/pyramid/). Our online magazine includes new **GURPS** rules and articles. It also covers *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and many more top games – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *In Nomine*, *Illuminati*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre Miniatures*, and more. **Pyramid** subscribers also have access to playtest files online!

New supplements and adventures. **GURPS** continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. For a current catalog, send us a legal-sized or 9"×12" SASE – please use two stamps! – or just visit www.warehouse23.com.

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

Gamer input. We value your comments, for new products as well as updated printings of existing titles!

Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. **GURPS** has its own Usenet group, too: rec.games.frp.gurps.

GURPSnet. This e-mail list hosts much of the online discussion of **GURPS**. To join, point your web browser to www.sjgames.com/mailman/listinfo/gurpsnet-l.

The **GURPS Dragons** web page can be found at www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/dragons/.

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**, except for the Appendix. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the **GURPS Basic Set** – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Page references that begin with CI indicate **GURPS Compendium I**. Other references are **GURPS Bestiary** (BE), **GURPS Cops** (C), **GURPS Cabal** (CB), **GURPS China** (CH), **GURPS Compendium II** (CII), **GURPS Dinosaurs** (D), **GURPS Discworld** (DI), **GURPS Egypt** (EG), **GURPS Fantasy Bestiary** (FB), **GURPS Fantasy Folk** (FF), **GURPS Grimoire** (G), **GURPS Greece** (GR), **GURPS High-Tech** (HT), **GURPS In Nomine** (IN), **GURPS Japan** (J), **GURPS Low-Tech** (LT), **GURPS Magic** (M), **GURPS Mecha** (ME), **GURPS Magic Items 3** (MIiii), **GURPS Monsters** (MO), **GURPS Places of Mystery** (PM), **GURPS Robots** (RO), **GURPS Shapeshifters** (SH), **GURPS Spirits** (SPI), **GURPS Steam-Tech** (STE), **GURPS Steampunk** (STM), **GURPS Supers** (SU), **GURPS Vehicles** (VE), **GURPS Voodoo** (VO), **GURPS Vehicles Expansion 1** (VXi), **GURPS Warriors** (WA), and **GURPS Who's Who 1** (WWi). For a full list of abbreviations, see p. CI181 or the updated web list at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

CHAPTER

1

THE NAME OF THE BEAST



*Whisht! lads, haad yor gobs, An' aa'll tell ye aall an aaful story,
Whisht! lads, haad yor gobs, An' aa'll tell ye 'boot the worm.*

*– C.M. Leumane, **The Lambton Worm***

Dragons have fascinated humanity since the dawn of history. The earliest Aboriginal cave paintings show the rippling form of the Rainbow Serpent, whose undulations in the Dreaming created hills and hollows in the land. In China, unearthed bronze vessels attributed to the earliest dynasties depict dragon images. In Africa, Scandinavia, and South America, people both worshiped dragons and feared them. Many civilizations saw them in such variety as gods and monsters, the glorious harbinger of irrigating rains, or a terror in the night.

Legends from widely diverse cultures describe similar distinguishing features. The fearsome monster, golden hoard, kidnapped princesses, wings and fiery breath, hidden lair, and

riddle games all intimately connect to ancient beliefs. Although all these legends have common elements, dragons still vary. The beneficent demigods of Chinese legend and the ancient Mesoamerican winged serpents are half a world away from the “laidly wyrms” of European medieval folklore, behaviorally as well as geographically.

Even in games where dragons are unlike their mythic forebears, it is worth knowing the contradicted core images and archetypes – and mythology and fiction offer a wide range of dragons to modify. So what, then, *is* a dragon, at its great and thunderous heart?

ESSENTIAL SYMBOLS



Some elements are common, if not universal.

Raw Power

First, the dragon of legend is *powerful*. It often seems to be power incarnate. A dragon may be unimaginably huge or merely big, invulnerable or cunning, smart or bestial – but traditionally, whether breathing fire or casting spells, it represents devastating force. Modern stories with small, even cute, dragons are exercises in bathos. They shrink the myth down to something trivial (with perhaps a double bluff, if the small creature still breathes a deadly flame or wields psychic powers).

In this sense, a dragon is *just* a monster, although a powerful one. It has the same role in stories as a great lion or bull or boar. However, the dragon is unique. For one thing, it is often a composite, with serpentine venom, eagle claws, and bat-like wings; it goes beyond nature in its form and hence its power. For another, it is more or less reptilian, and hence strange to human perceptions in ways that no other mammal can match; it has a sense of the alien and often a weirdly hypnotic gaze.

Even benevolent dragons are tricky and strange. To the Chinese peasant, for example, they perhaps symbolized the inscrutable bureaucracy, operating the weather as incomprehensibly as the government operated the tax system; while to the Chinese overlord, the divine dragons were a reminder that the power of nature exceeded even his own authority.

Symbols of Disaster

Like any good myth, the dragon makes a useful metaphor. Given its raw physical power, one thing it often symbolizes is natural disaster.

Draconic monsters represent many types of catastrophe.

Some have venomous breath or spittle that poisons the countryside for miles around, and hence embody plague or famine. The French *gargouille* was a serpentine river monster associated with disastrous floods, while the Chinese *Li Lung* caused earthquakes.

This version lies between the image of the dragon as a bestial monster, and the refined dragon as demigod of water and weather. The wiser sort of divine dragon only brings disaster on rare occasions, when sorely provoked or commanded by higher powers; others embodying raw catastrophe are as irrational and brutal as any random accident. Still, their role in stories is, in a sense, comforting; by giving disaster a physical form, the stories make tragedies susceptible to defeat by a hero or saint.

Serpents at the Gates of Wisdom

Serpents – dragons being the ultimate serpent – sometimes embody a subtle, positive aspect in myth, derived from a sense of strangeness and their expressionless gaze. They often are symbols or guardians of wisdom, possessing and distributing knowledge while being powerful enough to impose a price for it. Their hypnotic, unblinking eyes, which paralyze their prey, seem to hint at unspoken knowledge. Even the serpent in the biblical story of Eden fits this pattern, drawing introducing the first humans to the knowledge of good and evil, with enigmatic promises of immortality and transcendence.

This ancient image, too, has fed into the dragon myth. Dragons have acquired a reputation for cunning and borrowed the serpent's gaze, and their taste for hoarding now applies to information as well as to gold. Likewise, their fondness for riddle games may be a dangerous process of teaching and initiation. While classic western medieval dragons were usually unthinking beasts, modern fantasy *has* to treat them as mysterious.



Greed and Cunning

As the dragon myth developed, their raw power, moderated by a grasp of secrets, made the dragon more dangerous. Some still rampaged mindlessly around the countryside, devouring cattle and burning down houses, but others gained intelligence. In Asia, dragons are gods or demigods, usually intelligent and



not especially malicious, but in the West, the idea of an intelligent dragon just implied an intelligent monster.

Being powerful, dragons made effective guardian monsters, often depicted as sitting atop piles of treasure. Being intelligent and selfish, their motive for this could only be personal greed. Hence, the dragon could represent a whole complex of related abilities and vices – power and cunning, selfishness and avarice – all bound together as they might be in a powerful, selfish human being.

The idea of the cunning dragon identifies it with the ultimate power of evil. The Bible talks about “the great dragon . . . that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan.” In other words, the Devil himself could be as a dragon.

Refined Power

The most formidable, and perhaps the most restrained, great dragons have a balanced combination of power and wisdom. If a dragon has both physical and supernatural power, and is clever and wise or cunning, it obviously applies that power very effectively. The divine dragons of China ruled the storms and oceans, and did so intelligently (if occasionally with outbursts of violent temper). Modern fantasy has dragons so powerful that only the greatest of human wizards can have dealings with them, such as those in Ursula Le Guin’s “Earthsea” stories.

Hybrid Symbolism

One thing that helped dragons become well known also gave them credibility problems. They became too convenient as pure symbols. A dragon could embody power, or disaster, or greed, or evil, or wisdom – but then, it no longer looked like a “realistic” creature. It became two-dimensional. When dragon characters work best, they retain some complexity and their symbolic status. The rampaging beast can also be the wise and ancient creature of magic, capable of holding subtle conversations with anyone trying to outwit it.

In other words, dragons have enormous potential for story purposes, and for something so familiar, a remarkable ability to spring surprises.

ANCIENT DRAGONS



Early human cultures often revered snakes. Their deadly venom and keen senses can represented spiritual power, and the regular sloughing of their skins can symbolized immortality. Ancient snake-cults existed in places as diverse as Australia, the Middle East, and India (where snake worship continues to this day). These primeval serpent deities represented elemental forces. Although appeased with sacrifices, these dragons were neither reasoned with nor understood.

Later societies, living in agricultural communities detached from direct experience of nature, more often separated the “good” from the “evil” aspects of divinity. In their stories, the beneficent sun or rain god (associated with successful harvests) defeated the ancient serpent. Subsequent myths represented this snake as an amalgam of fearful beasts or a vast horror, emphasizing its power.

The reptilian supernatural monster of terrible power is an ancient idea, although in the earliest tales that contribute to the Western tradition, it was a divine entity, not a creature met and

fought by human adventurers. Organized mythologies of agricultural or urban cultures, however, did not generally worship such creatures; rather, dragons were images of primal chaos, enemies to the creative, orderly gods.

Sumer

The Sumerians, one of the world’s first civilizations, lived in Mesopotamia, in the fertile delta between the Tigris and Euphrates, and their empire dated back to 4000 B.C. They recognized a number of common gods; each city had its own deity inhabiting the local temple.

They described the world as a round island floating on an infinite ocean – imagined as a huge snake. This great serpent Abzu was the progenitor of the Sumerian gods, birthing Ann the sky-god and Ki his mate, also known as the Lady of the Serpent. As well as being the name of the world snake, “Abzu” was also a location – an incomprehensible, unfathomable, secret place.

Messengers and Angels?

Most dragons, at least in Europe, serve no one – unless a superior power or holiness tames them and they become mere captives on leashes. Even Chinese dragons, bureaucrats of nature, have absolute authority in their own domains. However, in their aspect as divine beings, dragons occasionally take an intermediary role, bearing a deity's pronouncements to Earth, and sometimes enforcing his decrees.

The Bible describes a few angels as draconic – that shape is more typical of demons, devils, and images in apocalyptic visions. Still, angels take many awe-inspiring forms, and occasionally appear as graceful and beautiful snakes. For example, in the *In Nomine* setting, the Seraphim manifest as six-eyed, feather-winged serpents (pp. IN44-45).

Other Biblical Dragons

A number of well-known passages in the King James translation of the Bible refer to “dragons” implying they are actual features of the landscape instead of vast supernatural creatures. For example, the prophet Jeremiah warns that “Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons,” while the despairing Job declares “I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls.”

However, these passages seem to be the product of translation problems. For all their scholarship, the translators of the King James Version were 17th-century Western Europeans, with little knowledge of the wildlife of Bible lands, and some species names were a problem for them. A modern translation renders Jeremiah's prophecy as “Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, a haunt of wolves,” and Job's cry as “The wolf is now my brother, the owls of the desert have become my companions.”

Of course, a “mythic” game, influenced by the older translations, can have the biblical lands infested with real dragons. These are symbols of desolation and decay, instead of sophisticated, eloquent creatures; their lairs are bywords for all that is ruined. Of course, some lines in the Bible definitely *do* refer to great and terrible monsters. Whether or not the original writers envisaged the modern image of a dragon, using the term in translation makes their point.

Babylonian Myth: Tiamat

*Ummu-Hubur [Tiamat] who formed all things,
Made in addition weapons invincible; she spawned monster-serpents,*

Sharp of tooth, and merciless of fang;

With poison, instead of blood, she filled their bodies.

– *Enuma Elish* (1st Tablet),

trans. George Smith (1876)

After Sumer came Babylon, the capital of Southern Mesopotamia from the early second to the early first millennium B.C. The empire's culture inherited much from the Sumerians, including their religious cosmology. However, the Babylonians and Akkadians, and the Assyrians who borrowed and adapted their myths, embellished these ancient legends, lending them a broader, more mythic scope.

One of the most familiar mythical dragons is Tiamat, the Babylonian water-demon. No mere serpent, Tiamat was a

terrifying force of darkness. The gods, her offspring, were brutal and chaotic beings who warred among themselves and created humanity as a slave race from their father's blood.

The Babylonian creation epic, the *Enuma Elish*, written on seven clay tablets no later than the 12th century B.C., describes the dragon Apsu, god of the primordial fresh waters under the earth. Apsu was the brother-husband of the dragon Tiamat, goddess of the salt sea of the Abyss. Their waters mingled underground and created the host of gods. However, the younger gods became unruly and churned up waves disturbing their parents, who wished only rest and inertia.

Ignoring Tiamat's pleas not to fight her children, Apsu warred against Ea (also known as Enlil), which led to his destruction. Enlil took over his watery realm and produced the dragon-son Marduk (also called Bel, who later became the Canaanite Baal). Marduk borrowed the powers of the other gods to make a stand against the enraged Tiamat before she could destroy them all. When the Mother of Dragons tried to swallow him, Marduk thrust a bag full of winds into her mouth, and then killed her by piercing her side with a lance. To celebrate this victory, the hero-god made the heavens and earth out of his Tiamat's body, and created humanity from her consort's blood.

For a *GURPS* treatment of Tiamat, plus notes on using Babylonian legends and magic in games, see *GURPS Monsters*, pp. MO24-25.

Egypt

Egyptian beliefs centered on the rising Nile as a source of irrigation, and on the beneficence of the sun. In legend, Apep (or Apophis), the great serpent, and Ra, the sun god, warred eternally. Apep lurked in the outer darkness and attempted to plunge the world into unending gloom by swallowing the sun. Each night, Ra traveled through the underworld's seven gates, fighting Apep's reptilian minions at every turn. Apep guarded the final portal from the underworld, and battled the sun with storms, darkness, and eclipses. He represented a malevolent ancient evil, and was never worshiped. In later myths, Set (or Sutekh), an evil god of storms and water, also endlessly warred with Ra. Set's followers took the forms of crocodiles and other dangerous creatures of the great river.

The monstrous snake-demons of Egyptian mythology do not resemble traditional western dragons as strongly as the Babylonian or Persian types, but they address the same archetypes of the dark water-god who fights the heroic sun-warrior. For more on Egyptian myth, including Apep, see *GURPS Egypt*, pp. EG108-109.

Ancient Persia

A people of similar culture inhabited the southwest part of Persia (Iran), or Elam, contemporarily with early Babylon. Founding the Zoroastrian religion in the sixth century B.C., Zoroaster classified spirits as good or evil. Earlier nature spirits, while still recognized, sank into minor roles compared with the wise spirit Ahura Mazda (Ormuzd), the personification of All-Good.

Many beings opposed Ahura Mazda including a dragon, Azhi Dahaka, whose home lay in Babylon. According to Persian mythology, Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), the father of lies, created this creature to rid the world of truth and righteousness. Azhi Dahaka was half human, half beast, and had three heads: pain, anguish, and death. Venomous beasts filled his body, so no one could cut him open without infecting the world. The vastness of

his wings blotted out the stars. He tried to extinguish the sacred flame known as The Divine Glory, but the fire god Atar stopped him, fighting him in the firmament. The hero Thraetaona then bound Azhi in chains beneath the mythical Mount Dermawend.

Tiamat also filled her children's bodies with poison, but Azhi Dahaka was more actively malevolent than the Babylonian dragoness. Where Tiamat had reason to hate the world and the gods who disturbed her eternal slumber, Azhi Dahaka exists only to destroy. He was born in hate, serving the Great Lie. Even safely bound, the intensity of his fury will only increase with time. During his escape at the end of the world, the shadow of his wings will again cross the sun, inspiring unimaginable terrors as he devours one-third of all living things. On that day, another mortal hero, the youth Keresaspa, will kill him in a river of fire.

Although these early dragons remained essentially vast forces of nature, they also established a pattern for future stories – the coming of the mortal slayer-hero.

Greece

If ever a culture believed in essentially mortal heroes, however touched they might be by divine aid or descent, it was the Greeks. They also absorbed influences from other cultures; for example, Egyptian myths inspired Greek tales of terrifying serpent monsters even in a land with no large native snakes. Greek myths influenced others, including the Romans.

In fact, the word *drakkon* (snake) comes from the Greek. The “dragons” in Greek myth often have the nature of, simply, enormous serpents, devoid of the wings and claws which characterize the traditional Western dragon. Some, like the creature guarding the Golden Fleece, and Ladon, the fire-breathing dragon guarding the garden of the Hesperides, were placed as guardians by the gods themselves. They were natural watchmen because their eyes, like those of snakes, never blinked. Others' sole purpose was testing a hero, allowing him to prove his claim to glory upon their scaly, twitching hides. Apollo slew the Python that guarded the original oracle at Delphi before taking it over.

Three Heroes

The Greeks may not have invented some major features of the dragon myth, but the popularity of their legends certainly helped to reinforce one or two of them.

Perseus and Andromeda: While magically flying home from his quest to slay the Gorgon Medusa, Perseus (pp. GR31-32) noticed a young woman chained to a rock by a stormy coast. This was the princess Andromeda, offered as a sacrifice to a terrible sea monster. Perseus slew the monster and married the princess, establishing a model for human dragon-slayers thereafter.

Heracles and the Hydra: Heracles (pp. GR32-34) slew the Lernaean Hydra, a huge, lizard-like monster with numerous serpentine heads, as one of his Twelve Labors. Its central head was immortal, all its heads spat poison, and its blood, too, was deadly. Furthermore, for every head chopped off, two grew in its place. Hercules' companion Iolaus seared the neck-stumps with a flaming brand before the replacements could grow. After the decapitation of the final (immortal) head, the body collapsed and died. Hercules then buried the immortal head and used its blood as poison on his arrows. Many-headed dragons in later tales might trace their origins to this story (and GMs might wonder if the last head might still be alive).

Fear Death by Water

The ancient (mostly Western) idea of the dragon-serpent as the symbol of primal chaos often relates it to the greatest, most fearsome and chaotic phenomenon that people knew: the ocean. The ocean-chaos-dragon surrounded and threatened to engulf the world of man. Neither men, nor gods, could control the encircling deeps, nor hope to understand them.

Tiamat, Apep, Jormungand, Ophion, the Makara demon of South East Asia, the great wyrm Ourobouros, and even the biblical Leviathan are all names for the terrors from the deep. They have the character of the malevolent Elder Gods as imagined more recently by H.P. Lovecraft. However, Chaos also represents the primal matter out of which the universe was born, and water can also indicate fertility. Tiamat's bones were later used to create the Earth, the Makara was a life-giver as well as a terror, and the Pelasgian Ophion created the known world itself with Eurynome's aid.

The more subtle dragon deities of China bring the rains or guard rivers or lakes. Recent Western myths also maintain this association; European wyrms often emerged from wells or rivers.



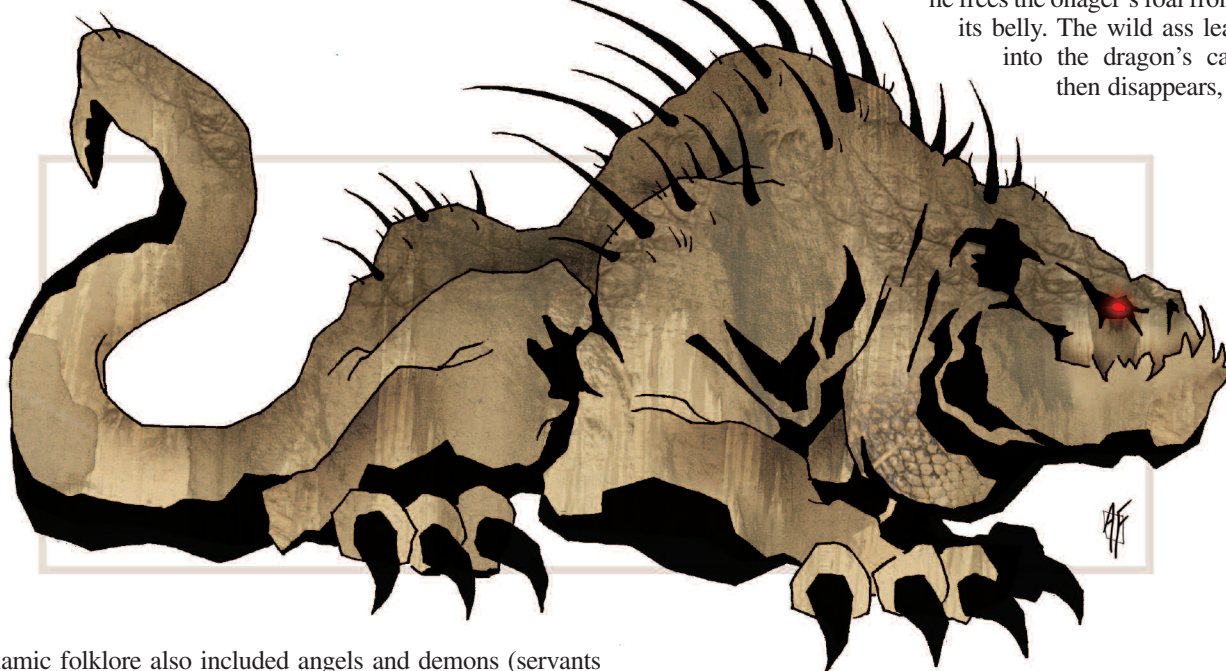
Jason and the Serpent's Teeth: The young hero Jason (pp. GR34-36) sailed with a crew of heroes to bring back the legendary Golden Fleece from the distant land of Colchis.

There, King Aeetes set various deadly conditions for Jason to earn the Fleece, which Jason met with the aid of the King's daughter, the sorceress Medea. At one point, Aeetes sowed the ground with the teeth of a serpent, which immediately grew into a band of warriors who attacked Jason – an early example of the magical power of serpent or dragon body parts. After this, Jason and Medea claimed the Fleece, despite the unsleeping fire-breathing monster who guarded it. Medea magically put the monster to sleep.

(Other Greek legends also mention serpent's teeth growing into warriors, some of whom became noted heroes. Heroic Greek characters could thus have draconic ancestry of a sort.)

Islamic Dragons

Islam spread across the Middle East, discrediting ancient gods as ignorant traditions. However, the new theology adopted some older myths. Islamic folklore enthusiastically described djinn and dragons, personified as elemental figures of fire and water. Poets wrote of the cities of the djinn, and of the heroic kings and warriors who defeated mighty dragons. (See *GURPS Arabian Nights* for more on all this.) These dragons were creatures of flesh and blood, joyfully depicted in medieval Persian art in jewel-bright colors.



Islamic folklore also included angels and demons (servants of Allah or Iblis, respectively) with draconic forms. Prominent among these was Jawzahr, the celestial dragon who danced among the stars, causing comets and eclipses in his wake. Fire-breathing demons that took the shape of giant dragons were called *Th'uban*. It is from this old Arabic term that the star Thuban (also known as Alpha Draconis) was named. This was the pole star many thousands of years ago, while the Egyptians built their pyramids. (In an illuminated campaign, perhaps reptilian aliens traveled from Thuban to Earth.)

The Book of Kings

In the 10th century, the great Persian poet Ferdowsi (or Firdawsi) retold Persian royal myths in the epic the *Shah-Nameh* (or *Shahnama*) – the “Book of Kings.” This includes several encounters with dragons. These creatures sometimes breathe fire and sometimes poison, and in death emit poisonous fumes

powerful enough to render a hero unconscious. They also speak – enough to mock their opponents, at least – and one of them becomes invisible by either magic or uncanny stealth.

To judge by his verbal descriptions, Ferdowsi imagined dragons as monstrous serpents. One resembled a black mountain, another was amphibious, and another had long hair that trailed on the ground. However, the illustrators of his works borrowed heavily from Chinese traditions, and often gave their dragons four legs, odd flame-like wings sprouting from their shoulders and flanks, and vestigial horns (although they disregarded Chinese subtleties such as attaching significance to the number of toes).

King Bahram Gur and the Black Dragon

The *Khamisa* of Nizami, another great work of medieval Persian literature, tells the story of a legendary Sassanid-era king, Bahram Gur. In one episode, the king's hunt chases an onager (wild ass) to a cave where no man has ever set foot. Outside a dragon lies in wait in a black mountain of coils. Realizing that this dragon injured the onager and the ass seeks justice, the king takes his sword and faces the monster. After killing the dragon, he frees the onager's foal from inside its belly. The wild ass leads him into the dragon's cave and then disappears, leaving

Bahram Gur with a fabulous golden hoard. The poet notes: “A king who gives justice to an onager and imprisons a dragon in its grave, finally, for his pains, gains salvation and a treasure.”

Nizami described dragons as having wings and four legs, suggesting that by his time – the 12th century – some of the poet's images came from pictorial art. However, “factual” Muslim writers never picked up such ideas. For game purposes, the dragons of both the *Shah-Nameh* and the *Khamisa* are much like European drakes or wyrms, although their scales may be more colorful.

Incidentally, not all dragons in medieval Islamic myth were evil. A dragon advised the minor hero Darab, and when angels and wild beats aided the heroes of the Book of Kings in battle against a horde of demons, at least one artist added a dragon to the forces of good.

WESTERN DRAGONS



The great fire-breathing lizard of medieval European lore is the most terrible of predators, the most feared of all beasts. In his hidden lair, he jealously guards a glittering hoard of gold and jewels. His roar splits the night and makes even brave men tremble. If the dragon keeps away from human habitation, people silently breathe a prayer of relief. If not, they hope for a knight in shining armor to pass by, or a saint who will tame the beast with his faith. It is no shame to flee a dragon, for even having laid eyes on the creature and lived is a story worthy of a budding hero.

However, there are many variations on the basic type; it sometimes seems that every district had its own peculiar dragon. The “standard” dragon probably sprang from a mingling of local tales, ancient symbols brought from the Near East by the Roman armies, and the harsh myths of the wide-traveling Norsemen. With the spread of Christianity, the dragon gained a theological role, representing not only power, strength, and ferocity, but also greed, monstrous appetites, and sin. He was now associated with the Adversary, Satan, and with the seven-headed dragon of Revelation.

Description

The archetypal Western dragon, or firedrake, is a giant flying reptile, usually portrayed with a serpent’s body, two large bat-wings, four legs, and a head that somewhat resembles that of a horse. The most common colors mentioned in stories are green, red, or gold. Its tail is long and serpentine, with a spike at the end, possibly barbed. Each leg ends in large talons, similar to those of a bird of prey. The dragon has rows of sharp teeth, and often dorsal spines. Frequently, the creature breathes fire or poison, or has poisonous blood.

(Incidentally, these physical descriptions of dragons were reinforced not only by artists, but also by “monster-makers” in the 16th and 17th centuries, who sewed together body parts from natural animals to create “fabulous beasts” which were sold to collectors. As well-known monsters, dragons were in demand, and several “baby dragons” were displayed in Paris in 1557.)

Some writers distinguish between the “heraldic” dragon – which has wings, stands proudly on four legs, and breathes fire – and the “worm” of Scandinavian myth, a more serpentine creature – which may not have legs at all, may employ poison instead of fire, and mostly is slain by heroes rather than appearing on coats of arms. However, this distinction is hazy at best, and easily obscured by an artistic touch in a picture or story.

These Western dragons are solitary creatures. Usually they lair either in remote mountainous caves or in secluded waters, feed on livestock, with occasional requests for beautiful virgins to supplement their diet. If two or more dragons appear in the same story, they usually fight, unless they are a mother and her brood.

Celtic Myths

The body of myths that descended to the Celtic peoples in the Dark Ages from their pre-Roman ancestors is full of heroes and magic (as *GURPS Celtic Myth* describes), but relatively light on dragons. The image possibly arrived in these lands with Germanic and Norse invaders. However, some Celtic dragons

exist, and the creature eventually became an important symbol of some Celtic peoples.

Wales

The ancient myth cycle, the *Mabinogion*, includes one of the first accounts of *Y Ddraig Goch*, the Welsh red dragon. Llud, King of Britain, consulted with his brother the King of France about the troubles in his kingdom. One of the problems was a tremendous battle between the dragon of his homeland and a foreign dragon. From hiding, Llud watched the dragons fight in the shapes of a series of wild animals. Finally, when they collapsed in exhaustion, Llud imprisoned them underneath Dinas Emrys, in Snowdon. He was told that as long as the dragons remained safely buried, no harm would come to his kingdom.

Welsh folklore is rich in legends of dragons, serpents, cockatrices, and griffins. A recurring tale is that all the snakes in the principality had a huge gathering in the Spring. Here the serpents chose a new king, and the old colony fought a bitter battle against the younger generation, at which the new monarch was always successful. After the battle was over and the snakes had dispersed, a snake-stone (*Maen Magl*) that resembled a polished pebble could be found. This was supposed to cure all eye ailments.

Ireland

Ireland has no native snakes, presumably because the island was cut off during the last Ice Age, although the fact is traditionally credited to the efforts of Saint Patrick. Perhaps as a result, Ireland has little in the way of dragon stories. The stories of river monsters (such as the peist, p. FB92) are likely akin to the “afanc” of Welsh legend (p. FB6), a rather obscure creature that can be a giant serpent, leech, crocodile, or even beaver. Vague threats that lurk below the surface of large bodies of water lack the versatile sophistication of a real dragon. The dark and ancient god Crom Cruach (whose cult Saint Patrick attacked) is sometimes described as a dragon.

Arthurian Dragons

The Roman and post-Roman use of dragon standards (p. 17) is the most likely reason the dragon became associated with the legendary King Uther Pendragon (“dragon head” or “chief dragon”). According to the chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth, Uther had a vision in which he saw a dragon in a comet, and adopted it as his symbol when he became king.

In a more Welsh Arthurian legend, the fifth century’s King Vortigern asked Merlin the magician why one tower of his castle had repeatedly fallen down. The sorcerer said the castle was built over the den of two immense dragons, whose combats shook the structures above them. These were in fact the same dragons described in the *Mabinogion*. The king ordered his men to dig deep into the foundations, where they found two enormous serpents, one white and the other red. All the onlookers fled in terror except for Merlin, who stood by and cheered on the conflict. Eventually the red dragon was killed and the white one disappeared. Merlin interpreted the battle for the king as symbolizing the struggle between the Saxons and Britons. The red dragon represented the Welsh (the native Britons), and the white represented the Saxon invaders. Although the red dragon might lose initially, the white dragon would eventually be thrown out of the country (a prophecy never actually fulfilled).

Fire-breathing dragons are uncommon in Arthurian stories, but two of the most capable knights of the Round Table battled such creatures: Lancelot and Tristram. In one version of the Tristram story, as written by Gottfried Strasburger in the 13th century, the knight encounters a dragon. A long fight follows, “so fierce that the shield he held in his hand was burnt well-nigh to a coal” by the dragon’s flames. Eventually the exhausted hero collapses and is rescued by the beautiful Iseult. He later proves that he slew the dragon by producing the beast’s tongue (a trophy also mentioned in other dragon-slayer tales).

Germanic and Norse Myth

In Norse art, dragons again symbolize great destruction, darkness, and chaos. Dragons in these myths are often greedy and *always* dangerous. More than this, they are never purely natural animals. A common theme in the sagas involves a greedy man who steals treasure, flees with it, and is eventually cursed to become a dragon that watches over the hoard. Other monsters are the dark offspring of gods. These tales are also related to the mythology of ancient Germany; the legends of northwestern Europe have to be viewed together, although with local variations. See *GURPS Vikings* for more on Norse myths.

Nidhogg

According to Norse mythology, the giant ash tree Yggdrasil supports the entire universe. The great serpent Nidhogg coils at its base, gnawing endlessly at the world-ash’s roots. A vicious spirit, he knows only his dreadful hunger to uproot the tree and thus unmake the universe. Known in Norse poetic metaphors as the “Dread Biter,” if any being in Norse myth symbolizes pure evil, it is he.

The Midgard Serpent

The child of Loki and the giantess Angrboda, the Midgard Serpent (Jormungand) is the Norse version of the infinite snake of the deeps. Odin stole him from his parents and threw him into the sea. The serpent lurked, brooding, eating so much that he grew until he encircled the world. In pictures, he often holds his tail in his mouth, regurgitating the ocean even as he swallows it. The god Thor is his nemesis, and the two have met twice, with neither victorious. Thor is fated to kill the serpent at their third meeting, in the final battle of Ragnarok, when the world will be destroyed. However, the god will take just nine more paces before he collapses alongside his old enemy, slain by the serpent’s poisonous breath.

Fafnir

In the *Volsung Saga*, Fafnir killed his father to gain control of a vast hoard of treasure. Using the *tarnhelm*, a magical helmet

that allowed its user to change shape, he turned himself into a dragon to guard his loot. A wise old dragon and a proficient shapeshifter, he enjoyed playing riddling games with his victims before they died.

Fafnir’s jealous brother Regin taught Siegfried, the saga’s hero, how to kill the beast. Siegfried dug a pit in the dragon’s path and crouched inside, stabbing the dragon from underneath as it passed overhead on its way to a waterhole to drink. After accidentally tasting the dragon’s blood, he could understand the language of birds, and overheard two discussing Regin’s plans to kill him. He therefore killed Regin before Regin could strike.



Growing Hoards

In one Danish tale, a wyrm, when placed in a jewel-box, grew to vast size in a short time and magically caused the gold on which it lay to grow in proportion! This seems to be a unique power, of which most dragons and wyrms could only dream. Still, it might explain why dragons always have such big hoards. If the effect was well known (or merely widely rumored), it would give greedy humans an incentive to *encourage* wyrms to settle in their neighborhood – if only they could get rid of the monster when it got too big and greedy, or when they wanted their profit.

Another version says that Fafnir’s lust for the treasure and his dying father’s curse transformed him. Then Siegfried tasted Fafnir’s heart after Regin asked him to roast it for Regin to devour. Yet other accounts say Siegfried bathed in the dragon’s blood and became superhumanly tough or even invulnerable.

Sea Serpents

Sea serpents are gigantic snakelike creatures that live in water, usually in uncharted oceans or the deepest lakes. For centuries, ship's logs have described sinuous torsos traveling in straight lines across the water's surface as waves crash across their girth. Many also credited these monsters with causing storms.

Most sightings were mere glimpses of monsters in the distance, but sea serpents could also be veritable terrors of the deep. They could not be placated, only avoided, and would unexpectedly surface in a rage, throwing their armored coils around ships. Pictures often show monsters rearing up with huge draconic maws filled with teeth, poised before plunging down to the ocean's floor with their prey.

Sightings might be explained by purely mundane creatures. Schools of porpoises swimming one behind the other could produce the famous "serpent" shape in the water. Basking sharks, whales, marine worms, giant eels, and oarfish are also possible sources for these stories. Another explanation is that the sailors saw giant squid, which live where most sightings have been reported – the way they swim matches many reports. Still, the giant squid – itself still largely unstudied by science – shows the sense of mystery and terror the oceans retain, even today.

Old English Myth

When the Germanic peoples crossed the North Sea and conquered Britain, they brought dragon-stories with them. Among these was the heroic tale of *Beowulf*, now considered the first great literary work in the English language.

Beowulf and the Firedrake

*The hoard-guard heard a human voice;
His rage was enkindled. No respite now
For pact of peace! The poison-breath
Of that foul worm first came forth from the cave,
Hot reek-of-fight: the rocks resounded.*

– *Beowulf* (trans. Francis B. Gummere)

The unknown author of *Beowulf*, as we know it today, is widely thought to have been a monk, writing around 1000 A.D. In *Beowulf*, a hero slays monsters in his youth and eventually becomes king of the Geats.

In the tale's last part, a dragon, which has been sleeping with a hoard of treasure under a burial mound for many years, awakens and emerges after an escaped slave steals a cup from the hoard. Unfortunately for the Geats, the monster ravages the countryside, venturing out at night to murder, pillage, and feast. The saga describes the dragon as having a writhing serpentine body, flying, and spouting flames.

When told of the suffering, the aging hero puts on his armor and sets out to defend the land and the people he has sworn to protect. The king's valiant fight is his last. He is buried with the glittering hoard, in a royal tomb at an unknown site.



Medieval Dragons

At the height of the Middle Ages, a different style of draconic folklore grew up across Europe. Where the original Celtic, Norse, and Greek dragons were mythical monsters that could only be defeated by a legendary hero, medieval dragons were more rooted in the real world. So were medieval heroes. The folklore is very precise about where the dragon lived. Some dragons were named after towns they had ravaged, or vice-versa.

Still, the dragons of European folklore clearly trace their ancestry back to the earlier types, with a spicing of Christian morality. English beasts seem to be descended from the serpentine Norse types, coiling around their hoards, churches, or parts of the scenery, while French dragons wield strange powers and are especially vulnerable to the prayers of Christian saints.

Storytellers of this era faced the same issues that GMs face in roleplaying today. The dragon had to be frightening enough to pose a real threat, but the hero also had to slay the dragon, because that was the point of the story. The dragons in medieval folklore are not very intelligent, and are often outwitted. With the ascendancy of the church, the storyteller had another solution: God's grace could tame the powers of Evil. However, even here, the challenge was making the story interesting to audiences who wanted to hear about blood, gore, and violence.

Dragons and the Church

Another sign was seen in heaven. Behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven crowns.

His tail drew one third of the stars of the sky, and threw them to the earth. The dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

– *The Revelation of St. John*, 12:3-4

Early Christians associated the traditional figure of the chaotic serpent-god with Satan. The Lord of Hell roamed the Earth in subtle disguises, tempting men to place themselves in his power. Although he might appear human, his true form was the red seven-headed dragon of Revelation. In medieval artwork, dragons in their terrifying glory became icons representing all manner of sin, wickedness, and paganism. The Church smiled upon folktales of pagan dragons being defeated by Christian heroes.

These dragon images drew on the past legends, but stories rarely dwelled on what the monster looked like, focusing instead on the tale's hero. The Church's imagery of dragons depicts feeble reptiles usually being crushed beneath a saint's heel, just as the faith held evil powerless. The beasts' ability to breathe fire symbolized their association with Hell.

Folklore sometimes associated lesser wyrms with church buildings, perhaps symbolically, perhaps simply because these were noted landmarks. For example, many Danish churches are said to have had a lindorm (p. 14) coiled round the building, preventing anyone from entering until it was slain by a specially raised bull (which died after the fight).

Here Be Dragons?

Many medieval maps show dragons or sea serpents frolicking in unexplored lands or uncharted waters. These images indicate danger, and mark the edges of the known world. Strange creatures were often drawn onto historical maps (including many, such as elephants, that are not considered mythical today). Later maps replaced the mythical monsters with notes marking unexplored areas, or phrases such as *terra incognita* ("unknown land"). Another interpretation of early medieval European map-dragons theorizes that dragons meant Vikings, with their dragon-ships and destructive habits.

It is commonly thought that most old English maps bore the phrase, "Here be dragons!" Sadly this is not true, although at least one 14th century map bears the Latin legend, "*HC SVNT DRACONES*" (*hic sunt dracones*, or *here be dragons*) blazoned across eastern Asia. Reinforcing European myths of draconic creatures inhabiting Eastern and Central Asia, Marco Polo reported having seen lindorms on his travels to the East.

Medieval Variations

Medieval legend presents a huge range of scaly and sinister creatures. Not all of them were called dragons, but many were clearly cousins to dragonkind.

Cockatrices and Basilisks

He does not impel his body, like other serpents, by a multiplied flexion, but advances lofty and upright. He kills the shrubs, not only by contact, but by breathing on them, and splits the rocks, such power of evil is there in him.

— Pliny the Elder

The cockatrice developed from European misunderstandings of garbled descriptions of Egyptian wildlife in Classical Greek bestiaries. Originally thought to be a creature, probably aquatic, which was the mortal enemy of the crocodile, it was eventually confused with the crocodile itself, and with the basilisk (see below). In heraldry, it has the head, wings, and feet of a cockerel, and the body of a snake with a barbed tail.

The basilisk also came, more directly, from Greek stories, probably inspired by the poisonous snakes in the Libyan deserts. A ruler among snakes and perhaps among all animals – its name means "little king" – the basilisk hatched when a snake incubated a hen's egg. Its hissing drove away all other snakes, enabling it to eat their kills, but more importantly, it could kill with its venomous breath, or even just a glance. It made a desert wherever it went, by the sheer power of its poison breath or supernatural nature (a power also displayed by some dragons). Water in which a basilisk had bathed or drunk instantly became foul and deadly, and its blood and sweat were equally poisonous. Legends claimed that if a mounted knight speared a basilisk, the venom would pour up the lance and kill not only the warrior, but also his horse (another attribute also found among dragons). Some said that it could even split rocks by walking across them.

However, the basilisk was usually described as small, only a few feet long or even less, with a marked crest or fiery red eyes. It is more the epitome of magical vermin than a great monster.



The basilisk feared only three things. One was the weasel, the only animal immune to its poison. Another was the crowing of a cockerel; travelers in the desert would take one with them as extra protection. The third was the herb rue, which was also immune to its gaze.

In medieval times, weird hybrid monsters such as cockatrices were often served up at fancy banquets to start conversation. The dish actually consisted of half a hen and half a pig, sewn together and then roasted and glazed.

Processional Dragons

Dragons make for a good show. In Europe, as in China (p. 21), local processions and fairs sometimes included a dummy dragon, running or dancing on the many legs of people underneath the costume. In some cases, such as the Whitsunday festival at Tarascon, France (p. 15), this commemorates a local legend of a dragon-slaying. Cynics suggest the legend was invented as an excuse for a celebration, but even in a world with *real* dragons, they would probably form part of popular imagery, and the subjects of the odd procession or show. Unless one of them takes offense, of course.

The *Basic Set* has basic details for a cockatrice/basilisk (p. B145), and the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary* has suitably formidable treatments (p. FB11 and p. FB19). Both are only suitable for use as monsters, not as PCs, being animalistic and extremely dangerous to anyone around them.

Wyrms

The English word "worm" originally referred to all kinds of snakes, serpents, and dragons; its modern use for small invertebrates represents a sad decline. However, some modern writers use the archaic spelling "wurm" when talking about the great and terrible dragonish "worms" of myth, especially the snake-like, legless variety. If nothing else, it looks more interesting.

Stories abounded in Europe and the Middle East of legless dragons. These usually laired underground – if they dwelled in water, they became sea serpents. Unlike snakes, they often had large mouths filled with teeth, and used their strength and height to rear up above prey and then come crashing down when they struck. The *lindorm* and the *tatzelworm* were both depicted with two forelimbs, which they used to claw and rend rather than for movement.

The lindorm had a huge serpentine body, with draconic forelegs and a tail like a whip. Lindorms, frighteningly swift hunters, brought their tails round sharply to down unwary horses and riders, and could grow large enough to eat whole cattle. They were associated with central Europe and central Asia. The *tatzelworm* was similar, if usually smaller, but had the forelegs of a large cat, and sometimes also a feline head. It was associated with southern Germany and the Alps. Unlike the lindorm, this jumping dragon threw itself forwards with startling speed when pouncing.

Another dangerous attribute of wyrms, especially common in English tales, was the ability to regenerate, even after being sliced in two. The two halves would rejoin and form a creature as strong as ever. (Folklore also credited ordinary snakes and worms with this power.) Fortunately, wurm regeneration had its limits; slicing the creature into *many* parts would kill it.

Old World Winged Serpents

Stories of winged serpents (sometimes called *amphipteres*) shade over into mainstream dragon-lore on one side and sober cryptozoology on the other. (Indeed, one or two small tropical snakes in the real world have limited gliding ability.)

Flying snakes have been reported in many lands, often suggesting interesting wild animals instead of monsters. The ancient Greek writer Herodotus described flocks of a poisonous type infesting Arabia, and in 1669, a pamphlet claimed local farmers drove a nine-foot specimen away from the English village of Henham. (This became an excuse for an annual fair, complete with flying snake souvenirs.) As late as the mid-19th century, reports circulated about feathered flying snakes in Wales that preyed on chickens.

For game purposes, this sort of creature can be treated as a normal or giant snake, or a minor serpentine dragon, with the power of winged flight. The winged serpent of the New World (p. 22) is a more formidable creature.



Other European Legends

Britain, Germany, and the Nordic lands were not the only European regions with dragon stories, of course. Geography never limited these monsters.

The Red Cross Knight

*I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit; and, upon this charge
Cry "God for Harry! England and Saint George!"*
— William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

The most famous of all dragon-slaying saints is St. George. The most influential version of his story was in Jacobus de Voragine's 13th-century work *The Golden Legend* (*Legenda Aurea*), translated into English by Caxton in the 1400s.

In the tale, a dragon ravaged the lands around Silena in Libya, demanding a tribute of two sheep every day. Eventually, mutton became scarce, and the villagers offered townsfolk instead. When St. George came to the region, the land's princess was being sacrificed. She warned him to save himself and leave before the creature arrived. Instead he crossed himself, rode into battle, and stunned the foul serpent with a blow of his lance. He then asked the princess for her girdle and, using it as a tether, lead the now mild-mannered dragon into the town. The saint gave a sermon, and promised to kill the dragon if all the townsfolk converted to Christianity. They agreed, and the tame dragon was duly slaughtered.

But what of the "real" St. George?

Cults devoted to this saint were active and popular in the early church. He was then a saint of soldiers, having been a soldier himself under Diocletian before being martyred. His popularity grew during the crusades, after he appeared to Richard the Lionheart in a vision. The veneration of St. George became associated with knighthood, chivalry, and valor. He eventually became the patron saint of England, Moscow, Germany, Greece, and countless other nations and cities. It was only then that the dragon story became popular.

The "dragon" in the story possibly refers to the pagan King Dadianus, who ordered the saint arrested and tortured in the earliest texts. However, the modern church regards the whole story of St. George, especially the dragon-slaying, as myth.

Two English villages have claimed to be the scene of that battle. Even if they had heard of George's "real" origins, Englishmen were presumably unhappy to think of the nation's patron saint as a foreigner. The English co-option of George also led to his appearance as the dragon-slaying "Red Cross Knight" in Edmund Spenser's Elizabethan verse-epic, *The Faerie Queen*, where he symbolizes the Anglican Church.

George was not the only saint who vanquished a monstrous wyrm. Other heroes include St. Margaret, St. Martha, St. Veneranda, and St. Radegund. Female saints did not wield spears, but tamed the savage beasts through the power of their piety, and sometimes song. The saint leading the miraculously docile dragon back to the threatened town was a common feature of these stories. The dragon usually symbolized paganism, or cruel feudal overlords the saint overcame or converted.

French Dragons

Judging from its folklore, medieval France was plagued by dragons. Two of the most infamous, the *tarasque* and the *gargouille*, were routed by the devotion of Saints Martha and Romain, respectively. The tarasque was a water monster covered with steely scales (some stories say that it also breathed fire) and a daughter of Leviathan. St. Martha bravely ventured out and conquered it by sheer force of faith and devotion, luring it to her with a song. The monster knelt submissively as she made the sign of the cross, and allowed her to lead it back to the town, later renamed Tarascon in honor of its defeat.

The gargouille laid waste to the lands around Rouen when St. Romain was the local archbishop. One account claims that it dwelled in the River Seine and created devastating floods. No one dared to approach the monster until the saint, accompanied by a condemned criminal who had volunteered his services, subdued the dragon by the power of faith. The dragon, leashed by an Episcopal stole around its neck, was led meekly to the water's edge by the prisoner. The doomed creature was then pushed in and drowned, and the criminal was rewarded for his aid with his freedom. The story claims the gargouille inspired the form and name of the gargoyle, the architectural water-spout in the shape of a monster, and that the archbishops of Rouen were subsequently given the right to pardon one criminal a year.

Other French dragons include the shapeshifting draconic poets, Jillocasin and Cercamon. The former was known for his kindness, even adopting two orphaned children after their widowed mother died. The two boys grew up to become knights, and paragons of chivalry. They named themselves the Knights of the Dragon.

Ordo Draconis

The Order of the Dragon was a semi-religious, semi-military order of knighthood, comparable to the Knights of the Hospital of St. John (Hospitallers) or the Teutonic Knights. The Holy Roman Emperor created it in 1387 to protect Catholicism and to crusade against the Turks. The most infamous member was the Romanian Prince Vlad, named Dracul (Dragon) by his nobles because he used a dragon on his seal after having been inducted into the Order. Vlad's second son, Vlad Tepes, "the Impaler," is better remembered by the nickname Dracula ("little dragon"); see pp. WWi56-57.

In later centuries, fraternities such as The Imperial and Royal Dragon Court & Order, claiming associations to the historical Order of the Dragon, suggested that the order had a secret occult mission connected with guarding the Holy Grail and Jesus' bloodline. These theories are wild even for an ersatz secret society, but in an illuminated campaign, there might be a grain of truth in them. Of course, the Order of the Dragon would be in symbolic conflict with the Order of St. George (p. 15), whose badge shows a dragon being slain.

Other European Monsters

The Basque country of Spain had the seven-headed, mute, venomous *herren-surge* (p. FB88), while Central Europe had the tatzelworm (p. 14). Finland has the malevolent *ajatar* (p. FB86), and Mount Pilatus, in Switzerland, had an infestation by dragons, including one small but quick and deadly creature which killed its own slayer by the intensely poisonous nature of the blood which flowed from its death wound. Most stories are straightforward variations on the standard dragon theme, although the variety of habits and magical powers could be used to spring some surprises on wandering dragon-slayer PCs.

Symbolism

In pagan times, the dragon's power, ferocity, and energy led to its enthusiastic adoption as a military symbol. Dragons in Welsh and Norse myths are dangerous and ferocious, but rarely more evil than other beasts. Like any other fierce creature, they made a fitting badge for a warrior (see p. 11 for the association between dragons and King Arthur). Norse ships, called

"drakkars," meaning "dragons," often had intricately carved prow in the form of dragonheads.

However, in Christian art, the dragon symbolized the forces of darkness and paganism. He became the embodiment of ultimate evil, in the person of the Devil himself. In religious terms, the dragon represented spiritual evils – greed, gluttony, and monstrous appetites – so his defeat by valiant saints was a spiritual as well as martial victory.



Dragon Banners

Late Roman and early Byzantine armies adopted the *draco* banner, a “windsock” with a metal head and embroidered cloth body, possibly copied from a Persian model. This design survived through several armies of early medieval Europe, including Charlemagne’s Franks and perhaps both the Saxons and the post-Roman Britons. Likewise, some standards in the form of ornate flags depicted dragons. If there was a real Arthur, a British warlord struggling to defend an old Roman province against Saxon invaders, both he and his enemies might have fought under dragon banners.

From the point of view of a Dark Ages farmer, the people carrying dragon banners came out of the wilderness, destroyed his crops, burned his house, and killed his family. *Metaphorical* references of dragons in stories of warfare and social chaos could have later been taken literally. A tale of “how we killed the dragon who burned our farms” may have slipped from being a poetic but accurate war story to a monster myth.

Similarly, in older Near Eastern legends, the evil dragon may have been symbolic of the armies of an enemy empire. The seven-headed dragon of Revelation might have represented Rome.

Heraldic Dragons

Despite any negative associations, dragons remained in use on personal badges and crests, eventually becoming part of the high medieval system of heraldry. The Welsh crest still includes a red dragon, and the Black Prince fought under a dragon standard at Crecy in 1190, before the army of Richard the Lionheart attacked Messina birthing the “terrible standard of the dragon.” When the Welsh-descended Tudors took the English throne, the red or golden dragon became a symbol of the British monarchy. Strangely enough, given its pagan history, Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585) also adopted the winged serpent on his heraldic shield.

Formal heraldic terminology recognizes a number of dragon-like beasts, most of which are discussed elsewhere in this book. They include: the *Amphiptere* (a serpent with feathered wings), the *Cockatrice* (p. 14), the classic western *Dragon* (with four legs, bat-like wings, a forked tongue, and a barbed tail, shown in various positions – *rampant* or *segreant*, *statant*, or *passant*, or even *displayed*, with its wings splayed), the *Lindorm* (a legless dragon, often with bat-like wings, and sometimes a scorpion tail), and the *Wyvern* (a two-legged dragon whose tail coils in a loop beneath it and is sometimes fish-like).

Dragoons

To add even more confusion, military terminology has the “dragoon,” a type of light musket, named because it “breathed fire.” Later attached to troops who carried these guns, dragoons evolved from mounted infantry into light cavalry. Some British army regiments, formerly cavalry, are still called dragoons.

Alchemical Dragons

Draconic symbolism was also rife in alchemy. Alchemists described each stage of the transmutation process from base matter to perfection (whether lead to gold, or a more spiritual transformation) as a meeting with animals symbolizing the substances’ colors and state changes. These images aided meditation; on a pragmatic level, they disguised the true meaning of the texts from non-initiates.

Dragons appeared at both the beginning and end of the great alchemical journey. They represented an initial blackening

Dragon Diet and Metabolism

Dragons have the attributes of an active carnivore – fangs and claws, of course – but also its lifestyle of long periods of lazy relaxation punctuated by brief flurries of frenzied hunting. Realistically, a scientist might wonder how even a very high-protein diet sustains such a huge beast, but the general pattern makes sense.

Reptiles need less food than mammals because, being “cold-blooded,” they spend less energy maintaining their bodies. Anyone attempting “realistic” dragons would have to decide whether they are “cold-blooded” (ectothermic/poikilothermic) or “warm-blooded” (endothermic/homeothermic). The former fits with dragons’ reptilian image, the latter is associated with more active lifestyles and speed. Worrying about this is probably a mistake – dragons are *mythical*, and cannot be rationalized – but interested readers can look at some debates about dinosaurs for a reference (see *GURPS Dinosaurs*, p. D21).

Forgetting excessive logic, draconic eating habits have another explanation. Being intensely magical creatures, dragons may be *thaumivores*, feeding primarily on magic, either overtly or subtly. For example, Chinese dragons eat pearls and opals – gems which possess magical significance. (*GURPS* Powerstones are usually opals; if dragons regard them as delicacies, it would seriously inconvenience human wizards.) Even Western dragons, with their notorious fondness for nubile female human flesh, act less like carnivores with excessively refined palates than like demigods or demons in search of *sacrifices*. What they derive from their victims may be mana, not calories, with virginity and high social status carrying great symbolic weight, enhancing the power derived.

In games, a serious Dependency disadvantage (infrequent or rare, daily to monthly; -20 to -90 points) could represent this. It could also be a less onerous Dependency on mana in general (p. 82). Perhaps dragons in normal or higher mana zones can absorb enough magic from their environments, but living in a low-mana area obliges the creature to obtain magical energy from special diets, rituals, and sacrifices. A worldwide decline in magic could cause dragons to become more savage and annoying, hoarding Powerstones for future consumption or demanding sacrificial virgins. Dragons living in high-mana lands could be civilized and reasonable, while exiles and outcasts forced to dwell in barbarous low-mana regions might be ravening beasts.

process or putrefaction. When winged, they symbolized the transmutation of a solid into a vapor. Dragons also symbolized a chemical reaction that consumed its reagents – the fury and volatility of the reaction evoked the dragon inside the flask, especially true if a reaction involved heat or poisonous gases. A dragon could also symbolize mercury, an important component of many processes.

One of the most enduring alchemical symbols is the wyrm Ourobouros, depicted as a snake holding its own tail in its mouth. This dragon – its beginning was his end – symbolized infinity, perfection, the cyclical nature of alchemical work, and also the fabled Philosopher’s Stone.

Modern Symbols

Modern Jungians use the dragon archetype to represent the ultimate enemy of the hero archetype. As the evil mother figure, the dragon is the subconscious, and the dark inner world of the emotions. The hero (the conscious mind) must vanquish “the dragon” in order to achieve independence. Destroying a dragon becomes symbolic of overcoming one’s own worst nature.

EASTERN DRAGONS



While the dragons of East Asia have much in common with their Western counterparts, there are also many important differences. Some scholars believe the myths are related, while others have suggested that the myths began in the East, but it is equally easy to imagine the two images evolving separately.

Perhaps the most extensive and complex eastern dragon-myth comes from China, which probably influenced the mythology of its neighbors.

The Essential Form

The typical full-grown Oriental dragon is a slender, sinuous creature with four stumpy legs. Two horns curve delicately from its brow, and its elongated face is often shown with whiskers and a fringed beard. Wings are optional, though not uncommon; as intensely supernatural creatures, dragons can often fly without them. Dragons are also strong swimmers; some live in the seas, while others coil up under the land.

The number of toes on a dragon's foot is significant: the five-toed type is the Imperial Chinese dragon, the four-toed is the lesser Chinese or Korean dragon, and the three-toed version is the Japanese dragon. Chinese stories claim the dragon loses toes the further away it gets from its true home in China – a reason why the most powerful dragons are reluctant to travel far.

The dragon is also often depicted with a small glistening orb: the dragon pearl. This bright gem may be attached to its chin, held in its mouth, or shown floating through the air around its head. Healing powers are ascribed to this jewel, and to the *chi'ih muh*, the prominent lump on the top of the dragon's head, which confers the power to ascend to Heaven.

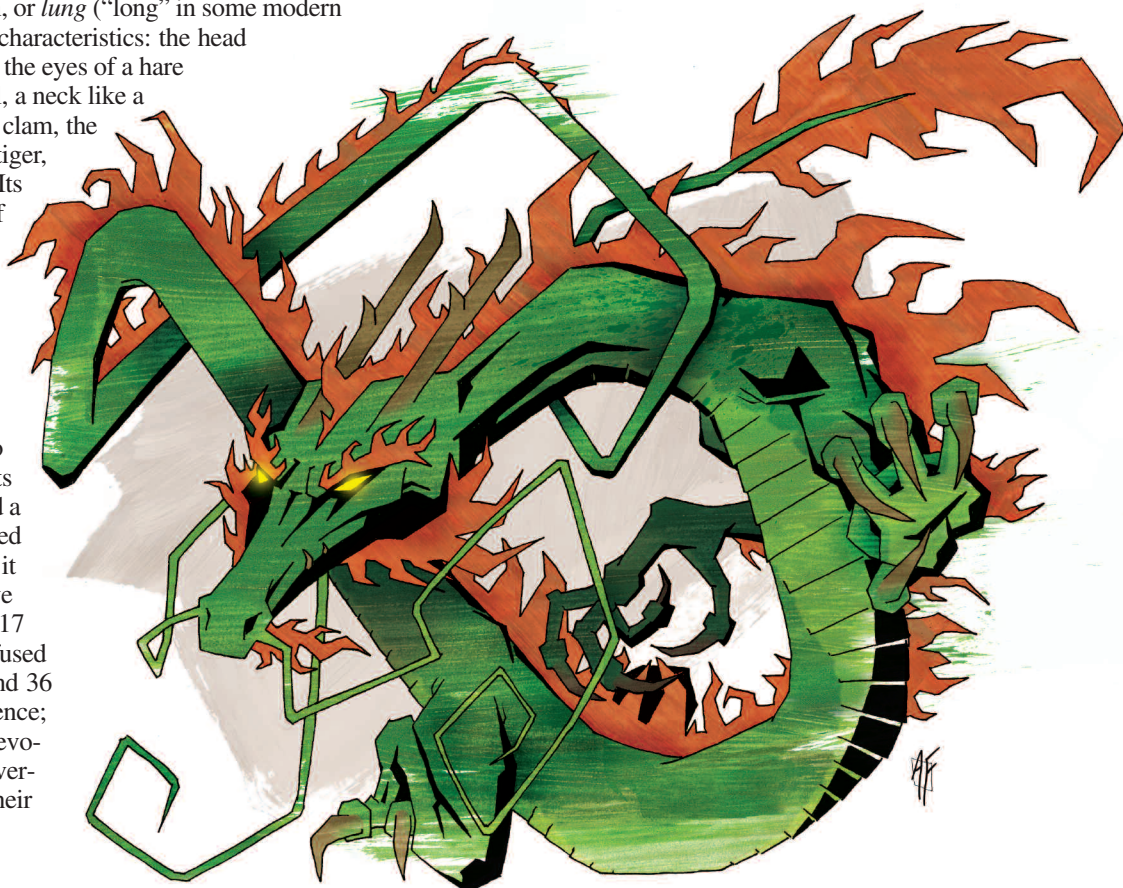
The Chinese horned dragon, or *lung* ("long" in some modern transliterations), has nine key characteristics: the head of a camel, the horns of a stag, the eyes of a hare (or a demon), the ears of a bull, a neck like a snake or iguana, the belly of a clam, the scales of a carp, the paws of a tiger, and the claws of an eagle. Its voice resembles the jingling of copper pans, and is neither pleasant nor ugly. It likes the flesh of sparrows and swallows, and fears the centipede and silk dyed in five colors. (Japanese dragons, too, are enemies of a type of giant centipede.) It also abhors iron, hating even its smell, which can actually blind a dragon; an iron sword plunged into a dragon's pool will cause it to emerge with an aggressive temper. The dragon has 117 scales, of which 81 are infused with dynamic Yang essence and 36 with colder, brooding Yin essence; thus, dragons are mostly benevolent preservers, but may be overcome by the dark side of their nature and become destroyers.

A Clash of Symbols

Games which feature both Western and Oriental dragons will have to explain the obvious differences in their natures. The simplest explanation is, of course, that the two types are completely unrelated, and the physical resemblance between them is mere coincidence. However, this may feel rather unsatisfactory. After all, the similarities extend beyond mere shape. Both types dwell in great lairs with fabulous treasures, and embody great natural forces. Both are almost as enigmatic as they are frightening.

One approach is to define the Western dragon as symbolizing or working for the forces of evil, and the Eastern type as innately good. However, Eastern dragons can also turn to evil on occasion, and at best represent the uncaring forces of nature, prone to destroy human lives and communities by accident, or to cause famine by oversleeping and neglecting to bring the rains. Hence, it might be better to define Western dragons as renegades, outcasts, or ruffians among their kind, and the Eastern dragon as lawful and high-minded creatures who know and fill their role in the cosmos. (See *Dragon Diet and Metabolism*, p. 17, for another related possibility.)

Perhaps the Oriental dragons are not as much divine agents as tyrants, usurping a place which is not truly theirs. After all, the West has its share of necessary rain and fine weather, without anyone having making offerings to dragons. Alternatively, the dreams of humans could shape both, one emerging from the experience of peasants who have been ruled by bureaucrats for centuries, the other manifesting the fears of folk prone to barbarian incursions. Of course, no dragon likes being told that it is the creation of human peasants . . .



The Nature of Chinese Dragons

In contrast to its Western counterpart, the Chinese dragon is cherished as a harbinger of greatness, and of the rains that feed the famished Earth. Dragons are often the gods' messengers, being demigods themselves, comparable to angels in the West. They may ascend to Heaven, and protect against evil spirits. It is often their special responsibility to guard clouds and rivers, as well as precious metals. Everything related to them is blessed – the year of the dragon is lucky, and being connected with a dragon through birth or happenstance is a sign of greatness. Dragons are associated with kings and emperors, who proudly display the symbol of this supreme, demi-divine creature.

Although these dragons are usually kindly, they are capable of great destruction if angered. It is never wise to irritate them. A furious dragon can raise floods and storms, until the heavens stab at him with bolts of lightning to force him to return to his lair. The gods also use lightning to rouse lazy dragons from their slumber, reminding them of their duties. At times, dragons disagree about what weather to send, and even fight above the clouds, producing storms; it is unlucky for humans to watch this too much, apparently because irritated dragons may curse such impertinent mortals.

Chinese dragons are masters of the art of shapeshifting, and walk among men disguised as mortals. Legend says that when a shapeshifted dragon mates with a human, their descendants are destined for greatness. The first emperor, Fu Xi, is said to have descended from a dragon, and even to have had a tail.

Being demigods in the most bureaucratic of mythologies, most adult dragons are actually celestial officials. Each makes an annual visit to the Celestial Palace to file a report of the previous year's activities. Based on this report, rewards and punishments are handed out.

Pearl of the Orient

Pearls and dragons have been associated all across Asia. The dragon-like Naga queens in ancient India often have elaborate pearl accoutrements. In Buddhism, the pearl, preserved as the jewel in the lotus, magically grants all desires. In Korea, the yellow dragon bore a pear-shaped pearl on its forehead that had supernatural powers of healing. Some Japanese dragons also bear the gem on the forehead, mainly appearing in connection with mythical stories of the ocean and its dragon king. In China, the pearl is a significant part of draconic images in pictures and other decorative designs. This fabulous pearl is at least half as large as the dragon's head, and is white or bluish in tone, with a glowing halo.

Another interpretation is that the dragon pearl represents the moon. Dragons would swallow the moon when it disappeared behind a bank of clouds. After the hungry cloud dragons finished their meal, the fields were blessed with rain, for which the dragons were given due credit. Artists liked to portray several dragons vying to devour the moon, so that the winner could enjoy the grateful appreciation of the people.

Western alchemists also believed in a mystical dragon stone. Albertus Magnus relates that *draconites*, in the form of black pyramidal stones, cured all forms of poison, and imbued a user with invincible courage. Unfortunately, this stone had to be cut from the head of a dragon while the creature was still breathing.

Symbolism

When the brave, noble, and magnanimous dragon sets his mind on something, he perseveres until he is successful. Great leaders and wise men are often referred to as dragons. Dragons are foes to evil spirits; the image of a dragon or an abstract design representing its serpentine form provides protection. Designs of this type appear widely on artifacts, writings, and buildings.

The dragon is also the creature that best represents Yang energy (associated with the sun, warmth, light, and male energies.) The tiger, a creature essentially of the Yin essence, is sometimes the enemy or antithesis of the dragon. When the two appear together in art, it symbolizes the power of the elements over even the strongest animal.

Dragons vary widely in color, with the different colors having different meanings. In China, blue dragons herald the approach of spring. Red and black dragons are ferocious creatures whose fights cause storms, and the yellow or golden dragon symbolizes perfection, only appearing rarely and at its proper time. In Tibet, the turquoise dragon protects against discord of all types, including gossip and the misuse of words.

Types and Life Cycles

The lung is very long-lived, taking perhaps 3,000 years and several metamorphoses to reach maturity and its full powers. Accounts vary on the precise details of this process, and the duration of each stage, but most agree on the broad outline; the following is a reasonable guess.

When a male and female dragon mate, their eggs, which look like polished stones, are laid near water; some accounts describe them as beautiful, gemlike stones which fall from the sky. These eggs hatch slowly, sometimes taking a thousand years. So when they do, it is a momentous event. Some say the parents cry out, others that lightning flashes, thunder rolls, and darkness blots out the sun. Given adult dragons' power over the weather, these events may be one and the same. By some versions, the cry of the male dragon raises the winds, the female's cry calms them, and the resulting darkness, torrential rains, and storms cause the egg to crack open.

A young dragon first forms a water snake. (Other stories say the hatchling is a tiny lizard that flies into the sky, but most agree that infant dragons must live in water.) After 500 years, it develops the head of a carp and becomes a *kiao*, or *jiao*. In the next few centuries, it also develops forelegs, and the ability to live out of water for up to an hour, although it remains cautious and shy. After another 1,000 years, it attains a fully draconic form, with four legs, bright, fully developed scales, an elongated tail and face (with a beard), and the ability to breathe both air and water. It is now known as a *kiao-lung*, or simply a *lung* – a true dragon. However, it takes another 500 years to grow horns, at which point it is known as a *kioh-lung* (or sometimes *jue lung*). It probably also learns or develops substantial magical powers at around this point. Finally, after another 1,000 years, it reaches its fully adult form, the *ying-lung*.

This term is often translated as "winged dragon," and indeed many *ying-lung* have very impressive wings. However, others do not, and indeed it appears that young dragons can mature into any one of several adult forms. Whether this final metamorphosis reflects the dragon's nature as developed through its prolonged adolescence, an "office" assigned it by the Celestial Bureaucracy, or a quirk of fate or ancestry, is unclear; GMs are welcome to decide this for themselves, and even to keep it a mystery if they want to have something with which to tantalize young draconic characters.

Dragon Lines

The chi energy of the earth and waters flows through the *lung-mei* (“dragon lines”), say the Chinese. This concept links dragons to arts such as acupuncture and *feng shui*, which deal likewise with chi. Modern western geomancers have a similar “earth energy” concept, popularly called “ley lines” (pp. PM25-27), although (in a crude Occidental fashion) leys are usually straight, not curved as proper “dragon lines” should be for efficient chi transmission.

Alfred Watkins, the father of ley lines, identified one in southern England as the “St. Michael Line,” running between sites sacred to that dragon-slaying angel. Modern occultists have christened this the “Dragon Line,” adding sites sacred to St. George and St. Catherine to its itinerary.

The various types of adult lung, and the duties entrusted to them by the Celestial Bureaucracy, are as follows:

Li Lung (*Li Ying Lung* or *Di Lung*) control the energies of the earth, and as such have no ability to breathe water. They resemble great lions, with functional wings and draconic heads with human features. They tunnel through the solid earth, and create earthquakes by roaring, or perhaps by their restless writhing. They are immune to the effects of earthquakes, landslides, and cave-ins.

Lung Wang (*Ying Lung Wang*) are sea dragons and the guardians of sea creatures. Their bodies resemble gigantic turtles. They dislike human intrusions, but refrain from harming ships in exchange for regular offerings.

P'an Lung (*P'an Ying Lung*) are weather dragons with particular responsibility for bringing rain. Their slender, serpentine bodies ripple through the clouds. They create shields of “water fire” around themselves, which burns anything that touches them; it can be extinguished by ordinary fire.

Cult of the Dragon Lady

The original “Dragon Lady” was a character in the comic strip *Terry and the Pirates*. A complex, dangerous Asian femme fatale who commanded a shadowy army of assassins, she was a formidable foe to the heroes, but occasionally also their ally.

Since then, the title “Dragon Lady” has been freely and even retrospectively applied in the West to a particular stereotype of Asian-style villainess. A staple of pulps and melodrama, the Dragon Lady is powerful, ruthless, and cold, abusing her minions with a curl of her painted lips. Dragon Ladies may have formidable and terrifying fathers, such as Fu Manchu or Emperor Ming (the nemesis of Flash Gordon). They often (but not always!) fall for the story’s hero, and *may* miraculously shed their ice-bitch shells to become weak and feeble women – for love is a wonderful thing.

This stereotype was fueled by the sexist and xenophobic tendencies of the Victorian and pulp eras, and the reputation that the Chinese in particular despised Westerners. However, East Asian myths often involve *real* dragon ladies. Daughters of the Dragon Kings are portrayed in art as beautiful and terrifying women, and many ruling dynasties of the region claim such a princess in their ancestry.

GMs running *GURPS Cliffhangers* campaigns may well want to use Dragon Ladies as NPCs. It might sometimes be amusing to have them turn out to be, literally, dragons.

Shen Lung (*Shen Ying Lung*, or *Jaing Lung*) are lords of nature, rulers of rivers and lakes, with bright azure scales and considerable supernatural powers. Kin to the P'an Lung, with whom they share a secret language, they also create water fire. They are immune to poison; it is said that no poisonous animal can even approach them.

Tien Lung (*Tien Ying Lung*, or *Tian Lung*) are the celestial rulers of dragonkind, the five-toed dragons whose image is the symbol of the emperor. They live in cloud castles or atop mountains, supporting the gods’ mansions and shielding them from decay. As rulers, they are always accompanied by retinues of lesser spirits, dragons, and ghosts. They can also breathe fire.



Other types include the *Dun Mi Lung*, or typhoon dragons, who control dangerous forces of air and water. Living in lavish palaces on the ocean floor, they take part in wild dances of destruction. The *Fucang Lung* (or *Fu-Ts'ang Lung*) guard hidden riches and deposits of precious minerals deep under the earth, while the long, thin *Ban Lung*, or coiled dragons, hibernate in watery depths and marshes and guard especially important objects.

The *Yu Lung*, or fish dragon, began life as a carp and became a dragon only after successfully scaling the supernatural “Dragon Gate.” This dragon became the patron of medieval students who toiled over the writings of philosophers in their quest to qualify for the imperial bureaucracy, and the status that went with it. The exams were as daunting to them as the mysterious Dragon Gate to any carp.

Imperial Dragons

The imperial yellow dragon is the most august of all of the Chinese dragons. This is the Dragon King, who advises the emperor by moving in four directions at once. It is made up of four separate dragons, which each rule one of the four seas – East, West, North, and South. Earth is in the center of these seas.

The four directional dragon kings are brothers – Ao Qin, Ao Run, Ao Guang and Ao Shun. They live in a glorious

underwater palace, and receive their orders directly from the August Personage of Jade, being told how much rain to distribute and where it should fall. Each dragon-king employs an army of crabs, fish, and draconic ministers, and rarely associates with mere humans directly. Subservient to the four supreme dragon kings are many local draconic satraps, each honored by the human inhabitants of their domains.

Japanese Dragons

Have you seen the dragon? . . . He unfolds himself in the storm clouds; he washes his mane in the blackness of the seething whirlpools. His claws are in the fork of the lightning, his scales begin to glisten in the bark of rain-swept pine-trees.

– *The Awakening of Japan*, Okakura (1905)

Japan never venerated the dragon to the extent it was in China, possibly because rain was rarely lacking, and Japan has few dangerous snakes. The Japanese dragon, the *ryu* or *tatsu*, is represented in art in various forms. Some lack limbs altogether; these are usually shown twisting through the clouds. More usually, Japanese dragons resemble the Chinese p'an lung – long and slender, but possessing legs (with three claws per foot). Some have bristling dorsal spines and flame-like appendages on the shoulder and hip.

Old Japanese sea-gods were often female water snakes, but the river gods were four-footed dragons, identified with the Chinese Dragon Kings. These four noble dragons, in Japanese myth, are:

Sui Ryu: A rain dragon. When in pain, it causes the rain to run red, colored by its own blood.

Han Ryu: A dragon that is striped with nine different colors, and can never reach heaven.

Ka Ryu: A scarlet, fiery dragon that is only seven feet long.

Ri Ryu: A dragon with incredible vision that can see for more than 100 miles.

The Chinese ying-lung is often identified with the Japanese *Hai Ryu*, or dragon bird, which is shown with feathered wings, but physically the two are very different. The dragon of good luck is the *Fuku Ryu*, contrasted with that of bad luck. Japanese myth also includes some unique, monstrous dragons, such as the gigantic eight-headed beast slain by the god Susa-no-wo in the course of his adventures on Earth.

GURPS Japan, p. J65 and p. J121, has another treatment of the Japanese dragon.

OTHER DRAGONS?

Beyond the relatively familiar types from Europe, China, and Japan, and the diverse myths of the New World, we may discover numerous serpent gods and the like around the planet, many of them at least reminiscent of dragons. In a game world where dragons exist, these would probably be cousins, or simply dragons who favor a different style of presentation.

The Nagas

The Indian sacred *Vedas* describe the most ancient of Hindu beliefs, dating back to the Aryan period (1500-600 B.C.). These beliefs resemble those of ancient Persia (p. 8), with a mythology of nature-gods, mixed with an ancient streak of snake-worship. Unsurprisingly, the inhabitants of the subcontinent mythologized serpents; they are more numerous and more dangerous in India than in Mesopotamia.

Eastern Dragon Imagery

With dragons playing a central role in the myths and traditional beliefs of the Orient, and given the visual image's appeal, the following often occur:

Dragon Dances: As in Europe (p. 14), many Chinese festivals include processional dancers disguised as dragons. This popular tradition is familiar to Westerners from travel films or Chinatown celebrations; similar dances may have featured in Chinese rain rituals as early as the Sixth century B.C.

Dragon Boats: The Chinese Dragon Boat Festival is held on the fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese lunar year. It commemorates the search for the body of famous poet Chu Yuan, who drowned himself around 289 B.C. The festival involves races between the highly ornate and rather unstable dragon boats, each propelled by 39 rowers.

Enter the Dragon! When kung fu movies became popular around the world in the late 20th century, Chinese artistic dragon imagery came with them – appropriately enough, given that the Chinese dragon was an embodiment of dynamic energy. Dragon designs look good on the tattoos or the flashy clothing worn by the leading characters, and the late Bruce Lee, one of the most famous stars, became more or less identified as “the dragon.”

Korean Dragons

Korea came under Chinese influence early in history, and a dragon cult existed there from early times. Mountains and lakes were personified and usually associated with dragons. The dragon, or Yong, was considered one of the four divine creatures.

Korean legend says that snakes might become dragons when they have spent 1,000 years in the captivity of the mountains and 1,000 years in the water. Anything or anyone who shows excellence is compared to the divinely virtuous dragon. A “dragon child” is a paragon of propriety, and a “dragon horse” is speedy and well configured. In ancient times, sacrifices were made to sea and river dragons, including human sacrifices in some cases.



Snake cults venerated the naga (cobra) as a semi-divine being, and each one was seen as a living incarnation of a demigod. The mythological nagas were dangerous creatures of uncertain tempers. They lived in an underground kingdom called Patala-loka (Patala Land), where they kept resplendent palaces filled with the treasures of the Earth. Supernatural powers were associated with them, especially power over clouds and storms. Female nagas were beautiful princesses, portrayed voluptuously in art, and several dynasties claimed naga ancestry.

Hindu cosmology also features draconic beings such as Sesha, the many-headed serpent who may symbolize time, and the demonic Vritra, another serpent who coiled around the world, holding back the waters until slain by the god Indra.

When Buddhism was introduced into northern India around 700 B.C., a challenge was to overcome the local traditions of cobra worship. Just as Christianity syncretized pagan symbols in Europe and the West, so Buddhism incorporated the cobra demigods into its teachings, particularly in the *Mahayana* school. This taught that nagas were relegated to the netherworld when they became too numerous on Earth, and commanded only to bite those destined to die prematurely. A seven-headed cobra once sheltered the Buddha from a storm.

Later writings depict nagas as beneficent spirit servants of the Buddha, bringing rain to the thirsty Earth, and entrusted with guarding treasure. The Naga Kings were even entrusted with a special set of sutras.



Australia

Indigenous Australian peoples honor the Rainbow Serpent whose body parts are features of the land. Rivers, hills, and valleys twine and curve because of the Serpent's movements. In Australian myths, the snake has powers of creation and destruction, and is often associated with rains and the monsoon. Two types of Rainbow Serpent appear in these stories: the female, or the creator, and the male, or the transformer of land. They often live in deep waterholes beneath waterfalls. In art, the Rainbow Serpent is made up of parts of other animals – for example, a kangaroo's head, a python's body, and a crocodile's tail.

Africa

A similar creature also appears in myths originating in Africa: a female primordial being, of shifting colors. In Africa itself, she is known as Aido Hwendo. Among the Haitian

Nagas in GURPS

Nagas, as described in many Indian stories, are shapeshifters with two forms, one human, the other that of a large or gigantic snake. The snake form is also often very venomous. At least some nagas are also magically skilled.

In *GURPS* terms, treat such nagas as broadly equivalent to a large venomous snake (p. BE32), but with full human intelligence and a good Move. The most powerful have one or more levels of Magery and a good selection of spells, usually from the Animal or Elemental colleges. These impressive and colorful supernatural creatures (who may well transform into regal and impressive human shapes) should have some level of Attractiveness or Charisma.

A basic template for naga characters in snake form might have ST +5 with No Manipulators (-40%) [36], DX +3 [30], HT +5 [60], the advantages Extra Hit Points +5 [25], Flexibility [15], Shapeshifting (To human form: see p. 79) [15], Sharp Teeth [5], and Venom 3 (Poisonous) [45], and the disadvantages Cold-Blooded [-5], Horizontal [-10], No Manipulators [-50], and Reduced Speed -1 [-25], for a total cost of 141 points.

Other depictions show nagas as creatures with the heads, arms, and upper bodies of humans, but a serpentine tail instead of legs. A template for this type of naga might have ST +3 [30], DX +3 [30], HT +4 [45], and "Tail Instead of Legs" as a special -5-point disadvantage. (The last mostly represents the fact that the creature cannot kick, which is itself worth -5 points; in addition, it cannot jump far, and it occupies two hexes when moving at faster than a walking pace. In partial compensation, it cannot be tripped or knocked down by a minor leg wound.) This makes the template cost 100 points. Once again, many might have Magery, several good spells, and some positive Appearance or Charisma.

These are *basic* templates; many stories suggest that, aside from knowing numerous powerful spells, nagas would qualify for other advantages, such as Amphibious, Gills, or Speak with Animals. On the other hand, their sinister reptilian natures might imply disadvantages such as Low Empathy, a negative Reputation among humans, or a Duty to the Naga Kings. If they are spirits, use the rules and advantages given in *GURPS Spirits*.

voodoo gods, she is Ayida-Wedo, the wife (or female aspect) of the powerful serpent deity Damballa, who also forms the rainbow. (See *GURPS Voodoo*, pp. VO87-88, for more descriptions and game treatments.)

Africa has a range of myths similar to dragon myths. One creature is the product of the unnatural union of an eagle and a she-wolf, with three rows of teeth. The Mulala (p. FB91) is a relatively small but aggressive and formidable jungle dragon resembling a gigantic but slender lizard, invulnerable to all weapons except fire. The mokole-mbembe (p. BE60) could be seen as a kind of river dragon.

PRE-COLUMBIAN

Dragons and snake-like creatures are prominent in Mesoamerican myths and art. Many of the Mayan deities could appear in ophidian forms as shown on stelae. Another common image is the feathered serpent, or *Quetzalcóatl*, which was believed to be a powerfully venomous creature. (Unlike European winged dragons with their membranous wings, this

AMERICA

serpent had feathers like a bird.) However, Quetzalcóatl was the name of a deity who had once manifested as a heroic figure and was a kind of celestial dragon. Worshiped as a teacher and bringer of peace, he was one of the most powerful figures in ancient Mexico and Central America's mythology. The feathered serpent was one of his manifestations. It is a prevailing



motif on ancient monuments, in both “realistic” and heavily stylized depictions. Central American myth also featured other dragon-like creatures, including the *acóatl*, a huge poison-spitting water snake.

In the Caribbean and the Yucatan peninsula, serpentine creatures (*Huracan*, or *Kukulcan*), often shown winged, were believed to control the weather. This creature lent its name to the hurricane. Brazilian Indians tell of the “Mbaê-Tata” or “Fire-Thing,” a serpentine nocturnal monster.

North America

The diverse mythologies of North America’s native tribes included numerous beings with more or less draconic features.

Two examples are the Algonquin *mashenmak*, an amphibious coastal creature that was invulnerable, even to magic, everywhere except its mouth (p. FB91), and the dreaded *piasa*, the “Bird Which Devours Men” of the Mississippi (pp. FB92-93), formerly depicted on an Illinois’ cliff-painting.

The eastern peoples’ complex mythology described an “underwater” world beneath the waters of lakes and streams, which had its own varied fauna. The rulers of this realm lived in its lowest levels, and included the “underwater panthers” or “great horned snakes,” depicted in various forms, some resembling dragons. They ruled all underwater and subterranean animals, and were generally malevolent – deaths by drowning were blamed on their hunger – but, like many dragons, they were also a potential source of wisdom, including healing magic. (Healing herbs, growing from the ground, drew power from this realm.) These “dragons” were enemies of the divine thunderbirds of the sky, and storms and natural disasters represented battles in their war.

MODERN FANTASY



With the emergence of modern fantasy fiction, the image of the dragon inevitably has adapted – and perhaps suffers from overuse. From the first, writers either attempted a “logical,” “scientific” approach to the myth, or simply made a bit of a joke of it.

Victorian Dragons

Nineteenth-century fantasists, inspired by medieval folklore and fairy stories, adopted their dragons – either treasure-loving monsters or something a little more whimsical. (During this era, folklore studies became very popular, so some older tales became better known.) When, in the middle of the century, the German composer Richard Wagner created his great operatic “Ring Cycle” from the legend of Siegfried (p. 12), he naturally included a version of Fafnir. However, Victorian writers mocked traditional images as often as they took them seriously. In 1898, the children’s writer Kenneth Grahame (better known for *The Wind in the Willows*) wrote about a good-natured dragon with no desire to fight.

Mostly Victorian writers seemed more interested in ghosts or faeries than in dragons. This period’s fantasy was often gothic in style or built around nostalgic images of a summery medieval era, and dragons were too brash and blatant to fit.

Pulp Fantasy

The American pulp magazines of the ’20s and ’30s covered a vast range of topics, with varying originality, and in the process helped the development of modern genre fantasy –

drawing once again on myths and legends. Heroes such as Conan tackled a wide variety of monsters, some of them more or less draconic. However, these were for the most part stock antagonists. Perhaps the most important dragon in modern fantasy appeared towards the end of this period – not in the pulps, but an ocean away.

Dragons in Dungeons

With the emergence of fantasy roleplaying games, and especially the early development of “dungeon-bashing” games, the dragon’s role as a defender of treasure once again came to the fore. Countless RPG titles and illustrations exploit the hoard-dragon’s visceral appeal.

However, almost as soon as the games developed, fans noticed an obvious problem, and began making jokes about it. Serious dragons are *big*, while a decent underground labyrinth is cramped, twisty, and inaccessible. How could the former find themselves in the midst of the latter?

Some gamers just do not care, and others are fond of nostalgic, “postmodern” hack festivals in which such things’ illogical nature is part of the point. Other GMs may offer more or less plausible or frivolous solutions. Having a dragon raised from the egg in the midst of the maze might just work, as might shapeshifting or powerful teleport spells, whether cast by the dragon, a whimsical wizard, or a deity. As some have observed, the discomforts such things imply might explain dragons’ irascible natures, as well as why they are so often depicted in contorted postures.

Tolkien and After

In 1937, a scholar of early English at Oxford University published a children's story. It was moderately successful at the time, although J.R.R. Tolkien's fame was only really established later, with the publication of the much larger *The Lord of the Rings*. However, *The Hobbit* introduced several memorable figures, not least a dragon.

Tolkien's Smaug borrows heavily from *Beowulf* and from the Norse Eddas. He certainly has Fafnir's one weak spot. However, he is also a *character* in his own right, evil and cruel but intelligent and fond of good conversation.

However, there were no dragons in *The Lord of the Rings*, (although there are in the posthumously published *The Silmarillion*) and Tolkien's most direct imitators limited the idea's use. Writers who worked independently of Tolkien, such as Poul Anderson, or who declared an active aversion to his work and drew more on the pulp tradition, such as Michael Moorcock, perhaps made the most effective use of dragons.

Still, dragons became part of the fantasy tradition, usually in the Western mode – although the nigh-godlike beings of Ursula Le Guin's "Earthsea" perhaps owe as much to Chinese images. With the growth of roleplaying games, featuring mighty heroes tackling mighty monsters, dragons returned to the foreground.

Dragons as Cute Pets

Dragons were now in danger of becoming too familiar, even cozy. One sign the dragon was in trouble as a true monster, even threatened with terminal decline, was the appearance of the cute "shoulder dragon" – a creature with all the traditional attributes of dragonkind except size and convincing ferocity.

To be fair, better writers could make miniature dragons interesting. Steven Brust's *Jherig* and its sequels, for example, feature a small but fierce dragon, telepathic and a very useful companion for its hero. Still, this just literally shrunk the dragon. Perhaps the most effective use of the pocket dragon was deliberately comic: the irritable, incontinent, explosive swamp dragons of Terry Pratchett's Discworld (interestingly contrasted with a full-sized dragon of very traditional ferocity in one novel).

Reptile Men

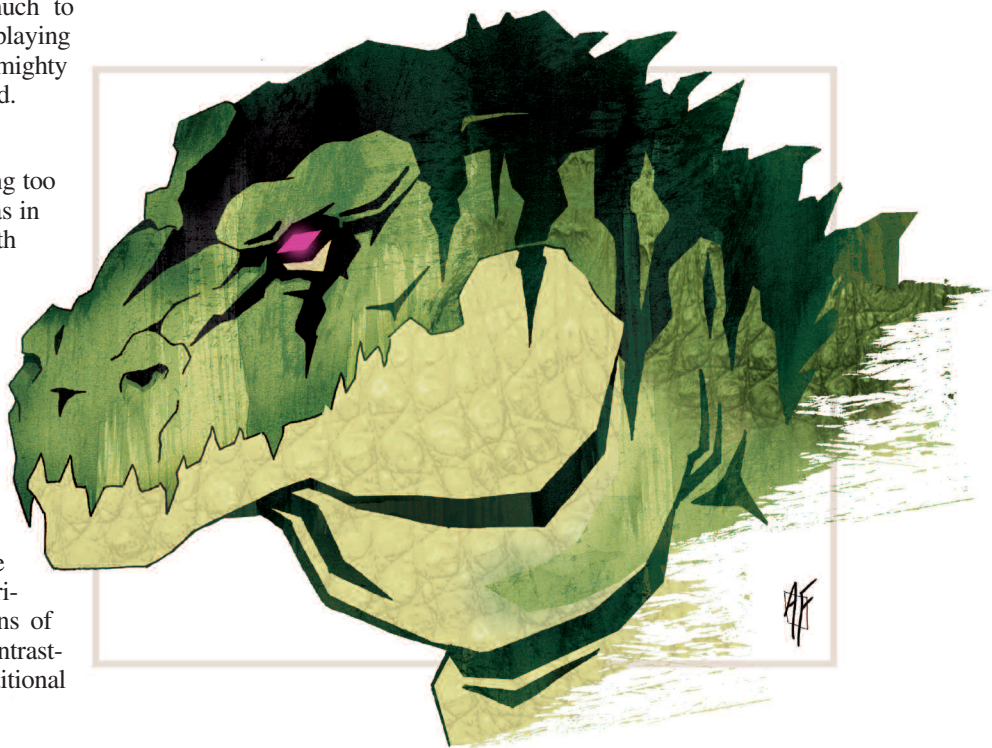
Meanwhile, the range of exotic nonhuman races in fantasy expanded to include "reptile men" and "lizardmen" – approximately human-sized, sapient creatures with reptilian physiologies – mainly appearing as humanoids with "reptilian" features (cold blood, hissing speech, claws, strength, tails). *GURPS Fantasy Folk* has one treatment on pp. FF116-119, a good example of reptile men as physically powerful and slightly strange wilderness dwellers. However, a different approach emphasizes the idea that lizardmen have an affinity with dragons.

Perhaps dragons are "mature" forms of lizardmen who have achieved mystical perfection, or both might be the product of magically accelerated evolution from the same root species or creations of the same reptilian god. Alternatively, the resemblance may be symbolic, or the two races may simply along well and share secrets because their shared reptilian natures give them something in common.

Japanese Monster Movies

Perhaps the best known of all modern monsters is Gajira ("Godzilla" in English adaptations), first brought to the screen in the 1954 Japanese film of the same name. Like the primeval dragon, he is a vast reptilian monster living deep beneath the waves, capable of wreaking destruction on cities with the flick of his tail, and possessing a devastating breath weapon. The generation that experienced atomic horror described Gajira as a creature caused by nuclear weapon tests – a monster born of a monster. Later movies and spin-off products elaborated the legend and introduced other monsters, some displaying other draconic features.

For more on this theme, see *GURPS Atomic Horror* and *GURPS WWII: Weird War II*. GMs might find it interesting to merge Atomic Horror with Bronze Age myth. Tiamat might send her draconic children out of the ocean depths to punish humanity for its noise by trampling the great coastal cities . . .



Dragons at the Movies

As genre fantasy novels grew in popularity, occasional attempts to translate the form to film resulted in varying success. However, for most of the 20th century, such films mostly steered around the idea of dragons. Unfortunately, flying, fire-breathing, gigantic lizards were beyond the available special effects technology for most of this period. Occasional attempts succeeded, such as the dinosaur-like creature that appears briefly in the 1924 *The Thief of Baghdad*, or creatures in animated films, but it was not until the '80s and '90s that technology really caught up with the problem. This led to a handful of films with reasonably effective dragons, whatever the quality of their scripts. Today it seems that computer effects make things a little *too* easy; any second-string movie can feature a sky full of dragons.

Draconic Lizardman

90 points

This represents one sort of “draconic lizardman.” The species is enigmatic, reptilian in a *smart* way, and seriously magical. These lizardmen are tall and slender, making them no stronger than humans, and very deft and quick. Some humans find their appearance disturbing, but others see them as graceful and elegant. Their reptilian metabolisms make them resilient, and their light scales provide some protection from harm. They also have impressive teeth, although their claws are too short and weak to do much in combat. However, their thought processes sometimes seem *too* deep and intricate, making them slow to respond to mundane problems by human standards, and their hissing voices strike humans as sinister.



Attribute Modifiers: DX +1 [10]; IQ +2 [20]; HT +1 [10].

Advantages: Composed [5]; DR 1 [3]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Magery 2 [25]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (2□ HT at bottom of range, 1□ HT at top) [3].

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Odious Racial Habit (Willfully enigmatic, rarely volunteer information) [-5].

Variations

In a campaign where these creatures do not deal with humans, or have such regular dealings that humans are used to their speech, the Disturbing Voice disadvantage should be deleted. Likewise, in a campaign where most interactions are between lizardmen, their Odious Racial Habit might not be considered annoying, and might be reduced to a quirk. (Alternatively, members of the race may have problems even among themselves, relating as badly to each other as they do to humans.)

Science Fiction and Dragons

Meanwhile, although the dragon was a quintessentially *fantastic* creature, the myth's power and popularity worked in science fiction. Some authors explained the legends in terms of surviving dinosaurs in “lost worlds,” weird biology, or visiting reptilian aliens, while others place more or less “rationalized” dragons on alien planets. Still others had robot dragons. Perhaps the best-known dragons in science fiction (instead of science fantasy) are those in the “Pern” stories by Anne McCaffrey – creatures genetically engineered from smaller natural animals to assist human interstellar colonists in fighting an alien menace.

***Homage to thee, O thou who hast
hacked the Sebau-fiends in pieces, and
hast annihilated Apep!***

– The Egyptian Book of the Dead

However, dragons have arguably reappeared most *powerfully* in science fiction without ever using the name – which is, after all, associated with pure fantasy. Originally, dragons were terrifying reptilian killers with venom of unmatched potency, whose very blood could slay other creatures on contact – monsters who could slaughter countless lesser warriors before the tale's hero slew them in a long, hard battle. This primal image has reappeared with spectacular success in SF horror movies in recent decades. The dragon is not dead yet.

REAL DRAGONS



Although dragons are ultimately creatures of human imagination and subconscious, it may be hard for a myth to coalesce out of absolutely nothing. Dragons are bigger versions of something entirely solid, or composites of parts of several such creatures. It is also worth taking a moment to look at some real creatures with something draconic about them.

Large Snakes

There are some impressive reptiles in nature. Snakes come in a wide range of sizes, with and without venom, and while the largest usually do not use poison, the idea of a snake which is both huge *and* very poisonous obviously makes for a great story. The reticulated python can grow as long as 32', while the slightly shorter but heavier anaconda may reach 500 lbs. The longest venomous species is the king cobra, which can reach 18', while the heaviest is the eastern diamondback rattlesnake, which has been known to reach 34 lbs.

Legends of giant snakes and dragons run together. The Greek “draco” was described as a constrictor big enough to attack an elephant, while it is clear that some limbless, venomous “wyrms” of European myth were large serpents. Of course, in the days before widespread global travel and photography, any tale of a big snake in foreign parts could grow in the telling. One account, presented as fact by the ancient Roman writer Pliny the

Elder, described how the general Atilius Regulus, while campaigning against the Carthaginians in North Africa, encountered a snake 120' long, and used siege engines to kill it. In fact, Pliny claimed that Regulus brought the snake's skin and jaws home to Rome as a trophy, where they remained on view for over a century before being lost.

GURPS Bestiary has game data for a range of snakes; see p. BE32.

Crocodiles and Alligators

Crocodiles and alligators resemble the dragons of medieval western art (or vice versa). Dangerous and reptilian, crocodiles can grow over 18' long, and can also become used to human flesh – for example, if condemned criminals have been thrown to them. They would make good “dragon candidates,” but they are not native to Europe. However, they do live along the Nile's banks, and probably influenced Greek stories; medieval traders and travelers may have brought back descriptions or even preserved specimens.

Preserved crocodile skins *have* been displayed as trophies, even being described as having belonged to dragons. Likewise, the river-dwelling alligators of China may have influenced that land's legends of river-god dragons. See *GURPS Bestiary*, p. BE6 and p. BE11, for game details.

The Komodo Dragon

Of all the real species which carry the name of “dragon,” one above all does so with real credibility. The Komodo dragon is a monitor lizard native to certain islands in Indonesia. A full-grown male Komodo reaches from 9’ in length and 160 lbs. to 12’ in length and 300 lbs. for the largest specimens. The latter figure can be increased by the fact that they can eat up to 80% of their normal body weight in a meal. Females are slightly smaller.

Dangerous predators, these lizards are capable swimmers, can take down small deer and goats and possibly even buffalo, and have been known to attack and kill humans. They were unknown beyond their native islands before 1912, however, making them poor candidates as the source of dragon legends.

Megalania

The biggest true lizard which ever lived was probably an Australian cousin of the Komodo: *Megalania prisca*, which died out some 20,000-50,000 years ago, as a result of climate change, possibly due to humans burning off its forest habitat. Estimates of *Megalania*’s size range up to 20’ long and 1,000 lbs. or more (some sources say over a ton, or even several tons, and compare it to the great flesh-eating dinosaurs), but these figures are based on limited and debatable fossil evidence; other scientists claim that it may have been only 10’ and 350 lbs. It is disputed whether it was an aggressive predator or a rather peripheral and sluggish scavenger. However, *Megalania* was evidently impressive, and almost certainly encountered the first human inhabitants of Australia; any such who brought one down could have claimed to be true dragon-slayers.

The largest lizard known in Australia today is a smaller monitor, which reaches 6’ and 30-40 lbs. However, occasional reports of *much* bigger lizard sightings lead some cryptozoologists to claim that *Megalania* may not in fact be extinct. For such a large creature to remain hidden today would be an impressive achievement, though, even in the vast Australian outback.

A game treatment of *Megalania* is on p. 63; statistics for Komodo dragons and other monitors are in *GURPS Bestiary*, p. BE19 and p. BE21.

Sharks and Whales

Monstrous carcasses found washed ashore and described as “sea-dragons” probably were whales or sharks, but are certainly impressive enough on their own account. In 1808, a body with a long neck, small head, and “mane” was stranded on a beach in the Orkney Islands and identified as a “sea-monster.” Years later, its vertebrae were examined and found to be almost identical to those of a basking shark. After the shark dies, the first areas to decompose are the cartilage areas around its face and gill area, causing the jaw to drop off. This leaves what looks like a small head on a thin neck. The fins could fray and one of the two lobes of its tail could decompose faster. The resulting mass could be mistaken for a long-necked sea creature with a pointed tail.

Sharks and whales can serve as effective sea monsters in games; see *GURPS Bestiary*, p. BE30 and p. BE37.

Dinosaurs

Early in the Victorian era, scientists became aware of past creatures *truly* comparable with the dragons of myth, as scholars unearthed and studied the remains of the dinosaurs (and their flying contemporaries, the pterosaurs).

Students of mythology thus began to wonder whether the dragon could have been inspired by some racial memory of these great reptiles. This was reasonable in the early days of paleontology, when the geological time-scale was not well understood, but by the 19th century’s end, scientists and folklorists dismissed this theory. There was a gap of at least 60 million years between the last dinosaur and the first man.

However, if creatures such as the coelacanth, a fish that existed 400 million years ago, have been caught alive in the last century, perhaps other remnants of the prehistoric age also survived long enough to inspire legends. There are theories that surviving plesiosaurs could account for sea monster sightings, although no traces have been found of such beasts, and African legends of the “mokole-mbembe” (p. BE60) sound teasingly dinosaur-like. Some people even think that certain monsters in Babylonian art have the same look; could a picture, or a specimen, have made its way back from Africa?

(Modern theories that dinosaurs may have had more in common with modern birds than with reptiles also raise the possibility that rationalized dragons could be more avian than reptilian – hollow-boned and warm-blooded.)

Dragon Bones

The Chinese have long known of fossil bones, although no one in past ages knew what creatures they represented. One authority suggested that they were the castoff skeletons of living dragons, who sloughed their bones as well as their skins once every thousand years. Others pronounced them simply the bones of dead dragons. These fossils often found their way into herbalists’ shops, where they were ground up and offered to the public as having strong curative virtues. A Sung dynasty author recommended that the bones be soaked in spirits overnight, and then dried over a fire and rubbed to powder before use. Another authority warned that the bones can be poisonous and that iron tools should be avoided when preparing them because of dragons’ notorious dislike for the metal.

Fossils have also been instrumental in shaping Western views of dragons. Some pictures of dragons seem influenced by the fossilized plesiosaurs. These creatures’ skeletons may have been discovered in the Middle Ages, when fossil-rich slate was being mined in Swabia. A 16th-century statue of a giant killing a dragon in Klagenfurt, Austria, shows the dragon with a head copied from the skull of a woolly rhinoceros which had been unearthed in the area 30 years previously. Stories of the small but fierce dragon of Mount Pilatus (p. 16 and p. 58) come from a region where pterodactyl remains have been found in rocks.

Dragons are not the only legendary creatures to have been inspired by fossils. Skeletons of *Protoceratops* found in Asia would have influenced or inspired early descriptions of griffins. Like the fabled griffin, this small horned dinosaur had a birdlike beak and an elongated shoulder blade located where the griffin’s wings might have been.



PLAYING
WITH FIRE

*And the wild beasts of the islands
shall cry in their desolate houses, and
dragons in their pleasant palaces . . .
— Isaiah 13:22*



Breathing life into the fire-spouting lizard, beyond a few simple stereotypes and a liking for fresh meat, is a challenge for both players and GMs. How do dragons feed? Where do they live? Do they meet,

and if so, where? How does a creature that could live for centuries amuse itself, or relate to humanity? Finally, can this topic be interesting and varied enough to build a whole campaign around the subject?

FITTING DRAGONS INTO A GAME WORLD



A GM who creates a game world containing dragons needs to decide their place in its hierarchies, and how they relate to other species. Their status can cover a wide range. Are they slaves – maybe mounts and guard dogs for wizards – or just more monsters to kill? Are they the biggest of beasts but no more, or are they more or less divine?

Dragons as Ravening Beasts

The simplest approach keeps dragons as mere monsters. Even if they are intelligent, they are too selfish, shortsighted, and aggressive to use that intelligence beyond the tactical level. Their chief function is to rampage around the countryside from time to time. Between rampages, they skulk in underground lairs, perhaps on top of substantial hoards. They are almost certainly solitary, except when breeding instincts take over, because two ravening monsters together *will* turn on each other, sooner rather than later. Hence, dragons are rare, and rarely mix with other species or their own.

This view of dragonkind works fine in its way, but does not make much of a central feature for a continuing campaign. Still, it ensures the occasional spectacular fight scene, after which, any human survivors can definitely call themselves heroes.

The Feral Heart

In its pure form, this approach is poorly suited for dragon PCs, except perhaps as an excuse for some cathartic combat against NPC monsters or implausibly tough human heroes. Even then, the possibilities for roleplaying are so minimal as to bore all but the most limited of gamers. Non-heroic, non-monstrous NPCs may react to them with awe, screaming terror, or even adoration, but their only true home is out in the wilderness, alone with their hoards.

However, if some more sophisticated behavior relieves the draconic savagery, there could be an interesting game. Representing “nature red in tooth and claw,” the PC dragon becomes a powerful predator whose blood-thirsty instincts are part of an honest, natural personality. In such a game, PCs should rarely engage in angst about following their instincts. Why would dragons care? Does the lion weep over the antelope? Still, sometimes, the world proves a complex place, in which violence only achieves so much – and restraint has an interesting feeling of novelty.

Although they may toy with their prey as a cat toys with a mouse, dragons indulging their feral instincts should make clean kills. In a complex draconic society, elders devoted to the “traditional ways” disdain “undraconic” politicking as a decadent hobby of the young, which goes against everything “real” dragons should stand for.



Realism, Folklore, or High Fantasy?

Three variations of dragon depictions exist: “a realistic approach,” as in folklore, or as in modern sword and sorcery tales. This can lead to very different flavors of game. Here are a few suggestions:

A “realistic” dragon should violate the laws of physics and biology as little as possible (which is not the same as “not at all”). Depending on the exact level of realism, some pseudo-scientific explanation should be available about flight or fire breathing, and longevity or intelligence. Dragons can be similar to dinosaurs or giant lizards, perhaps surviving secretly in some “lost world.” Their ecology needs to make real-world sense, and unless they are laboratory-created, they must have a large enough breeding population (unless they are dying out).

“Folkloric” dragons conform to the stereotypes of myth. Western dragons are solitary, and often ravage herds and villages. Eastern dragons wander among men, dispensing wisdom and advice, except when summoned to report to the Celestial Bureaucracy. Individuals can be unique – there was only one Hydra. Folkloric dragons can be highly supernatural by nature, so practical details of how they eat enough to maintain their metabolisms, or how a giant lizard could use human speech, or whether they could physically fly, can be explained away as “magic.” Often described as terrifyingly large – able to coil three times around a hill, or blotting out the sun with their wings – these monsters are probably the most ancient or powerful of their species; game dragons can be larger than any natural creature. Fortunately, they can also have very convenient vulnerabilities, although only a few sages and witches know these.

A game can have the tone of a specific culture by restricting the source material to specific myths and legends. On the other hand, a campaign that spans cultures and continents can find room for numerous different species, while still doing each one justice. In a campaign set in the modern world, even legendary monsters can be globetrotting jet-setters!

Like most such creatures, dragons have mutated with the transformation of folklore and legend into modern fantasy stories and games. The emphasis has moved from monstrous violence or divine authority to more subtle uses of power. The “high fantasy” dragon is often an evil overlord among monsters, scheming atop his golden hoard, and rejoicing in an (almost) impervious hide, fabulous magic, incredible wealth, and astounding longevity. Wicked dragons may demand tribute from mortal villages, keep slaves, and manipulate kingdoms. However, dragons need not be evil, or even amoral. They can simply be a magical, long-lived species that rarely interacts with mortals. Individuals can be well disposed enough to act as teachers, using their natural hoarding instinct to gather collections of rare tomes – or dragons can be glorious, transcendent, and nearly divine, dangerous for humans to approach because the sheer power of their presence can be so overwhelming. More typical high fantasy dragons collect gems and magical artifacts (especially enchanted swords that could otherwise pose a threat to them). Subtle magical abilities are common, as are special vulnerabilities. Dragons often have well-defined breeds that are easily identifiable from an individual’s size, coloration, and type of lair, and each breed has well-known abilities that rarely vary.

Dragons as Intelligent Monsters

Going one step up from the preceding version, a setting can retain the monstrousness of dragons, while making full use of their reputation for cunning and subtlety. This approach can even leave dragons torn between their powerful intelligence and their equally powerful instincts. If these dragons are solitary, they are probably very egotistical and eccentric, natural outsiders, knowing very well how special they are and rarely conforming to the expectations of other dragons (or anyone else). If they are more sociable, they will need to develop very sophisticated systems of etiquette (p. 42) to keep from each other's throats.

If dragons are so powerful and intelligent, what prevents them from simply taking over the world (assuming that they have not already)? The simplest answers could be that they do not want to – they have better things to do with their time than organize lesser beings or posture about, such as counting their hoards and inventing subtle new riddles – or that they are too smart to bother. They may intelligently calculate that, while they could each take over a goodly piece of territory and bully its other inhabitants into compliance, those inhabitants have numbers on their side . . . and even weak enemies, motivated by desperation, can wear down a dragon or get in a lucky shot. Of course, they could team up with other beings for conquest, but smart monsters are still monsters, and may hate their own kind too much to cooperate, while regarding any partnership with “lesser races” as demeaning.

In general, intelligent monstrous dragons should serve as the “boss monsters” for the campaigns they inhabit, probably in more sense than one. They may well control other creatures, by supernatural right or through subtlety or magic, and use them to avoid having to bloody their own claws. A fight with a dragon should be a spectacular, climactic event.

Intellect vs. Instinct

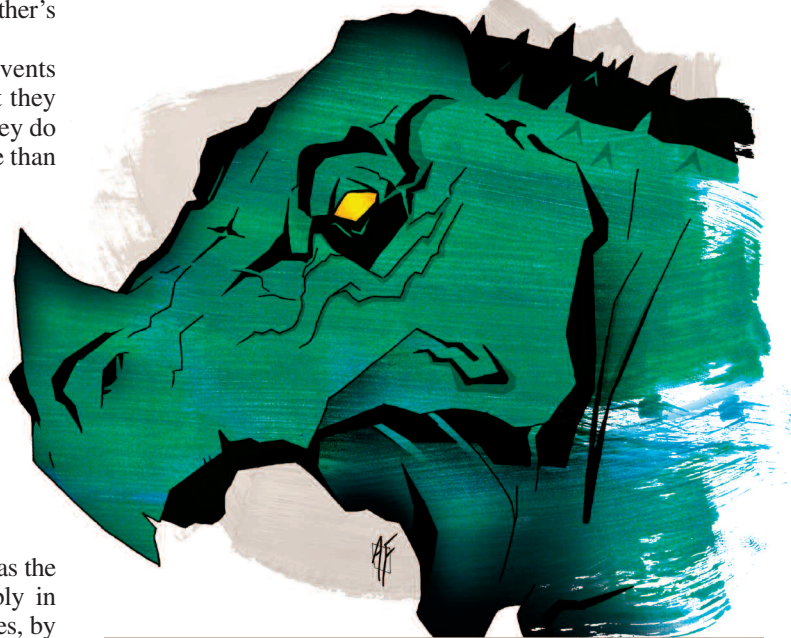
In this sort of setting, incongruities between the dragons' natural drives (to hoard wealth and power, devastate towns, and eat human flesh) and other nobler, more civilized aims (to master magic, perhaps, or to solve enigmas) can be brought into sharp focus. The action may cut directly from flesh-rending hunting trips to introspective conversations. PC dragons should be encouraged to form social relationships within and outside their species, and take on “undraconic” goals and weaknesses as well as traditional ones. (Of course, many dragons look upon making nondragon friends and forming other relationships as an undraconic weakness.) A plot could involve a dragon with a human friend who lives in a town that will be devastated by a spiteful older dragon who denied of his usual tribute. Can the town be saved, even though draconic law says that it is doomed?

Dragons as Complex Characters

Then again, truly intelligent dragons can be more than just monsters. They do not need to be nice, although benevolent dragons are an option. Remember, even the vilest villains can have complex motivations and long-term goals.

Such dragons can have an involved, complex social structure. There is a truly nonhuman society, with cultural assumptions that are very different from humans'. Dragon PCs could easily spend an entire campaign involved in draconic politics, without meeting any other species except while hunting. They would need to pay close attention to powerful older dragons while carving out their own power bases and finding their social niche.

A race of shapeshifting dragons might even live alongside humans, as just another strange subculture in the melting pot of a large city. Even if players are torn between two different cultures, with one foot in the draconic world and the other in the human, they can never forget what they truly are.



Fighting Diabolical Dragons

If dragons are *merely* huge and powerful monsters, they can be fought, using force or cunning greater than their own. Holy or saintly opponents only gain special advantages against dragons when purity of heart gives them the strength of many, or God (or the gods) intervenes directly to assist them – represented in game terms by advantages such as Blessed, Divine Favor, or Power Investiture.

However, if dragons are literal embodiments of supernatural evil, then they can be defeated directly by the power of holiness. Indeed, this could be the only way to defeat them. In traditional stories, devils are not susceptible to mere physical force. (If the GM still gives the dragon a character sheet, it should have considerable ST, high DR or broad Invulnerability, and additional defenses such as Magic Resistance. It might also be some kind of spirit-being, using the rules from *GURPS Spirits*, so that destroying its physical body merely sends it temporarily to the spirit realm.)

Individuals with the True Faith advantage, or their own Dread of holy symbols or objects, could drive off diabolical dragons. In the former case, whether faith protects against a blast of fiery breath is up to the GM. This might make the advantage look more like a magical force field than the subtle benefits of faith, but few dragons in stories toast saints from a safe distance. A diabolical monster may not even *try* to attack someone with True Faith, at any range.

Servants of a Greater Power

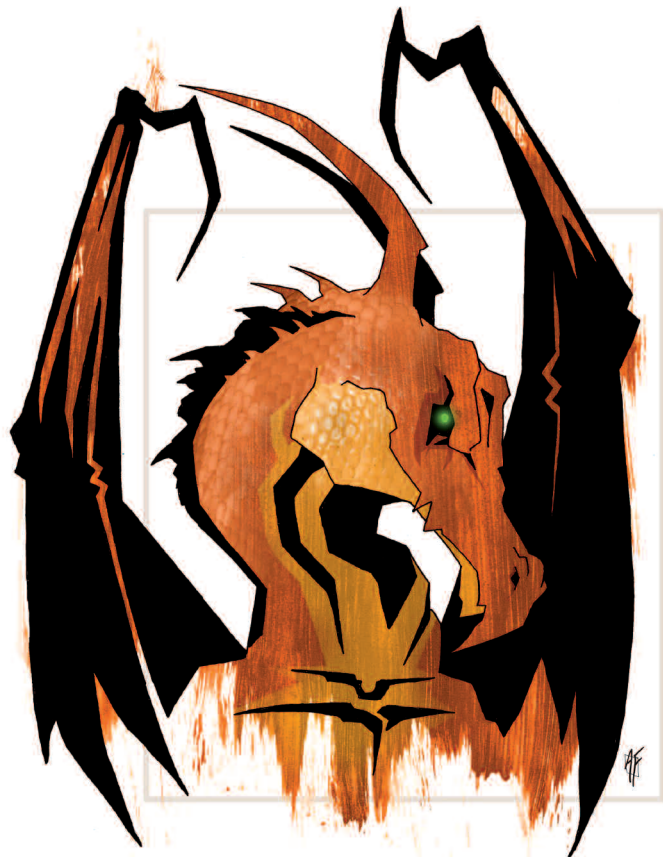
Optionally, dragons can have duties and responsibilities to some other, greater power. These dragons report regularly to the gods, or guard knowledge and hidden treasures. When they interact with other species, it is usually while carrying out their duties.

PLAYING A DRAGON'S ROLE



Evil adversary, undying guardian, or feral beast – the established draconic archetypes – describe humans' perceptions of dragons . . . but they are not the *only* possibilities. Moreover, they do not consider the dragon's point of view.

Dragons can be glittering personifications of terror and dread, noble guardians of hidden treasures, teachers and collectors of knowledge, or tyrannical lords of the land – but each has its own views on their position. They are often highly intelligent, and deserve to have some kind of personality. This dictates other aspects of their behavior, such as whether they live side by side with human allies or slaves, or jealously keep their lairs in remote wildernesses. This section reviews the range of options, and tries to see things through those great, hypnotic eyes.



The Ultimate Adversary

Before humanity invented atomic bombs, sent tanks to crush undefended villages, or used gas on battlefields, dragons terrified people. The beating of dragon wings drowned out the sound of thunder; when outspread, they could blot out the sun. Dark draconic shadows slid soundlessly across the land, and at the unmistakable shape of a dragon in flight, even armies might break and flee. Impervious hide, needle-sharp talons, and wicked, bloodthirsty temperaments added to the terrifying reputation. Their poisonous or fiery breath could devastate entire villages. They were primal terror given form.

PC dragons in such a setting can take on human form to walk among men, but should always have their true mission in mind. They could seek out lost spells or relics, or protect mankind against strange creatures that ooze out of the shadow-world. They likely have a powerful patron – a deity, or an older dragon – who advises them or gives them missions.

Dragons pose the ultimate threat to any would-be hero. If overwhelming physical might is not enough, their silver tongues slyly lure the unwary. They toy with lesser beings for amusement or for profit. Such dragons lurk in their lairs for decades, but when piqued, they delight in vast destruction. They care nothing for petty human hopes or fears.

Dragons who are subject to fits of rage or paranoia about their hoards can vent their fury on irritating trespassers. For some, terrorizing the countryside is a byproduct of their normal lifestyles. If mortals see them as monsters, then perhaps the mortals should stop encroaching on the dragons' hunting grounds! Others revel in their infamy, and actively encourage the legends.

A drawback of the reputation as the most dangerous foe in the world is that brave or stupid heroes occasionally want to try their luck. Some dragons regard this as a perk of the job, and enjoy playing cat and mouse with those who would assail them. The vain temptation to allow a beaten hero to flee – so stories of their accumulated splendor spread through the outside world – sometimes dooms many an otherwise noble and voracious wyrm.

Riddle Games

No dragon can resist the fascination of riddling talk . . .
– J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

According to many stories, dragons love riddles. Their fascination with puzzles, enigmas, and all types of intellectual challenges is instinctive and automatic. Riddle games allow dragons to prove their superiority, in the mental rather than the physical realm, but can also become an obsession. In a campaign that emphasizing this draconic mindset, dragons win status among their own kind by investigating knotty and arcane puzzles, solving the riddles of history, or collecting obscure knowledge for its own sake. Instead of fighting over resources or status, dragons set each other wagers, or engage in riddle contests.

This behavior can even reflect racial templates. It is not usually Compulsive Behavior, in *GURPS* terms, as a dragon can likely go for days without puzzle-solving. It could be a -5-point Vow (to attempt to puzzle out any enigma the dragon encounters), or perhaps just a quirk.

Plot Seeds

④ The PCs are set a riddle by either an older dragon, or another powerful creature, whose favor they need. They must go out into the world and quest for the solution.

④ A dragon captures a mortal and poses him a challenge to win freedom. The PCs subtly influence the outcome of the contest.

④ By an ancient tradition, every dragon in the land will meet for a set of important games, at which winners can curry political favor with important dragons. The PCs must travel to the event, compete, and win.

Elemental Forces

More subtly, dragons are the untamed fury of nature given form. Such creatures' descriptions often reflect natural forces: the pent-up anger of the hurricane, the boiling heart of the volcano, or the hunger of the raging ocean. If they are destructive, it is rarely because they are evil, any more than nature is evil. And if angered (perhaps ancient forests are being destroyed, or pristine caves ruined by mining), Nature might send an elemental dragon to punish her oppressors.

These dragons can be kindly elemental forces as well as deadly ones, calming the elements as well as rousing them to destruction. The elemental dragon might be associated with local spirits, or have responsibilities to set the courses of waterways or to guide the lightning safely to the ground. His native environment tempers his personality, lair, and appetites. For example, a fire dragon can be flamboyant and hot-tempered, and an earth dragon more placid, given to cold-blooded long-term plotting. If elemental dragons choose to hide among mortals, they retain ties to their native elements. The water dragon may look like a man, but he likes to spend at least an hour a day soaking in the bath . . .

Guardian

Coiled possessively about his hoard, the doomed guardian dragon forever watches over treasures that he will never use. He rarely, if ever, sleeps – or he sleeps very lightly – and has centuries to plot revenge on anyone who dares to trespass or steal, although his reactions will often be instantaneous. His treasure can be gems, or secret knowledge, or even mortal bloodlines, but anyone seeking to harm or steal the hoard must be ready to pay with his life. If an item should go missing, the guardian dragon tracks the thief to the ends of the world or beyond.

When rich men guard their belongings, they build vaults and hire guards to keep them safe. When gods must keep treasures safe from mortal men, they set dragons to watch over them. Many legendary dragons have an overwhelming guardian instinct, even if they never guarded golden apples (p. 9) or hidden sutras (p. 22). Benevolent guardians are loyal and trustworthy protectors. Prey to paranoia, Feral wyrms' corrupted instinct forces them to curl up jealously with whatever treasure they scavenge, bitterly devoting centuries to ensuring that no one steals it.

Sometimes only “worthy” beings can enter the forbidden garden, retrieve the legendary weapon, or speak with the sole descendant of an ancient hero. Often this involves a test of arms (which will likely be fatal to the loser), but a more imaginative dragon sets strange quests or plays riddle games with hopeful seekers, testing their mettle in other ways. Although a draconic librarian might reluctantly allow readers with proper permits into his library, he will not take his eyes off them as they search the aisles.

King of the Beasts

The dragon king of the beasts usually has little to do with humanity, and is content if his basic instincts are satisfied. He requires a secure lair, open skies, and sufficient hunting grounds. If instinct drives him to hoard or mate, he seeks out those objectives also. Being closer to nature, a feral dragon can resent those seeking to tame or pollute his environment, or wish to avoid other sapient species, preferring to be left to his own devices.

Just as the basilisk was “the king of snakes,” the dragon king can hold court for the beasts of the world. In a “furry fantasy” campaign with intelligent animals, dragons can be the

secret (or not-so-secret) rulers of the animal kingdom. Subjects obey these proud, aristocratic creatures out of a mixture of love, fear, and tradition.

Great Collector

Unlike the guardian, a collector dragon is a frenetic creature, given to bursts of excitable activity. He represents voracious greed and cunning. A hoarding instinct spurs him constantly to gather wealth, knowledge, or even useless trinkets. The pursuit of a new acquisition stirs a true collector into delicious frenzies of excitement, whereas looking over his old treasures may elicit merely a bored yawn of contempt. Dragons rarely use the items they collect, and can neglect their belongings – the chase is the thing! Other dragons itemize their hoards in minute, pathological detail whenever time permits, even taking great pains to find appropriate backdrops for their hoards. If a remote cave in the mountains is too damp, a private art gallery, a mansion in the clouds, or a bank vault in Zurich are all possibilities.

Not all collectors are connoisseurs. Many dragons hunger only for wealth, and care little for the form. Others develop rarified tastes, and ruthlessly dedicate their lives to completing collections. The hoarding dragon stops at nothing to attain his goals. For example, a modern-day dragon collecting fine art could frequent exclusive legitimate auctions, but also hire infamous cat burglars to rob galleries, assassinate rival dealers, or employ forgers to swindle hapless mortals out of their valuables.

Playing Long-Lived Characters

Getting into the mindset of characters from a long-lived species is a challenge. Players who think a decade is a long time must come to terms with a race for which it is a blink of an eye.

Long-lived dragons view time in an unhasty way. They set schemes in motion that run for decades without bearing fruit, or think nothing of waiting a century to buy a fabled red diamond at auction – or they may regard a century spent dozing on a satisfactory hoard as time well spent. This sense of time, and an associated jaded cynicism, gives dragons an alien edge. They will think and plan, but not like humans. Campaigns featuring dragon characters can span centuries of game time. They *may* be inept at dealing with sudden, pressing emergencies or respond to such situations with overwhelming force, simply as a way of restoring the world to the comfortable, static condition to which they are accustomed. Such extreme reactionary conservatism could explain the legendary dragon rampages; they become, *very* annoyed at disturbances.

On the other hand, highly intelligent dragons handle the short *and* the very long term equally efficiently, giving them a depth of intelligence far beyond the human. While older dragons have centuries to achieve their goals, younger creatures sometimes feel an urgent need to accomplish those basics that grant minimal credibility in draconic society – the acquisition of a decent hoard and a lair in which to keep it.

“Adventuring” dragons, especially youngsters, involved with shorter-lived races may react well to immediate emergencies. Where older dragons can be hidebound, their younger brethren might embrace new ways of thinking. This juvenile enthusiasm (or delinquency, depending on the dragon) can pass with age, but it could explain why dragons might seek out human companions, or mix in different societies. Even older dragons emerge from their mountain fastnesses and enter the world of men, if they perceive some need that interests rather than annoys. Even a dragon may not be immune to nostalgia for its younger days of excitement and novelty.

Dragons and Strange Gods

If dragons are more or less divine, as some tales suggest, how do they interact with other beings of similarly transcendent power?

Myth often answers this question. For example, storm gods such as Thor or Indra were sometimes deadly enemies of cosmic chaos-dragons, whereas Chinese dragons were agents of the celestial bureaucracy. Less powerful dragons, common in Greek myth, could be enforcers for the gods, placed like guard dogs. However, in game worlds, which do not draw directly from such specific legends, the GM can define the relationship from scratch.

An established arrangement or relationship between deities and dragons could exist. If the two think along broadly similar lines – if the gods are humanlike in psychology, merely possessing vast power and the job of enforcing morality, while dragons embody natural forces and the power of the animal kingdom, but do so with the personalities of irascible, greedy hermits – then a working relationship would be feasible. Problems may arise when the two categories come from completely different directions.

In particular, dragons could interact weirdly with horrific, high-powered Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Bringing both into the same game can cause a clash of symbols to big to be manageable. Would dragons crush these interlopers, or would their minds, no more flexible than the human for all their physical power, be just as swiftly withered by a confrontation with something unutterably alien?

On the other hand, dragons might just *be* Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Perhaps their seemingly terrestrial features are feeble analogies created by the shattered minds of mortals who encountered them. After all, they are vast and uncaring, and their supposedly reptilian forms hint at a greater difference from human biology. While their rather strange behavior – the obsessive hoarding, the devastating rampages, the withdrawal from action for extended periods – could actually be the result of thought processes incomprehensible to minds that are more mundane.

Messenger or Prophet

The gods also sometimes need messengers. Dragons, swift flyers who also embody awesome power and magnificence, make reasonable candidates.

This role does not appear very often in stories, except as one of the many bureaucratic duties of Chinese dragons, but it could make an interesting variation. A messenger dragon might be forever busy, running back and forth, or it might only be dispatched once a decade or so, when some important situation arises, spending the intervening years dozing in its lair or amusing itself around its overlord's realm.

Messenger dragons take their work very seriously or at least are keenly aware of their own dignity. They should usually be tolerant of different races and environments – the messenger's job is to deliver the message, not to criticize – but any obstruction may be taken as justifying violent or spectacular responses, and any disrespect to the messenger can be taken as disrespect to his lord, justifying severe vengeance.

While a divine messenger carries specific words from a deity to another being who can be expected to accept and comprehend it, a *prophet* carries a general message to the world at large, and has to be enough of a teacher to explain it. Dragons do not make good prophets. Humans fear or

respect them, but usually find it hard to regard them as leaders or teachers. Still, a dragon shapeshifted to human form could have the dignity, knowledge, and supernatural power appropriate to this task.

Teacher

Seeking lessons from a dragon that is *not* an appointed prophet represents wresting knowledge from the most dangerous sources of all. Dragons are usually perilous, almost as much when their help is sought as when attempts are made on their lives. The doctor who dares ask a dragon about a cure for a disease is risking his own life for *the truth*, and to save others. However, some dragons do adopt this role.

Although a committed draconic teacher guards hidden knowledge, he is not a jealous guardian. An ancient, inscrutable creature, he can be persuaded to pass on his lore to worthy students. For those initiates who win his favor, the rewards can be great. Practically a living monument in himself, the dragon may have known historical figures personally, and spoken languages that have been lost to men for centuries. He could be one of few creatures in the world who knows arcane magical rites or forgotten craft skills. In his travels to strange lands, he may have learned the secrets of eternal life, or the composition of the Philosophers' Stone.

Dragons may be patient and long-lived creatures, but their tolerance of fools is notoriously low, and a would-be student must keep his wits about him. Well-disposed teachers think kindly of their nondraconic students (in their own way), but some dragons are fundamentally untrustworthy. They are not above releasing a few fragments of information to a supplicant if it may gain them a useful servant later on. Learning gained from draconic sources may turn out to be as treacherous as it is esoteric.

Flesh or Spirit?

One of the paradoxes of dragonkind is that these physical, materialistic of mythical creatures are also the epitome of magic. They walk the line between the worlds of flesh and spirit, demonstrating the power of both. Literary scholars call them "liminal beings," marked out by their double nature (animal and intelligent, physical and mystical) and fated never to change, but able to guide, instruct, or obstruct the hero.

GMs playing up this aspect of dragonkind should keep them as nonplayer entities, unless the players are very good roleplayers and interested in the idea. A truly liminal dragon will usually have considerable physical and magical power, but not use them very much.

Lord of the Land

The tyrannical dragon terrorizes the lands and settlements surrounding his lair into obedience. He is as rapacious as any feral dragon, but his predations have a purpose. He *knows* that he was born to rule!

Dragons are possessive, and a draconic lord likely takes an active (if selfish) interest in "his" lands' and peoples' welfare. He may deign to receive supplicants in person, or appoint advisors to deal with his vassals and their problems. In a modern urban fantasy, the dragon might rule a vast business empire, using a hoard built over centuries to finance his schemes. In an illuminated campaign, cruel draconic overlords might be the Secret Masters of the world (or at least, they might believe that they are).

Younger dragons can also try their luck at mortal dealings in the hope of building a power base to counter their elders. These “Young Turks” may try to enforce their will on humans, acting as though they were legendary rulers who had reigned for centuries. Often, in their egotistic fervor, they forget that even the most powerful dragon requires genuine loyalty from reliable minions if he wishes to rule them openly and in safety.

Virgin Sacrifices

Many legendary dragons required the sacrifice of a virgin (often a princess) as the price of sparing a mortal settlement. The innocent maid is a symbol with all sorts of connotations. In Medieval Europe, she symbolized the purity of the church, threatened by the forces of evil and ignorance. In Greek myth, she was the most valuable property of her father, the King. The loss of a young girl to a ravening beast could also represent her adolescence and growth into a sexually mature being, facing primitive and passionate forces within herself.

Allegory aside, in most cases, the dragon has only two uses for the captive: she will either be eaten, or become a permanent guest in the lair as a servant or companion. In the latter case, the girl can become a political hostage for good behavior from the human community.

A dragon taking human form might have other plans for the virginal thrall. She is a sop from terrified peasants to appease the voracious monster, and if that means allowing him to slake his human appetites on her flesh, then so be it. Perhaps the sacrificial victim will remain in the lair as a permanent fixture, to be killed if she ever fails to amuse her new master, or perhaps she will return to her village silently some weeks later, a hollow-eyed broken woman, never speaking of her ordeal.

A feudal shapeshifter-dragon might request a human mate as part of his tribute, demanding a beautiful virgin of impeccable breeding for the same reason as any other aristocrat. If the dragon insists instead on perpetuating the custom of *jus primae noctis* (the right of a feudal lord to sleep with the brides of his serfs on their wedding nights), who would dare to argue? Certainly not the terrified young women who are escorted dutifully to the lair, returning the next morning, maybe with a gift of dragon-gold, maybe pregnant with a dragon-child.

See “Selecting the Sacrifices,” p. 93, for discussion of this subject from the human viewpoint.

Pet, Mount, or Weapon

Some types of dragon, particularly smaller varieties, find favor as pets. Wild dragons can be trained, or there may be domesticated bloodlines, specially bred for temperament and conformation. If trained, small dragons make for interesting and exotic companions. More intelligent than other household animals, they could find clever ways to communicate with an owner. Their magical nature and obvious intelligence makes them rare and desirable familiars for wizards (pp. M115-116). Special abilities granted to a mage by a draconic familiar might include physical protection (especially against fire), flight, the ability to speak with animals, and even the obvious fire breathing. Small intelligent dragons must lack the arrogance associated with larger creatures’ raw power, and might even enjoy such partnerships, in which case, they bond well, refusing to transfer their loyalty under any circumstances.

In a game with larger trained dragons, they become a fantasy army’s equivalent of heavy artillery or air support. A truly

mighty kingdom might field wings of soldiers on dragonback! However, such dragons probably will not act less intelligent or subtle than those in other settings. An intelligent dragon could find the role of trained mount humiliating, unless its rider and partner are of comparable power and passions – a warrior demigod, perhaps. A kingdom with dragon forces has a terrible advantage, unless its neighbors can field something similar, but there may be practical limits to their usefulness. For example, in Michael Moorcock’s “Elric” stories, war dragons sleep for years between each bout of activity, and cannot be roused early for any purpose, except by the mightiest of magics.



The capture and training of wild dragons is surely a fiendishly difficult pursuit. Even if bred in captivity, they are never entirely domesticated. Dragons also can be demanding of their riders, and one who forgets what he is riding may not live to regret it. Trained or not, these are dangerous predators.

Winning the respect of a wild dragon enough to ride it, even temporarily, is the mark of a truly great hero. Impressing a dragon requires someone extraordinary. (Of course, extraordinary evil may impress a diabolically evil dragon!) Intelligent, self-willed dragons may agree to act as mounts in response to requests from trusted friends, but woe betide the hapless fool who thinks that all he has to do is ask.

Comic Relief

Comical dragons fail the noble and terrifying reputation of their kind. They pathetically stalk humans, or become vegetarians, or fall in love with inappropriate beings.

If heroes hunt them, the dragon's downfall often involves some unlikely scheme that takes advantage of his amusing weakness. A dragon with a sweet tooth may have his jaws locked together by a particularly sticky toffee, allowing a local hero to stab him with a pitchfork. (This happened in one English

folktale. In another, a dragon's weak point proved to be its backside.)

Alternatively, dragons may be much smaller than their reputations; even if they are ferocious fire-breathers, the surprise of discovering their size is good for a laugh. Or in somewhat "realistic" fantasy worlds, they may be victims of their own biological and practical implausibility, prone to tragic boiler explosions or forced to pursue bizarre diets to sustain their fiery metabolisms.

DRAGON-ORIENTED CAMPAIGNS



If a campaign not only includes dragons, but also depicts them in detail, they probably will become a key feature. Dragons are charismatic beasts, and hard to keep on the sidelines.

The All-Dragon Campaign

In this campaign, all the PCs are dragons (or perhaps other supernatural creatures of comparable power). Such a game could be, with tongue somewhat in cheek, much like an ordinary RPG campaign. Parties of dragons could work as mercenaries, fight evil (well, whatever is evil by *their* definition), investigate mysteries, or plunder underground mazes for loot (presumably to fill their own underground lairs). However, this does not seem very draconic. It is probably better to play up the traditional nature of dragons, leading to long-timescale games of politics and scheming, with the occasional exercise of raw force to solve specific problems.

Such epics could span decades, or even centuries. Characters can spend much of their time in their lairs, working on strategic plans. Draconic goals include stockpiling their hoards, keeping domains running smoothly, increasing mortal influence, and gaining status among other dragons.

Genre Background

The obvious background to this campaign is a standard fantasy world, in which dragons fit naturally. However, it is equally possible to run such a campaign in any setting in which intelligent dragons appear; see Chapters 6-9 for examples.

Groups, Neighbors, or Rivals?

Dragons are traditionally solitary. A game can build around a very loose community, each with a lair some miles from the next, only working together as politics or expediency demand, and perhaps working against each other some of the time, secretly or otherwise. This could run well as a play-by-mail or play-by-e-mail game; it might be harder to manage in face-to-face play. However, dragons might be capable of living as a group – especially if they are youngsters (maybe siblings) who have decided to collaborate to accumulate a large hoard or political power. (Not that such a group lacks internal friction.) A group of large, hungry dragons will need substantial food supplies; perhaps some broad expanse of forest or a fertile plain will support edible herds.

Dragons and Minions

To vary the pace of the game, players might also create mortal minions to their dragon PCs (with fairly limited point values in *GURPS*). If the dragons maintain separate lairs, the humans could act as messengers and emissaries. Some possible scenarios involve mortal agents leading dangerous, adventuresome lives, while others revolve around the dragons, typically when hatching world-shaking plots or requiring high-level diplomacy. Still others could involve mixed parties, with a dragon leader being assisted and guided through complex situations – and perhaps being saved from the consequences of its own pride, limited knowledge, and occasional naivety.

Timekeeping

It is important to keep a careful track of time in a game like this. If each session spans a year or more of game time, mortal agents will (if they are lucky) retire one day, or at least move from "field" to "household" work. Hence, the dragons must always keep an eye out for new recruits. Requiring dragon PCs to spend experience points in particular ways, to keep their physical powers roughly appropriate for their age, might improve play.

Goals and Information

In any session, players might decide on their dragon's main goal for the current month, season, or year. Additionally, assuming legends accurately define draconic lifestyle, dragons must pay attention to five types of news. Players can decide whether to respond to what they hear via mortal agents, by diplomatic messages, or even by direct action. The important news will

Wandering Water Monsters?

While specific types of dragons should probably be closely associated with the nations and cultures whose myths described them, it can be interesting to interpret accounts from different lands as garbled and incomplete descriptions of the same creature. For example, the Malaysian *bena* (p. 51) shares a habit of causing devastating floods with the French *gargouille* (pp. 16 and 51). Dragon PCs could dominate a campaign that follows a race of aquatic flood-dragons roving the seas and occasionally swimming up rivers to cause trouble. Chinese dragons also have power over rivers, but exercise it more moderately. Could the *bena* and *gargouille* both in fact be thuggish exiles from the Middle Kingdom, assuaging their anger by harassing human "barbarians"?

arrive as messages, information from mortal minions or local animals, or even via personal visits from other dragons. (If the dragon is a natural gossip, all news will be of interest, especially if it is particularly juicy!)

Household News: Has an important minion asked permission to marry, or had a child who could serve the dragon when grown? Do minions need to be rewarded, or threatened into obedience? Does one dragon suspect a servant of secret loyalty to another? Are the dragons recruiting or training new agents?

News About the Domain: Is prey plentiful? Do any local problems (such as forest fires or pollution) need intervention? Are other predators hunting the dragons' herds? Are the local peasants paying tribute on time?

News About Local Mortal Affairs: Are local villages plotting against the dragon? Are his finances in good shape? Can he send agents to report on the local human rulers? Is he satisfied with the performance of his human agents? Does a shapeshifting dragon have a mortal lover? If not, does he want one?

News of Great Mortal Matters: Which human (or elvish, or goblin, or whatever) kingdoms are making war on each other? Which kings are newly crowned, and are their interests in line with the dragons' own? Has the dragon been invited to a wedding or christening? Are foreign armies on the march? For that matter, are *immortals* up to anything – demons planning war on heaven, or sea-gods sending tidal waves to reclaim land drained for agriculture?

News of Draconic Affairs: Are the dragon's enemies gaining ground? Do his friends request assistance? Should he attend a draconic gathering? Is he summoned to a draconic court to defend his actions?

Sample Event 1: Local herds of roe deer (the dragon's favorite prey) are thinning out. Perhaps poachers are picking out the strongest young bucks, and the dragon or his minions must find and stop them – or perhaps the dragon himself has taken too many of the breeding does, and the population is no longer sustainable. He may have to “kidnap” deer from neighboring forests to start a new breeding program, and employ gamekeepers to watch them – a strategy that will take a few years to establish.

Sample Event 2: A dragon, taking the role of a feudal lord, is building his hoard by imposing a hefty trade tax on markets in a town where barbarian nomads ply their wares. The local monarch declares war on the barbarians, and the market is closed. The dragon could send an agent to persuade the king to change his mind or to assassinate him. He might choose to assist the barbarians in gaining the upper hand, and then force them to sue for peace so that the markets can continue. What happens when the king's magistrate arrests the dragon's agents for “trafficking with the enemy”? Could another dragon be forcing the king's hand?



Campaign Themes

The following are possible medium- or long-term themes for a dragon-centered campaign. A theme can be as prominent or as subtle as players or GMs wish, and different game sessions may emphasize one or more of these different aspects.

War of the Generations

Nature pits the old against the young. For dragons, this conflict can become consuming. The elder dragons have amassed power and influence over centuries, and spent long years brooding in their lairs, growing jealous and possessive. They wield their authority with cruel and tyrannical talons. Elders are even more terrifying than other dragons – they actively and malevolently manipulate or abuse their younger kin. In their turn, the younger dragons hide, and scheme against the day when they will destroy their sires . . . and tyrannize their own children. Dragons in this type of campaign may occasionally come into conflict with other species, but their worst enemies are to be found among their own kind.

Typical stories might see PC dragons driven into exile by a paranoid ancient (possibly even a parent) and hiding among the lesser races while plotting revenge, or cautious, long-fermenting assassination plots.

Politics

Ancient dragons scheme at a level that would have confounded Machiavelli. Everything they do or say stems from at least three complex motivations, even before considering their *hidden* agendas. For many of them, merely collecting gold poses no challenge anymore. Instead, gathering political power has become their obsession. Politically significant individuals in the campaign must be highly detailed, with their own goals and *modus operandi*. Characters will form relationships with many of them (whether they want to or not). Playing the political game successfully can give younger dragons allies and influence over both their own kind and others. Etiquette and status are crucial. However, draconic politicians are not like humans; they need not prefer cooperation over violence, and the political wyrm must understand how to use both in order to get ahead.

PCs sent as envoys to another dragon need to find appropriate gifts and determine if they are supporting the other's schemes. They might also involve great draconic ceremonies, with plots and counter-plots in the shadows, or investigations conducted by supposedly “neutral parties” (the hapless PCs) when some powerful dragon is accused of going too far.

Resources

While dragons' first instinct is to defend their homes, they also frequently compete for resources. Conflicts usually focus on hunting grounds, influence, mates, or hoards. In a game where such conflicts are a major factor, characters must constantly defend their own domains against other dragons, or other species. Everything they own is something for which they have to fight. PCs could even be budding evil geniuses that see the temporary benefits of cooperation in the face of a common threat, whether it is older dragons or heroic slayers.

Typical plots would include the formulation and execution of defensive or offensive plans, or cautious collaboration with older dragons in exchange for a share of profits.

A Dying Race

Slowly but surely, the dragons are dying out. The world is changing, and dragons will eventually no longer be a part of it; it may not happen in the party's lifetime, but it is unavoidable. Older dragons may be consumed with power-lust, or slow and senile. PCs who know their history will realize just how far the race has fallen from its zenith. If younger dragons have a trusted and wise draconic mentor, he dies during the course of the campaign, or takes his leave and flies into the setting sun, never to return.

Typical plots would see characters questing after lost draconic knowledge, the protection of old relics or mortal bloodlines, the quest for new domains where dragonkind might prosper anew, or the forging of links with younger cultures and species.

Campaign Categorization

This set of categories will simplify the task of defining campaigns with dragons. Think of these tags as useful shorthand to help GMs come up with new ways to use dragons.

Defining the Dragons

To begin with, consider the dragons as creatures in the game world. What is their general nature – how common, powerful, smart, and magical are they?

Note that the values assigned to each aspect compare with normal humans, not PCs (who may not be anything like normal humans, and in some cases may, be dragons themselves). Note also that the dragons in a given setting can cover a range of values for any given aspect; for example, most may be powerful monsters, moderately common opponents in a heroic fantasy game, but a very few of the oldest of the species may have become gods. In addition, many different distinct types of dragons require many different “values.” For example, the swamp dragons in Terry Pratchett’s “Discworld” novels are weak, moderately common, nonsapient, and only slightly strange, but the Discworld also has much rarer “true” dragons of at least two different sorts, both much closer to the traditional image of power and magical strangeness.

Power

This refers to the raw physical (or possibly magical) force of the dragon. Power takes many forms, though teeth, claws, and fire are common.

Weak dragons – weaker overall than a normal human warrior – are usually employed for comic effect, as a deliberate contrast to the more frightening myth. Being weak is not the same as being “safe” or helpless. Discworld swamp dragons are rather pathetic creatures, but their flaming breath inflicts a very nasty burn at close range, and they sometimes explode with dangerous force.

Human Strength dragons are approximately as tough overall as an ordinarily trained and equipped human soldier. This type is rare in stories, because it loses much of the dragon myth’s point while lacking comic effect, but does exist. This sort of dragon can have different abilities from those of a human, which makes it a useful character or a tough opponent. Aside from anything else, it probably has innate weapons, while a human can be disarmed. A shoulder dragon with moderate psychic abilities could fall into this category.

(Mis)Using the Shoulder Dragon

While petty drakes and “shoulder dragons” usually function as pets, companions, or small-but-fierce wild animals, miniature dragons have other game uses. They display unexpected ferocity when fighting each other. Bored adolescents train them for competitive “arena” fights. They can be psychic manipulators, reducing their gullible owners to puppets, or parasites with powerful psionic vampire powers. They sometimes turn out to be poorly disguised demons. Other times they become endangered species – how many shoulder dragons does it take to make one suit of dragonhide armor?

Powerful dragons are, simply, tough monsters – no joke as opponents, but not beyond the capacities of a band of competent human adventurers. They make impressive opponents and obstructions in play, but are unlikely to dominate a campaign, unless present in large numbers or unusually cunning and cooperative.

Very Powerful dragons are at or near the top of the monster hierarchy. Slaying one is indisputable proof of heroism, whatever the tactics used. This is the traditional power level for dragons in folklore – something for the great hero or saint to tackle. Such dragons should usually be rare, unless they completely dominate the campaign, logically requiring substantial resources and food supplies.

Godlike dragons have powers beyond those of any mere mortal. Like most gods, they mostly exist beyond the experience of ordinary PCs. Encounters with them impress and unnerve, but do not usually turn out violent.

Frequency

A measurement of how often most people encounter dragons, or at least indisputable signs of their presence. Of course, it is only an approximation, and has to be practical. If millions of dragons sleep in realms beyond the stars, but just three are active in the world, then they are functionally *Rare* – though if the three awaken and seek ways to call their brethren that might change.

If dragons are actually *Nonexistent*, they can still influence a campaign by their reputations, symbolic power, or legacies. Rumors of their appearance can be crucial or just red herrings.

A *Unique* dragon can be a god who adopts the form, a similarly important supernatural entity, or the last survivor of its race. Of course, most people will never encounter it, although they can still be aware of its influence or activities. The PCs, being involved in important plots, could run into it, once or repeatedly.

Very Rare dragons can be foes for mighty heroes, or extraordinarily enlightened beings, or senior servants of the gods, or an endangered species. An encounter with a dragon makes a plot special in itself, and should not happen too often.

If dragons are merely *Rare*, meeting them is still special, but does not mark the PCs as touched by destiny. PCs can look for a dragon with a good chance of success, although it may take time and effort.

Moderately Common dragons make for interesting encounters, but such encounters happen during most people’s lives, perhaps more than once. If such dragons are also violent, everyone else is in trouble.

Common dragons are regular features in many people’s lives. If they are intelligent, the world probably belongs to them as much as to humanity. If they are large, they are probably still rarer than human beings in absolute terms, of course.

Lastly, if dragons are *Very Common*, the campaign will need an explanation as to how this is possible, given their likely need for resources and space. This would be an unusual game, but could be interesting.

Intelligence

Dragons may be mere animals (although usually dangerous ones) or the epitome of cunning and wisdom. This has nothing to do with how nice or nasty they are. A dragon can be a rampaging predator or a controllable riding-beast, a monster of diabolical cunning or the epitome of virtuous wisdom.

Nonsapient dragons are, simply, animals. They are predators and driven by an instinctive grasp of practical tactics. They do not talk, do not make long-term plans, run away from things that injure them (unless they are defending their young), and respond instinctively to pleasant experiences. If they accumulate hoards, it is presumably out of bizarre instinct.

Intelligent dragons are approximately as smart as human beings. This can cover a spectrum. Dragons can be a little dull, used to applying brawn instead of brains to a problem, or can

have the smarts appropriate to something with centuries of experience and reptilian patience, but still be in the human range.

Super-Intelligent dragons are usually deities or very old “drakes.” In the former case, they embody wisdom and refinement. In the latter, they tend toward devious cunning and alertness. It is unwise to try to out-think this sort, but a very careful, lucky planner might just succeed, especially if simple, predictable motivations, such as greed or divine duty, drive the dragon, whatever intelligence they bring to any specific task.

Weirdness

This reflects how strange a dragon will seem when considered by a moderately intelligent player who had not thought much about the subject before. Many types of weirdness exist – magic, bizarre science, and so on – but this discusses the degree instead of the type.

Rationalized dragons are as unmagical as possible. They have a small and limited amount of power, or involve some ingenious biological speculation. If they breathe fire, it is probably

powerful. A shoulder dragon with unique psionic abilities, or man-sized dream-spirit made flesh, is just as bizarre.

Totally Weird dragons probably confuse even the most open-minded scholar. Their mere presence in a scenario makes it somewhat surreal. Usually, they are more of a symbol than a material creature.

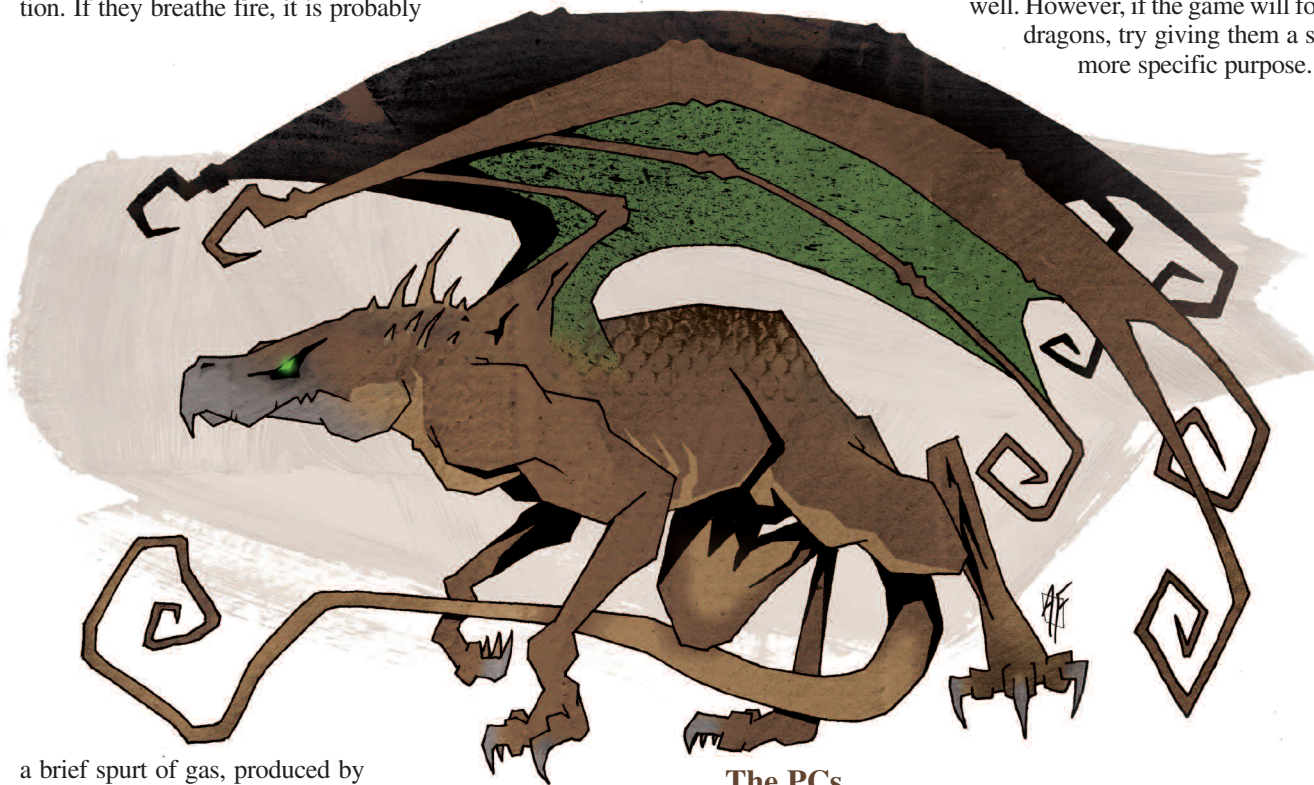
Defining the Campaign

Having defined the nature of dragons, we can define the nature of the campaign, and what the point of the dragons is to the story.

Dragon Symbolism or Role

Having dragons, large or small, mundane or magical, is all very well. However, what is their purpose in the campaign? In other words, what do dragons represent?

It is perfectly reasonable to answer “large, powerful monsters which mark this campaign out as fantasy” – most game dragons serve this purpose, and do so very well. However, if the game will focus on dragons, try giving them a slightly more specific purpose.



a brief spurt of gas, produced by intestinal chemistry and mostly for show.

“Dragons” which are really dinosaurs, in “lost world” games, also fit in this category. When meeting these dragons for the first time, PCs might be startled and confused, but should understand what they are dealing with quickly.

Exotic dragons partake unashamedly of the supernatural (or of related fields such as psionics or “weird science”) in controlled doses mostly to explain how a giant lizard can fly and breathe fire. These dragons work magic, but probably no more than a trained human expert. In a high-fantasy world where magic is common, these dragons would not seem weird to their neighbors, but they will still be special to most players.

Very Exotic dragons are an extreme version of the preceding type. They not only incorporate magic (or whatever) to function, but embody it by existing. Dragon gods and demons are in this category, as are most formidable “drakes” of fantasy . . . big as houses, with inhuman cunning and superhuman magical powers. However, Very Exotic dragons are not always overwhelmingly

The PCs

Gamers focus on player characters at least as much as they do on settings. So, what is their relationship with the dragons? Can they be dragons themselves? If not, do they fight dragons, serve them, worship them, exploit them, or all of these? What are the relative power levels?

Of course, there are many answers to these questions, especially if the PCs can exercise a lot of free will. Power levels may be defined by *GURPS* point totals, but they may also refer to the political structure of the setting. In a world where dragons control secret conspiracies, for example, PCs might be dragons (with high point values), or their human servants, or their enemies, knowing or unknowing.

Plots and Stories

Putting the nature of dragons together with the position of the PCs should imply what plots are possible in the setting. The range of story possibilities ultimately depends on how the game plays out.

DRAGON TACTICS



A dragon displays the style of combat dictated by its instincts or personality. That is “style” in a general sense, of course, not usually anything as formal as a school of martial arts. Dragons slam into opponents, rending them with teeth and claw, just as often as they choreograph an elegant dance of flame and spell.

Dragon tactics are simple and pragmatic, based on the efficient use of raw power. On the other hand, arrogant, confident dragons can revel in their sense of superiority, toying with opponents until they achieve victory with one elegant attack. Similarly, dragons embodying some principle or force, such as “magic” or “fire,” may use that force in combat even though other options would work better, hurling spells or flames at an opponent they could crush with a flick of the tail.

Game mechanics for dragon abilities and combat styles are discussed in Chapter 4 (beginning on p. 70).

Getting in Close

Virtually all dragons have impressive teeth, serious claws, and a lot of physical strength. Hence, the basic option for all dragons is to get in close and crush or rend. Large dragons attacking much smaller prey may even be able to swallow it whole.

Even smart dragons with other options opt for this approach much of the time. Ranged attacks have their negatives – breathing fire could be tiring (or could use up limited supplies of “personal fuel”), and magic can be unreliable and unstable. Likewise, fast, glancing attacks can miss or lead to accidents. Furthermore, a foe engaged at close quarters will rarely get away, and an escaped opponent implies a lost meal, not to mention the danger of the victim regrouping and coming back with a better plan.

This approach has obvious problems against two types of opponent: very large ones and numerous ones. Slamming, crushing, and rending work for many battles, but if the opposition can take the damage and dish out as much or more in reply, they quickly lose their charm. Likewise, a pack of foes – whether lesser monsters using pack tactics, or a humanoid army – might exploit the fact that even a dragon, engaged in mauling one opponent, cannot guard its back properly against others. (A muscular sweeping tail can help, but that trick has its limits.) Shrewd dragons aim to destroy the opposing force’s morale by eliminating their first victims as quickly and gruesomely as possible. Clever tacticians will aim to take down enemy leaders or spell-casters in the first engagement, but there are risks. Hence, the sensible or experienced dragon will be ready to employ alternative tactics.

Using Space

A dragon exploiting range, speed, and maneuverability has two general options; ranged attacks (usually breath weapons or spells), and “fast pass” melee strikes. Fast pass strikes inflict relatively mild but effective injuries while evading the opponent’s retaliation, and hopefully wear the victim down or land a lucky hit. Dragons will usually employ such tactics against other dragons (especially bigger, slower, dumber foes), or other large monsters, but also choose to fight this way when intimidating lesser beings. This is also the safest option against multiple enemies who cannot match the dragon’s hitting power at range.

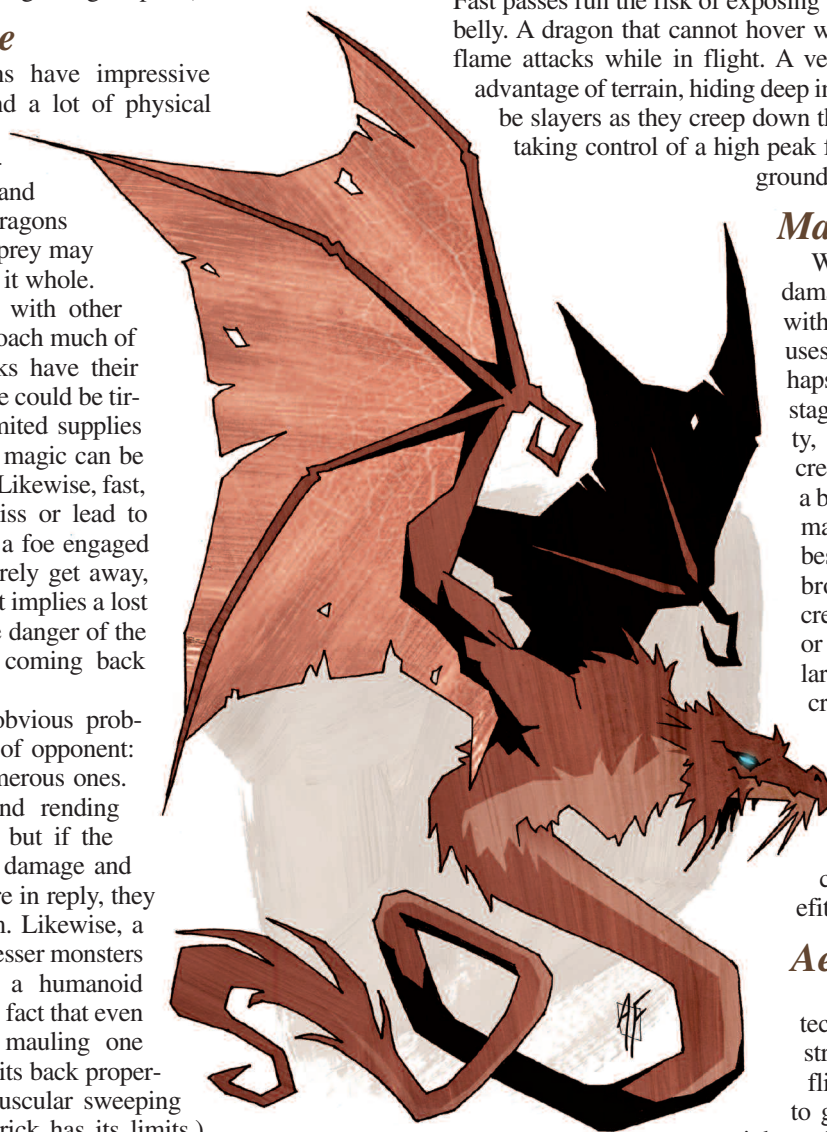
This sort of fighting depends on a degree of skill; in *GURPS* terms, high DX helps a lot. The dragon also needs a good sense of space and position, especially when fighting multiple foes. Fast passes run the risk of exposing the dragon’s back or underbelly. A dragon that cannot hover will need high skill to make flame attacks while in flight. A very clever dragon will take advantage of terrain, hiding deep in a cave and flaming would-be slayers as they creep down the one entrance passage, or taking control of a high peak for a height advantage over ground-based foes.

Magical Aids

While most dragons do more damage with flame or fang than with spells, a clever monster uses magic to win fights – perhaps mostly in the planning stage. Shapeshifting, invisibility, or clairvoyance enable a creature to assess foes or scout a battlefield, while earth spells may reshape its lair for the best defensive effect. Minor broad-area spells, whether creating floods, earthquake, or darkness, can disrupt a large attacking force at the crucial moment of engagement, while illusions can set attackers up for easy destruction, or just distract some of them. Finally, healing magics can provide their usual benefits.

Aerial Combat

Aerial hunting and fighting techniques link to dragons’ strengths and weaknesses in flight, which vary from game to game (pp. 70-71). Dragons might prefer to hunt on land, as taking too many risks in the air could easily kill a heavy flier from the force of a crash. (They may still fly to and from their hunting grounds, however.) A dragon who makes a couple of aerial passes at an opponent then “gives up” will decide to take his frustration out on easier prey or land nearby to return on foot.



Most traditional dragon-slayer stories make little mention of the dragon's flying ability, focusing on crunching sword – vs. – claw duels at close quarters. As a result, GMs often assume this reflects dragons' preferred approach. However, in some tales, dragons do hunt from the air, and when they fight each other, especially in modern stories, it is often while flying. (After all, this displays their power to the full.) In any case, the essence of aerial combat is simple: whoever falls out of the sky first loses. A direct kill with flame or claw might seem more elegant, but a crippling strike will usually be more than enough.

To force a flying opponent down, a dragon can target wings, perhaps even attempting a brief constriction attack, or knock it unconscious by heavy blows with tail or claws. He could terrify a smaller target into diving so low to escape it cannot regain height. Dragons with good range to their breath weapons, and skill in aiming them, will make best use of this advantage, hoping to down the target or land a crippling hit. Expert fliers could use their great wingspans to steal air currents from a gliding victim, or deliberately whip up turbulence. If hunting a smaller flying creature, a dragon simply catches the prey in his talons, and even devours it while circling round to the next target.

DRACONIC LIFE CYCLES



What might be the life cycle of a creature that lives for centuries? Is hoarding gold just an adolescent interest, or is it a mating strategy? Is the desire to devastate large tracts of countryside with fire or venom the sign of a mid-life crisis?

As with all animals (including humans), instinct as well as intellect directs draconic behavior. What are these fabulous beast's instincts? "Mundane" animals commit acts that seem strange (such as cannibalistic mating, or continent-spanning migrations), but these rituals, perhaps like typical draconic behavior, follow simple rules of biology.

The way dragons live, mate, and die differs by species, campaign setting, and game style. Since dragons are mythical, there are no objectively "wrong" or "right" answers here, but simply a great many possibilities.

Age

Many dragons live for long spans of time, their ages reaching centuries or millennia. Over this time, the dragon continues to grow and acquire new skills. Some types, such as the Chinese (p. 59), have discrete phases of growth; each stage develops distinctive physical characteristics and supernatural abilities. Others, such as the typical Western dragon, grow to maturity in a few decades and already display all the normal adult features of their species. They grow slowly, getting larger and stronger until finally old age, or a foe, catches up.

An old dragon might be more powerful, knowledgeable, and devious than a younger one, but this is never assured, any more than with humans. However, a particularly ruthless draconic society or brutal selective pressure from human slayers could guarantee that only the strongest survive.

Breeding

Many accounts say dragons, like natural animals, mate in pairs, the female laying the eggs. However, this is not the only known means of procreation. Some legends claim that dragons

arise spontaneously from a battlefield on which hundreds of men have died. A delirious and mortally wounded soldier sees a slow mist rise from the battleground, stained with blood and mixed with the last groans of the wounded and dying. Inexorably, it twists into a monstrous serpentine shape, hovering above the ground. Then, with a malevolent cry, the mist takes flesh . . .

This idea would once barely have seemed magical. Scholars once believed life could arise spontaneously from inanimate matter – worms from soil, maggots from rotten meat, and so on. Dragons would just form a more grandiose example.

If dragons are supernatural creatures, they could spawn artificially by magical means. Special invocations or sacrifices might be needed if dark forces are involved. Or the dragon is a creature of the devil, as the medieval church claimed, begotten either on other demons or on the most monstrous of natural beasts. If the dragon serves a more benign power, an act of divine will can create it, or worshippers petition for a dragon's creation through weeks of purification, prayer, and fasting.

In most stories, dragons are relatively rare. This makes sense. A long-lived species of large predators would reproduce rarely or risk wiping its food supply. Many members of the species could be infertile. Or there can be a huge imbalance in the dragon sex ratio. (This is very unusual with natural creatures, but dragons are supernatural.) Dragons could only reproduce under very specific circumstances, under unusual astrological influences, or only when the number of local dragons falls beneath a natural limit. If dragons mated rarely and for life, they could live alone or in pairs. Otherwise, larger family groups are possible, especially if the creatures are omnivorous or live in an abundant hunting ground.

Dragons could produce many small, weak offspring, not recognizable as dragons, and leave them unprotected, so that few reach adulthood. This could cause terrible danger if human action inadvertently prevented the reduction of larval dragon numbers by wiping out their natural predators.

LAIRS AND HOARDS



Dragons take their lairs very seriously, and even unintelligent dragons find and protect a comfortable home – their instincts may select highly defensible lairs. For an intelligent dragon, the lair is a home, a refuge, and a treasury. Over centuries, a dragon becomes intimately acquainted with every stone, corner, and draft. In such cases, any intrusion feels threatening and treated accordingly.

Not every dragon keeps its home beautiful. Animalistic dragons pile bones in their smoky, mephitic lairs, and inherently evil creatures surrounded themselves with signs of their unpleasantness. A long-held lair will be the way the dragon wants it. All locations reflect the dragons' mythic nature from old burial mounds for Norse dragons to active volcanoes for creatures of elemental fire. Dragons with powerful talent at magic will use spells to protect their lairs.

The Western dragon's lair is a plain (if treasure-filled) cavern, whereas oriental species live in palaces (although often magically disguised). Any intelligent dragon with access to servants, stone-shaping spells, or the ability to shapeshift should have a civilized lair, with several rooms of different sizes. If it keeps human prisoners (or guests), whether as hostages, for conversation, or as future meals, the lair will need quarters. Few stories suggest dragons set traps around their lairs, but a smart, forward-thinking monster who did would be a doubly formidable opponent.



For I Am a Material Wyrm . . .

The Dragon's Hoard – the very words conjure up an image of mythical treasures and fabulous wealth. The chinking mounds of coins, pigeon's blood rubies and pale red diamonds, ancient magical swords, and careless piles of baubles and antiques are surely worth an emperor's ransom – and there for the taking, of course, if it was not for the dragon. The creatures love their collections, gathering riches around themselves to serve as bedding.

Possessive dragons spot tampering with their hoards notoriously quick. They have an uncanny memory of every single item. (This idea goes back at least to *Beowulf*, p. 13, in which the dragon notices the theft of a single cup.) A robbed dragon takes a burglary extremely personally and will devote years to locating the missing item and dealing with the perpetrator.

Like its lair, a dragon's hoard reflects its nature, whether scattered, carrion-encrusted, or neatly stacked and tended. However, the legendary dragon fondness for wealth is precise and cautious. Like a teenager with a chaotic bedroom, a dragon with a messy lair will notice if anything is disturbed.

Beyond this, the nature of the dragon's precise treatment of its hoard will depend on its precise reasons for having it. A dull dragon with a simple lust for bright, shiny stuff will likely have a chaotic heap of treasure, and sleep on it nightly, whereas a wise old dragon for whom the hoard represents millennia of memories will have a number of items of no great value along with the skulls of defeated enemies. A dragon that needs literally to devour treasure could keep it on one side of the lair; one does not sleep on one's food. A real connoisseur, with a true appreciation of value and beauty, could meticulously organize, and hire or kidnap notable artists or a human curator.

In game terms, a dragon's perfect knowledge of its hoard might if necessary be represented by Eidetic Memory with a -60% limitation, "only regarding treasure," or as Area Knowledge skill with an exceptionally small focus – just the dragon's hoard, or just its lair. For NPC dragons with reasonable IQ, however, this is a simple special effect. After all, the dragon has had decades or centuries of living in the same room to become intimately familiar with every detail of the heap.

Tracking Stolen Items

Dragons with serious hoard obsessions are also traditionally good at tracking stolen items. This can be achieved through (relatively) mundane or magical means.

Some dragons have exceptional senses, especially (in *GURPS* terms) Discriminatory Smell. If they cannot locate a stolen item precisely, they follow it to a general area, and then use violence, threats, or gentler means to recover it. An amusing "anachronistic" plot could involve a dragon with only moderate senses playing detective, recovering its treasure with using logic and forensic skill.

In other cases, dragons see recovery of stolen property as an excellent use for magical abilities. Many have multiple Information spells, which help sustain the draconic reputation for inscrutable, uncanny wisdom; Seeker is the obvious option. Any item that has been piled next to the stolen object for a few decades can be considered "associated" for purposes of casting this spell! In addition, some dragons know one or more type of Divination, which helps them search. Specific spells of use include Astrology (flying into the sky to observe the stars), Haruspication (dragons slaughter an animal to examine its entrails), Oneiromancy (dragons' own dreams have power), Pyromancy (dragons and fire go together), and any type of Elemental Divination (all of which involve resources dragons may have in profusion).

Some dragons lack either of these options, but remain determined to recover their possessions. In that case, dragons often rampage around the countryside until the property returns or until it forgets what made it angry. This works best when a dragon can explain why it is committing mayhem. A rampaging mute or animalistic creature could be misunderstood as a deranged monster, causing its neighbors to start looking for a dragon slayer. More reasonable, law-abiding dragons, perhaps in the Oriental mode, might seek to use local laws to claim justice and recover their property. A good basis for a scenario could involve human PCs working for the dragon (as agents, lawyers, or investigators), the accused (seeking to save him from an unjust accusation – or from merited punishment), or the court (as investigators, enforcers, expert witnesses, or legal advisors). For that matter, some PCs could be the actual thieves, whether or not they are the accused. Will the dragon be subject to unfair prejudice from human society, or will the threat of its power and anger distort matters beyond any hope of fairness?

A Possessive Streak?

Why are dragons attracted to wealth that they cannot seemingly use? Perhaps it is purely instinctive – an evolutionary vestige. Or precious metals might form an important part of the draconic diet, be a by-product of dragon digestions, or form the only comfortable bed for a creature with acidic sweat. Some real creatures, such as bowerbirds, create displays of "found objects" to attract mates; male dragons with the biggest mounds of gold could attract the most females.

For long-lived dragons, the hoard can act as a concrete memory; each piece could have its own story, which the dragon murmurs softly to himself in the long still nights. A cruel deity could have created dragons as servants and each hopes to buy freedom. Or the hoard could represent the soul or the traditional price of escape from draconic purgatory – the towering draconic rage at hoard-thieves is understandable in such cases. A portion of the dragon's power could mystically exist in his wealth, holding the keys to his life, or empowering his magical abilities (p. 89).

Then again, if dragons were the supernatural guardians of great secrets and divine lore, the hoard could have subtle significance incomprehensible to human intellect.

DRACONIC SOCIETY



If dragons have a society or culture, their natures – that of aggressive carnivores – must dictate the society's form. If they have a hierarchy, they must have a system for asserting and adjusting it – whether by simple battle or formal etiquette.

Even the proudest, most glorious of draconic lords are wary of their own kind. Even if he can defeat any existing rival, some of them are always growing in power until they can challenge him. He may spend years patrolling his lands, guarding his hoard, and handling local politics with cruel efficiency, but eventually a dragon must interact with other dragons.

Draconic society could be vicious, greedy, and cruel, or based on sagacity, patience, and respect for tradition. It seems highly likely that there will be wise and powerful dragons, wicked-tongued gossips, and despised outcasts at the bottom of the heap. A sensible wyrm must be cautious of his kin and keep



Dragon Social Types

Myths and stories present all types of dragons. Even given a valid general stereotype, many variations and unusual individuals exist in any game world.

Antisocial Dragons are proud, independent beasts, jealously guarding their own domain. Their solitude seems natural; they respond notoriously prickly toward intruders. Coldly incurious about their own kind, they stir only to drive out foolish rivals. Still, during any dragon's life, instinct may cause him to seek his kin. The mating instinct can also cause a solitary predator to seek others. Courtship may involve a long quest, and perhaps fights with rivals.

Although an antisocial dragon has little interest in other dragons, he may listen appeals for urgently required collaboration – but the supplicant should present a good case. These dragons are not necessarily evil, just aloof.

Aristocratic Dragons also live alone, guarding their independence and domains. They acknowledge, with possible resentment, ties of blood and allegiance. Like human lords in their castles, they sometimes venture out to meet with their equals. In fact, not doing so may be dangerous, whatever their personal inclinations. These aristocratic societies could generate Machiavellian politics. Young dragons must quickly learn to guard their thoughts and words. However, even if the younger generation shows proper restraint, ancient dragons can hatch century-spanning plots. When they occasionally convene in large numbers, the gatherings of aristocratic dragons are impressive events.

Aristocratic dragons send messages, passing on news, ideas, or invitations to gatherings, but do not deliver messages in person. Communication could involve magical messengers, slaves, or arrangements with local flocks of birds (an advantage to being the Lord of Beasts). This could be an interesting, if risky, employment opportunity for adventurous humans.

Communal Dragons maintain adequate food supplies for large carnivores in large groups, and actually choose to live in close proximity. They keep slaves to perform tasks requiring manual dexterity or those below their dignity, such as building, farming, and maintaining tools. Or perhaps they develop magical methods to substitute for the skills that nature denies them.

A fantastically complex system of etiquette could breed out, train out, or sublimate natural territorial instincts.

Maybe draconic civilizations have risen and fallen, or the dragons have always lived alongside humans or other races, using shapeshifting to hide among them.

track of the social state. If he provokes them, they may be the only living creatures that hold any true threat. In time of need, they may be the only ones who will come to his aid. These politics hold even if dragons are mere animals – wolf packs and lion prides have their hierarchies and courtesies.

Reptile Sociability

Dragons in tune with their animal natures could have social instincts similar to other reptiles. This is more likely among Western-style dragons than among the refined deities of the East.

Komodo dragons hunt alone but gather around each other's kills – one of the few opportunities for displays of strength and for courtship. Komodo parents do not show interest in newly hatched offspring, and in their early years, older dragons (who eat them) form as big a threat as any other predator. A draconic society based on the Komodo would be vicious and unforgiving. Older powerful dragons would rule absolutely, determining when the younger dragons could hunt, feed, or mate. Cannibalism of younger dragons would be frequent, encouraging youngsters to evolve clever methods to disguise themselves or move far away from their ravenous elders.

Alligators, on the other hand, engage in some of the reptile world's most attentive childcare. Parents stay with their young up to a year, guarding them as they grow to adulthood. Males disperse to find territories of their own, and their bellowing later attracts females, who build nests on the males' territory. Dragons following this model might never develop complex cultural relationships with the rest of their species, but would remain close to their sires and grandsires. Having older kin pay attention to one's attainments is not always an unalloyed boon . . .



Etiquette at the Top of the Food Chain

Speaking with dragons is legendarily perilous business. Being mighty predators with uncertain tempers, the most benevolent dragon will still turn on a visitor if it feels irritated or threatened. Dragons are often arrogant, scheming, or self-obsessed. Even if a supplicant can keep his head when faced with those glinting hypnotic eyes and that soft melodious voice, he is speaking with a creature at the very top of the food chain.

This arrogant self-centeredness makes for dangerous interactions between dragons. If such dialogues take place at all often, dragons should develop a very strong, formal etiquette. The politeness of dragons, a scaled-up version of the “manners” of any other predator, would avoid annoying more powerful creatures while establishing superiority and putting inferiors firmly in their place. Status would also be important, along with respect. Some dragons, considering themselves refined aristocrats, could prefer their manners couched in fine language and ornate protocol. Others, caring little for such guilt, could look for the intent behind the words. The following notes suggest a plausible, logical code for such beings.

Any visitor, human or draconic, wishing to make a good impression must obey a few basic rules or suffer the whims of an angry dragon. Even among friends, the polite dragon will be careful to avoid deliberate offense.

1. Respect Another's Territory

It is rude to enter another dragon's hunting grounds without permission. Territorial dragons are naturally aggressive toward intruders, particularly rival dragons. Visitors should bring gifts and offer them immediately as a customary mark of respect. The most traditional presents are gifts of prey or gold of the finest quality available.

2. Respect Another's Kill

Hunting in another's domains without permission is the height of rudeness. Many dragons consider this a direct challenge to their territorial rights, and meet the threat with lethal force. Polite dragons do not eat when visiting kin until specifically invited.

3. Respect More Powerful Dragons

In most draconic cultures, might makes right. A show of force often settles status among these great beings, and woe betides the dragon refusing to accept the result. Perhaps the oldest and most powerful drakes do not flex their political muscle openly – much – but it is deathly rude for a younger dragon to fail to acknowledge an elder.

4. Challenge the Pecking Order, Where You Can

Status among dragons is only accepted because it means something. When a dragon believes that another dragon weakens, or that he deserves a higher standing, he not only wants to advance but also feels that it is the right thing to do. This means challenging those higher up the ladder.

A dragon can challenge another in many ways. He can turn up in his rival's territory and goad the other dragon into a fight. Elaborate rules for determine relative rank and status in more civilized communities. Political influence or riddle games decide many disputes, but most dragons eventually resort to ritual combat. Refusing a formal status challenge is a terrible insult to both one's rival and society.

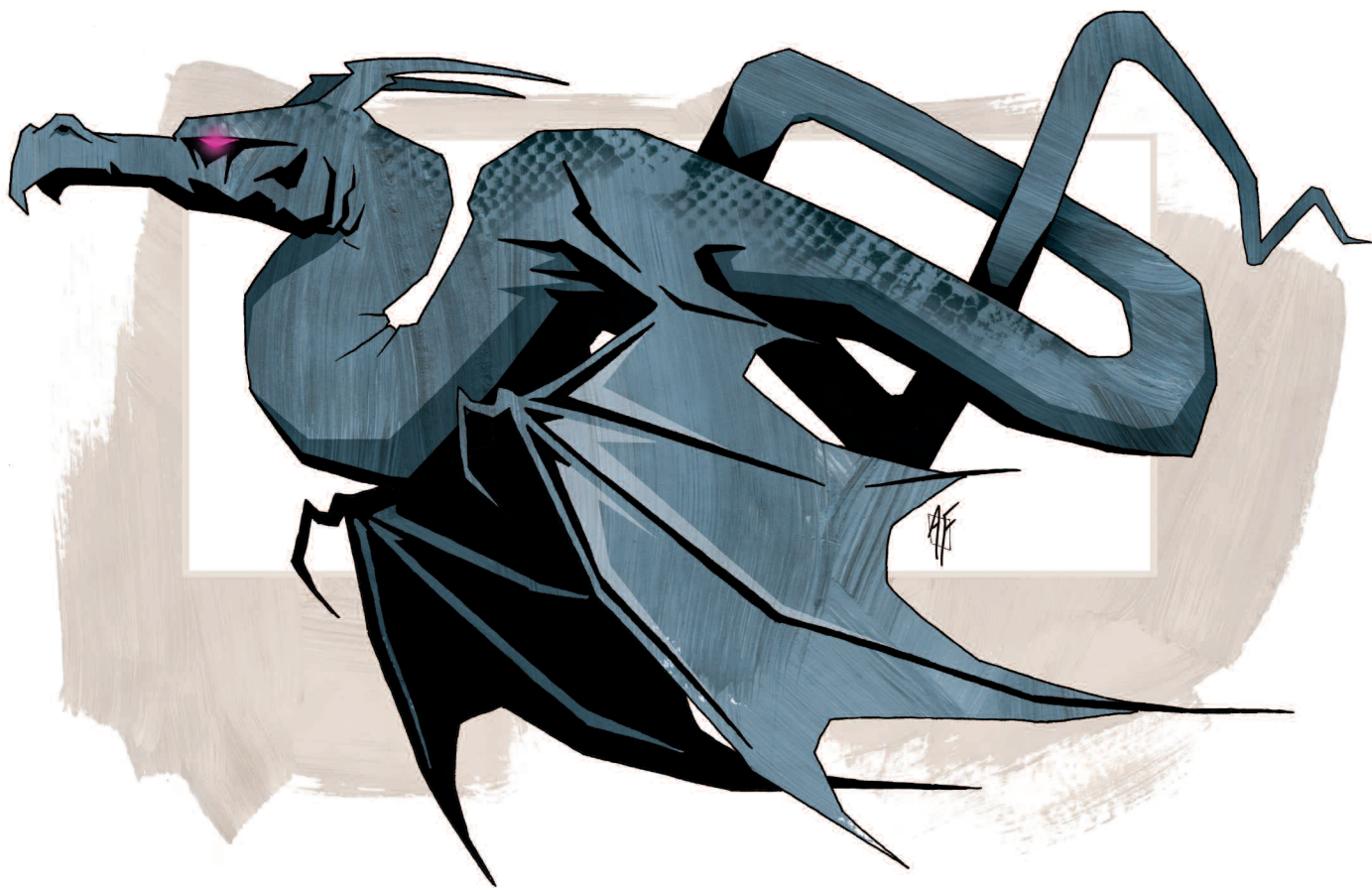
Dragons and Cultural Familiarity

In *GURPS* terms, dragons – at least, intelligent dragons with at least some grasp of social interaction – certainly have social skills such as *Savoir-Faire*. In some settings, dragons have *Savoir-Faire* at high levels automatically by possessing positive Status. However, anyone whose social interactions are all or mostly with other dragons considers “dragon society” as its “home culture,” with regard to the rules on p. CII189, and will suffer a -3 familiarity penalty when first trying to use certain skills in human company.

In particular, draconic etiquette is very different from the human version – it may be subtler, more blunt with direct threats of violence, or just interminably long-winded. Unless they can shapeshift into each other's forms, dragons and humans have a great deal of difficulty immersing themselves properly in each other's cultures to eliminate this penalty, and even shapeshifters may not bother. GMs can optionally charge an Unusual Background to allow dragon characters to be fully familiar with even nearby human cultures at the start of play.

Note that “Dragon *Savoir-Faire*” is not a new skill: it is still *Savoir-Faire*. The basic principles of respect, formality, and refinement are universal, and adapt with little effort. However, dragon society is unlike human society, and the finer points of politeness may well vary enormously.

Humans suffer the same penalty when dealing with dragons, and experience as many practical problems with the familiarization process. However, humans serving dragons can learn *Savoir-Faire* (Servant), gaining complete familiarity with draconic culture. Scholars studying dragons can become familiar with dragon Psychology, even though they do not socialize with their subject matter.



Rites of Tooth and Claw

In a campaign with a substantial dragon society, the formality enabling a group of proud, aggressive, predatory beings to live together likely will lead to ritualistic behavior. This is not (necessarily) a matter of religion; social behavior might be extremely formal, with many traditions marking life events. In campaign terms, anyone dealing with dragons will need to understand these rituals, and dragon PCs will be involved in these rites, either as guests or as participants.

Hatching is the first formal event of a dragon's life. If dragons are a rare or dying race, it can be an occasion of joy and optimism or nervous terror. If dragons are very numerous, it will be marked by overt or subtle attempts to discern the new creature's ability to survive in a competitive society.

Most animals are protective of their young, and highly possessive dragons might take this to extremes. Even if a female dragon allows strangers into her lair while eggs are present, she will closely watch for the duration of the visit. Less paranoid creatures may welcome trusted guests into the lair to watch the eggs open. *Naming* could be a matter of ceremony; this could be left to the parents, or might be a more public event. Dragons, like some human cultures, might grant a new name on entry to adulthood.

Most cultures have some kind of *Rites of Passage*, and dragons could carry this to interesting extremes, requiring young dragons to face a dangerous challenge. The crudest versions might involve the dragon driven out of his parents' lair and left to sink or swim on his own or pit young dragons in fights with no holds barred. Symbolic versions might require the dragon to lead a hunt, face a would-be dragon-slayer, destroy a small village without assistance, demonstrate magical aptitude under very difficult conditions, or win a complicated riddle game. There could be one great rite of passage, or several throughout a dragon's long life.

Draconic ideas about *Education* depend a great deal on the campaign's assumptions. In some legends, dragons are born fully capable of speech, with many refined instincts. However, games could start with helpless infants and even attend some kind of school. The traditional fondness for riddle games and verbal subtlety could play a large part in the education.

Mating is a great challenge for any dragon culture. For "barbarian" dragons, it involves either tricky negotiation or some level of violence (or both), especially if there is competition for a particular mate. A refined culture may impose numerous formalities, tests of worth – and the occasional tricky negotiation or brutal fight, reflecting the primal nature of the instincts.

Disputes between intelligent dragons will surely involve a vast amount of formality and politeness, even if they end in a fight to the death. Such smart and powerful creatures engage in a lot of verbal interplay, psychological testing, and attempted distraction first. Dragon society could include elders arbitrating and attempting to prevent actual bloodshed, but dragons with fiery tempers might have difficulty accepting outside judgments and may question a judge's neutrality. For that matter, human PCs attracting the attention of a group of dragons could be asked to act as neutral arbitrators in a dispute – a dangerous invitation which might not be open to refusal.

Lastly, the *Death* of a dragon can be a great and terrible event, especially since the species is long-lived and not prone to the degeneration as lesser beings. Other dragons could come from great distances to attend the deathbed or funeral, or a dying dragon could, like the elephant of myth, slip away to some "graveyard" to die. An old dragon might pass on great secrets (or the odd curse). A draconic funeral can be a strange event to human eyes, involving extended speeches, strange magics, or ritual cannibalism. In a politicized dragon society, deaths herald a mad scramble for power, status, or ownership of lands and hoards.

RELATING TO LESSER BEINGS

Dragons also deal with other, smaller, sapient beings – and it is hard for them not to think of these as lesser beings. Sheer size and physical power influence the judgment of the wisest and most even-tempered creature.

However, dragons do not always regard mortals as nothing but food or unimportant. After all, the use of intelligence may include the employment of small tools and minimum force instead of wasting greater efforts.

See Chapter 4 for more on relationships from the human point of view.

Human Slaves

Some dragons take humans as slaves. This is not very common. Most dragons have little use for cringing servants. Oriental dragons are more likely to keep large households, but these often consist of lesser dragons, spirits, ghosts, and so on.

Still, a mean-minded dragon of some power can demand service from mortals, and incinerate those who fail to perform well enough. A cleverer creature could employ a subtler system of staff management. However, dragons are rarely, for the most part, like humans – and the difference makes it difficult to handle humanity. A slave has uses, but also could learn the weak points in a dragon's defenses, and turn traitor when other humans start looking to cause trouble.

A dragon might also dominate an entire community of humans near its lair, exploiting them only when it needs workers, messengers, and other forced labor. Such a relationship represents anything from a reasonably equitable feudal bond, with the villagers putting up with the occasional moderate demand in exchange for effective protection, down to a system of terrified oppression, with quivering serfs never knowing when the master will crave the taste of human prey. Wanderers blundering into such a situation may not even discover who rules this sad, nervous community – either because they fear for their own lives or want to sacrifice the outsiders.



(and similar races), their communities and relationships. If it neglects this research, the dragon may find small groups attacking it or robbing from its lair, and then have difficult moments with dealing with the majority, who see these raiders as troublemaking renegades. Worse, the dragon may not realize that one human faction is manipulating it to make trouble for another.

Dragons and Wizards

The relationship between dragons – powerful supernatural beings, born (or hatched) to that state – and wizards – humans (or similar beings) who achieve supernatural power by skill and study – will be complex. Its exact nature will depend on the setting.

Wizards could be smart and versatile, and regard the dull if not downright bestial dragons as little more than animals, dangerous but easily defeated by the right spell. At the other end, quasi-divine dragons could disdain the petty hedge-magics of human wizardry, seeing wizards as no more significant than any other scurrying mortal.

In more complex cases, a dragon might see a wizard as an equal or near-equal, if he is ancient and powerful enough – especially if he can shapeshift. (Humans are small, soft beings, with limited physical abilities, and hence easily seen as inferior. One who can surpass those limitations is easier to respect.) Then again, wizards and dragons could compete for the same magical resources, leading to conflict – or they might ally and share information, if both see profit in cooperation. Even “inferior” wizards deal with dragons, running errands or acting as agents in exchange for potent dragon-lore.

(It is surely smarter than dealing with demons; dragons are not usually interested in human souls. But remember to check the small print on the contract, especially if demons can impersonate dragons.)

In some senses, dragons and wizards occupy the same ecological niche, though wizards usually go through fewer cows and virgins – unless their magic needs a lot of sacrifices . . . But perhaps, if dragons practice magic more consciously and ritualistically than humans realize, they demand these particular supplies because they need to perform sacrifices.

In some cases, dragons could be wizards, and vice versa. Magical aptitude could be the result of draconic ancestry, and a wizard in touch with his superhuman nature joins the ranks of dragonkind, spiritually and physically. Wizardry could also require no specific descent; temporary or permanent transformation into a suitably symbolic form could mark success in the quest for supernatural power.

Treaties and Alliances

Some dragons find it convenient or even necessary to form equal relationships with other races. Sometimes, this simply means the dragon, not particularly inclined to bullying, sees the lesser beings as occasionally of use, and remains distantly polite most of the time. In other cases, it recognizes human heroes, wizards, or armies as a genuine threat, and negotiates from a position of near equality.

If dragons have a reputation for fierce honor and basic rationality, such negotiations work well. A reputation as an unstable monster would force the dragon toward convincing the people of its good intentions – or to cover up its duplicity! For that matter, the dragon may not be fully informed about the nature of humans

Dragons can use their long lives and reptilian wisdom to understand humans. They also could consider such trivia beneath them. It might seem sensible to employ some humans as servants, rather than slaves – assuming they are not too miserly to pay decently, or too unworldly to select worthwhile staff. In time, such relationships could entangle a dragon thoroughly with the local human community.

If dragons sleep in their lairs for years at a time, a treaty with nearby humans can have odd aspects. If nothing else, when the dragon wakes, the mortals might have to dig through musty scrolls to determine the precise nature of the relationship. If they have forgotten it altogether, the dragon might have to remind them – assuming they stand still long enough to listen.

Tamed or Domesticated Dragons

Finally, the draconic relationship with smaller beings can be subservient. Perhaps they are bred, or magic or mystical pacts control them. Perhaps they are intelligent enough to understand how this works in their favor, from their point of view. An instinct-driven but intelligent dragon whose sole concerns are getting lots to eat, glittery stuff on which to sleep, and a bit of flattery, could define what passes for its pride purely in those terms, and not care if other beings regard it as a pet. Still, dragons – even the smaller types – are powerful predators. Their relationship with human masters or owners will always have a twist of danger.



Tamed and domesticated animals have a subtle distinction. Humans capture the former and persuade them to accept a place in human company. Humans bred the latter in captivity and brought the dragons up integrated into their own social systems. It is easier to imagine dragons as domesticated animals; capturing and breaking a dragon, even from young, would surely be a heroic feat. Still, raiding for eggs could be feasible, and some writers imagine brave humans bartering with wild draconic creatures for their service or that of their young.

Often it is more realistic to domesticate pack or herd animals (such as cattle or dogs) because they see trainers as pack or herd leaders. Dragons do not usually live in flocks, but if they do, humans might be able to pull this trick. On the other hand, the link can be a mystical bond, whether between noble human riders and the lords of the skies, or between grim black-armored warriors and beasts of hellfire. Whatever the relationship actually is, humans encountering “tamed” dragons would do well not to get it wrong.

Other Interactions

By their nature, Dragons are often the center of any story in which they appear. Nonetheless, if other intelligent beings occupy the same world, the dragons and those other species will interact, however simple or distant the interaction. For example, consider some of the standard beings found in fantasy RPGs:

Dwarves have an especially *bad* relationship with dragons. In simple, modern terms, they compete for gold and cave space. This rivalry does appear, in subtler forms, in older tales; see the discussion of Fafnir on p. 12, and remember the plot of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

Elves do not meet dragons very often in stories, but could have a very guarded standoff. Intelligent and dignified dragons, if not violently malevolent, could acknowledge the comparable experience and wisdom of the elvish race, without believing individual elves were worthy of respect. The elves might consider dragons rather crass, and tell ancient tales of dragon violence, while acknowledging not just the dragons' power, but also their sinister beauty. In other cases, elves might avoid dragons, politely share the role of embodying supernatural power with them, or even tame them.

Orcs and other “goblin” races are usually greedy and selfish, and if not especially smart, at least cunning, with a great deal of respect for power. An orc might dream of plundering a dragon's hoard, but strictly in the dragon's absence. More heroic races slay dragons; an orc ordered to undertake the task by a dark lord would want to be part of a large army.

Intelligent *Undead* do not interact with dragons, although a greedy wyrm could plunder a tomb, swatting away its guardians – or finding some way to lift their strange curses. There is a stylistic clash between dragons, as symbols of raw living power, however malevolent, and the undead, as symbols of negation. They can appear in the same worlds and even the same tales, but rarely in the same scenes, unless the story's creator can handle the contrast.

Genre Crossovers

As dragons so often appear in myths and legends, their campaigns tend towards the mythic mode and high fantasy. However dragons also could be a semi-magical species in a “low fantasy” setting, an exotic alien race, spirits or dreams

given fleshly bodies, or cunning immortals that take human forms – and can cross over into other genres. The following are some of the options, with reference to appropriate *GURPS* sourcebooks.

Historical Fantasy

Many draconic legends date to medieval times or earlier, which makes a quasi-historical medieval fantasy campaign a good setting for dragons. They reflect the beliefs and fears of real peoples who cowered in stone churches and listened eagerly to tales of knights and monsters – as long as plenty of blood was involved. But what of the dragons' point of view, so sadly underrepresented in human writings?

GURPS Vikings, **GURPS Middle Ages 1**, **GURPS Russia**, and to a lesser extent, **GURPS Arabian Nights** are all relevant references here. At the other end of the Eurasian landmass, **GURPS China** and **GURPS Japan** cover the appropriate historical cultures for the involvement of Oriental dragons.

In Nomine

In the canonical *In Nomine*/**GURPS In Nomine** setting, dragons existed as ethereal spirits – creatures of the Marches – who were sometimes able to manifest in the material world. However, Uriel's Purity Crusade wiped them out entirely. Since then, although dragon forms can be called into existence in dreams, and other ethereal spirits can temporarily adopt the shapes of dragons, any spirit whose nature, and hence normal form, becomes too dragon-like is quickly obliterated. *Something* prohibits dragons from returning – although no one seems to know what. See the *In Nomine Ethereal Player's Guide* for more details.

Given the association of Western wyrms with evil, Hell probably sought to exploit and inspire the rampages of material dragons when they existed. A Demon of Dragons, in service to Belial, would be weak, spending his time doing odd jobs in the Marches, seeking to tap a few points of Essence from mortal dreams of dragons.

The Purity Crusade wiped out Oriental dragons, too. However, some might *just* have managed to shift their essential image to something nondraconic, as a survival strategy. For all its scale, breadth, and number of worshipers, the Chinese pantheon took a very bad mauling from the Purity Crusade. Crippled by its inflexibility and a legalistic tradition that meant most human worship was a matter of form instead of devout (Essence-rich) belief, the draconic culture was subsequently battered by Western missionaries and Communist atheism. The Japanese *kami* (the “August Prosperity Collective”), conversely, hung on strongly, and now have a dark bargain with Nybbas, Demon Prince of the Media – but the *tatsu* are still gone.



angry dragon. Dragons are not subtle (although they can be, at times) and do not need subtlety to be frightening. A powerful, magical dragon could represent Fear of the Universe; it wields cosmic levels of power, and does not care about human concerns. At the other end of the scale, a crawling wyrm spewing fumes, withering plants, sickening livestock, and choking heroes could be the Fear of Disease incarnate. In each case, a dragon works best in an essentially fantastic setting where it will not be too excessive for the players to take seriously.

Horror dragons work in many ways, although usually as vast ravening monsters, frightening because they kill anyone they choose and nothing stops them, or secretive creatures of inhuman malice and cunning, with serious physical power as well. In either case, evil dragons personify everything that is greedy, cruel, and destructive. They take roles of dark and hungry gods, demanding human sacrifice and incinerating innocent children. They wield vast insidious powers from behind the scenes – sucking the souls out of people's bodies, enslaving entire populations, and shapeshifting to walk among humanity, picking out future victims with malicious glee. They may not even have physical forms, at least at first; a dragon's spirit could slowly take over a town, preparing to take shape after corrupting enough people with its influence.

In a dark fantasy world, monsters can recruit cults of servants and minions. Magic-using dragons can practice necromancy, destroying villages and then raising armies of corpses. Their physical appearance alone may cause intruders to flee or lose their wits.

Player character dragons could be evil themselves, or struggle with the temptations of power (whether internal or manifested as demons), or be threatened by even more powerful entities . . . such as armies of well-equipped men determined to annihilate the entire species!

GURPS Cabal describes one dark fantasy setting featuring dragons; however, the last known dragon in that setting died in 1531. Still, some formidable dragons live in the Inner Realms – although they can be either very nervous or very aggressive, since humans looking for them are often after their blood. GMs can use several of the more powerful types described in this book, Western or Oriental, for such encounters, as seems appropriate. In other wildly illuminated games (with **GURPS Illuminati** as a starting point), dragons may walk among men, taking human form, building up their hidden empires over centuries, controlling multinational corporations, seats on the UN, and even the convenience food store down the road. Look everywhere for the sign of the wyrm!

Urban Fantasy

“Urban fantasy” settings can be broadly defined as those that take the modern world, more or less, with its cities and technology – and add a fantasy twist. Dragons can feature in this.

Dark Dragons

Dragons may be very familiar to modern readers as complex and rational creatures, but in many of the original tales, they embodied pure terror and evil. Therefore, **GURPS Horror** is a plausible reference for games involving dragons.

In the terms presented there, dragons primarily represent Fear of Nature. Nothing is redder in tooth and claw than an

Dragons and Supers

Dragons are a little oversized and magical for the grittier, low-key sorts of superhero stories (such as the “baseline” for *GURPS I.S.T.*), but in more fantastical sorts of setting, where magic works and mythical gods walk the modern world, they definitely have their place. In the comics, they tend either to be very large and to devastate modern cities in the giant monster movie tradition, or to play their traditional mythic roles in magical “otherworlds.” There is also a comic-book tradition of “scientifically” created draconic beings, robots, and similar.

For that matter, a shapeshifting dragon, descended from a long line of dragons living quietly in human society or newly come to Earth from elsewhere, could make either a good addition to a team, or a fearful supervillain. Who would have guessed Dr. Ouroboros’s secret, and who would not quake in fear of Dragon Lady and her Black Claw minions?

In themselves, most dragons are serious opposition for one or two heroes, but perhaps susceptible to a competent team – but a lot depends on GM decisions. Anyone designing a dragon to take on a PC team should turn the dials on the traditional draconic features up to 11, in accordance with the best four-color traditions.

Dragons surviving in modern society are likely, again, to be shapeshifters. They might belong to an otherworld that only rarely contacts our own, or lair in strange dimensional caverns that open out behind innocent cupboard doors or arboreal archways. Secret dragons may have highly developed societies, adapting well to the modern age. Conversely, in the magic-laden world of *GURPS Technomancer*, dragons are often bred for military service, where their respectable but not overwhelming physical powers are useful as long as their occasional atavistic impulses are kept under control; some become respected citizens after completing their tours of duty.

Steampunk

Dragons may seem too grossly fantastical for steampunk games, even those featuring supernatural forces. However, this genre’s many strands can draw upon fantasy and children’s stories of the appropriate period – some of which definitely feature dragons. And something about the classic dragon image, with those scales of iron and breath of flame, seems symbolically steam age.

Whimsical games, and those drawing on children’s stories, can use the slightly smaller dragons, while those tending towards dark fantasy can feature powerful dragons played as cunning and ferocious monsters. “Lost world” stories – an appropriate period subgenre – can also feature dinosaurs, some a notch or two smarter and weirder than would be strictly realistic. For a slightly whimsical but distinctly steampunk dragon, see “Professor Friedl’s Mechanical Dragon” (p. 52).

A truly steampunk dragon – a monster of the Age of Steam – could be a glorious fusion of mechanical engineering and esoteric technologies. Its gleaming metallic and wooden fittings rumble and hum as internal boilers and generators work to capacity, clouds of superheated steam adding to its fearsome demeanor . . .

Castle Falkenstein

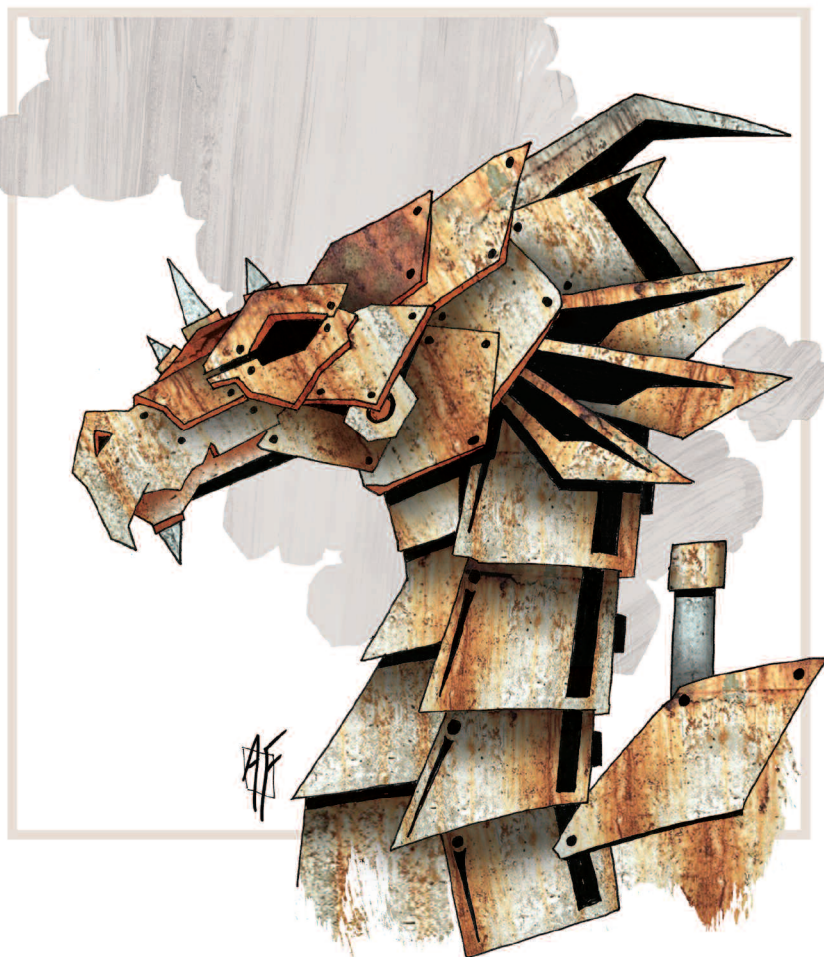
Castle Falkenstein, as published by R. Talsorian Games and adapted as a *GURPS* worldbook, is a fantasy-steampunk setting featuring dragons (among many other things). These dinosaur-descended sapient creatures have considerable magical powers, notably (but not only) shapeshifting and flame attacks. They also boast impressive racial memories, which lead them to accumulate collections of rare items associated with their own and their ancestors’ lives.

Ranked aristocrats by courtesy, they occasionally grace high society while pursuing amusement or their personal concerns. Most commonly, they search among humans for a suitable mate. Some of them also cautiously ally with the heroes of the setting. See *GURPS Castle Falkenstein* (or the original game) for details.

But this could be any good high-steampunk machine, which may say something about dragons or something about steampunk.

Science Fiction

While dragons are theoretically creatures of fantasy instead of cool rationality, the sheer power and appeal of the image has caused their appearance in science fiction, either in thin disguise or openly. Leaving aside those SF monsters that perpetuate the horrific spirit of the dragon myth (p. 46), these dragons are often artificial constructs of one sort or another. Other draconic creatures may be aliens, whether sapient or animalistic, who have been labeled by humans.



A society of space-faring “dragons” could fit a space opera game. Perhaps their native planet has low gravity (enabling large creatures to fly) and a very energetic ecology (assisting the flight and permitting the evolution of fiery breath weapons). A race of sapient dragons, with any technology, must develop some way to manipulate tools and record discoveries. If claws make this too tricky, the dragons could have psionic powers – either telekinetic abilities to work themselves, or telepathic control of servant races. Or someone could genetically engineer them, perhaps even with extraordinary metabolisms and innate powers to fly through deep space; see below for more on this.

In other “soft SF” settings, dragons might be the interdimensional projections of an alien species. Perhaps they first came to Earth in ancient times, established bases in the Near East, and were worshipped as gods. If they have psionic powers or sufficiently advanced technology, the draconic reputation for magical talent would soon follow.

Mechanical Dragons

Given the myth’s appeal, it is inevitable that people build machines in dragon form. The trouble and expense of carrying this idea through would require a strong justification.

Dragon-like robots developed for underground work could negotiate winding tunnels with their articulated structures, and dig with titanium claws or plasma “breath.” Or they could be fearsome armored weapons; the configuration would be a little eccentric, but not entirely pointless. A dragon-like war robot or vehicle makes an effective psychological weapon, or an appealing toy for an eccentric despot; something similar could infiltrate an alien or technologically regressed world. After all, a local reporting strange machines may cause trouble for the infiltrators; one reporting dragons will be written off as a lunatic or a joker. Also, a large robot built by a reptilian race might resemble a dragon in the same way that robots imagined by humans resemble humans. Spaceships with broad radiator wings or solar panels might be sculpted into something like dragon form, if only as a cosmetic whim.

In *GURPS Vehicles* and *Robots* terms, a “dragon-tank” or “robodragon” will need, at minimum, a leg or flexibody drivetrain; if it is specifically designed to pass as a living thing, use the rules for “Sculpted” vehicles in *GURPS Vehicles Expansion I* (pp. VXi25-26), or those for “biomorphics” in *GURPS*

Robots. It may also fly, using either an ornithopter drivetrain or a combination of hidden contragrav generators and reactionless thrusters plus more or less cosmetic wings. Weapons such as a flamethrower (liquid projector) or flamer in the “head” (a turret for vehicle design purposes, of course) would help complete the effect. If the machine behaves like a mythical dragon in every way, it will also need a carnivore bioconverter power plant.

The Genetically Engineered Dragon

Hard SF also offers the possibility of genetically engineered dragons, from experiments with reptilian base material. If they cannot breathe flame, they might be able to spit poison (or to operate simple flamethrowers). Skull capacity and modified metabolism permitting, their intelligence could be raised to human levels. Flight would be hard to arrange, at least on Earth, but might be possible in low-gravity space colonies or on smaller planets.

Why would such creatures be created, other than as novelties? Perhaps they could be intimidating guard-beasts, or future societies might enjoy watching armored soldiers or robots hunt dragons in a mock-Arthurian reenactment. Just as mechanical dragons may appeal to some inventors, genetic engineers may dream of creating this “ultimate life form.” However, this will require a lot of skill, some very advanced biotechnology, and probably a number of design compromises.

A gigantic, fire-breathing creature, capable of operating actively (let alone flying) under anything like Earth-normal conditions, has many problems with the laws of physics. Of course, the creator might cheat, giving the dragon implanted cybernetic features – possibly biotechnological, possibly simply mechanical – such as incendiary weapons or contragrav systems.

Following the guidelines in *GURPS Bio-Tech*, this creation needs the radical anatomical and structural modifications available at TL10, and entirely new organs requiring TL11. Alternatively, the task involves some exotic transplants, also requiring technology around TL9-11. A fully effective dragon – as good as biological technology will offer, at least – could require full TL12 techniques, although working with a nonsapient subject allows use of experimental techniques one TL early. On the other hand, creating a giant fire-breathing monster attracts the attention of licensing bodies and ethics boards, making things that much harder.



HATCHING
A DRAGON

Trying to create PC or NPC dragons sometimes amounts to a monstrous task, but not one that requires a hero. This chapter includes many different racial templates and guidelines for GMs or players to choose between when creating their dragon. The details of specific draconic traits – armor, weapons, and attacks – are included in Chapter 4.



*In fury, a Serpent wondrous, among the constellations of Urizen.
A crest of fire rose on his forehead, red as the carbuncle;
Beneath, down to his eyelids, scales of pearl; then gold and silver,
Immingled with the ruby, overspread his visage; down
His furious neck, writhing contortive in dire budding pains,
The scaly armour shot out. Stubborn, down his back and bosom,
The emerald, onyx, sapphire, jasper, beryl, amethyst,
Strove in terrific emulation which should gain a place
Upon the mighty fiend.*

– William Blake, *The Four Zoas*

DRAGON TEMPLATES



These suggestions primarily focus on intelligent dragons and similar creatures, as these make the most interesting fully developed NPCs (as opposed to “one fight” monsters), or PCs in games with appropriate starting point levels. Skills that come free with powers such as Flight or breath attacks are not listed (flight and breath attacks are in the next chapter, see p. 70); individual creatures may nonetheless choose to buy them up from the default (usually equal to DX).

Most of the templates have notes regarding variant species and similar types from various sources. See *Lenses: Personalities, Reputations, and Roles* for ways to modify them to fit particular conceptions of a dragon’s role or nature.

Peripheral Vision

Most of these templates do not have Peripheral Vision, so that dragons have senses comparable to those of mammalian

predators (or human beings). If they prefer, GMs can add this advantage to any template to represent the horse-like or crocodilian heads depicted in some art.

Lifespans

“True” dragons are extremely long-lived – as close to unaging as makes no difference, although they may grow and change over time. The lifespans of other similar species are undefined, although some wyrms grow frighteningly quickly in stories. The Early Maturation, Extended Lifespan, and Unaging advantages were assigned to these templates on a basis of guesswork, consistency with past *GURPS* publications, and hints from legend. GMs are welcome to modify them.

Crawling Wurm

402 points

This template represents perhaps the least charismatic of “dragons.” A limbless and wingless monster, the crawling wurm is a gigantic snake with a somewhat dragonish look and a high resistance to damage. This particular version is around 1,500 lbs. and 6 hexes in size.

Crawling wyrms are violent, predatory animals instead of intelligent beings. The template assumes a limited intellect, and the Animalistic lens (p. 64) will probably be appropriate. Hence, crawling wyrms make unlikely PCs, although they might represent unusual Allies for players in weirder high-points games.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +30 (No Manipulators) [108]; DX +2 [20]; IQ -5 [-40]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Acute Hearing +1 [2]; Acute Taste and Smell +3 [6]; Alertness +6 [30]; DR 6 [18]; Early Maturation 1 [5]; Extra Hit Points +30 [150]; Flexibility [15]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; Night Vision [10]; PD 3 [75]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Striker (Tail, Reach 3) [20]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (HT at bottom of range, 2 HT at top) [3].

Disadvantages: Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Mute [-25]; No Manipulators [-50].

Variations

Constrictors: Many wyrms wrap themselves round prey to crush it to death. Add Constriction Attack [15].

Swimmers: Some wyrms are happy in water. Add Amphibious [10], and possibly Breath-Holding [2/level] or even Gills [10].

Breath Weapons or Poison: Some wyrms have breath weapons. Poisonous or pestilential breath is more common than fire breathing, and usually represents a monstrous threat instead of a symbol of regal power. Others simply have a venomous bite. Plausible options for a creature of this size might be Venom (1 level, Contact Agent +70%, Cloud of Mist +100%. Blood Also Poisonous +30%) [45] representing choking breath and deadly blood, Venom (2 levels, poisonous) [30] representing a bite, or Breathe Fire (2d, 6 hex range, Costs 4 Fatigue -20%) [21]. These could be scaled up or down for larger or smaller creatures. (p. 74).

A wurm that spreads devastation across a farming district, add Magery 1 (Plant College Only) [10], and Blight-20 as an innate spell [32]. A malevolent wurm with this power will occasionally slither forth at night and spend a few minutes and a few

Detailing Dragons as Characters

Dragons are powerful. Serious dragon PCs require at least 600 points (enough for an adolescent Western dragon or a kioh-lung), and could easily reach far higher totals. An offbeat campaign might have dragon PCs built on as little as 200 points – sufficient for a Western hatchling or a Chinese kiao. NPC dragons can also have fully detailed personalities. This is most appropriate when the creature becomes a major figure, or when unusual draconic powers need detailing.

Size and Age

A dragon’s exact size may be important in play. Each template gives an approximate range, but gamers may tinker with these. Realistically, following reptilian growth patterns, a living dragon can expect to attain 2/3 of its maximum possible size when it reaches adulthood. While the maximum size of a species represents what is attainable by the oldest, most powerful specimens.

How long a dragon takes to reach maturity varies wildly, from Chinese dragons spending their first 500 years as water snakes, to English wyrms growing from tiny wrigglers into huge monsters in only 20. However, dragons are creatures of myth, and highly individualistic to boot. GMs can permit a fair amount of variation for the sake of style. Of course, stronger dragons should be bigger than weaker ones, but this varies – compact, muscular creatures may possess more power than lazy specimens that spend too much time asleep on their hoards.

Size Disadvantages

GURPS disadvantages such as Overweight, Fat, Skinny, or Gigantism are generally inappropriate for dragons, if only because calculating an appropriate “base” weight and then deriving encumbrance and other details from it proves tricky. Furthermore, many of these overlap the common racial disadvantage of Inconvenient Size. (Likewise, Dwarfism would be inappropriate, although a “dwarf” dragon of a 2-3 hex species might buy off Inconvenient Size and then take other disadvantages.) GMs can permit disadvantages that genuinely cause problems in proportion to their point value (especially if the results are amusing), but should be cautious in such cases.

points of fatigue blighting a field or two, and then use its breath weapon or poison on any available farm animals.

Scavengers: Most draconic monsters are fussy eaters, sometimes existing on a diet solely of tender maidens, but the earthy nature of wyrms may imply a less fastidious attitude. In this case, add Cast Iron Stomach [15].

Creature of Venom: Being symbols of corruption and pollution, wyrms might have Immunity to Poison [15]. This is not standard, however – cunning slayers have used poison against dragons or wyrms.

Lifespan: The lifespan of wyrms seems to vary from tale to tale, if estimated at all, but little evidence supports a shorter lifespan than human beings. Some survive for decades or even centuries, making Extended Lifespan [5/level] or Unaging [15] appropriate. The former can also combine with extra levels of Early Maturation.

Small Wurm: Only around 900 lbs. and 4 hexes in size. Change ST to +15 [90], Extra Hit Points to +10 [50], Striker to reach 1 [10], and Increased Life Support to 1 level [-10]. 284 points.

Giant Wurm: A huge creature, around 1.5 tons and 12 hexes. Change ST to +50 [114] and Extra Hit Points to +55 [275], replace Sharp Teeth with Fangs [10], and change the Striker to reach 4 [25]. 543 points.

Lindorm: This creature of European myth is similar to a wurm, but has two legs. Use any version of the crawling wurm, but replace No Manipulators with No Fine Manipulators [-30] and Short Arms [-10] (actually representing *legs* with reach C if used for kicking), increasing the package cost by 10 points. The lindorm might also have some level of Enhanced Move (Running).

Gargouille: Use the Giant Wurm template for this French river monster (p. 16), adding Gills [10], Splash (5d, 15 hexes, 5 yard Cone +100%) [88], Magery 1 (Water Elemental College Only) [10], and Waves-25 as an innate spell [42] (p. G34; as a “special effect,” the waves that this produces spill forth from the creature’s open mouth). Because of its destructive but undirected behavior, and its eventual defeat by the prayers of a saint, Gargouille should take the Animalistic and Diabolical lenses (pp. 64-66).

*But the worm got fat an’ grewed an’
growed,*

*An’ grewed an aaful suze;
He’d greet big teeth, a greet big gob,
An’ greet big goggle eyes.*

*– C.M. Leumane,
“The Lambton Worm”*

The Lambton Wurm: For this creature out of English folklore, use the Crawling Wurm template, change IQ to -7 [-60], and add Constriction Attack [15], Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Neck, or Vitals) [15], Magery 1 (Plant College Only) [10], Regeneration (1 HT/turn) [100], Wither Plant-20 as an innate spell [32], Hideous Appearance [-20], Odious Personal Habits (devastating the countryside and eating people if not given regular supplies of milk) [-15], the quirk “Likes milk in large quantities” [-1], and the Animalistic lens (p. 64).

The Lambton Wurm allegedly coiled nine or 10 times around a small hill, but as it was an even match for a single well-equipped fighter, this may be poetic license. As a special effect, its “spell” takes the form of breath that slays plants on contact. The product of someone’s disrespectful behavior towards the church, it qualifies for the Diabolical lens (p. 66). But as it was defeated by an essentially prosaic tactic (although on the advice of a witch), this is optional. Its regeneration was fast enough to enable it even to rejoin severed segments even if cut apart (represented by its Injury Tolerance), but it was eventually slain by a hero in blade-covered armor (p. 99), who provoked it to attempt to crush him while he was standing in a river. This meant that it suffered enough damage to overcome its regenerative abilities, while the current scattered its severed body parts.

Winged Serpents

A giant winged serpent is a crawling wurm with the addition of Flight (Winged Flight, -25%) [30] and the deletion of Horizontal (this posture being normal for flying creatures). Some could have a couple levels of Enhanced Move (Flight), while others could suffer the Cannot Hover limitation. Other options discussed for the wurm may also apply.

Wyvern

460 points

The name “wyvern” comes from the archaic “wyver,” which seems originally to have meant a viper or serpent. In fact, this creature seems to have been virtually unknown outside heraldry, until it showed up in modern fantasy stories and games whose writers presumably saw the heraldic pictures and liked the image.

This template is based on the entry in the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*, p. FB94, which is consistent with most accounts. The wyvern has two legs, wings, and a long, barbed tail. It has no breath weapon, but its tail carries a dangerous poison. With its wings and long, slender body, a wyvern is a 10-hex creature, but light (800-1,000 lbs.). It is furiously fast in the air, but clumsy on the ground. Its standard tactic is to strike with its tail from above, then carry off dead or unconscious victims to devour at leisure. It is also clever enough to slam heavily armored foes to remove them from the fight for a while.

The wyvern is a smart animal; the Animalistic lens on p. 64 should probably be added to the package. Thus, like crawling wyrms, wyverns are poor candidates for use as PCs. However, with its IQ bought up and some disadvantages bought off, a wyvern might be suitable as a weird PC, or at least as an Ally. In an all-dragon campaign, wyvern Allies might be regarded as pets or “attack dogs.”

Attribute Modifiers: ST +15 [150]; DX +4 [45]; IQ -4 [-30]; HT +4 [45].

Advantages: Alertness +7 [35]; Blunt Claws [15]; DR 3 [9]; Extra Hit Points +13 [65]; Flight (Winged Flight, -25%) [30]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Increased Speed +3 (Only while Flying, -30%) [53]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; PD 2 [50]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Spear (reach 2) [35]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (HT at bottom of range, 2 HT at top) [3]; Venom (poisonous, level 2, delivered by spear) [30].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Mute [-25]; Reduced Move (Running) -4 [-20]; Restricted Manipulators [-15]; Short Arms [-10].

Variations

Smaller Wyverns: Some fictional wyverns are rather smaller than this. For a smaller or immature (but still formidable) version of around 400 lbs and 5 hexes, reduce ST to +8 [90], Extra Hit Points to +4 [20], DR to 2 [6], PD to 1 [25], the Spear to reach 1 [30], Venom to 1 level [15], and Increased Life Support to 1 level [-10]. *317 points.*

Larger Wyverns: Much larger wyverns might also appear, with increased ST and Hit Points, a hex or two greater reach to the tail sting, and more levels of Venom.

Shooting Quills: Some accounts suggest that wyverns shoot poisoned quills from their tails. These do no significant physical damage, but can penetrate up to DR 1 armor (plus toughness) to deliver the creature's poison. To represent this, add the following enhancements to the template's Venom advantage: Contact Agent (+70%; the use of quills instead of actual skin contact is a special effect), Ranged (+35%), and Increased Range 1 (+5%). This increases the template cost by 33 points (17 for a smaller wyvern).

Professor Friedl's Mechanical Dragon

A fondness for dragons often leads to weirdness. Professor Friedl's Dragon is a steam-powered contraption, created at TL(5+1) (see *GURPS Steampunk*). It has a large body mounted on four legs, and a turret (the dragon's head) with 360-degree rotation. It also has small wings and a tail, which are strictly decorative. A primitive (TL5) flamethrower is installed in the head. Cumbersome and limited electromechanical devices provide the machine's senses, which is unfortunate given how fast it charges.

The design uses a heavy standard TL5 frame and TL5 standard metal armor. The dragon's advanced miniature Babbage engine can obey spoken commands, requiring an anachronistic robotic structure (at double cost). This analytical engine has IQ 5 and DX 9. Although it was not really built as a war machine – the flamethrower mostly just helps it look the part – the dragon could be dangerous in a fight, or if it runs amok.

Subassemblies: Body +2, 4 Legs +0, Turret [T:Body] +0.

Powertrain: 20.2-kW sextuple-expansion steam engine w/20 kW leg drivetrain.

Fuel: 3.64 cf coal bunker.

Armor

All: 3/10

Weaponry

Light Flamethrower [Tur:F] (12 shots)

Equipment

Body: Analytical Miniengine (Automaton, Genius, Mechanical: Complexity 2, IQ 5, DX 9, 0.2 kW).

Turret: Basic Sensors (Color Blind, Low Res Vision, Low-Res Hearing, No Smell/Taste).

Statistics

Size: 6'x2.5'x7' **Payload:** 218 lbs **Lwt:** 3.3 tons

Volume: 59.34 cf **Maint:** 54 hours **Price:** \$138,972.51*

HT: 11

HP: 187 **Tur:** 53 **Legs:** 54 each
gSpeed: 30 **gAccel:** 10 **gDecel:** 20
gMR: 1 **gSR:** 2

* Price is \$6,948.63 or £1,389.73 in period currency (pp. STM48-49 and p. STM72).

The dragon's flamethrower has Malf 16, Damage 2d, SS 10, Acc 5, 1/2D 25, Max 35, RoF 1. See pp. VE118-121 for detailed rules. The dragon has low ground pressure, speed 24 off road.

The cost of this design includes fuel for the engine and flamethrower, but not the cost of "software" for the analytical engine. Being complexity 2, this can run programs that give it effective skills Driving (Robot Dragon)-8 and Gunner (Flamethrower)-8, but it can not run these and its main speech recognition/control program simultaneously. It will usually stop moving to fire.

Awakening the Dragon

In an especially cinematic game, the Babbage Engine controlling Professor Friedl's Dragon may somehow "awaken" (p. STM86). The following character sheet models the result of this, turning the Mechanical Dragon into a free-willed character; the awakening process may raise the analytical engine's complexity by 1, and raises its IQ.

Awakened Dragon

1,145 points

ST 374 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [208]; **DX** 9 [-10]; **IQ** 8 [-15]; **HT** 11/183 [870].

Advantages: Absolute Timing [5]; DR 10 [30]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Eidetic Memory 2 [60]; Extra Legs (4 legs) [5]; Flamethrower (see below) [42]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Lightning Calculator [5]; Mathematical Ability [10]; PD 3 [75]; Temperature Tolerance 5 (2x HT at bottom of range, 3x HT at top) [5].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Farsighted) [-25]; Color Blindness [-10]; Dead Broke [-25]; Hard of Hearing [-10]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Mute [-25]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; No Natural Healing [-20]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10].

Following *GURPS Robots*, p. RO50, divide this robot's total point cost by 5 because of its obviously mechanical appearance – not considering its social disadvantages (Dead Broke and Social Stigma). This reduces its cost to 201 points.

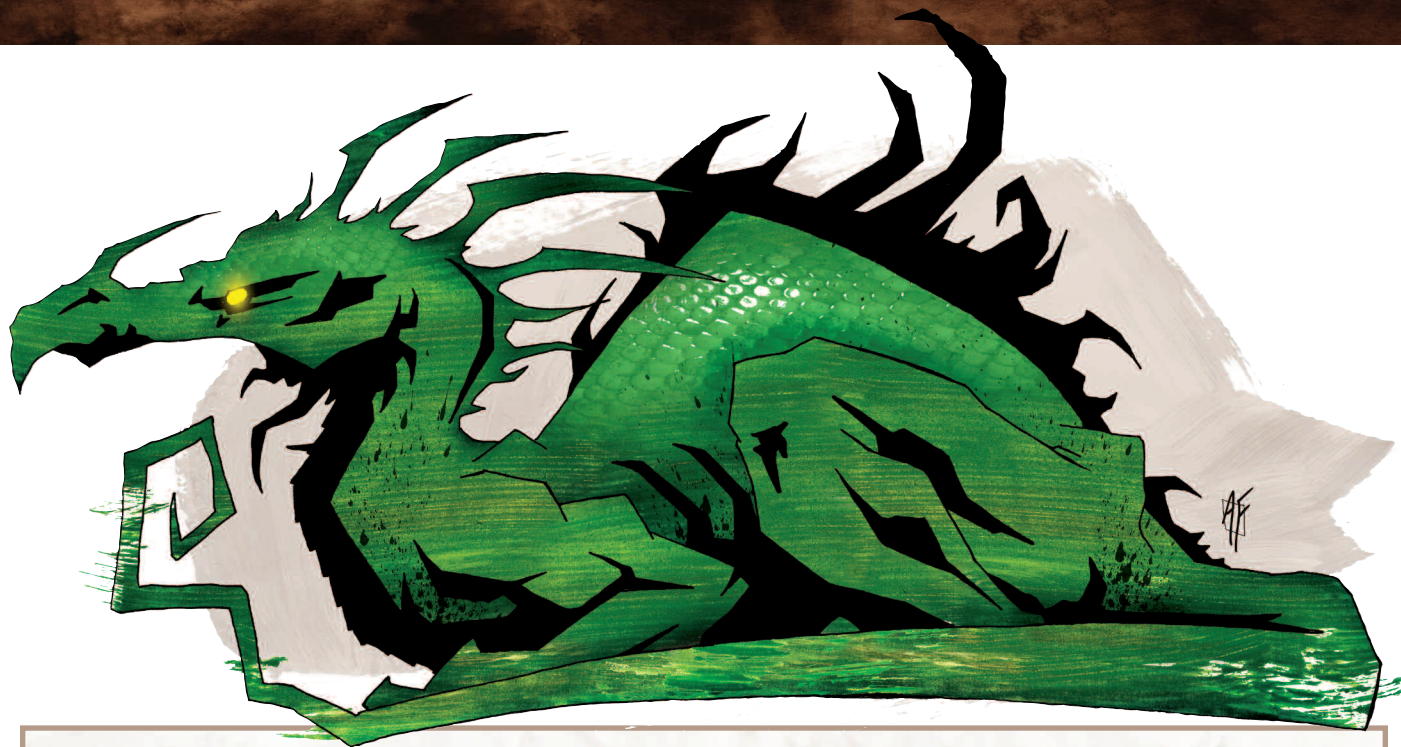
ST was calculated using rules from *GURPS Mecha* (p. ME91). The flamethrower has stats as above; its point cost was calculated based on 2 levels of the Fireball superpower (p. SU60), with the enhancements Accuracy (p. SU49: +40%), Enduring (p. 74: 200%), and Increased Range (p. 81: +10%), which give close enough statistic values. The skill the dragon uses when attacking with this is Physical/Easy – effectively Guns (Flamethrower) – defaulting to DX for this innate attack.

An "awakened" machine surely has, or quickly develops, mental disadvantages and quirks (and might learn some skills). Details vary with the campaign style; a dangerous (if confused) menace could have Berserk and Paranoia, a "realistic" newly awakened machine might

have Clueless and No Sense of Humor, while a more whimsical "children's story" sort of game calls for Oblivious and Sense of Duty.

The Mute disadvantage could be eliminated by installing a speech synthesizer (*GURPS Steam-Tech*, p. STE67), adding 30 pounds to the weight. Upgrading the senses would be a long-term project.





Hit Locations

If a game uses the full hit location system in combat, it may need a random location table for some unusual combatants. *GURPS Compendium II* has a very detailed treatment for humans and a basic table for ordinary quadrupeds (pp. CII53-55). The following table covers an assortment of draconic monsters, and other, similarly shaped creatures. (A winged lindorm can use the same column as

a wyvern; the winged wurm column can also be used for amphipteres and other winged snakes, and so on.) The “Wingless Dragon” represents a four-legged creature, usually very long and with short legs.

In each column, the numbers in parentheses are the penalty to hit this location with an aimed attack.

Hit Location Table

Roll (3d)	Wurm	Winged Wurm	Lindorm	Wyvern	Wingless Dragon	Firedrake
3-4	Brain (-7)	Brain (-7)	Brain (-7)	Brain (-7)	Brain (-7)	Brain (-7)
5	Head (-5)	Head (-5)	Head (-5)	Head (-5)	Head (-5)	Head (-5)
6	Torso (0)	Wing (-1)	Foot/paw (-4)	Foot/paw (-4)	Hind foot/hind paw (-5)	Hind foot/hind paw (-5)
7	Torso (0)	Wing (-1)	Leg (-3)	Leg (-2)	Hind leg (-4)	Hind leg (-3)
8-9	Torso (0)	Wing (-1)	Torso (0)	Wing (-1)	Torso (0)	Wing (-1)
10-12	Torso (0)	Torso (0)	Torso (0)	Torso (0)	Torso (0)	Torso (0)
13	Tail (-1)	Torso (0)	Tail (-1)	Torso (0)	Foreleg (0)	Foreleg (0)
14	Tail (-1)	Tail (-1)	Tail (-1)	Tail (-2)	Forefoot/forepaw (-5)	Forefoot/forepaw (-5)
15-16	Tail (-1)	Tail (-1)	Tail (-1)	Tail (-2)	Tail (-2)	Tail (-2)
17-18	Vital organs (-3)	Vital organs (-3)	Vital organs (-3)	Vital organs (-3)	Vital organs (-3)	Vital organs (-3)

Aimed Attacks from Behind or Above: If attacking any of these creatures (except a wyvern) from behind, or a wyvern from behind in the air, brain/head attacks are at an additional -2, and tail attacks have a penalty of 1 less than listed (so -1 becomes 0, -2 becomes -1). If attacking a wyvern from behind on the ground, its wings are 0 to hit instead of -1. If attacking any creature from above while it is in flight, wings are at 0 instead of -1, and legs and feet are an *additional* -1 to hit.

For most locations, use the same rules for injury to a specific location as for humans (p. B203), with the following exceptions:

Head/Brain: The skull always provides +2 DR in addition to the creature’s normal armor (except for targeted shots at the eyes at the usual -9). For creatures with horns (purchased as strikers), the extra DR becomes +3.

Wing: Roll randomly to determine if the left or right wing is hit (targeted attacks permit the attacker to choose). Total damage over 1/3 of the creature’s base hit points cripples a wing, making the

creature incapable of flight until healed. Damage from a single attack greater than 2/3 the creature’s base hit points is lost, although a cutting attack that rolls damage equal to the creature’s base hit points severs the wing completely.

Leg, foot, or paw: Roll randomly to determine if the left or right leg or foot is hit (targeted attacks permit the attacker to choose). Crippling damage does not necessarily cause a four-legged creature to fall. If it successfully makes a roll against DX-3, it retains its footing. It may not attack with a wounded foreleg, nor may it attack with the other foreleg unless it can fly, or rear onto its hind legs like a bear. In the latter case, it attacks at -3 and does only half damage. With a wounded hind leg, the animal attacks at -3, but does normal damage. Speed in either case is reduced by 3.

Tail: A tail that was bought as a striker cannot be used to attack if it is crippled. A crippled tail also gives -2 to Flight skill. Cutting damage from a single attack equal to the creature’s base hit points severs the tail completely.

Undead Dragons

Draconic undead do not exist in folklore. Legendary undead beings represent the horror and uncertainty of death for people. That said, in games where magical reanimation and infectious undead states are not limited to humanity, the questions about other undead creatures will rise sooner or later – and few images are more unnerving, in an excessive sort of way, than an undead dragon.

To begin with, however, consider some possible excuses for not letting such things happen. The magical laws of the universe may rule out or make undead dragons very unlikely. Dragons' corpses could resist necromantic magic, especially if dragons have any kind of innate magic resistance in general. Alternatively, dragons too powerfully link to the universal life force – their yang energy may be too strong, in Chinese mythic terms, or they may be agents of deities who disapprove of undeath. Alternatively, dragon corpses could be too big to gather enough magic to empower, or the undead-making magic or power could draw on the mystical energies associated with a human soul or human death, and dragons may not have the right sorts of souls or natures.

However, GMs can bring the occasional undead dragon into play if they wish. If nothing else, the visual image has become popular in recent years, and it never hurts to threaten PCs with something this potent . . .

The simple but effective approach is to choose a template from *GURPS Undead* and apply it to a dragon. (There may be a little fudging required, especially if one wants to calculate a precise character point total.) Broadly speaking, there are two types of undead, corporeal and noncorporeal, and dragons might become either. A zombie or skeleton dragon is, from the game point of view, just a very big and hideous killing thing, and is relatively easy to envisage. (For an ultimate devastating corporeal monster, a dragon practicing magic might become a lich.) A noncorporeal undead dragon seems rather stranger. Even if dragons have souls much like those of human beings, the idea of one staying around as a ghost or specter may be just a notch too bizarre.

For one example of an undead dragon with a rich backstory, see *GURPS Monsters*, pp. MO102-103.

limits, but domesticated specimens would often buy some or all of these off.

Attribute Modifiers: ST -6 [-50]; DX +5 [60]; IQ -4 [-30]; HT +4 [45].

Advantages: Alertness +6 [30]; Breathe Fire (1 point damage and 1 yard range only -70%, Costs 1 Fatigue -5%) [5]; DR 1 [3]; Decreased Life Support [10]; Disease-Resistant [5]; Extended Lifespan 2 [10]; Flight (Winged Flight, -25%) [30]; Increased Speed +1 [25]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; PD 1 [25]; Sharp Teeth [5].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-15]; Mute [-25]; Reduced Hit Points -8 [-40]; Semi-Upright [-5]; Short Arms [-10].



Petty Drake

78 points

A wide variety of very small (cat- or dog-size) dragons appear in modern fantasy, SF, and superhero stories; for one example, see the irascible and explosive “swamp dragons” of Terry Pratchett’s Discworld novels (pp. DI167-168). This template represents a fairly typical, less comic, treatment of the concept, the “Petty Drake” depicted in *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary* (p. FB92) – an agile flyer which can reach up to 3’ length in the course of a long lifespan.

This creature can breathe a small but effective jet of flame, doing 1 point of damage for most specimens (2 points for the largest, raising the advantage cost to 9 points). However, this costs it a point of Fatigue. Its claw-tipped feet are small and deft enough to serve as semi-functional hands.

Wild petty drakes live in family groups in mountainous country. They are tamed and even used as familiars by humans, preferably from infancy, but never lose their tendency toward vanity and fiery tempers. They certainly have the Whimsical lens (p. 54); a petty drake companion behaves like an affectionate, overactive, self-centered child. Wild petty drakes would have Bestial [-10], Innumerate [-1], and Presentient [-20], which could be considered part of the racial package instead of counting against campaign disadvantage

Variations

Larger Petty Drakes: The Inconvenient Size disadvantage implies that this creature is less than 2’ tall, which is appropriate even for a 3’ long specimen that does not stand upright. Slightly larger but essentially similar creatures could delete this disadvantage, and probably have slightly more ST and Hit Points.

Cute Shoulder Dragon: For an insufferably attractive miniature dragon, of only limited use in a fight but appealing as a pet, change ST to -8 [-70] and Reduced Hit Points to -10 [-50], replace Semi-Upright with Horizontal [-10], delete Extended Lifespan and Increased Speed, and add Extra Fatigue +3 [9], Extra Legs (4 legs) [5]; Pitiable [5], and Laziness [-10]. This type should not take any standard lenses. 17 points.

Venomous Dragonet: Some miniature dragons lack a flaming breath but compensate with some kind of venom. This may knock a victim out instead of killing him, or have even more exotic effects. For one version, replace the template’s breath weapon with Venom (2 levels, Fatigue Damage Only -20%) [24], delivered by a bite. 97 points.

Becoming a Dragon Through a Curse

Often mortals offend the wrong being, or violate a taboo or great moral principle, and find themselves waking up with a new, scaly body. This happens two ways.

The Wages of Sin

In the first, someone displaying a dragonish tendency toward greed or wrath ends up with a body to match. This usually produces a full-powered dragon with the character's full memories, which sits on its loot feeling possessive or depressed.

The obvious problem in game terms is that most players will not regard this change as a problem. So separate the transformed character from society forever, and limit communication with other mortals. Cursed creatures may not always slink off to a cave and sulk for millennia. They could be slaves to higher powers, required to guard treasure, or protect herds.

This scenario could provide a background concept for a dragon character. While some players may only indulge token angst-laden dialogue between rampages, one playing to an Obsession (seeking restoration of his true shape) could be very effective – especially in a finite-duration campaign where being cured will represent a triumphant climax.

Malicious Magic

The second “fairytale” dragon is the result of a curse cast on some tragic maiden or noble male by a wicked witch/stepmother. The cursed creature becomes formidable and hideous enough to frighten everyone on sight, while remaining vulnerable enough that mobs or ignorant heroes represent a real threat. It loses most of their intelligence, and certainly the power of speech, but does not become a ravaging monster.

The traditional cure for this curse, again following fairytale conventions, involves finding love despite the hideous shape. A simple kiss or a more complex device may break the curse.

This is best suited to a one-off, short-term scenario, whether the victim is a PC or NPC. A party, commissioned to capture a confused, terrified victim-wyrm in the wilderness, could deal with interference caused by the curse-placer and bring the wyrm unharmed to a handsome prince or brave maiden. GMs should use a template such as the small wyrm (p. 51) for the transformed shape – something just powerful enough to cause trouble, but without poison or flame breath. The transformation spell can be a variant Shapeshift Others (p. M25) known only to the secret sisterhood of sinister stepmothers. A specialized condition for removal is always more fun than the basic Remove Curse.

Sea Serpent

454 points

This template represents the oceans’ answer to the dragon – specifically, a creature of 2 to 3 tons and 35 hexes in length (as in the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*, p. FB65). The sea serpent is essentially a big animal capable of crushing small ships in its coils, so the Animalistic lens on p. 64 should apply. However, GMs can raise the serpent’s IQ and add a different lens and some dragonish powers to make a real monster of the deep. (Such a creature might even be Amphibious instead of Aquatic.) The increased reach of the creature’s fangs represents its ability to strike like a snake at opponents some yards away.

In a campaign full of draconic demigods, an enhanced version of this template, with significantly higher IQ, might represent the rulers of the seas.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +90 (No Manipulators) [126]; DX +3 [30]; IQ -7 [-60]; HT +6 [80].

Advantages: Acute Hearing +5 [10]; Acute Taste and Smell +3 [6]; Alertness +5 [25]; Constriction Attack [15]; DR 3 [9]; Extended Lifespan 1 [5]; Extra Hit Points +34 [170]; Fangs (reach 8) [50]; Flexibility [15]; Gills [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Nictating Membrane 2 [20]; Night Vision [10]; PD 2 [50]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Pressure Support (100 atmospheres) [10]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (2□ HT at bottom of range, 1□ HT at top) [3].

Disadvantages: Aquatic [-40]; Color Blindness [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Mute [-25]; No Manipulators [-50].



Variations

Air or Water Breathers: The template assumes the serpent, as a mythical sea monster with a taste for surfacing for extended periods (sometimes to attack ships), breathes both water and air, at least for long enough to operate in either environment effectively unhindered. A more “realistic” treatment might limit the species to one or the other.

For an air-breather, perhaps a gigantic snake, delete Gills from the template. If the creature has a whale-like ability to store air in its lungs for long dives, add Oxygen Storage [14]; a less well adapted creature might have a few levels of Breath-Holding [2/level] at best, and might only have the 5-point version of Pressure Support. For a water breather, the Gills become a 0-point feature.

Very Small Sea Serpent: Change ST to +20 [105], Extra Hit Points to +4 [20], and Increased Life Support to 1 level [-10]. This relatively small or very young creature is around 1,000 lbs. and 10 hexes long, although still able to wreck a boat full of men. 293 points.

Small Sea Serpent: Change ST to +44 [113] and Extra Hit Points to +19 [95]. This type is around 1 ton and 20 hexes long. 366 points.

Giant Sea Serpent: Change ST to +140 [141] and Extra Hit Points to +59 [295]. Around 5 tons and 60 hexes long. 594 points.

Vast Sea Serpent: Change ST to +190 [156] and Extra Hit Points to +84 [420]. This is large even by the standards of sea serpent myths (although those have no clear upper limit, and this creature is fairly slender) at around 10 tons and 80 hexes long. 734 points.

Bena: Change ST to +22 [106], DX to +4 [45], IQ to -5 [-40], HT to +5 [60], Alertness to +3 [15], Extra Hit Points to +18 [90], and Fangs to Sharp Teeth (reach 1) [10]. Then add Enhanced Move (Swimming) +1/2 [5], Magery 1 (Water Elemental College Only) [10], Splash (3d, 9 hex range, Costs 6 Fatigue -30%, Fatigue Damage Only -20%) [16], and Tide-30 as an innate spell [52] (p. G34), and optionally a Vulnerability (2 levels) to wooden weapons [-20]. This creature out of Malay myth, 5 to 7 tons in weight and 7 hexes long, usually lurks in river estuaries. Unfortunately, it sometimes comes upstream to feed on river fish, and uses its magical powers to raise the water level as it goes, allowing it to swim further while flooding the surrounding area. It may also attack fishing boats to steal their catches – or to eat the crews. It can use its splash power (a jet of water from its mouth) at reduced power and range for a similarly reduced Fatigue cost. While this jet is not concentrated enough to do serious harm, it still does full knockback (based on double the damage, this being a Splash attack), and may douse fires. See p. FB87. 402 or 382 points.

Western Dragons

The western dragon is the most common in European depictions. It is also known, in *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary* among other places, as a firedrake. It has four legs (with some manipulative ability), two wings, fiery breath, and very often, an attitude.

Dragons vary noticeably in size, and grow from relatively modest beginnings to awesome size over their long lives – if they survive. Hence, the common features below list additional details for each size/age category. The ages and weights for each category come from the firedrake description in *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary* (pp. FB83-84), and can adjust to fit games where firedrake life cycles differ.

The templates include the Unaging advantage because these dragons never die of old age – they just get bigger and tougher, although the rate of growth eventually slows. Of course, unlike most Unaging beings, dragons cannot avoid showing the signs of age – but as these are somewhat beneficial, and are not any sort of limitation. Younger individuals have Reduced Move when both flying and running (their bodies simply lack the grace of a mature dragon). Older individuals, while fast, are slightly cumbersome on the ground (giving reduced running move), but gain extra reach on their bite attacks because of their long, serpentine necks.

These creatures breathe broad jets of flame, which hit automatically unless dodged but do not spread very much. This is purchased as a “Cone” attack (p. 82) with no added width. GMs can change the details of these Breathe Fire attacks, or adjust them into other breath weapons to reflect different ideas about draconic powers.



Western Dragon (Common Features)

Advantages: Alertness +2 [10]; Flight (Winged Flight, -25%) [30]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictating Membrane 2 [20]; Night Vision [10]; Temperature Tolerance 6 (2 HT at bottom of range, 4 HT at top) [6]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip [-10]; Horizontal [-10].

Age/Size Categories

Hatchling/Man-Sized Dragon 199 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +3 [30]; DX -1 [-10]; HT +3 [30].

Advantages: Common Advantages [111]; Breathe Fire (1d-1 and 2 yards range only -30%, 1-hex Cone +60%, Costs 2 Fatigue -10%) [25]; DR 1 [3]; PD 1 [25]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth [5].

Disadvantages: Common Disadvantages [-20]; Reduced Move (Flying) -2 [-10]; Reduced Move (Running) -1 [-5]; Short Arms [-10].

Notes: Size 2 hexes, weight 150-200 lbs.

Young/Very Small Dragon 377 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +10 [110]; DX +1 [10]; IQ +1 [10]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Common Advantages [111]; Breathe Fire (1d, 3 yards range, 1-hex Cone +60%, Costs 2 Fatigue -10%) [30]; DR 2 [6]; Extra Hit Points +5 [25]; PD 1 [25]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth (Reach 1) [10].

Disadvantages: Common Disadvantages [-20]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Reduced Move (Flying) -2 [-10]; Reduced Move (Running) -1 [-5].

Notes: Size 3-5 hexes, weight 500-800 lbs.

Adolescent/Small Dragon 568 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +22 [176]; DX +2 [20]; IQ +2 [20]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Common Advantages [111]; Breathe Fire (2d-1, 6 hex range, 1-hex Cone +60%, Costs 2 Fatigue -10%) [37]; DR 3 [9]; Extra Hit Points +18 [90]; PD 2 [50]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth (Reach 1) [10].

Disadvantages: Common Disadvantages [-20]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support [-10].

Notes: Size 4-8 hexes, weight 800-1,500 lbs.

Young Adult/Medium-Sized Dragon 684 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +34 [182]; DX +3 [30]; IQ +3 [30]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Common Advantages [111]; Breathe Fire (2d, 6 hex range, 1-hex Cone +60%, Costs 2 Fatigue -10%) [39]; DR 4 [12]; Extra Hit Points +33 [165]; PD 3 [75]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth (Reach 1) [10].

Disadvantages: Common Disadvantages [-20]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Reduced Move (Running) -1 [-5].

Notes: Size 8-12 hexes, weight 1,000-2,000 lbs.

Adult/Large Dragon 862 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +44 [187]; DX +4 [45]; IQ +4 [45]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Common Advantages [111]; Breathe Fire (3d-1, 9 hex range, 1-hex Cone +60%, Costs 2 Fatigue -10%) [46]; DR 6 [18]; Enhanced Move (Flight) 1/2 [5]; Extra Hit Points +48 [240]; Fangs (Reach 2) [20]; PD 4 [100]; Talons [40].

Disadvantages: Common Disadvantages [-20]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Reduced Move (Running) -1 [-5].

Notes: Size 10-14 hexes, weight 1,500-2,500 lbs.

Old Adult/Very Large Dragon 974 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +54 [192]; DX +4 [45]; IQ +5 [60]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Common Advantages [111]; Breathe Fire (3d, 9 hex range, 1-hex Cone +60%, Costs 2 Fatigue -10%) [48]; DR 6 [18]; Enhanced Move (Flight) 1 [10]; Extra Hit Points +65 [325]; Fangs (Reach 2) [20]; PD 4 [100]; Talons [40].

Disadvantages: Common Disadvantages [-20]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Reduced Move (Running) -1 [-5].

Notes: Size 13-16 hexes, weight 2,500-3,000 lbs.

Monstrous Dragon 1,057 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +60 [195]; DX +4 [45]; IQ +6 [80]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Common Advantages [111]; Breathe Fire (3d, Increased Range to 18 hexes +5%, 1-hex Cone +60%, Costs 2 Fatigue -10%) [50]; DR 7 [21]; Enhanced Move (Flight) 1-1/2 [15]; Extra Hit Points +75 [375]; Fangs (Reach 2) [20]; PD 4 [100]; Talons [40].

Disadvantages: Common Disadvantages [-20]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Reduced Move (Running) -1 [-5].

Notes: Size 15+ hexes, weight 3,000+ lbs.

PC Dragon Maturation

In games with PC dragons, players spend earned character points to advance from one category to the next, improving various aspects of their dragon gradually over time. The GM decides when a dragon has effectively increased in age category, which may involve some adjustment of point totals as the template changes. The player may then be required to commit all future experience to making up a shortfall or permitted to spend a surplus on something that seems appropriate. If the change gives the dragon additional points overall, they go into its experience pool.

Alternatively, the players can keep their initial template, even when the dragon has outgrown its nominal age/size category, adding more points to produce a plausible approximation of a dragon from the next size category up.

In fact, in campaigns where many years of game time pass (as may be appropriate with dragon PCs – see p. 31), players may be *required* to commit some experience to represent the maturation process. GMs should be generous with experience in these cases, to give the players options in their character development. An all-dragon campaign may be deliberately designed to include jumps of decades or centuries, in which every PC dragon advances from one template to the next, being given the necessary points for free.

Variations

Wilderness Skills: Dragons can own an instinctive knowledge of their native environment, or learn one very young. In that case, add an appropriate Survival skill to the templates at IQ-1, for a cost of 1 point.

Spells: Many dragons' magical powers grow throughout their lives – the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary* assumes this as the norm – and some acquire dozens of spells. To reflect this, add Magery 3 [35] to templates, and see the suggestions for spell selections in Chapter 4.

Constrictors: Some dragons, especially those lacking powerful breath weapons, wrap themselves round prey like constricting snakes. Add Constriction Attack [15] and Flexibility [15], and optionally delete or reduce the breath weapon.

Multiple Attacks: GMs may not only permit dragons to take the Full Coordination advantage, but may add it to templates; see p. 75.

Poor Flyers: While most legendary dragons are remarkably graceful in the air, some work hard to stay up. They might take the limitations Cannot Hover and possibly Costs Fatigue on their Flight.

Natural Trackers: Some dragons have an uncanny sense of smell. This is not universal in legends, but if it does occur, it can create nasty surprises for stealthy or magically invisible slayers. Add Discriminatory Smell [15].

The Dragonet of Mount Pilatus: This creature from Swiss legend (p. 16) was unusually small but terribly swift, aggressive, and deadly with highly poisonous blood. Use the Man-Sized Dragon template, but change its DX to +5 [60] and its breath weapon to Breathe Fire (3d, 9 yards range) [32], and add Venom (4 levels; poisonous; Contact Agent, +70%; Blood Alone Poisonous, -70%) [60]. A template for creatures of this type would therefore cost 336 points. The original's behavior would justify the Animalistic and possibly Malevolent lenses.

Fairytale Dragon: Depictions of dragons in some whimsical or magic-rich fantasies are often more elegant than the general

run of fictional firedrakes. Some have iridescent scales or even filmy or butterfly-like wings. For such a creature, use the Very Small, Small, or Medium-Sized templates above (assume that the creature is a hex or two longer than the *Fantasy Bestiary* type, but no heavier), with Attractive Appearance [5]. Dragons of this type may well have a Dependency on Mana (p. 82) and the Whimsical Lens (p. 65).

Legged Worm: This is the "Worm" detailed in the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*, p. FB94 – essentially a Western Dragon with a serpentine body but without wings. Use any Western Dragon template above, but double weights (due to heavier non-flying body structure), delete the Flight, and in most cases, delete the Breathe Fire advantage, replacing it with Venom with the Cloud of Mist and possibly Increased Area enhancements, at a level equal to the number of dice inflicted by the creature's claw attacks. As the worm cannot fly, it will get little benefit from having any grasping ability in its claws. To simulate this, replace Bad Grip with No Fine Manipulators and Extra Legs (4 legs). Legged Worms are usually vicious or evil; they add the Animalistic or Malevolent lenses, and may have lower IQ (and no chance of spells).

Valor and Snarl

Examples of how similar dragons develop in different ways, Valor and Snarl express the flexibility of a single template and lens. (Neither has Magery or spells, although they could each have around 40 points in such.) They are cousins, hatched at the same time.

As soon as he learned fly, Valor took to the skies. Although intelligent, he defines himself by his power. Other dragons consider him honorable, but he enforces honor on himself, for the sake of his self-image. He is actually as solipsistic as only a powerful dragon can be. He hoards honor as he hoards treasure – although his taste for the open skies prevents him from accumulating more than a moderate heap of gold and silver.

Snarl deals willingly with other beings. While Valor flew among the mountains, Snarl wandered the valleys, sometimes learning to use his flame, but more often approaching other dragons (carefully) or members of smaller races (more brazenly) – to talk. He naturally possessed a poetic way with words and convinced many human adventurers to negotiate instead of fight. He has built a fair hoard through his cleverness. Snarl likes other beings, enjoys talking to them, and wants to control as many of them as possible. His hoarding instinct supports this sort of power.

As they turn 100, both dragons have established lairs for themselves: Valor on a mountain peak, Snarl in a strategically chosen valley. Both know they need years to develop their full power. Valor glories in the prospect, while Snarl lays his great plans. They have met a few times, and been civil, but each senses something wrong with the other. Valor thinks Snarl is a jumped-up wyrm threatening to shame their bloodline; Snarl regards Valor as a witless dolt, requiring careful handling if he will be useful.

Valor

600 points

ST 33 [10]; DX 13 [10]; IQ 12 [0]; HT 16/34 [10].

Speed 7.25; Move 7 (running)/14 (flight).

Dodge 9.

Advantages: Adolescent/Small Dragon with the Hoarding Dragon lens [543]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Comfortable [10]; Semi-Literacy [5]; Status +1 [5].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (personal) [-10]; Solipsist [-10]; Uncongenial [-1].

Quirks: Insists that a power and freedom are always more important than intelligence; Loves flying and high places. [-2]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Mountains)-14 [4]; Flight (Winged)-15* [6]; History-10 [1]; Magic Breath-14* [1]; Savoir-Faire-9* [0].

Languages: Draconic-12 (native) [0]; three other Mental/Average languages at skill-11 [3].

* Free from advantages; Savoir-Faire includes -3 for Solipsist.

Notes: Valor's Code of Honor is a draconic variation of the Gentleman's Code. He protects the name of his bloodline instead of women or a flag, regards attempts to steal from his hoard as proof that the thief is beneath the need for a fair fight, and considers a reasonably armed and armored human as close to "equally armed" as honor demands.

Snarl

600 points

ST 32 [0]; DX 12 [0]; IQ 14 [20]; HT 15/33 [0].

Speed 6.75; Move 6 (Running)/12 (flight).

Dodge 8.

Advantages: Adolescent/Small Dragon with the Hoarding Dragon lens [543]; Charisma +2 [10]; Contact (Street – adventuring rogue, unconnected, usually reliable) [4]; Cool [1]; Literacy [10]; Status +1 [0]; Wealthy [20].

Disadvantages: Broad-Minded [-1]; Congenial [-1]; Fanaticism (own advantage) [-15]; Nosy [-1]; Selfish [-5].

Quirks: Finishes combats quickly and brutally if he cannot avoid them; Proud of his way with words; Regards lesser beings with affection – as nice tools. [-3]

Skills: Appreciate Beauty-11 [1]; Area Knowledge (Foothills)-15 [2]; Bard-16* [2]; Detect Lies-12 [1]; Diplomacy-12 [1]; Flight-12** [0]; Magic Breath-13** [1]; Naturalist-12 [1]; Orienteering/TLO-13 [1]; Poetry-13 [1]; Savoir-Faire-14* [0]; Tactics-12 [1].

Languages: Draconic-14 (native) [0]; six other Mental/Average languages at skill-13 [6].

* Includes Charisma bonus.

** Free from advantages.

Ice Dragon: Cold-using dragons are popular in modern fantasy stories and games. For a simple version, use one of the above templates. The creature's breath weapon becomes cold instead of heat as a special effect, and its temperature comfort range shifts so that most of it is below freezing. Such a creature may also have a good Survival (Arctic) skill. The Inuit "Palraujuk" also fits this pattern, but lacks wings and cannot fly.



Chinese Dragons (Lung)

For convenience, these templates represent ages as well as the different sizes of Western dragon. A kiao-lung may develop into a kioh-lung as time passes, and later into another types. See p. 19 for details of the life cycle of the Chinese dragon.

If someone wishes to play a creature near transformation, or if an epic campaign stretches over the centuries of a dragon PC's development, apply the principles discussed under *PC Dragon Maturation* (p. 57). At the GM's option, transformations may be sudden and supernatural, with the PC gaining a whole new character sheet, or more gradual, with new features being added and disadvantages deleted one at a time as accumulated experience permits. Not allowing a PC dragon to transform until the player has saved up the points is easily justified whatever the creature's age. The age of transformation may not be precise, or, dragons being agents of divine power, the gods may not permit transformation until they have accumulated enough experience, virtue, or energy – which earned character points can be represented.

Iron: The Chinese dragons' Allergic Susceptibility to iron implies that these creatures find the smell of the metal intolerable, and actually could be blinded by its pungency. This effect requires a fair amount of iron – a sword or plowshare within a couple of yards, or a cartload of iron bars within 20-30 yards. It is stronger in water. A sword plunged into a pool where a dragon lives will certainly drive it out, in a very bad mood. Although iron is widespread in human society, dragons can avoid the problem with a little care – and it does take a fair amount, fairly close, to annoy them. Nonetheless, since the problem applies even without direct physical contact, and is known to humans wishing to harass dragons, it is treated as a very common substance.

The value of this disadvantage could decrease in a Bronze Age setting, where iron is almost unknown. Conversely, if

humans have a developed industrial society, dragons will withdraw to the far fringes of civilization in disgust.

Water Snake (Infant)

-36 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST -3 [-20]; DX -1 [-10]; IQ -2 [-15]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15]; DR 1 [3]; Flexibility [15]; Gills (breathe water only) [0]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; Night Vision [10]; PD 1 [25]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Temperature Tolerance 2 (+HT at top and bottom of range) [2]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) [-15]; Aquatic [-40]; Mute [-25]; No Manipulators [-50]; Reduced Hit Points -10 [-50]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Skills: Survival (River) (M/A) IQ+4 [10]-12.

This template represents a Chinese dragon for the first 500 or so years of its life, when it takes the form of a human-sized water snake. Younger and older specimens might have a range of ST values and Inconvenient Size. During this extended childhood, the dragon may have the nature of a wild animal instead of a sophisticated supernatural creature. Disadvantages such as Bestial, Impulsiveness, Incurious, Presentient, or Short Attention Span may be appropriate, and might not count against campaign disadvantage limits. Dead Broke should probably be mandatory in most campaigns.

A water snake may frequently be dominated by Yin energies, gaining disadvantages such as Bloodlust, Bully, Laziness, or Sadism, expressed in cold viciousness instead of violent passions. It could also be functionally Cold Blooded, displaying reptile-like behaviors that older dragons discard after their metamorphoses. On the other hand, adult dragons do not necessarily forget or disregard their offspring, and might represent formidable patrons (and a deadly threat to anyone foolish enough to harm a "mere snake").

Kiao

169 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +4 (No Fine Manipulators) [27]; IQ -1 [-10]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15]; Amphibious [10]; Blunt Claws [15]; DR 2 [6]; Enhanced Move (Swimming) 1/2 [5]; Extra Hit Points +5 [15]; Flexibility [15]; Gills (can only survive out of water for 1 hour at a time, -20%) [8]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; Night Vision [10]; PD 2 [50]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Temperature Tolerance 2 (+HT at top and bottom of range) [2]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) [-15]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 1 [-10]; Mute [-25]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Short Arms [-10].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Skills: Survival (River) (M/A) IQ+5 [12]-14.

This young dragon has the head of a carp, forelimbs, and the ability to live out of water for about an hour at a time. (GMs may assume it then needs to immerse its gills in water for another hour or so.) It is around 3 to 5 hexes in size and 500 to 1,000 lbs. in weight, but still resembles an animal more than anything else. Some ignore this stage, implying that dragons metamorphose directly from water snakes to the four-limbed kioh-lung form (below), in which case this template can be disregarded or treated as a temporary transitional form.

A kiao is still very much an adolescent, lacking any magical powers except possibly some kind of telepathic speech, represented by Magery and Telepathy as an innate spell (or possibly a few levels of psionic Telepathy power and skill in Telesend and Telereceive). In any case, the same abilities need to be part of older Chinese dragon templates as well. Once again, disadvantages such as Bestial, Impulsiveness, Incurious, or Short Attention Span may be appropriate (along with Shyness – kiao are intelligent enough to avoid humans), and might not count against campaign limits, but its intelligence and personality are developing. Still, Yin energies might influence it, causing disadvantages such as Bloodlust, Bully, Laziness, or Sadism. Likewise, it may still be under the protection of its parents (as patrons).

Kiao-Lung/Kioh-Lung 543 or 548 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +10 [110]; DX +2 [20]; IQ +6 [80]; HT +5 [60].

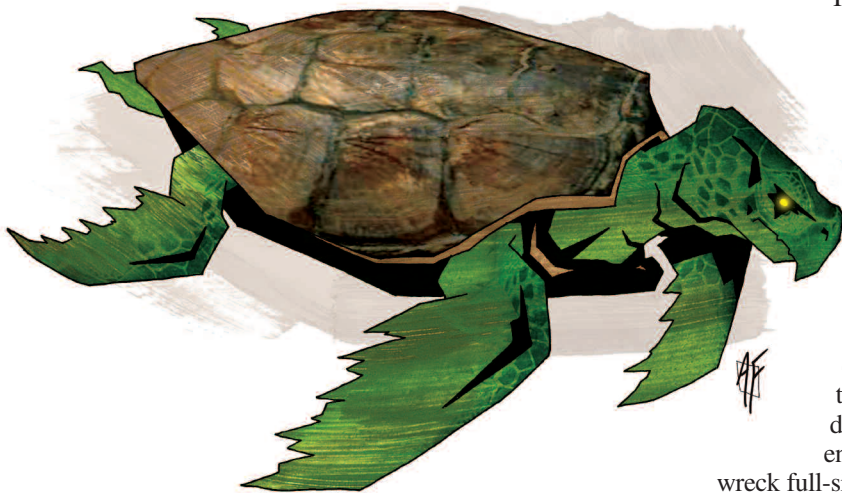
Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Attractive [5]; DR 4 [12]; Enhanced Move (Running) 1 1/2 [15]; Enhanced Move (Swimming) 1 [10]; Extra Hit Points +25 [125]; Flexibility [15]; Gills [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Horns (blunt: kioh-lung only) [5]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; Night Vision [10]; PD 2 [50]; Temperature Tolerance 2 (+HT at top and bottom of range) [2]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Speak Underwater [8]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) [-15]; Bad Grip [-10]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Short Arms [-10].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Skills: Survival (River) (M/A) IQ [2]-16.

This template represents the first two “fully draconic” phases of the Chinese dragon’s life cycle. It has four legs (assumed here to have some manipulative ability) and the ability to live out of water. It has also attained a respectable size – around 6 hexes long and half a ton to a ton in weight. At this point, the dragon becomes a fully thinking being, physically and mentally capable of holding conversations with humans. The dragon claws begin to grip, although a little clumsily. (Dragons will use magic or servants for fine work.)



The only obvious difference between the kiao-lung and the older kioh-lung is that the latter has horns. But the kioh-lung will be a little larger, wiser and more experienced. Slightly higher ST, Hit Points, and IQ, along with more and better skills, should

reflect this change. Younger dragons may still be notably prone to disadvantages arising from excess Yin energy. Incidentally, some sources suggest that only male dragons develop horns.

Dragons do not have special magical abilities at this age, but a kioh-lung at least may have acquired a level or two of Magery and perhaps a few simple spells.

Li Lung

1,111 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +70 (No Fine Manipulators) [120]; DX +4 [45]; IQ +6 [80]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; DR 6 [18]; Dark Vision (can see colors) [30]; Extra Hit Points +65 [325]; Extra Legs (4 legs) [5]; Flight (Winged Flight, -25%) [30]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Horns (Blunt) [5]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Invulnerability (All effects of cave-ins, earthquakes and landslides) [100]; Magery 3 (Earth College only) [22]; Morph [100]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; PD 3 [75]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+2HT at bottom of range, +HT at top) [3]; Tunnel (1 hex) [50]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) [-15]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; No Fine Manipulators [-30].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Skills: Geology/TL2 (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-15; Prospecting/TL2 (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-15.

Innate Spells: Earthquake-40 [46].

Resembling a winged lion with a dragon’s head (p. 20), the Li Lung is around 6 hexes in size and one or two tons in weight. It casts its Earthquake spell by roaring.

Lung Wang

942 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +190 (No Fine Manipulators) [156]; DX +2 [20]; IQ +8 [125]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Animal Empathy [5]; DR 10 [30]; Extra Hit Points +75 [375]; Extra Legs (4 legs) [5]; Flight [40]; Gills [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Horns (Blunt) [5]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictating Membrane 3 [30]; Night Vision [10]; PD 3 [75]; Pressure Support (Immune to pressure) [15]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Speak Underwater [8]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+2HT at bottom of range, +HT at top) [3]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) [-15]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Reduced Move (Running) -3 [-15]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Skills: Naturalist (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-16.

These “dragon turtles” (p. 20) grow to over 30’ in diameter, with a total size for game purposes of 60 hexes or more, and a weight of at least 100 tons. GMs including lesser lung wang can scale down the ST and Hit Points; however, given the legendary size of these creatures, and their ability to wreck full-sized ships, this template is conservative.

If GMs want lung wangs to routinely adopt other forms – which may seem slightly out of character for these creatures, but is common with many sorts of Chinese dragon – add Morph. Magery and Animal college spells could also be appropriate.

While the idea of a flying giant turtle seems bizarre, and lung wang do not fly much, they are fully developed dragons with the necessary chi'ih muh organ.

P'an Lung

1,316 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +44 [187]; DX +10 [175]; IQ +8 [125]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Amphibious [10]; Attractive [5]; Body of Fire (30 levels, "Water Fire" Only – see below, -50%) [75]; DR 4 [12]; Enhanced Move (Running) 1/2 [5]; Extra Hit Points +55 [275]; Flexibility [15]; Flight [40]; Gills [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Horns (Blunt) [5]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Magery 3 [35]; Morph [100]; Nictating Membrane 2 [20]; Night Vision [10]; PD 2 [50]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth (Reach 2) [15]; Speak Underwater [8]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+2HT at bottom of range, +HT at top) [3]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) [-15]; Bad Grip [-10]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Short Arms [-10].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Skills: Meteorology/TL2 (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-17; Secret Dragon Language (M/H) IQ [4]-18.

Innate Spells: Bless-25 [12]; Clouds-30 [22]; Curse-25 [12]; Predict Weather-21 [4]; Rain-35 [32].

"Cloud dragons" reach 18 hexes or so in length, but are slender and sinuous, massing no more than 1 or 2 tons, with very short legs.

Tending the weather on behalf of Heaven can constitute a Duty (which may not count against campaign disadvantage limits, being innate to the creature's nature), although some dragons sometimes forget this task and need reminding. Since dragons sometimes disagree and even fight over what weather is appropriate, powerful Enemies may also be appropriate!

Water Fire: The "water fire" with which p'an lung (and shen lung) can surround themselves works partly like a normal body of fire, doing 1d damage/10 levels to any creature in the same hexes as the dragon. However, it provides no extra DR against attacks, cannot ignite flammable materials, and adds no bonus damage to the creature's melee attacks. On the other hand, the dragon suffers no extra damage from incoming cold or water-based attacks. Any heat or flame attack that does at least as many dice of damage as the water fire can extinguish it. If extinguished, the dragon cannot then recreate the water fire for 2d turns. In total, this is a -50% limitation to the Body of Fire advantage.

Shen Lung

1,210 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +50 [190]; DX +5 [60]; IQ +10 [175]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Body of Fire (30 levels, "Water Fire" Only – see above, -50%) [75]; DR 6 [18]; Enhanced Move (Flight) 1 [10]; Enhanced Move (Running) 1/2 [5]; Enhanced Move (Swimming) 1 [10]; Extra Hit Points +60 [300]; Flexibility [15]; Flight [40]; Gills [10]; Handsome/Beautiful [15]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Horns (blunt) [5]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Magery 2 [25]; Nictating Membrane 2 [20]; Night Vision [10]; PD 3 [75]; Pressure Support (10 atmospheres) [5]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth (Reach 2) [15]; Speak Underwater [8]; Temperature

Tolerance 5 (+3HT at bottom of range, +2HT at top) [5]; Terror (-5 to Fright Checks; Only affects poisonous animals -50%, cannot be turned off -10%) [32]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) [-15]; Bad Grip [-10]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Assigned river or lake) (M/E) IQ [1]-20; Naturalist (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-18; Secret Dragon Language (M/H) IQ [4]-20; Survival (River) (M/A) IQ [2]-20.

The "river dragon" overseers of nature are another somewhat serpentine type, although more heavily built than the cloud dragons. A typical specimen might be 16 hexes long but weigh several tons. Given their duties and nature, various supernatural abilities can apply to this template, especially Medium and Spirit Empathy, and maybe Morph or Shapeshifting. The shen lung should have a good selection of spells, especially from the Animal, Elemental Water, and Meta-Spell colleges. If the campaign features many powerful spirits, shen lung should have spells or other powers designed to repel and control them. Those same duties might well appear on the character sheet as a disadvantage.

Poisonous animals cannot approach to within 20 yards of a shen lung, treated here as the ability to induce extreme terror in any such creature on sight.

Tien Lung

1,544 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +56 [193]; DX +7 [100]; IQ +15 [300]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Amphibious [10]; Animal Empathy [5]; Breathe Fire (3d-1, Increased Range to 18 hexes +5%, 1-hex Cone +60%, Costs 2 Fatigue -10%) [48]; Charisma +1 [5]; DR 6 [18]; Enhanced Move (Flight) 1 [10]; Enhanced Move (Running) 1 [10]; Enhanced Move (Swimming) 1 [10]; Extra Hit Points +75 [375]; Flexibility [15]; Flight [40]; Gills [10]; Handsome/Beautiful [15]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Horns (Blunt) [5]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Magery 3 [35]; Morph [100]; Nictating Membrane 3 [30]; Night Vision [10]; PD 3 [75]; Pressure Support (100 atmospheres) [10]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth (Reach 2) [15]; Speak Underwater [8]; Temperature Tolerance 5 (+3HT at bottom of range, +2HT at top) [5]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) [-15]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 2 [-20]; Poor Grip [-5].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Skills: Leadership (M/A) IQ [1]-25 (Includes Charisma bonus); Naturalist (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-23; Secret Dragon Language (M/H) IQ [4]-25.

Innate Spells: Bless-26 [1]; Curse-26 [1].

The greatest dragon lords are around 16 hexes long and 1 to 3 tons in their "natural" form, although their shapeshifting powers make this optional. Given the nature of their duties and status, a tien lung would need an extremely good reason not to be Filthy Rich, with Status 7 or 8 and some powerful supernatural Allies and Ally Groups, and possibly Divine Favor as well. It has an enlightened, orderly personality, a strong Code of Honor or Sense of Duty, and a lack of less admirable disadvantages. Of course, if Yin scales somehow dominate a tien lung, the danger for the world (and the plot possibilities) would be considerable.

Tien lung should have plenty of additional spells, especially from the Animal, Elemental, and Meta-Spell colleges. Their powers should seem godlike to PCs, because they are, effectively, gods.

Lenses

Because Chinese dragons have personalities defined by the balance of Yang and Yin energies in their bodies, and strictly defined duties and roles, the personality lenses on pp. 64-68 are not appropriate here. However, GMs can mix and match as appropriate for campaigns. Making Chinese dragons dependent on mana (p. 82) could certainly feel appropriate, while the youngest individuals might have part of the Animalistic lens. A lung overwhelmed by Yin energies might acquire the Hoarding, Malevolent, or even Diabolical lenses. One simply lacking interest in duties and tending toward Yin-governed behavior could gain the Whimsical lens. A slightly selfish but not unbalanced creature could be Disinterested, Subtle, or a Solitary Wanderer, and one with a proper sense of its place in the world might rate as Benevolent, a Keeper of Secrets, an Appointed Guardian, or a Lord of the Beasts.

Variations

Deafness: Some accounts say Chinese dragons' ears are non-functional, and that these creatures can only hear through their horns – which do not develop until they become kioh-lung. If this is the case, add Deafness [-20] to the water snake, kiao, and kiao-lung, along with Mute [-25] to the kiao-lung, and reduce template costs accordingly. (This is unlikely to apply if only male dragons develop horns.)

Beast Lords: Lung have significant powers over animals, especially water creatures. While spells can generally represent this, GMs can add the Speak with Animals or Speak with Fish advantages to some of these templates.

Languages: While Chinese dragons usually speak the languages of local human communities to a reasonable level for convenience, accounts suggest that lung wang have a racial language of their own, and the p'an lung and shen lung certainly share a secret tongue. The tien lung, wise and divine rulers of dragonkind, will know any language used by their subjects.

Literacy: Most adult dragons are literate – and if using the extended literacy rules from *GURPS China* (p. CH30), tien lung and many others could possess Scholarly Literacy. (This is not included in the templates because, apart from anything else, the cost will vary with the campaign date.)

Dragons as Spirits: If the Chinese heavens are spirit worlds, then the more powerful dragons may be creatures of pure spirit with the ability to take on flesh. To represent this, use the Spirit Form advantage from *GURPS Spirits* (pp. SPI33-36) with the Physical Form and Unlimited Lifespan enhancements. The being's usual Physical Form is obviously a dragon, but some might have a second, human form. For that matter, a dragon with several levels of the Easy Materialization enhancement could do well without the Morph advantage. Use of the Poltergeist Effect and Probability Alteration spirit powers could explain oriental dragons' abilities to function comfortably without hands and to bless or curse.

Alternate Shapeshifting: The templates for species that routinely display shapeshifting abilities have the Morph advantage, but there are other ways to handle such powers; see "Dragons Changing Shape," p. 87.

Other Chinese Dragons: The other major types described on p. 20, the Dun Mi Lung, Fucang Lung, and Ban Lung, require

small variations to the above templates, possibly with some appropriate innate spells.

Yu Lung: This type of dragon begins life as a humble carp; see p. 20. Presumably, this fish has exceptional intellect and willpower! In game terms, follow the progression described above, except that in its youngest form, it would lack Flexibility but have some levels of Strong Will. It would also lack the Unaging advantage at this stage. While it might be long-lived, it would have to scale the Dragon Gate before age wore it down.



Japanese Dragons: Japanese dragons (p. 21) generally resemble Chinese types. For a typical *tatsu*, use the p'an lung template, but without the "water fire" ability, reducing the cost to 1,241 points. For a version with no legs, delete Sharp Claws, Bad Grip, and Short Arms, add No Manipulators [-50], and give its ST the No Manipulators limitation, making its cost 113 points; the template cost becomes 1,112 points. Being high-minded creatures in the myths of a society with a strong belief in such things, a Japanese dragon has a Code of Honor (a -5 point code focused on always keeping one's word is common). However, in a traditional Japanese fantasy campaign, all nonhumans exist outside the rigid structure of society, and can have Status -4 [-20] as an extra template disadvantage. (*GURPS Japan*, p. J65, has a slightly different treatment.)

Danger in the Scales

The divided nature of Chinese dragons physically manifests in their scales; see p. 18. PCs who encounter them should be aware of the danger represented by the 36 Yin scales; see "Dragon Riders," p. 101, for one rule arising from this. GMs can use this feature in games, to give visual clues and to generate plots. A dragon overcome by Yin energies may glow with a dark, cool radiance, or shed Yang-energy-laden scales. Plundering the corpse of a dead Chinese dragon is dangerous for all sorts of reasons, but if one does, one should separate out the Yang and Yin scales for different purposes.

In *GURPS* terms, a dragon developing overpowering Yin energies will display disadvantages such as Bloodlust, Bully, or Sadism. These attitudes often appear as a cold, calculating personality; a Chinese dragon gone bad may be less dynamic than its cousins, but far more dangerous. Of course, temporary problems, such as seemingly minor injuries to its scales, could cause a dragon to suffer the Yin-Yang Imbalance disadvantage (p. CI100).

"Realistic" Dragon

66 points

This template represents a semi-serious attempt to depict a creature within the limits of real-world physics and biology, with as many of the classical attributes of dragonkind as possible. The

Dinosaurs, Pterosaurs, and Megalania

Unmodified the following templates are useful as “dragons” in “realistic fantasy” games, or given a few supernatural powers to represent stupid-but-deadly draconic monsters. See p. 24 for discussion of dinosaurs as dragons, and p. 26 for *Megalania*. *GURPS Dinosaurs* provides most of the following treatments.

Apatosaurus

ST: 300+	Move/Dodge: 5/0	Size: 30-40+
DX: 9	PD/DR: 2/3	Wt: 18-36 tons
IQ: 3	Damage: 4d cr	
HT: 17/100	Reach: 1-8	

Apatosaurus, formerly known as *Brontosaurus* (“thunder lizard”), is the classic big, long-necked plant-eating dinosaur. A few larger species existed, but *Apatosaurus* is impressive. An adult would be 70 feet long, and able to trample for 6d crushing damage or whip opponents to its rear with its 8 yards of bony tail for 4d. It would probably only fight in self-defense, but might crush smaller beings by accident without even noticing.

Tyrannosaurus

ST: 100-150	Move/Dodge: 17/7	Size: 13+
DX: 14	PD/DR: 2/3	Wt: 4-6 tons
IQ: 3	Damage: 5d+2 imp	
HT: 15/50-80	Reach: C,1,2	

A widespread, successful, and big predator, the *Tyrannosaurus rex* grew up to 40 feet long and 20 feet high, with 6 inch teeth. Bipedal, with short, nearly useless “arms,” it probably had good senses (roll 14). It might pin smaller prey with its feet, doing 3d cutting damage in the process (contest of ST to get it off), and then bite.

Quetzalcoatlus

ST: 7-9	Move/Dodge: 12/7	Size: 15
DX: 14	PD/DR: 0/0	Wt: 50-190 lbs.
IQ: 3	Damage: 1d cut	
HT: 11-13	Reach: C,1	

Quetzalcoatlus, the largest and last-known of the flying pterosaurs, lived in the late Cretaceous, and grew to a length of 8 feet with a 50 feet wingspan – as large as a light single-engine plane! Even with its light bone structure, it probably needed a wind assist to take off, and then soared, riding the air currents for long periods. It would have been clumsy on the ground, even with its wings folded (Move 1, Dodge 5, Size 1), and was probably a scavenger, perhaps also taking small live prey.

Incidentally, it was discovered in 1971 – dinosaur experts encountering it in games set earlier would be doubly startled.

Megalania

ST: 35	Move/Dodge: 9/6	Size: 6
DX: 13	PD/DR: 2/3	Wt: 1,000 lbs.
IQ: 3	Damage: 2d-1 cut	
HT: 16/25	Reach: C	

A predator with the same habits as other monitor lizards, *Megalania* ambushed prey, lurking in bushes near game trails and rushing out to attack passing animals. It would possibly deliver just one bite, then retire and wait for the victim to die of blood loss or infection. If attacked from behind, it could lash with its tail to knock opponents down (roll a contest of ST).

Monitor lizard saliva is full of extremely virulent bacteria, and *Megalania* delivers a particularly powerful bite. Victims should roll against HT at -1. On a failure, the wound becomes infected (p. B134). All HT rolls to recover from the infection are at -2.

result could be the product of a weird evolutionary path on an alternate world or another planet, or futuristic genetic engineering in a culture that indulges some extreme whims.

Dragons are traditionally very large flying creatures. This unlikely combination is possibly accomplished if the creature somehow was a living lighter-than-air balloon. A metabolism that produced hydrogen would help in flight and raise the possibility of a functional if limited breath weapon. Of course, this would make it hideously vulnerable (and potentially dangerous to be around in more ways than one), but impressive enough in its way. It would “row” through the air using its short wings, but avoid emerging from its sheltered lair on windy days. However, it would be far less physically powerful than its size might suggest.



Dragons’ traditionally reptilian nature and essentially cold-blooded metabolism could be a good option for a creature committing its biological resources to making flammable gas. The creature’s small reptilian brain would add less to the total weight, although the template does allow a little more smarts than the average crocodile. Because this is not a mythical creature, the lenses on pp. 64-87 are inappropriate. Instead, it has disadvantages appropriate to a nonsapient animal with precarious biology. Why it keeps gold or gems in its lair is hard to say, unless as a consequence of its bizarre biochemistry.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +10 (No Fine Manipulators) [66]; DX -1 [-10]; IQ -5 [-40]; HT +2 [20].

Advantages: Breathe Fire, 1d (6/day, -10%) [18]; DR 2 [6]; Extended Lifespan 1 [5]; Extra Hit Points +6 [30]; Extra Legs (4 legs) [5]; Flight (Small Wings, -10%; Clumsy – halves dodge, -25%) [26]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; PD 1 [25]; Sharp Claws [25]; Sharp Teeth [5].

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Bad Grip [-10]; Bestial [-10]; Cold-Blooded [-5]; Color Blindness [-10]; (Dead Broke) [-25]; Hidebound [-5]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support [-10]; Innumerate [-1]; Mute [-25]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Presentient [-20]; Reduced Move (Flying) -4 [-20]; Reduced Move (Running) -3 [-15]; Short Arms [-10]; Sleepy (50%) [-10]; Vulnerability (To heat/flame attacks which do enough damage to penetrate its DR before the bonus, +3d) [-30].

The “Clumsy” limitation on the dragon’s Flight represents that it is a living balloon that “rows” clumsily through the air. While doing so, its effective dodge is *halved*, and may have other minor problems at the GM’s option.

Depending on the campaign’s details, Unusual Biochemistry [-5] might be highly appropriate. Wild carnivores may also have Social Stigma (Barbarian), and domesticated creatures Social Stigma (Valuable Property), while in campaigns where literacy is the norm, animal templates should include Illiteracy.

If a dragon of this type is killed by massive physical or energy damage and the gas escaping from its body ignites, the fire or explosion may do 1-6 dice of damage to other creatures nearby. However, a special effect expresses this, instead of the template.

Lenses: Personalities, Reputations, and Roles

This chapter’s templates focus on essential physical abilities and skills for dragons – GMs and players determine their attitudes and behaviors. However, dragons notoriously have strong personalities and peculiar behaviors, which their racial natures may determine. In some cases, fate or the gods may assign specific functions. As a result, any “lens” described below may apply to an individual dragon or an entire species. At the GM’s option, whether innate in a dragon’s racial nature or assigned at birth by higher powers, a lens may count as part of the racial template, and its disadvantages need not count against campaign limits.

Animalistic Dragons

This category covers animal-like dragons motivated by instinct, needs, and desires. They may be cunning, even clever, but this intelligence applies only to short-term ends. (A highly intelligent but animalistic dragon is a curious creature, both formidable and slightly pathetic, dangerously confusing for human opponents.) Because the combination of raw power and lack of civilized restraint is so frightening, this type shades into the “Malevolent” category below, but the danger is like a natural disaster, not arising from malice. Such a creature makes no use of wealth; it may have an instinct to collect shiny objects, but cannot distinguish gold from gilded rubbish, or understand what to do with money.

Add the disadvantages Attentive [-1] (reflecting a predator’s ability to focus on prey), Bestial [-10], (Dead Broke) [-25], Hidebound [-5], Innumerate [-1], Presentient [-20], and Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15], for a total of -77 points. (Some GMs may determine that draconic Bestial behavior is a disadvantage worth -15, and change the lens value accordingly.)

Incidentally, some animalistic creatures will also have other preventable disadvantages. Possibilities include Bad Smell, Bad Temper, or Odious Personal or Racial Habits (such as eating people). Also, if Literacy or Semi-Literacy is the standard in the campaign, Illiteracy may be added to this lens.

Some animalistic creatures may be tamed and even domesticated. In that case, they can buy off the Bestial disadvantage, and – if generally recognized as being under control – change their Social Stigma to Valuable Property (worth -10).

The Inner Beast: Alternatively, even if dragons are fully sapient, sophisticated beings, their animal natures may still lie close to the surface. Thus, dragons may have Stress Atavism at some level as a racial disadvantage, or take it as an optional character disadvantage.

Hoarding Dragons

This lens represents the archetypal (mostly Western) dragon type obsessed with accumulating treasure and then lying on it. It consists of Greed [-15] and Miserliness [-10], for a total of -25 points.

Additionally, special fondness for a particular type of treasure (worked gold, rubies, etc.) would be a quirk. Paranoia can set in after a few centuries and be commonplace among hoarding dragons, perhaps becoming part of the lens. If the entire race symbolizes lust for wealth, its template may include skills such as Appreciate Beauty or Accounting, advantages such as Single-Minded, or disadvantages such as Clueless, Jealousy, or even Gullibility.



Alternatively, some dragons in legend or fiction have an outright Addiction to contact with treasure. If this is a property of the treasure, it could explain why humans who plunder dragon hoards often become unhealthily attached to their loot.

Whimsical Dragons

Some fictional dragons display the traditional draconic traits, but in a diminished form, perhaps because the creature is not fully sapient and the traits are the products of pure instinct. A “whimsical” dragon could replace the draconic lust for treasure with a magpie love of pretty, glittery objects (more to play with than to keep), pride with casual vanity, and the deep passion and fury with a flammable temper. However, it thinks purely in the short term, making its interests and passions transient.

To represent this, use Bad Temper [-10], Compulsive Behavior (playing with bright shiny objects) [-10], Distractible [-1], and a racial quirk of Vanity [-1], reacting well to flattery and very badly to insults to their appearance or prowess – reaction modifiers of +3 or -3 are perfectly appropriate for NPCs with this attitude faced with praise or abuse. This gives a total value for the lens of -22 points. Alternatively, for spectacularly unstable personalities, take the Capricious disadvantage (p. 80).

Benevolent Dragons

Dragons with kindly attitudes are either small and low-powered, or downright godlike and accordingly unwilling (or unable) to act directly in human affairs. Powerful, actively benevolent dragons that were also friendly to humanity would tend to overshadow the human heroes of stories. A game with high-powered (or draconic) PCs should relax this principle. Benevolent dragons still tend to be austere and forceful, with little interest in most human concerns, especially if they embody some virtue or principle.

Take a total of -15 points from Cannot Harm Innocents [-10], Charitable [-15], Code of Honor [-5 to -15], Disciplines of Faith [Varies], Duty [Varies], Fanaticism [-15], Pacifism (self-defense only) [-15], Sense of Duty [Varies], or Vow [Varies]. A give campaign of species may fix the precise selections, and individual dragons may have more than the minimum. Individual cases could also have other “good” disadvantages such as Honesty or Truthfulness, or evil supernatural beings as Enemies, but this depends on the background.

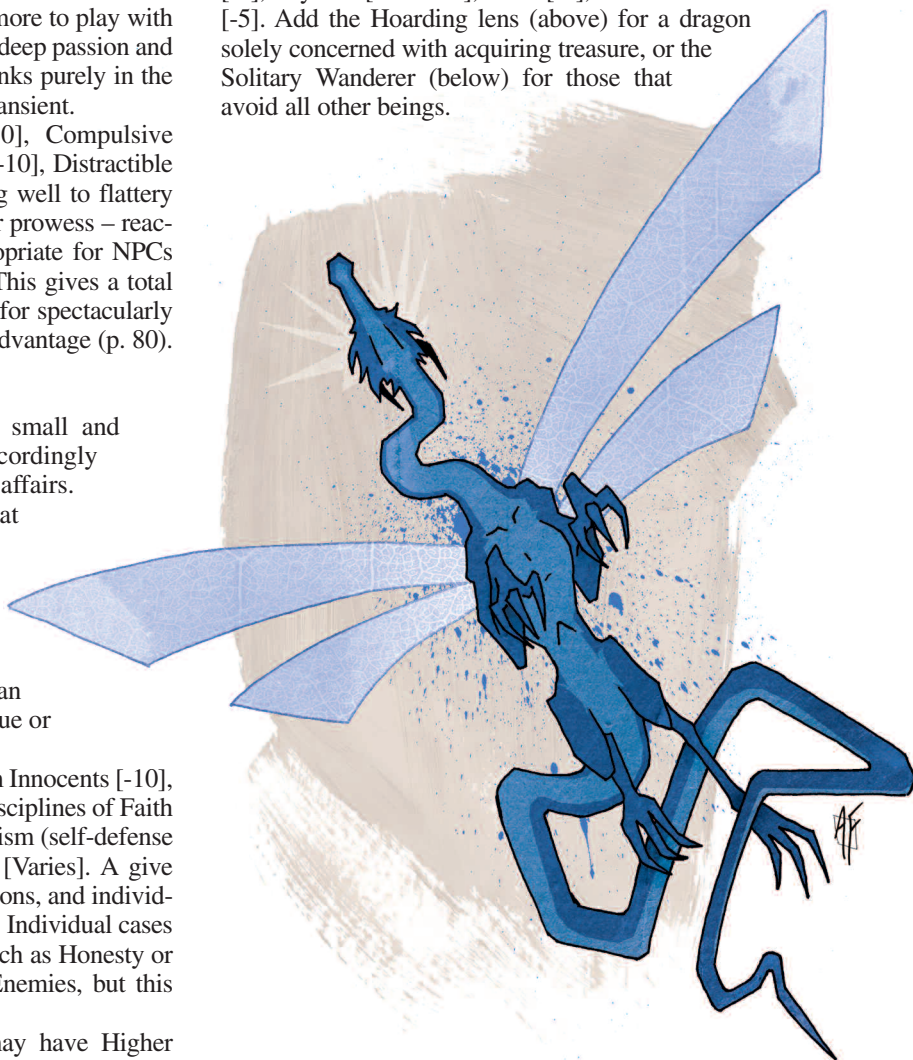
Living embodiments of focused virtue may have Higher Purpose, Single-Minded, or even supernatural advantages such as Blessed, Divine Favor, or Spirit Empathy. Although they are physically powerful, benevolent dragons are most impressive for their wisdom and supernatural significance, and should have a good IQ and magical abilities.

Disinterested Dragons

This lens covers dragons with little interest in the concerns or morality of other species. They can regard humanity as an occasional food source, but unless they are very powerful (or hungry), they think humanity is trouble than it is worth, and simply avoid human habitations. Humans who get in their way may be crushed underfoot, however. (Persuading a disinterested dragon that it shares an interest with humanity – if the entire world is in danger – and should assist the PCs can be an interesting task.) Because dragons are traditionally solitary, and have little need for the benefits of civilization (tools, weapons, laws, etc.), disinterested dragons seem unpleasantly selfish to more sociable,

cooperative beings, especially if they also have a draconic love of treasure.

Take one of Callous [-6], Oblivious [-3], or Solipsist [-10], and one of Loner [-5], Reclusive [-10], or Uncongenial [-1]. Then make the total value for the lens up to -20 points with any of Attentive [-1], Bad Temper [-10], Chauvinistic [-1], Clueless [-10], Dreamer [-1], Dull [-1], Hidebound [-5], Incurious [-5], Innumerate [-1], Low Empathy [-15], No Sense of Humor [-10], Odious Personal or Racial Habits (no small talk) [-5], Shyness [-5 to -15], Staid [-1], or Stubbornness [-5]. Add the Hoarding lens (above) for a dragon solely concerned with acquiring treasure, or the Solitary Wanderer (below) for those that avoid all other beings.



Subtle Dragons

Quintessentially subtle dragons may not have direct interest in the affairs of humanity, but are more involved with aspects of the world than the disinterested type. However, they also epitomize draconic cunning, and are long-lived enough to usually take the long-term view. Manipulative and cool, they will not destroy lesser beings without good reason, but have no compunction about exploiting and discarding anyone at their own convenience. Subtle dragons often exploit humans who try to deal with them.

These dragons have high IQ, a few appropriate social skills and sciences, and probably Collected, Composed, or Cool, but relatively few disadvantages. They may have vast Obsessions that are not obvious but underlie their plans and activities. Their thought processes may sometimes be too subtle and convoluted for their own good, as represented by disadvantages such as Attentive, Dreamer, Overconfidence, Staid, or Stubbornness.

Subtle dragons often have subtle supernatural powers or enough sensitivity to magic and other threats that they are unlikely to be defeated by a magical assault or sneak attack. Spells aside, Awareness, Danger Sense, Intuition, Medium, Oracle, Second Sight, and even Illuminated can simulate this.

Malevolent Dragons

This category covers dragons that are not simply amoral or greedy, but actively pursue or promote evil. If they possess modest power, they lurk on the fringes of human lands, killing and destroying until they either get bored and move on or are driven off or killed by determined humans. Powerful malevolent dragons dominate whole countries. Slaying them is a major heroic quest. This type may sleep much of the time, waking to cause trouble or when heroic party fails to sneak up on them deftly enough. Godlike malevolent dragons may be held in check by other beings of similar power, or imprisoned in cosmic dungeons. A worthy heroic tales could prevent depraved cults from freeing these monsters.

A malevolent dragon's malice can have some comprehensible cause, if it was wronged in the past. Its response may be disproportionate, or it may too late to right the wrong, making for subtle and tragic legends.

This lens consists of Bad Temper [-10], Bully [-10], Intolerance [-10], and Responsive [-1], for a total of -31 points. Some of these may be "upgraded"; for example, Bad Temper can change to Berserk. Many malevolent dragons have

Bloodlust, but others torture foes for extended periods of time. Sadism applies if the dragon can pay attention to individual victims, or Pyromania for a dragon which glories in its breath weapon. Such malevolence can also lead to Enemies or a negative Reputation (or a positive one among other evil beings), depending on the serpent's specific history. Fanaticism (Self), possibly with Megalomania added, makes for a heroically evil monster.

Diabolical Dragons

These creatures represent the power of Hell on Earth, or are so unnatural that the power of faith works directly against them. They also have the Malevolent lens (above), but they could be Animalistic, having been created or warped by sinister powers or weird accidents without malice on their own part. They are powerful, highly resistant to both mundane weapons and secular magic, and sometimes magically capable themselves (use other appropriate lenses and options), but their origins make them vulnerable to holiness.

They are susceptible to the power of True Faith (p. CI47), a 0-point feature. In addition, a Diabolical dragon may have a Duty to infernal powers, or even Fanaticism to the cause of evil. Depending on the campaign and its personal history, it may be Excommunicated, have a major negative Reputation or Social Stigma or a Vulnerability to blessed or holy items. It even could have Cannot Harm Innocents – with a -50% limitation applying this to direct harm to truly good or holy folk only.

Standard Dragon Attribute Summary

This table summarizes the "basic" attributes and abilities of the species. Ordinary species' members have their racial templates with no further attribute modifiers or special abilities. The

"Move" given is on the ground for most creatures, in water for aquatic species. Damage is for the creature's best normal attack. Size is in hexes.

<i>Creature</i>	<i>ST</i>	<i>DX</i>	<i>IQ</i>	<i>HT</i>	<i>HP</i>	<i>PD</i>	<i>DR</i>	<i>Speed</i>	<i>Dodge</i>	<i>Move</i>
Chinese Dragon:										
<i>Water Snake</i>	7	9	8	15	5	1	1	6	6	6
<i>Kiao</i>	14	10	9	15	20	2	2	6.25	6	6
<i>Kiao-Lung/Kioh-Lung</i>	20	12	16	15	40	2	4	6.75	6	15
<i>Li Lung</i>	80	14	16	15	80	3	6	7.25	7	7
<i>Lung Wang</i>	200	12	18	15	90	3	10	6.75	6	3
<i>P'an Lung</i>	54	20	18	15	70	2	4	8.75	8	12
<i>Shen Lung</i>	60	15	20	15	75	3	6	7.5	7	11
<i>Tien Lung</i>	66	17	25	15	90	3	6	8	8	16
<i>Crawling Wyrn</i>	40	12	5	15	45	3	6	6.75	6	6
<i>Draconic Lizardman</i>	10	11	12	11	11	0	1	5.5	5	5
<i>Naga (semi-humanoid)</i>	13	13	10	14	14	0	0	6.75	6	6
<i>Naga (shapeshifter, as snake)</i>	15	13	10	15	20	0	0	6	6	6
<i>Petty Drake</i>	4	15	6	14	6	1	1	8.25	8	8
<i>"Realistic" Dragon</i>	20	9	5	12	18	1	2	5.25	5	2
<i>Sea Serpent</i>	100	13	3	16	50	2	3	7.25	7	7
Western Dragon (all types can breathe fire and have Alertness +2):										
<i>Hatchling/Man-Sized</i>	13	9	10	13	13	1	1	5.5	5	4
<i>Young/Very Small</i>	20	11	11	15	20	1	2	6.5	6	5
<i>Adolescent/Small</i>	32	12	12	15	33	2	3	6.75	6	6
<i>Young Adult/Medium</i>	44	13	13	15	48	3	4	7	7	6
<i>Adult/Large</i>	54	14	14	15	63	4	6	7.25	7	6
<i>Old Adult/Very Large</i>	64	14	15	15	80	4	6	7.25	7	6
<i>Monstrous</i>	70	14	16	15	90	4	7	7.25	7	6
<i>Wyvern</i>	25	14	6	14	27	2	3	10	10	10

Keepers of Secrets

This lens represents a dragon whose primary concern is with knowledge instead of material things. It should have a good IQ, and probably numerous Mental skills (possibly in its template). It can have magical abilities (see the next chapter). However, its main functions are controlling knowledge, guarding a secret place, or simply knowing things that most beings do not. These dragons can dispensing their knowledge frugally to those who prove their worth – which may involve a quest, a very convincing demonstration of “need to know,” or the use of magic or similar powers to determine one’s motives or purity of heart.

To represent this, take -20 points from the following disadvantages: Broad-Minded [-1], Callous [-6], Careful [-1], Duty [varies], Fanaticism (ensuring the “correct” use of knowledge) [-15], Hidebound [-5], Incurious [-5], Loner [-5], No Sense of Humor [-10], Oblivious [-3], Obsession (controlling knowledge) [-15], Odious Personal Habit (Cryptic) [-5], Sense of Duty (to correct use of knowledge) [-15], Stubbornness [-5], Uncongenial [-1], or Workaholic [-5]. Make sure that the selection fully represents the dragon’s specific duties and role.



Appointed Guardian

This lens represents a dragon with a duty – one assigned by gods or a master – to guard a specific place or object. Such a creature is not usually suitable as a PC, but might be interesting in a limited-duration campaign in which the dragon searches for a lost object it should have guarded more carefully.

The key component for this lens is a Duty (full time), an Obsession, or a Vow, worth -15 points in each case. The creature might also have various advantages such as Awareness, Higher Purpose, Imperturbable, Patron, Second Sight, Single-Minded, Unfazeable, or Doesn’t Sleep (the last being traditional), and may also display minor disadvantages or quirks such as Careful. Appointed Guardian dragons can be unique creatures, if not terribly strongly characterized.

Lord of the Beasts

Some dragons are rulers in the animal kingdom. Other animals may instinctively understand the dragon’s status (or are intelligent enough not to argue with its claims), and the dragon may occasionally act to prevent this following being diminished (by human hunters). Alternatively, a dragon lord can be the gods’ “feudal” agent, diligently resolving territorial disputes, carrying messages to the deities regarding natural phenomena, and carefully tending the ecological balance.

<i>Flight</i>	<i>Damage</i>	<i>Reach</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Notes</i>
–	1d-3 cut	C	1	100-200 lbs.	Aquatic
–	1d-1 cut	C	3-5	500-1,000 lbs.	Amphibious: Swim Move 9
–	1d cut	C	6	1,000 lbs.	Amphibious: Swim Move 12
14	4d cut	C,1	6	1-2 tons	
12	10d cut	C,1	60	100+ tons	Amphibious: Swim Move 6
16	3d-1 cut	C,1,2	18	1-2 tons	Amphibious: Swim Move 8; Can produce “water fire”
21	3d cut	C,1,2	16	5+ tons	Amphibious: Swim Move 14; Can produce “water fire”
24	3d+2 cut	C,1-2	16	1-3 tons	Amphibious: Swim Move 16; Breathes fire
–	2d cut	C	6	1,500 lbs	Tail striker (2d cr, 3 hex reach)
–	1d-2 cut	C	1	80-160 lbs.	Can use weapons
–	1d-2 cr	C	1	130-250 lbs.	Can use weapons
–	1d-1 cut	C		2 40+ lbs.	Venomous
16	1d-4 cut	C	<1	1-40 lbs.	Breathes fire
4	1d cut	C	6+	1-4 tons	Half Dodge when flying; Breathes fire
–	5d imp	C,1-8	35	2-3 tons	Aquatic
8	1d-1 cut	C	2	150-200 lbs.	
10	1d cut	C,1	3-5	500-800 lbs.	
12	2d-1 cut	C,1	4-8	800-1,500 lbs.	
14	2d+1 cut	C,1	8-12	1,000-2,000 lbs.	
17	3d-1 imp	C,1-2	10-14	1,500-2,500 lbs.	
21	3d+1 imp	C,1-2	13-16	2,500-3,000 lbs.	
25	3d+2 imp	C,1-2	15+	3,000+ lbs.	
20	1d+2 imp	C,1-2	10	800-1,000 lbs.	Venomous; Move 3/Dodge 7 on the ground



The exact combination of attributes needed to represent lordship varies with the nature of the dragon and its rule. A benevolent ruler might have Animal Empathy or even Beast-Kin, although the latter would raise questions about its diet; a self-appointed tyrant might have Fanaticism (Self) and Megalomania. Most will have Speak with Animals (or Speak with Fish), plus a Duty, or perhaps a Sense of Duty, while genuinely loyal “subjects” might function as Allies or an Ally Group. Those mediating between the gods and the animal kingdom could have Awareness, Divine Favor, Higher Purpose, Medium, Oracle, a powerful Patron, Pious, Power Investiture, Second Sight, or True Faith. In any case, the confidence that comes with power might make the dragon Collected, Composed, or Imperturbable. A few spells from the Animal College might also be appropriate; see Chapter 4.

Solitary Wanderer

Lastly, dragons may, by virtue of their nature or perhaps by some kind of divine curse, be restless, wandering creatures, uninterested in interaction with other beings. This makes for poor PCs in most games, but a wanderer dragon forced into temporary alliance with other beings could be interesting.

This eliminates many traditional features of dragonkind, especially the lair and the large-scale treasure accumulation. But the wanderer reflects an alternative image – the dragon as an

unnerving and enigmatic wild force, coming and going like the weather.

Take one of Loner [-5], Reclusive [-10], or Uncongenial [-1], and then make the lens cost up to -20 points with any of the following: Attentive [-1], Callous [-6], Careful [-1], Confused [-10], Curious [Varies], Dreamer [-1], Dull [-1], Hidebound [-5], Impulsiveness [-10], Intolerance [-5 or -10], Low Empathy [-15], Oblivious [-3], Odious Personal Habit [Varies], Shyness [Varies], Staid [-1], Stubbornness [-5], or an appropriate Vow [Varies]. A wanderer also should take Dead Broke, and a few skills representing years of wilderness experience, notably Survival and Area Knowledge.

Some of this list’s disadvantages (e.g. Vow) can help explain why the dragon wanders, others form part of the classic “loner” personality, and others could be a cause or an effect. Beings with Stubbornness may avoid dealings with others, who “just won’t do things the right way,” or those that avoid such contact may become stubborn because they are not used to negotiation. Shyness could also explain why dragons behave this way, on an individual or racial level. Seemingly an odd disadvantage for a powerful creature, even monsters can find the idea of social interaction uncomfortable – and who is going to find out that dragons live alone, not out of arrogance, but because they cannot handle the alternatives? (And remember that shy beings are not always nice once you get to know them.)

TOOTH AND CLAW
AND FIERY MAW

Not every dragon is huge, or breathes fire, or flies – but most have several standard “draconic” abilities or features. This chapter evaluates these with *GURPS* rules.



Now it came about that when Feridoun learned that his sons were returning, he went forth to meet them and prove their hearts. So he took upon him the form of a dragon that foamed at the mouth with fury, and from whose jaws sprang mighty flames. And when his sons were come near unto the mountain pass, he came upon them suddenly, like to a whirlwind, and raised a cloud of dust about the place with his writhings, and his roaring filled the air with noise.

– Ferdowsi, *The Book of Kings*

POWER INCARNATE



Dragons are generally extremely powerful (costing a lot of points as characters, as seen in Chapter 3). This power can take various forms.

Size and Strength

Dragons tend to be big – if often slender and serpentine – and accordingly strong. However, lacking hands or interest in tools or building, they make limited use of this strength. They may cause terrible damage by direct assault, but are unlikely to pick up rocks and drop them on foes. Dragons have a certain dignity, and are, in some ways, the antithesis of tool-users. Still, a dragon should right itself if it falls over, and should not be wrestled down easily by other large creatures.

Most dragons' sheer size not only provides muscle mass and the ability to soak up considerable amounts of damage, it also overawes many opponents without attacking. However, not all dragons are noted for size; some, even in folktales, are surprisingly small, and many have notably slender bodies. Dragons display power instead of raw weight.

Scales of Iron

Tough reptilian scales cover a typical dragon's body, and stories sometimes emphasize the strength of these – it takes a powerful or lucky blow for a hero to hurt the beast. Indeed, in some cases, dragons are invulnerable, except for the underbelly, or perhaps just one weak spot. (Tolkien's Smaug, in *The Hobbit*, is protected underneath by an encrustation of gems from his hoard, except for one patch, though he seems to be a unique case.) Dragons certainly have the Scales advantage (p. C157), but many have better protection than even the strongest version of this provides. As a result, it is easiest to buy Damage Resistance and Passive Defense.

Mobility and Speed

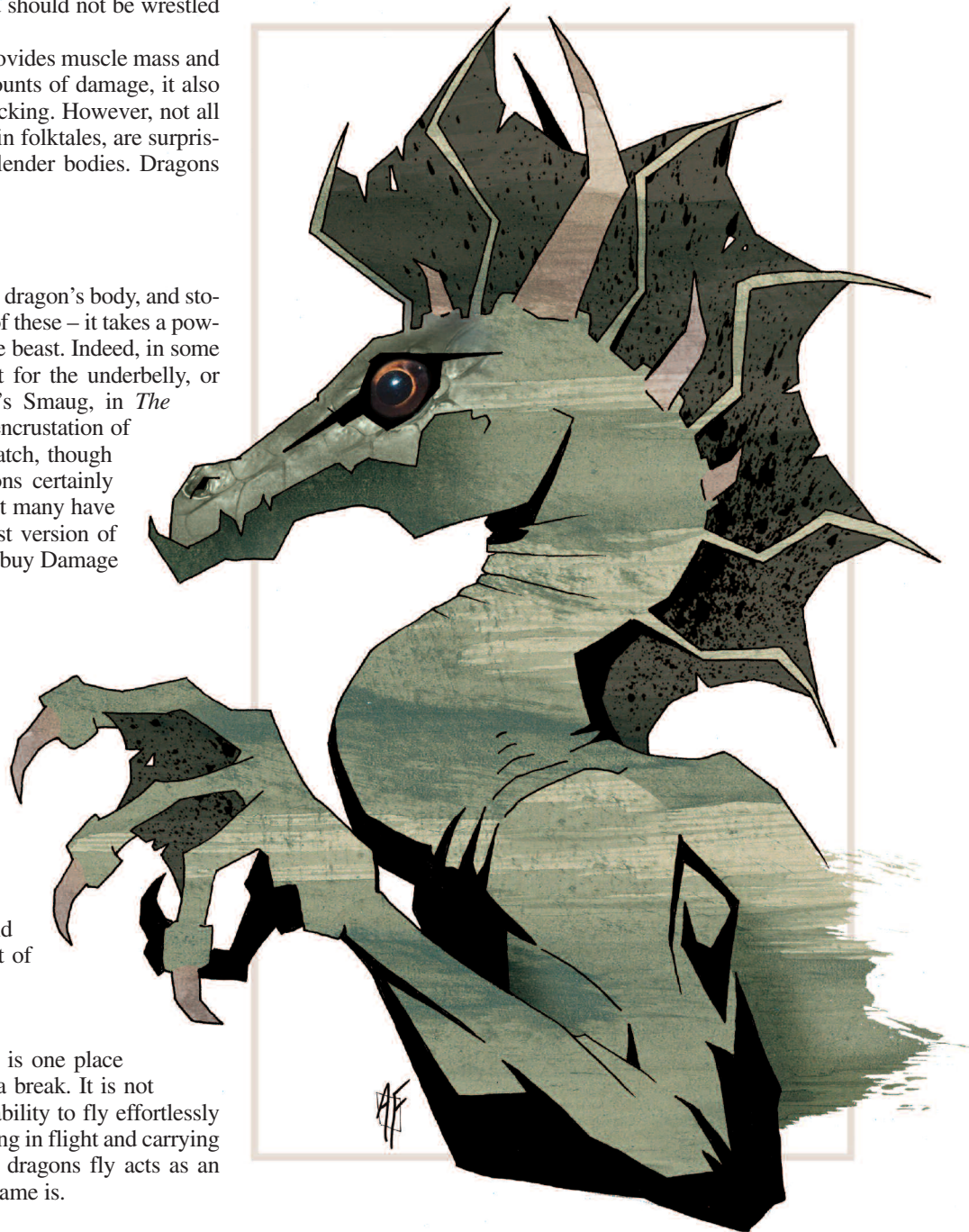
Dragons may be big, strong, and heavy, but they are rarely slow or cumbersome. They are often quite fast, with a sinuous, serpentine agility; flying dragons especially are legendarily quick in the air, and possibly agile to boot. Dragons are not generally known for speed, but being able to build up to a fair move rate is another aspect of their legendary power.

Flight

The ability of many dragons' to fly is one place where the logic of science has to take a break. It is not just that dragons are so big; it is their ability to fly effortlessly and gracefully, twisting and even hovering in flight and carrying significant loads. The ease with which dragons fly acts as an indicator of how fantastical or gritty a game is.

"Flight," in dragon stories, does not usually mean cumbersome levitation, but flight like birds – and predatory hawks or eagles, at that. In *GURPS* terms, their move rates should at least compare to an eagle's Move of 12, and probably higher.

As if to destroy any last hope of logic, many dragons have flimsy wings, sprouting from far back on their shoulders or even midway along their spines. These lack any obvious musculature, let alone the skeletal anchorage a large flyer would really need. Few dragons display the large breast muscles familiar to anyone who has ever cooked any sort of bird.



The Weakest Link

In general, “invulnerability” means “armored enough to deflect any attack which any mortal character can hope to deliver,” instead of total immunity to physical harm. *GURPS* reflects this with a high DR, instead of the Invulnerability advantage. If some passing deity smote the dragon for a thousand points of damage, it would be flattened. On the other hand, a dragon or dragon-analogue in a modern-day game might face weapons that inflict hundreds of points of damage, and “invulnerability” might as well be absolute. In addition, GMs can give the creature some versions of the Injury Tolerance advantage (p. CI58) – perhaps some combination of No Neck, No Vitals, or No Brain – to reflect, not the actual absence of those organs, but a degree of protection that makes blows at those locations ineffective.

If the dragon is “invulnerable” merely to hand weapons wielded by normal human beings, note that a knight with a lance on a ST 50 heavy warhorse (the limit of medieval mortal hand weapon capability) can do 5d+5 damage when at full speed. On a critical hit, depending on the rules used, this might do maximum damage (35 points) or triple damage (over 70 points on a reasonably good roll), so DR 80 may be needed for plausible invulnerability. (GMs should declare critical hit results that ignore armor, or automatically cause permanent injury or instant death, inappropriate with such creatures; reroll any that come up.)

A modern rifle may inflict 7d+1, requiring even higher DR for protection. Modern anti-tank weapons or the heaviest medieval siege artillery can launch damage in the hundreds of points. GMs should either decide that PCs arranging a clear shot at a dragon deserve dragonslayer status, or look again at Invulnerability.

The “one weak spot” then needs definition, primarily in terms of size. If the dragon’s entire underbelly is vulnerable, then all or most of its DR (or its Invulnerability) should be bought with a -25% limitation (and should probably not have the “No Vitals” form of Injury Tolerance). Striking at the underbelly is easy if opponents somehow get underneath the dragon; otherwise, the attacker must attack at a

tricky angle or with careful timing. This imposes a -5 penalty on missile and thrusting attacks, or -3 on swung melee attacks. A smaller weak spot should imply an accordingly smaller limitation on the protective advantages: -20% for a spot which is always attacked at -5, -15% for -6, -10% for -7, or -5% for one attacked at -8. If the weak spot is especially vulnerable – if a hit receives the same benefits as a brain, eyes, or (male) groin hit, for example – the limitation may be increased by -5% or more, at the GM’s option. If the dragon’s weakness is a secret or can only be exploited by very clever tactics (inducing the beast to open its mouth long enough for attackers to get a clear shot), then the limitation may be reduced further or even eliminated.

Alternatively, a dragon might have a Vulnerability (p. CI106) to blows to its weak spot. A hit location at -7 or -8 to hit (the brain, or a small missing scale) represents the equivalent of a “Very Rare” attack; damage to a location at -5 or -6 to hit (the neck or head, or a large missing scale) is a “Rare” attack; damage to one at -3 or -4 to hit (the vital organs) is “Occasional”; and damage to one at -1 or -2 to hit (the tail) is “Common.” For dragons with moderate DR – usually enough to fend off normal melee weapons – this gives well-aimed attacks a good chance to wound. Dragons can have Vampiric Invulnerability (p. CI70), along with this type of Vulnerability, making them impossible to kill by normal physical assault unless correctly targeted.

“Invulnerable” dragons’ total hit points could also be surprisingly low. In legends, when the hero identifies and strikes the one weak point, the dragon does not look surprised and stunned but keeps on fighting; it dies. Another way to handle dragons so they seem virtually invulnerable, while still giving numerous, fearless opponents a small chance of beating them, might be to keep their DR relatively low, but set a large number of hit points. Then give the dragon a “weak point” that represents a highly vulnerable vital spot, a hit on which causes massive hit point loss and other severe problems.



Reality Check

The largest flying birds in the world are various species of bustard, which can reach up to about 42 lbs., and swans, which can reach about 40. Some individuals actually become heavier than this, but then lose the ability to fly. The largest wingspans in the world belong to the wandering albatross, which may reach 12 feet or more, and the marabou stork, which can exceed 11 feet. However, an extinct South American vulture from around 6 million years ago may have reached 260 lbs., with a wingspan of 20 feet or more.

None of these compare to the pterosaur *Quetzalcoatlus* of 70 million years ago (p. 63), with its possible 50-foot wingspan – although that may not have weighed more than 200 lbs. The largest bats are flying foxes, which can achieve a 6-foot wingspan.

How well the largest creatures ever flew is a matter of discussion and definition. Certainly, any large flyer will tend to glide as much as possible, for the sake of efficiency.

Of course, a large flyer needs to be as light as biology permits. This leads to anatomical features such as hollow bones, which, in *GURPS* terms, the Fragile disadvantage simulates (p. CI102).

Faced with these problems, there are three ways to go. Either one ignores the issue completely (perfectly valid in fantasy games); one assumes that the dragon flies by magic (or psionic power, or super-science implants) and that any wings are purely symbolic, mana organs (p. FB113), or an aid to steering; or one fudges a semi-plausible “logical” solution.

The last is not entirely hopeless. Disregarding extreme ideas such as hydrogen-filled lighter-than-air dragons (p. 63), GMs can shrink dragons down a little, reconstruct their anatomy more like a bird or pterosaur, and treat them as cautious gliders rather than strong flyers. They are still implausible, but they do not insult the laws of physics. Dragons of this type will adopt a lifestyle fitting their limitations. They may choose to live atop high cliffs from which they can launch themselves. Much of their famous intelligence will apply to the science of gliding and the assessment of thermals and wind patterns. If they land in low areas, they will find somewhere quiet, where they can make long takeoff runs. They will probably fight at range with flaming breath, or make fast “passing” attacks on prey, especially if they have light, flimsy, hollow bones.

On the other hand, truly supernatural dragons that do not worry about such limitations can glory in their raw power, hurling themselves into the sky with casual ease and swooping down on prey. Catching such a creature in a place or time where magic does not work properly could leave it vulnerable, humiliated, and angry.

The Flight Advantage and Skill

GURPS offers a range of options for the gamer depicting a flying character, and can characterize both different dragon species and different individual dragons.

Most dragons will have the Flight advantage (p. CI56) with the Winged Flight limitation. However, magical flight can take either no limitations (appropriate for Oriental creatures who lack anything as vulgar as wings), or the Winged Flight (Small Wings) option (useful for essentially magical creatures with ludicrously small wings, needed for the magical symbolism or to steer, and also for “lighter than air” dragons which use their wings for the latter purpose). More “realistic” creatures might have the Gliding or Controlled Gliding limitations, or at least Cannot Hover.

This advantage gives flight at a reasonable move rate. However, many dragons are fast, adding some level of Enhanced Move (Flight) (p. CI54) to their racial template. If the species has members with very varied capabilities, notably fast individuals with the GM’s permission might purchase further levels as a personal option. Super Flight (p. CI67), while normally limited to super-powered individuals in superhero games, could apply to *very* fast dragon species or individuals in some campaigns. Conversely, some dragons may be weak flyers that cannot get far through the air. The Costs Fatigue limitation is the best model for this situation (p. CI110).

In all cases, flying dragon species know the appropriate Flight skill (p. CI131) at DX. This should be enough for most of them, but individuals might choose to practice their aerobatic technique and buy the skill up. Such dragons might be cunning aerial fighters or showoffs, whirling and twisting through the air for the sheer fun of it. If in combat with other dragons, they seek to draw their opponents into the air, and then exploit their superior turning ability, or take the fight low to the ground in complicated terrain. Making a foe crash without even exchanging blows could feel very satisfying.

Flight Techniques

Assuming, however, that dragons fly as well as tales claim, it is possible to draw a picture of how truly impressive legendary creatures might behave in the air.

If they are capable of covering long distances, and have either good brains or efficient instincts, they may ride the winds and thermals, soaring with wings extended. They may need to maintain a high minimum airspeed to avoid stalling, although some dragons actually hover. Creatures with a real stall speed problem could prefer a cruising height that gives them enough room to recover from any problems before they crash.

Taking off and landing are energetic, noisy, and very unsubtle processes, even for “mythic” dragons. The beating of a dragon’s wings may stir up a veritable hurricane. A dragon might build up speed on a runway or a stretch of open water, or else make a prodigious leap upwards. When landing, the dragon may slow his airspeed by controlled stalls and backward rearing.

Perfect landings may be uncommon, as they depend as much on the wind as on the dragon’s Flight skill. Large dragons could circle a landing area several times before setting down successfully. Winged dragons may prefer to lair on or near cliffs, so that gravity and updrafts can help with the process of getting airborne.

However agile it may be, a large creature will have problems maneuvering in flight. Younger, smaller dragons will bank more tightly and climb more steeply than their larger relations, but being less strong, may not fly as fast. Among intelligent dragons, tight turns and smooth landings may mark a suave or flashy character, while pragmatists and bullies may flaunt how robust they are by coming to earth with a shattering impact.



POISON AND BREATH WEAPONS



While not standard for every dragon in every myth or story, some kind of venom or deadly breath is a common feature.

In **GURPS** advantage terms (p. CI71) dragon venom is usually *poisonous*. Taking several levels of the advantage can represent the sheer deadliness of a wyrm’s bite or a wyvern’s sting. As stories emphasize the speed as well as the virulence of these effects, the poison will rarely be slow-acting.

Venomous Fangs, Dripping Jaws

In the simplest form, where the dragon is just the ultimate dangerous snake, a dragon can have an envenomed bite. Of course, a bite from a creature of superhuman size and strength and high-supernatural power can be very dangerous – it will involve a lot of poison, and dragon venom is incredibly virulent and fast-acting.

However, dragons may be so venomous that deadly poison drips from their jaws. While the bite is dangerous enough and

the visual effects terrifying, this ability can have other capabilities. The dragon may spit contact poison (much like a few real-world snakes, only bigger), or it may leave a trail of acidic venom wherever it goes, withering plant life.

Dragons slay opponents at range by breathing or spitting a stream of venom. Use the enhancement Contact Agent (+70%), along with either Ranged (+35%) or, for particularly devastating creatures, Cloud of Mist (+100%). Enhancements and limitations apply to such attacks, including those for Modified Attack Ranges (p. 81); see pp. CI109-112 for several other possibilities. For example, a creature with poison glands of only moderate capacity may have Limited Use or Takes Recharge.

A creature with a ranged venom attack rolls vs. DX to hit. This can be the Magic Breath skill (p. CI148) defaulting to DX, and can improve from this default in the usual way. Note that attacks using this skill are treated as melee rather than missile weapons, and do not take Aiming or Snap Shot modifiers.

Protection from Contact Poisons

When a monster spits contact venom, enough will contact the target's skin to take effect, especially if the victim is wearing low-tech protection. Poisons work through joints or links in armor and soak through cloth. This may take a moment (especially if the GM gives the target a chance to tear away the poisoned protection). Venom usually penetrates full-coverage low-tech armor in DR seconds.

High-tech armor, magical protections, or just carefully prepared waxed and oiled cloth may keep poison out. (Although, in the latter case, providing protection for one's eyes may be a serious issue.) GMs will adjudicate such questions on a case-by-case basis. Clever dragonslayers are traditionally successful, but do not find victory easy.

Of course, intelligent monsters may recognize their problem and compensate for it. If they cannot produce enough venom to overwhelm the defenses, they may try ripping away protection, biting through it with venomous fangs, or targeting unprotected hit locations. Again, GMs will have to rule on this strategy's effectiveness. Still, even a dull-witted monster will damage most protections during a long fight. The wise dragon-fighter will exploit the advantage granted by such protections quickly, before they are compromised.

Acidic Venom

Occasionally, dragon venom is acidic – *corrosive* according to the rule on p. C171. This type usually takes the Ranged

enhancement, delivered by spitting rather than biting (although anyone bitten by a dragon with corrosive venom is likely in a *lot* of trouble).

Paralyzing Venom

Some venoms paralyze victims temporarily, with no significant long-term ill effects – except that a stunned or paralyzed victim is left open to other attacks. (This is a dramatic convention; realistic paralyzing drugs or gases can be quite dangerous to victims. However, that consideration is beyond the scope of this book.) In *GURPS*, such venoms reduce fatigue instead of hit points, represented by the -20% Fatigue Damage Only limitation (p. SU53), often combined with other advantages and limitations.

Persistent Poisons

Dragon venom can be persistently lethal, and anyone acting careless after contact with it can suffer – especially if they wipe their mouths with gloved hands (deadly if combined with the Contact Agent and Ranged enhancements). Treat Persistent as an enhancement; for +10%, the venom degrades in effectiveness by one level per hour; for +25%, it degrades by one level per day, and for +50% the rate is one level per week. GMs should judge where venom splashed, and how easy it is to notice. PCs will probably find all sorts of devious and subtle uses for such poisons, given the chance.

Poisonous and Pestilential Breath

A ranged venom attack often takes the form of a deadly vapor or gas – yet another way some dragons kill by something other than fire. It can take the form of a disease – folk tales rarely bother drawing the distinction between chemical and biological weapons. In the case of dragons that embody plague and disaster, the poisons or diseases they produce may be virulent and persistent; coupled with the ability to attack large areas, this can enable a dragon to lay waste to whole kingdoms.

Because many cultures consider poison evil and underhanded, and deliberately causing disease or famine is considered worse, monsters with this power are not merely thought of as dangerous, but quintessentially evil – symbols of devastation and foulness. Of course, a venomous dragon could just be a dangerous animal, motivated by hunger but not by malice. But that's not the way that traditional stories work. Dragons take pleasure in their poisonous nature, squatting in once-fertile areas where their pestilence can cause most trouble.

Fiery Blasts, Slaving Flame

Descriptions of the “burning” effects of acidic or otherwise corrosive venom



shade this power into the classic dragon ability – breathing fire. Exactly how dragons biologically achieve this is often unclear. The creators of legends had little interest in the subject – after all, these are magical beasts – but some modern writers have played with various suggestions. Dragons may have exotic, powerful metabolisms that generate flammable gases or liquids in quantity. More magically, dragons could draw on powers of elemental flame or, being associated with the powers of evil, may actually exude hellfire.

Some descriptions of “dragon fire” in action suggest a minor variation on the theme: instead of a blast of flame – superheated gas – a dragon produces powerfully flammable spittle, functionally akin to “Greek fire” or napalm. The effects are broadly the same as simple fire, but can differ a little. For example, it could continue burning while floating on water, and might even stick to victims and continue to burn for a significant time, producing horrific injuries.

Other Breath Attacks

Some depictions of dragons, mostly in modern stories, give them breath weapons other than poison, acid, or fire; examples include cold, electricity, and weird or magical gases. These ideas can stop players from becoming too complacent about dragon abilities in high-power games.

The Breathe Fire Advantage

In game terms, the Breathe Fire advantage defines draconic fiery breath (p. C172). Obviously, different types of dragon have different breath weapons, in terms of raw power and other details.

“Cheap” vs. “Expensive” Powers

This book assumes throughout that dragon attacks use the “Cheap” Improvement Scheme (p. C172); given that its core topic is giant fire-breathing monsters, this seemed only appropriate. GMs can keep such characters under control, especially in games combining dragons with other species, by using the “Expensive” scheme, adjusting the template costs on pp. 50-64 accordingly.

To buy increments of less than a die (for flexibility or to simulate creatures from other *GURPS* books as precisely as possible), the costs are 2 points for +1 damage and +1/3 of a range increment, 4 points for +2 damage and +2/3 of a range increment, or 5 points for an extra 1d-1 damage and a full range increment. Very small draconic creatures may do very small amounts of damage; in such cases, buy one level of the power, and take a limitation. Doing 1 point of damage with a range of 1 hex is a -70% limitation, 2 points or 1d-3 (range 1 hex) is -40%, and 1d-1 (range 2 hexes) is -30%.

Rules Variations

1. See *Attack Enhancements and Limitations* (p. 81) for rules for breath with greater or lesser range than the standard 3 hexes.
2. Instead of using the standard “4 points for +1 to attack rolls” rule for Natural Attacks, dragons with the Breathe Fire advantage can attack with the Magic Breath skill, exactly as described for the Venom advantage (p. 72). Attacks using this skill are melee rather than missile weapons, and do not take Aiming or Snap Shot modifiers.
3. Other standard enhancements and limitations may also be useful. Costs Fatigue (p. C1110), Limited Use (p. C1111), or Takes Recharge (p. C1112) may help represent a dragon with “only so much flame.”

Slavering Flame

Burning liquid “breath” can be represented by a special enhancement: Enduring (+200%). This makes a flame attack function like a flamethrower (p. VE120 or p. HT78). Only sealed armor protects fully against this; nonsealed armor gets 1/5 DR. Once it hits, the flame not only does the listed initial damage, but sticks and continues to burn for 10d seconds, doing 1d extra damage per second (DR protects as above).

Such flames can be extinguished by complete immersion in water or the use of magic, but non-magical means may require one or more seconds and a DX or IQ roll, as well as access to appropriate substances, and can sometimes lead to a couple of dice of damage for anyone helping the victim.

Dragon Blight

Some dragons symbolize, not power or covetousness, but blight and decay. Their very presence devastates whole countries, and may even cause plague. Those who fight them do not suffer immediate infection, although such monsters are usually also very venomous; rather, the dragons emit large quantities of subtle, slow-acting poison that eventually affects living things anywhere nearby.

The Lifebane disadvantage can represent “dragon blight” (p. C198), but the area of effect is usually greater than that implies. To represent a wide-area effect under conscious control, give the creature some appropriate innate spells (p. 85) at very high levels. The most appropriate is probably Blight (p. G88); for a medieval-style community, a 50% fall in crop yields represents utter disaster. Wither Plant (p. M76) has even deadlier effects, but costs more fatigue and can be resisted. Other spells that help represent a draconic blight include Foul Water (p. G32) and even Suspend Mana (p. G74). Of course, a dragon flying overhead occasionally, breathing corrosive venom on crops or poisonous venom onto herds of animals (using the Cloud of Mist enhancement), and maybe emitting a Lifebane effect, can make a thorough mess of an area without spells.



OTHER ATTACKS

Dragons do more than breathe on or poison their victims. While supernatural abilities get a chapter to themselves later, it is worth reviewing some basic draconic combat options here. See p. 38 for how choice of tactics could reflect a dragon's personality and nature.

Melee Skills and Options

Attacks made with natural weapons such as claws and fangs consist of a roll against DX – or with Brawling skill (p. B50), so dragons that want to be good in close combat should buy that up. The GM can require that shape-shifting dragons learn a different mandatory specialization of Brawling for each of their forms; after all, punching and kicking in human guise is very different from fighting as a quadruped.

Environmental Variation and Color-Coding

Dragons inhabit a range of different environments – mountains, swamps, oceans, deserts, and so on – and often have slightly different abilities and attributes appropriate to where they live. Modern stories and RPGs often develop this idea, sometimes “color-coding” different species, red for fiery mountain dragons, black for swamp-dwelling acid-spitters, white for arctic types whose breath is lethally cold, and so on.

The actual game attributes for such variant species need not actually vary much, aside perhaps from their breath weapons. Most dragons of similar size will have similar ST, DR, move rates, and so on, although some species may be noted for speed, resilience, cunning, or whatever; GMs should adjust numbers to fit. Some have adaptations specific to their preferred environments, which advantages such as Amphibious, Gills, Ice Skates, or Temperature Tolerance reflect. Likewise, some species may have appropriate disadvantages – an “ice dragon” might have a Vulnerability to heat and flame, or a creature of elemental fire might have a severe Weakness related to low temperatures.

Non-Fire Breath Weapons

Unusual breath weapons can be represented by some Natural Attack other than Breathe Fire, possibly with some of the enhancements or limitations discussed for that advantage on p. 74. Lightning (p. CI73) is an obvious possibility, and *GURPS Supers* has applicable rules for “generic attack powers” (p. SU34). For that matter, some attacks may be functionally equivalent to Breathe Fire in everything except their “special effects.” If the dragon breathes blasts of bone-freezing cold, this can have exactly the same cost schedule as the existing advantage. Alternatively, the dragon could have a Knack with an offensive spell from *GURPS Magic* or *GURPS Grimoire*; see Chapter 5 for more.

Creatures with legs (e.g., most dragons) may attempt to *Trample* (p. B142) a much smaller foe; however, only a very few dragon species have hooves, so this is not usually a terribly effective tactic. Still, it is a good way of humiliating opponents. Any dragon can make a *Slam* attack (p. B112). Jumping

or flying dragons may also attack with a *Flying Tackle* (p. B113). “Fast pass” techniques (p. 71) are represented by a mixture of full moves with Wild Swing attacks, and the occasional carefully judged step and attack, or slams against smaller opponents. Wild Swings are not usually terribly effective, but a dragon with good DX or skill will hit reasonably often, and the threat of those whirling claws should keep opponents on the defensive, less able to counterattack. In addition, a flyer can make a half move and an all-out attack (p. B139). A dragon with a foe on the ropes, or that thinks that it can stand the risk of taking one or two hits, should exploit this to the fullest. A dragon should also not be too proud to use a retreating defense. If it can fly, it can retreat *upwards*, or in other unexpected directions.

Incidentally, most dragon breath weapons are treated as melee weapons with multi-hex reach rather than as missiles, and many of these tactical considerations apply to “breath combat.”

Claw/Claw/Bite

Some accounts, including some fantasy games, credit dragons with the ability to make multiple simultaneous melee attacks, ripping with their claws as they bite, or sinking their fangs into one foe while bowling others over with a tail sweep. This certainly fits the image of a furious predator. In *GURPS*, however, creatures can normally make just one attack per round. To enable dragon characters to fight this way, add one or more levels of Full Coordination to the templates on pp. 50-64, or permit individual dragon characters to buy the advantage.

ST, Natural Weapons, and Damage

Dragons and similar creatures using “natural” attacks – teeth, claws, and tail bashes or stabs – inflict damage based on the Biting Damage table on p. B140, not the full damage appropriate to a human warrior of the same ST. Exerting full strength with such “body weapons” can be unwise, leading to broken teeth and torn claws, even if it shreds the victim in short order.

However, a creature with such natural weapons gains two important compensating benefits. First, because its “weapons” are intended for close quarters, it does not suffer the -2 to hit in close combat that humans do. And second, it can opt to make an *All-Out Attack*, even in close combat (an exception to the rule on p. B113), making either two attacks, a single attack at +4 to skill, or a single attack at +2 damage (but with no defense possible on the same turn). In this case, if it wishes, it can also inflict full damage based on its ST as for a human fighter (teeth do thrust damage). However, if the victim is wearing hard armor (metal plate, heavy bones, dragon scales, etc.), the creature must make a HT roll, at a penalty equal to the armor's DR. On a failure, it suffers an injury to its teeth, claws, or whatever, taking 1d-2 crushing damage for every full 2d the attack inflicted. Its DR protects normally against this. Berserk dragons always use this option. See p. CII57 for more on all this (but note that the self-inflicted damage effect has been slightly increased here).

Of course, a creature with manipulators good enough that it can wield actual weapons can use its full ST when calculating damage for them. Perhaps fortunately, few dragons have this option, and fewer bother to use it.



Teeth

The vast majority of dragons have large, sharp carnivore teeth, and a willingness to use them. Even the most sophisticated dragons revert to this primal mode of combat if circumstances demand it – although anyone playing a refined, fastidious creature might make a point of keeping biting as a last resort or the sign of a bad loss of temper. (This might be a good quirk.) In game terms, these are Sharp Teeth or Fangs (p. CI67).

A draconic creature may declare the intention to “bite to grapple” when making a bite attack, consciously attempting what many animals do by instinct. In this case, the attack roll is at -3, but if it succeeds, and does at least two points of damage after subtracting for armor but before applying cutting or impaling modifiers, the dragon is treated as having grappled its victim. It may subsequently inflict half its usual dice of biting damage per round without needing to make another attack roll, attempt a *take-down* or *pin*, or, if it successfully targeted the neck with the bite attack, *choke* its foe. Also, a claw attack on a

victim already held by a biting grapple is at +2. The victim must *break free* before he can move away. However, if the victim makes a close combat attack on the dragon while being grappled, the dragon gets no active defense.

If a continued “biting grapple” on a limb or similar does total damage equal to the victim’s HT or more, the dragon has chewed right through. The grapple is automatically released, but the body part in question is *crippled* (and may, at the GM’s option, be severed or otherwise picturesquely maimed). See p. B111 for more on grappling, and p. BE73 for notes on how animals use this tactic.

Claws

Likewise, almost all dragons have big claws and fight with them – although some, especially the occasional two-legged varieties, may need to keep feet on the ground for stability. While it is not a feature of many dragon stories, some might use the feline predator technique of getting a good grip on a victim with their jaws and then raking with claws to shred and disembowel.

In *GURPS* terms, treat most dragon claws as Sharp or Talons (p. CI67). If they can only be used in the turn following a successful grapple or bite to grapple attack, and for as long as the grapple is maintained, to rake the victim, take a -25% limitation.

Tail Strikes

Most dragons also have long, muscular tails, which can batter opponents – those who try to attack them from behind, at least. Dragon tails are often sharply pointed, and may possibly even be used to stab. This applies especially to smaller species, which can have a poisoned tail-sting.

Tails used for bashing are generic Strikers (p. CI67), often with extended reach. Most quadruped dragons can only use them to attack to the rear (or rear sides). This is a special effect, given that the dragon’s other attacks are not effective in those directions. Such attacks to the rear are usually at -4. A striking tail receives the damage modifiers for the dragon’s claws – a dragon usually has spines or barbs there. A sharp tail that stabs to the front, typically on wyverns (p. 51) and similar agile, slender creatures, is bought as a spear (p. CI67).

Constriction

Serpentine dragons sometimes coil around victims and crush them like a constrictor snake. The Constriction Attack advantage (p. CI52) represents this. A serpentine creature with Flexibility (p. CI56), which constricts with its body rather than with limbs, can have this without also having Extra Flexibility.

Large dragons might not bother using such attacks on man-sized opponents. Also, having a long, slim, snakelike body may mean the creature has a higher effective size – and is easier to hit – than its mass would normally imply. (Incidentally, the Roman writer Pliny claimed giant African dragons would attack elephants, coiling round them and biting them for their famously cool blood, only to be crushed and killed when the elephants fell to the ground in their death throes.)

Poison Stings

Some draconic monsters carry poison, not in their jaws, but in stingers, usually on the ends of their tails. (Dragons with poison claws are rare.) Such creatures can have the Venom advantage (possibly with enhancements or limitations, including any from pp. 81-82); having it delivered by claws or a spear is simply a special effect.

Dragons vs. Guns

Dragons created with the templates in this chapter are powerful creatures, able to terrify unarmed humans and typical medieval warriors. However, in modern-day games, PCs may decide that they are overrated.

A TL7 assault rifle typically inflicts 5d-7d damage, with a high rate of fire; even a shotgun can do 5d, and anti-tank weapons do much more. The templates for Western dragons on pp. 56-59, following the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*, give a typical “young adult” creature DR 4 and 48 hit points. A couple of average hits, or one lucky shot to an important location, can easily kill this creature. Even a submachine gun will do significant damage with almost every hit. Against such a large target, a squad of competent human soldiers has a very good chance. A heavy sniper rifle does 13d damage with a 1.5 damage multiplier after DR (and, of course, a very long effective range); incautious dragons may fall to one shot. Even a “monstrous” dragon has just DR 7 and 90 HP; some man-portable TL7 anti-tank weapons can routinely expect to reduce these things to zero hit points with one hit.

Thus, GMs running high-tech games may accept that, while powerful, dragons are no longer the irresistible force of legend; see *GURPS Technomancer* for a setting that integrates such creatures on this level. Of course, with their innate weapons, speed, versatility, and intelligence, they still present formidable challenges to anything less than a prepared military unit.

Alternatively, modern dragons might have substantially enhanced DR. This has some problems of plausibility, but dragons are magical creatures – an excuse for treating their hides as “hardened” armor. With a +50% enhancement, DR can count triple against shaped charge attacks such as rocket-propelled grenades. Still, these weapons typically inflict 80-100 points of damage with a damage divisor of 10; only the most truly monstrous dragons would take them lightly. Vehicle-mounted weapons and artillery make things worse.

Thus, dragon antagonists in modern-day games have two different roles. Either they are enormous and tough like Japanese movie monsters, resistant to anything short of heavy weapons, or they are creatures of relatively subtle horror, lurking in dark corners, striking suddenly and ferociously at unprepared prey, and exploiting their agility and intelligence. Alternatively, as in some popular settings, they integrate into society disguised as equals – unnerving to meet, but not so powerful as to be immune to law or assassination.

Hypnotic Gaze

Although subtle mental effects mostly belong in the category of magic spells, some dragons have a more instinctual sort of mental attack, while others distract and confuse opponents with their uncanny ability for persuasive speech. Mostly, this idea comes from the belief that snakes could hypnotize prey with their gaze, combined with the idea of the dragon as an archetype of dangerous cunning.

In *GURPS* terms, an appropriate knack or innate spell most easily simulates hypnotic gaze (p. 77). Good candidates include Daze (p. M66), Mental Stun (p. M66), Sleep (p. M66), Mindlessness (p. M67), Loyalty (p. M68), Charm (p. M68), Suggestion (p. M68), or Fascinate (p. G75 – very appropriate). However, simpler or subtler effects can be quite effective enough; consider Fear (p. M65), Panic (p. M65), Foolishness (p. M66), Emotion Control (p. M68), or Enthrall (p. G75). The nature of a gaze-based effect suggests spells should have a single target, but powerful dragons capable of influencing many victims at once could use a spell like Terror (p. M65) or Mass Daze (p. M66).

Alternatively, a dragon with subtle supernatural power in its speaking voice can have one or more versions of the Enthrallment skill (p. CI139-140). Such creatures could have their own version of Hypnotic Hands (p. CI141), using serpentine body motions rather than gestures. Of course, aside from Hypnotism (which an intelligent dragon might well know), this skill has Trained By A Master as a prerequisite – but perhaps older dragons study under mystical masters of their own kind.

Venomous Blood

Some legendary creatures are so deadly that their blood is lethal poison. This requires some special rules. Buy such blood as Venom – as a poisonous contact agent. If it is a contact agent delivered by touch or in ranged form (if the Ranged or Cloud of Mist enhancements have been taken), the creature's blood *also* serves as poison at a +30% enhancement (Blood Also Poisonous). If blood is the only form of the venom and the only way the creature can poison an opponent is by suffering a significant wound then bleeding on them, it is a -70% limitation (Blood Alone Poisonous). This may seem like an inferior form of the Sweated Venom limitation, but blood can splash onto opponents in significant quantities more easily than sweat.

Poison Blood in Play

Venomous blood takes effect when splashed onto an opponent (or anyone else) when a cutting or impaling attack wounds the creature in melee. When this happens, roll 3d, with -2 if the attack was cutting; if the roll is equal to or less than the hit points of damage done to the creature, a splash strikes a random hit location on the attacker.

If a creature suffers multiple wounds, anyone at melee range may be splashed in any round of combat. Roll 3d; the base roll required to suffer a splash is 3, increasing by +1 for every 20% of its total hit points the creature has lost to physical damage. A dragon reduced from 50 hit points to near death (-50 hit points) has lost 200% of its hit points and would be rolling 13 or less each round to spray venomous blood on anyone nearby. The chance may also increase or decrease in particular circumstances, at the GM's option.

Poisonous blood can also contact victims in other ways, which GMs will have to administer. In particular, a sword or



spear delivering a powerful or killing blow is possibly very gory – flourishing it above one's head can be fatal. Grappling injured dragons, or attacking them as they fly low overhead, might also be unwise.

Fuming Blood

Perhaps the most relentlessly venomous monsters are those whose dead bodies emit clouds of dangerous fumes. In *GURPS* terms, buy this as some form of venomous blood, as above, with an additional +5% enhancement (Fuming Blood). The poison cloud forms 1d rounds after the creature is slain with cutting or impaling attacks or by most forms of magic (GM's decision as to whether the body remains effectively intact after some slayings). It covers the hexes occupied by the body and a distance of 1 hex around it, and lasts for 3d rounds before dissipating.

An advantage that only works when one is dead may not sound like much, but the prospect of posthumous revenge has its appeal, and if dragon-hunters know that their prey has such a power, they may be a little more cautious.

DRAGON COMBAT MANEUVERS



Claws, tails, poison, fire – all of these are wonderful weapons. But can dragons use them all at once?

In games using the Maneuver rules (pp. CI162-164), the players of dragon characters may develop distinctive fighting styles. A full “dragon martial art” might be excessive, but a few distinct maneuvers, learned by simple practice and experience, seem entirely plausible. The following are suggestions; GMs can adjust or expand them to taste.

Tail Strike and Tail Sweep are elaborations of the rules for dragon tail attacks on p. FB85, and can help maintain consistency with *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*. Some species, with a racial instinct for a certain style of combat, might include maneuvers in their templates.



Biting Grapple (Average)

***Defaults to Brawling-3 or DX-3
Cannot exceed Brawling or DX***

This maneuver simply negates the attack penalty when “biting to grapple.”

Tail Strike (Average)

***Defaults to Brawling-4 or DX-4
Cannot exceed Brawling or DX***

This maneuver is only appropriate for dragon species that pay the points for a tail striker, and favor creatures that like attacking suddenly from unexpected directions. (A favorite trick of playful dragons might be to target an assailant’s horse with a tail strike, and then pick off the rider after he has come crashing to the ground.) The maneuver bonus can only cancel the penalties for striking to the rear.

Tail Sweep (Average)

***Defaults to Tail Strike-2
Cannot exceed Tail Strike***

This maneuver also requires a striking tail, using it to sweep opponents off their feet. The dragon decides whether to sweep to the left or the right, and makes an attack against the first standing opponent in that direction. If the attack succeeds, it can be dodged, but not parried or blocked. If this fails, make a Quick Contest of ST between the dragon and the victim. If the dragon wins, then the foe falls over. If this happens, or if the intended victim dodged the attack, the dragon can make another such attack against the next foe in the same direction – and so on, until it runs out of targets or one of them withstands the sweep.

Wing Bash (Average)

***Defaults to DX-4 or Brawling-3
Cannot exceed DX-1 or Brawling***

Winged dragons do not buy their wings as strikers, because they commit their use to flight. However, any winged dragon can buffet a foe to the side with a wing while on the ground. This

option is not popular – wings are not made for striking, and are dangerously vulnerable compared to the rest of the dragon – but could be a lifesaver in emergencies.

A Wing Bash is a standard attack with reach up to half the dragon’s body length. It does crushing damage based on half the dragon’s ST. In addition, given the buffeting power of a dragon’s wings, this damage increases by 50% when assessing knockback (p. B106, p. CII58, and p. CII63). However, if a Wing Bash is parried or blocked, or if it hits but fails to knock the victim back at all, the dragon must roll against HT. On a failure, the wing is numbed and cannot be used to fly for 2d rounds. In addition, attacks targeted at a wing used for a Bash within the last round are at +2 to hit.

Death From Above (Hard)

***Defaults to Flight-2
Cannot exceed Flight+2***

A large, heavy flying creature can attempt to knock out an opponent by forcing him down to the ground at breakneck speed – that is, by landing on top of him. The dragon must drop at least 10 feet to perform this maneuver (shorter drops are Trampling attacks, p. B142), and must be at least twice the size or weight of the intended victim (as in a Trampling attack).

The dragon may either land full-force, or brake at the last moment. In the former case, if the attack is successful, the victim takes damage as given in *Damage from Falling Objects* (p. B131), and the dragon takes *Falling Damage* (p. B131). If the dragon brakes before hitting the ground and the attack succeeds, the dragon takes no damage, but the victim only takes the appropriate Falling Damage. In either case, roll a contest of ST between dragon and victim. If the dragon wins, the target is knocked down, and the dragon may choose to *Trample* it on subsequent rounds.

This attack can be dodged or blocked with a shield, but not parried. If it is blocked, the dragon still hits and inflicts full damage (with a chance of knocking the victim down), but this applies to the shield’s DR and hit points first, and only any surplus applies to the victim.

After this attack, the dragon has landed. If the attack missed, or the victim dodged or avoided being knocked down, the dragon must roll vs. DX+2 to avoid stumbling to a “kneeling” position on impact.

Other Possibilities

Dragons, especially smaller individuals depending on speed and skill instead of raw force, may learn standard maneuvers such as Feint or Ground Fighting (p. CI168). Close Combat (for natural strikers with longer-than-Close reach) or Dual-Weapon Attack (for natural “weapons,” in the case of dragons without Full Coordination) might seem overly fancy, but could be lifesavers (both are on p. CI167). Hit Location (p. CI168) is good for humiliating inferior opponents or “counting coup,” especially applied to a breath weapon with a low-power attack.

NEW CHARACTER FEATURES



The following new advantages, disadvantages, enhancements, and limitations (some drawn from other *GURPS* supplements) apply when describing dragons as *GURPS* characters.

New Advantages

Morph

100 points

You are a shapeshifter, able to take any number of living forms. Changing forms takes you 10 seconds of quiet contemplation. You can assume the form of a physically present being which you can perceive, and you can memorize a number of forms equal to your IQ and use them at any time. (To “overwrite” a memorized form with a new one, you must copy the new shape from something that is present, and then spend an extra minute in uninterrupted concentration.)

You can adopt the form of a creature with a racial template with a value less than or equal to your own. (Most dragons with this power have little difficulty emulating humans or small mundane animals.) You replace the attribute and hit point modifiers of your normal form’s template with those of the imitated form. Thus, for example, a dragon whose template has +10 ST and +2 IQ, and who has 25 ST and 11 IQ as a dragon, could shapeshift into a human with 15 ST and 9 IQ. (If this drops your IQ very low, you still retain the same motivations, but may not pursue them very cleverly.)

You cannot mix or blend forms. You do gain the abilities of the new form, and know instinctively how to use them. For example, if you turn into a bird, you know how to fly.

However, although you can become a perfect copy of a specific individual, right down to his voice, you do not gain his knowledge, memories, or any magical training. Also, your internal structure and biochemistry are different, if anyone could somehow perceive them. You can include the appearance of clothing in the shape, but it remains part of you, and cannot be removed or changed.

Any damage you take in one form carries over to the other. Either you subtract the same number of hit points from each form (so a 20 hp dragon reduced to 16 by injury changing to a 10 hp human form would become a human reduced to 6 hp), or you take damage in proportion to each form (so that dragon would become a human reduced to 8 hp). Choose which option when you buy this advantage.

Being able to change in just one second of concentration is a +100% enhancement to this advantage. Not needing to take one minute to memorize a form, once adopted, is a +50% enhancement.

Shapeshifting

15 points

You can shift to a single different living form, gaining all the abilities of that form and indistinguishable from a normal member of the species. You can choose any species whose racial template has a points cost less than or equal to your own. Thus, most dragons can easily buy this power for a 0-point human form. Your changed form is as identifiable as your “base” form. A dragon, for example, might take one particular human form, with the same appearance each time. (You may purchase this

advantage multiple times to have multiple alternate forms.)

The change is limited to your body; you must remove clothing and equipment first, or risk entanglement or damage.

Changing normally takes three seconds of concentration; being able to change in just one second of concentration is a +100% enhancement to the advantage.

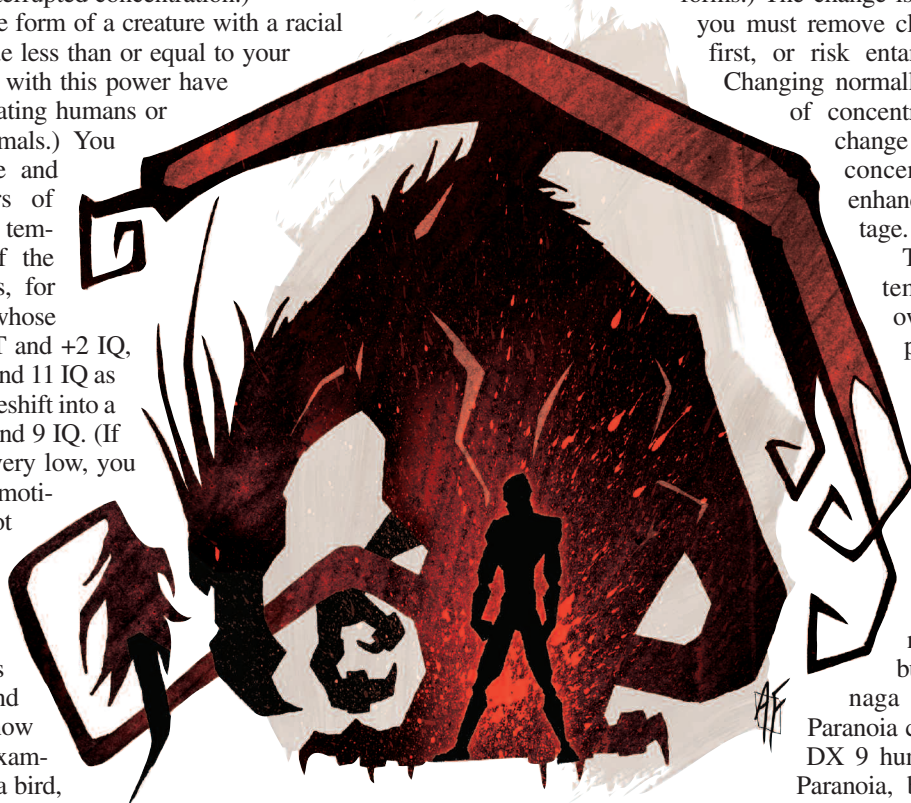
The changed form’s template replaces your own, but you retain your personal attribute modifiers, advantages, disadvantages, and skills, including any magical abilities, but not those included in the template. For example, if the naga template has +5 ST and +3 DX and no magical abilities built in, a ST 17, DX 12

naga with *Magery* and *Paranoia* could become a ST 12, DX 9 human with *Magery* and *Paranoia*, but it would lose the

Flexibility, *Sharp Teeth*, etc., included in the naga template.

You automatically change back to your “base” form when you are asleep, unconscious, or dead; also, severed body parts immediately revert. If you retain your changed form even in these circumstances, that is a +150% enhancement to the advantage. (You may revert when dead but not otherwise; that has the same cost, as characters are unlikely to worry too much about the fact.) Damage carries over between forms as for *Morph* (above).

These are simplified versions of the advantages given in *GURPS Shapeshifters* (pp. SH18-19), replacing the like-named advantage in *GURPS Compendium I. Shapeshifters* is strongly recommended for games involving many shape-changing beings.



Splash

This is a natural attack (p. CI72), a high-pressure stream of water like a firehose. The water can soak victims, douse fires, fill containers (at a rate of one gallon per die of damage per second), and in modern-day games, short out electrical equipment. Dragons with this attack often have it as a breath weapon. The notes on the Breathe Fire advantage (p. 74) also apply to this power, including use of the Magic Breath skill.

Damage: 1d. Damage doubles for knockback purposes, but halves for crushing damage.

Range: 3 hexes.

This advantage first appeared in *GURPS Spirits*.

Terror

Jet, DX, 20 points

30 points + 10 points/-1 to Fright Check

Terror strikes others with an irrational, supernatural fear in your presence. This can take several forms – a psychic compulsion, a palpable aura of despair, or whatever. With dragons, it can be associated with creatures that embody raw animalistic devastation, although it can also take other forms. Anyone who sees you must roll a Fright Check immediately – a new roll is required if you reappear after an absence of at least one hour. This power can turn off to enable you to engage in normal social

activities. If it cannot, and it always affects everyone, take Horrific Appearance (p. CI80) instead.

If your Terror only affects a limited class of beings, this is a limitation appropriate to the size of the class. Not being able to turn it off in this case is an additional -10% limitation, as you cannot socialize with those particular beings, but have no great problems otherwise.

Modifiers: the modifiers on p. B93; +1 per appearance after the first within 24 hours. Penalties are 10 points per -1. Multiple beings with Terror cause one Fright Check at the highest penalty among them, with an additional -1 for 5 creatures, -2 for 10, -3 for 20, -4 for 50, and -5 for 100 or more.

This advantage first appeared in *GURPS Undead*.

New Disadvantages

Capricious

-15 points

Your moods are unpredictable. One minute you are happy and laughing, the next you are furiously angry – or you burst into tears. Other beings who know you are extremely wary around you, since they do not know how you will react to anything they do or say; they react to you at -2. If you are in a position of authority, or have the physical or magical power to get your own way, your minions will fear you. They will obey your commands, but fearfully, reacting to you at -4 if they somehow achieve freedom of action.

Many-Headed Dragons

Some dragons or similar creatures, such as the Greek hydra and the Basque herren-surge, possess more than one head. This makes monstrous creatures more terrifying (and gives them the option of multiple bite attacks), but may not be suitable for PC dragons. Apart from anything else, each head should logically have its own brain, and hence might be a distinct character. However, *GURPS* represents the beast in various ways, and provides advantages and disadvantages for all.

If the heads represent extra mouths with which to bite, and the creature has just a single personality (perhaps formed by psychic communion among the multiple brains), buy each head as a striker with appropriate reach. Use the Teeth advantage to convert any damage inflicted (it may apply to every head). If several heads can bite in the same turn, buy Full Coordination at an appropriate level. If each head is on a flexible neck and can attack a different target in the same turn, add an appropriate number of Independently Focusable Eyes. In addition, if the creature cannot be disabled by a single head shot because the other heads continue controlling the body, take Injury Tolerance (No Brain or Neck), with a limitation representing the fact that, if every head is killed or disabled, the creature still dies or is knocked out; -30% for two heads, -20% for three, and -10% for

four. If the creature has five or more heads, the difficulty of disabling all of them causes no real limitation. A crippling injury can put a head out of action, temporarily or permanently.

Loss of heads does eliminate some other advantages. At the very least, extra heads can provide Peripheral Vision or 360-Degree Vision, as they can watch in several directions at once. If the heads do not all sleep at the same time, the dragon takes the Doesn't Sleep advantage with a -10% limitation reflecting nuisance effects. Such a creature can have a Compartmentalized Mind, with one "compartment" per head.

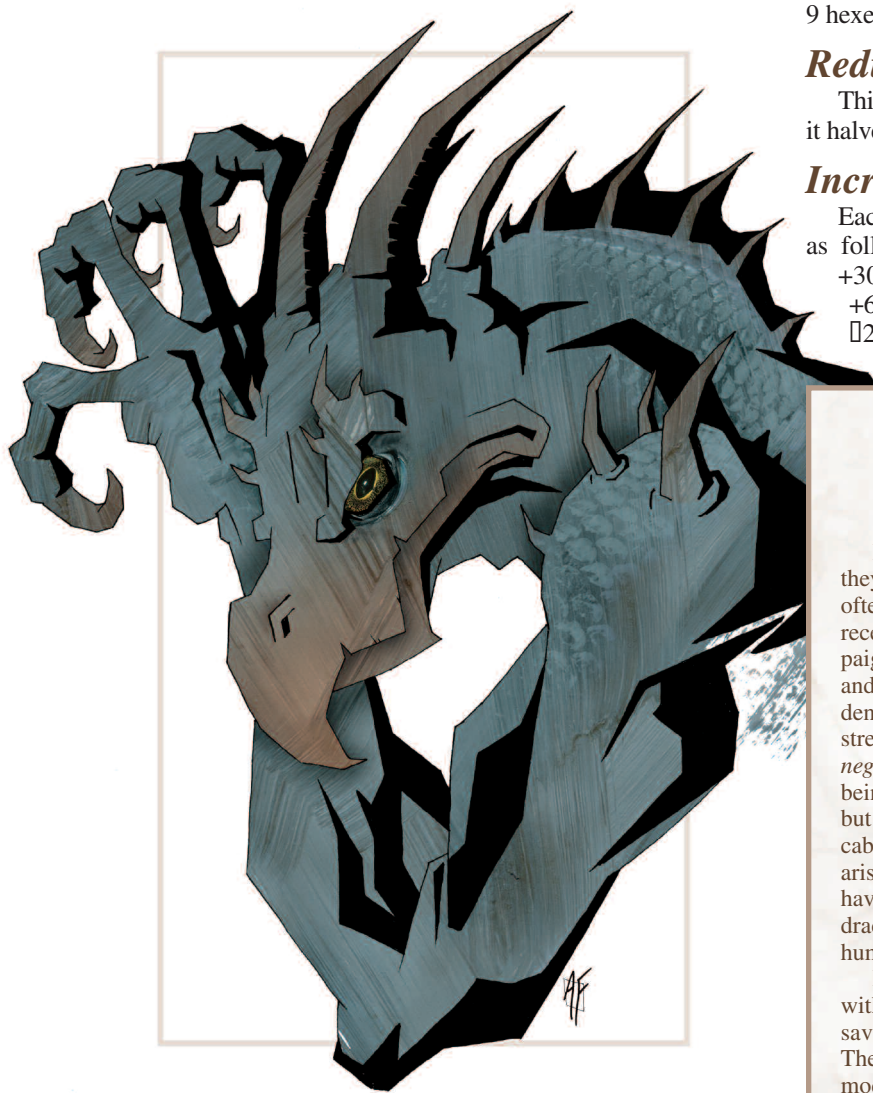
If the heads have markedly independent minds that disagree about important matters and contend for control of the body, the creature has Split Personality. This is especially good for comic effect. For even more comedy, the creature could also be Indecisive, or display the quirk or Odious Personal Habit of arguing with itself.

Regrowing Heads: The Lernaean Hydra (p. 9) had a frightening power: if one of its heads was destroyed, two immediately grew in its place, unless the stump was cauterized with fire. Injury Tolerance (No Brain or Neck) and Instant Regeneration could represent this horrific ability. Although the creature does have heads and necks, they do not have typical vulnerability, and head Regrowing is a "special effect" for the regeneration. However, the Hydra's power, and its potential to become indefinitely more powerful, is beyond the scope of a point-based character advantage system.



In any stressful or emotionally charged situation, you must make a roll on 1d. On an even roll, your emotions stay the same; on an odd roll, your emotions become completely different. The GM may require you to make such a roll at any time, for whatever reason, or simply to roleplay it.

This disadvantage is especially suited to chaotic supernatural characters. It first appeared in *GURPS Celtic Myth*.



Restricted Manipulators -15 points

You have an upright posture but walk on your fine manipulators (like a parrot or an eagle). You can use your manipulators normally only when sitting, hanging, floating, flying, etc. Or you can use one manipulator in conjunction with your mouth (or beak). This is an awkward pose that completely prohibits hopping, let alone running or flying. This disadvantage is not available to Horizontal or Semi-Upright creatures.

This disadvantage first appeared in *GURPS Bestiary*.

Attack Enhancements and Limitations

GMs or players defining creatures with ranged attacks, such as dragons that breathe fire or spit venom, may adjust their

effective ranges or areas from those listed for the relevant advantages. The following options can help with this.

Increased Area (see p. CII09)

Each level of Increased Area, applied to a “cloud” attack that covers a fixed number of hexes rather than a circle, increases that number by the original amount. For example, a +20% enhancement increases a 3-hex cloud to 6 hexes, +40% makes it 9 hexes, and so on.

Reduced Range (see p. CII12)

This limitation also applies to a “cloud” attack, in which case it halves the number of hexes covered.

Increased Range +10% or +5%/level

Each level of this new enhancement increases attack range as follows: 2□ range, +10%; 5□ range, +20%; 10□ range, +30%; 20□ range, +40%; 50□ range, +50%; 100□ range, +60%; and so on, with further levels following the same □2/□5/□10 progression.

The Social Standing of Dragons

Dragons are usually intelligent and sociable creatures, so they may have a meaningful Social Status. (In fact, as they often have high Wealth in the form of hoards, they may receive some free Status.) What this means varies from campaign to campaign. For practical purposes, it reflects a loose and tentative “pecking order” among the dragons, and a tendency for humans to regard anything with brains, loot, and strength as worthy of a kind of respect. If a dragon acquires *negative* Status, Humans will treat it with nervous contempt – being a scruffy and unprepossessing creature can induce fear, but no awe. Of course, if dragons interact frequently and amicably with humans, they can have Status similar to human aristocrats. (If they routinely dominate humans, they may have some level as a racial feature.) In games with a complex draconic society, their status games can be as involved as any human court.

Furthermore, if a species of dragon interacts regularly with humanity, it can earn a Reputation or Social Stigma for savagery, deviousness, or other negative characteristics. These should only rate as disadvantages if they genuinely modify human reactions to the dragon beyond the natural tendency to fear any big, powerful creature. Still, Social Stigma (Barbarian) is appropriate for many dragon types in many settings.

If dragons dwell in wilderness areas on the edge of civilized lands, but are known as intelligent and not totally savage, they could have lesser Social Stigmas, and perhaps Primitive. In settings where they are routinely tame or domesticated, they can have Social Stigma (Valuable Property). Humans would have to be very confident of large, powerful dragons’ harmlessness to patronize them in this way. Racial Reputations of many kinds are possible depending on the setting.

Unfavorable reactions from humans to powerful dragons involve flight, evasion, or nervously limited compliance, unless the humans are very powerful, personally or in numbers, or insanely overconfident – or the dragon has a solid reputation for reasonable behavior. Still, the human may start thinking about legends of dragon weaknesses, and wondering about the availability of mercenary dragonslayers.

Each level increases both 1/2D and Max. You may increase 1/2D or Max individually at half cost; that is, Increased 1/2D and Increased Max are each +5%/level. However, you cannot increase 1/2D past Max. At most, you can make 1/2D equal to Max; this means the attack has no 1/2D range. Attacks with no 1/2D range, including Breathe Fire and Venom with the Ranged enhancement, need only take the Increased Max version.

Cone +50%+10%/1 yard max width

An attack with this new enhancement covers an area starting at one yard wide at the creature's jaws or nostrils, and spreading in proportion to the distance from the creature, up to a maximum width at the attack's maximum range. Anyone within the area is struck automatically, unless they can get out of the way (e.g. by a Dodge and Retreat). Cover protects against the attack.

A Cone attack costs +50% plus 10% per yard of maximum width at the attack's maximum range, so the advantage can also be used to create a "broad jet" one yard wide along its entire length (for +60%).

Example: A dragon character buys a 2d Breathe Flame attack (base cost 26 points) with the standard six-yard range, spreading in a cone three yards wide at its maximum. This is a +80% enhancement (50% plus 3 times 10%), so the attack costs a total of 47 points; the cone is one yard wide up to two yards from the dragon's mouth, then two yards wide up to four yards away, and then three yards wide up to the maximum range.

Metabolic Variations

GMs can adjust dragon metabolic function. Many dragons doze in their lairs for years or even centuries at a stretch, apparently without any need for food or drink, only awakening and emerging under specific circumstances or if provoked. There are several ways of handling this draconic tendency.

Cold Blood: By taking a "scientific" approach, most templates in this chapter assume that dragons and their kin are "warm-blooded" – active, fast growing, quick, and adaptable to different climates. In games where they function like reptiles, add Cold-Blooded [-5] and Sleepy (50%) [-10] to the templates. This will also lower levels of Increased Life Support, or delete the disadvantage entirely. Cold-blooded dragons would sleep more and eat less, which does not match the legends, but helps explain them.

"Realistic" Hibernation: Dragons could hibernate, like some real animals in winter, during periods of reduced food supplies, or under more exotic conditions: during unfavorable astrological circumstances or under request of the gods. Several levels of Metabolism Control (p. CI60) with the Hibernation limitation can represent this action. Alternatively, try higher levels of the Sleepy disadvantage, with the special effect that much of the extra sleeping takes place in winter months. Taking Sleepy with a limitation (only in specific circumstances) might also work.

Magical Hibernation: Dragons might place themselves in long-term "stasis," either to await changes in global magical conditions, out of sheer boredom, or on the command of the gods. This can be represented by Metabolism Control at high levels – 10 levels (50 points) allows the creature to breathe without oxygen, and survive for a couple of years without food or water, while 16 levels (80 points) allows it to "sleep" for over a century.

Light Eaters, Long Sleepers: Simply lowering the levels of Increased Life Support on any template will suffice in "mythic" games, where dragons subsist on a diet of an occasional

princess. (However, most accounts imply that dragons feed voraciously on cattle, wildlife, and passing peasants between these luxury meals.) Likewise, dragons spending a lot of time dozing on their hoards could have high levels of the Sleepy disadvantage. GMs can adjust to fit the "style" of dragon they want in their game.

Other Possible Variations

The dragons of legend exist in many different forms; therefore, dragon templates should be adjustable for any type of campaign or purpose. Here are some final possibilities for variations on dragon PC and NPCs:

Manipulators: Dragons use claws to grasp and hook, for example grabbing small prey, although perhaps clumsily. In some games, dragon feet may be more like land animals' than birds'; in such cases, change Bad Grip to No Fine Manipulators [-30]. This reduces package costs by 20 points, and permits the creature to take the -40% No Fine Manipulators limitation on its ST.

A wyvern using this option also loses the Restricted Manipulators disadvantage. Such a wyvern adopts a less upright posture, giving it Horizontal [-10] – which does accord with some illustrations.

Alternatively, some dragons are surprisingly deft with their "hands"; in that case, change Bad Grip to Poor Grip [-5] (increasing template costs by 5 points), or delete it altogether (a 10-point increase).

Magic Resistance: Dragons are sometimes highly resistant to magic, possibly to the point of immunity. To represent this, add some level of Magic Resistance (2 points per level) to the species template, and/or permit individual dragons to buy it.

This technically bars a dragon from learning spells. Unless the GM relaxes that rule (which could make dragons too powerful), spell-casting dragons that are resistant to magical attacks should purchase good HT, Strong Will, and the spell Magic Resistance (p. M61).

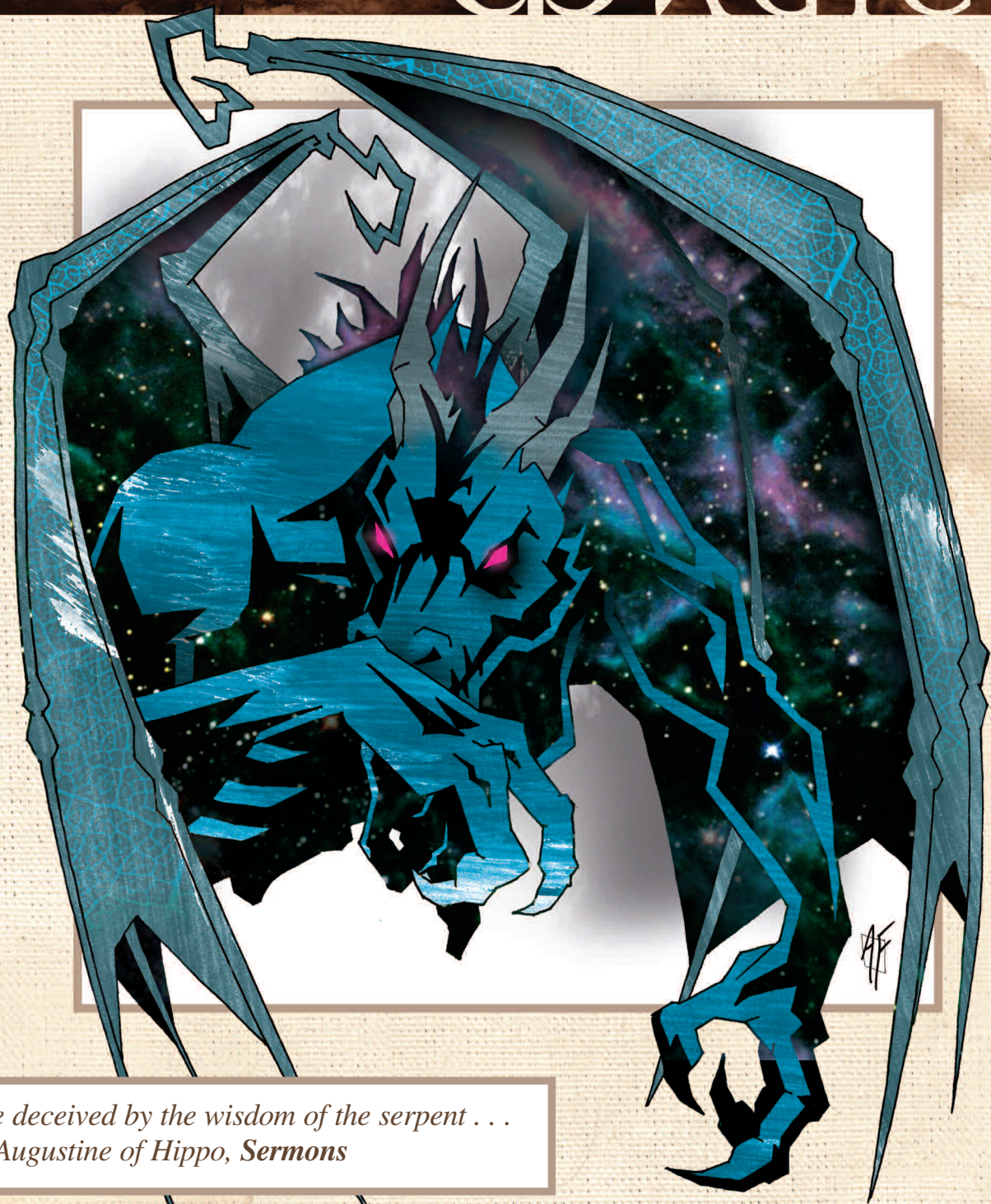
Mana Dependency: Dragons are clearly creatures of magic, and may be actively dependent on "ambient magical energies" – mana, in *GURPS* terms – to survive. In campaigns involving zones with lower levels of magical energy, a dragon's template should include a Dependency. Mana is common for this purpose and required constantly, for a total disadvantage value of -25 points. However, these details vary between different creatures and settings. Dragons that are unaffected by low mana, intelligent enough to recognize this condition, and not overly concerned with casting spells may choose to lair in such a zone to reduce the risk from human spell casters. Conversely, if dragons depend on rare high-mana conditions to exist, they get more points for the disadvantage, but risk becoming an endangered species (especially if mana is receding), or at least cautious, reclusive, and especially defensive of their lairs.

If a dragon loses powers when mana is absent, or even some intelligence – perhaps changing from a fire-breathing terror of the skies to a big sleepy lizard with some odd frills – it will have limitations on the relevant advantages (augmented by taking appropriate disadvantages with limitations). Of course, innate spells depend on the presence of mana. A dragon with this problem, forced to venture into dangerous "cold zones," would be an unhappy, twitchy creature. Even so, its enemies should examine an area's mana variations carefully before attacking. If mana levels fell substantially since ancient times, dragons may be sad and faded or a mercifully diminished menace.

CHAPTER

5

DRAGONS AND MAGIC



*We were deceived by the wisdom of the serpent . . .
— St. Augustine of Hippo, Sermons*

Dragons and magic go together. Only magic can explain dragons' existence, and both belong to the same sense of the fantastic. Dragons are more than just oversized snakes with biophysical problems. This chapter deals with the most overtly magical aspects of dragonkind.

WIELDERS OF MAGIC OR CREATURES OF MAGIC?



Some say that dragons can only exist in magical worlds, and magical forces empower and enhance their abilities, even if the dragon is not aware of this fact. This supports nonsapient dragons, or at least not very smart ones; they are simply magical animals.

Others say that dragons are aware of their nature, and wield magical forces consciously. They cast spells much like human wizards – at the very least, powers such as flaming breath or flight could use supernatural awareness and techniques. This supports highly intelligent and near-immortal dragons or draconic demigods.

Although commonly perceived as spellcasters, most dragons in myth or fiction are not. After all, a creature that can fly,

bounce arrows off its scales, and incinerate a house with one breath does not need the petty tricks of human wizards. However, dragons that use magic use it powerfully. Dragons are never *trivial*.

Inherent Magic, Learned Magic

If dragons use spells, how do they learn them? Human wizards often spend years studying under teachers, poring over books of lore, and experimenting with subtle and complex “magical ingredients” – activities that are not available to gigantic solitary reptiles with claws instead of hands. Of course, some breeds (even-tempered shapeshifters, for example) are better students, but there is a problem here.

One answer assumes that dragons know spells instinctively – that they are encoded into the dragon’s mind from conception (in its genes, in modern parlance), or carried in racial memory (which may be genetic or psychic). This makes sense if dragons use a few short, powerful abilities. After all, a dragon “just born knowing” a complex array of spells, including lengthy strings of magic words, can strain the suspension of disbelief.

Spells Instead of Powers

One option in a game that allows dragons to cast spells or use knacks (or other kinds of magic) is to declare this as the source of all their powers except their innate size and strength and natural weaponry and armor. After all, a big, intelligent lizard that casts the right spells could do everything that the standard mythic dragon does – and, by being explicitly magical, sidesteps any tiresome issues of physics or biology. In this scenario, even winged dragons use flight magic, instead of hauling themselves aloft with those flimsy appendages. Their wings could be pure decoration, “evolutionary vestiges,” or useful aids to steering. While seemingly overcomplicated, some groups may prefer this possibility – it makes dragons interestingly vulnerable to Dispel effects and low-mana areas.

This type of dragon knows the spells *Breathe Fire* (p. M38) and *Flight* (p. M71), probably as innate spells or knacks. For a decent speed, it might prefer *Hawk Flight* (p. M71); dragons with just *Levitation* or *Walk on Air* might seem feeble. If the species uses wings to steer, that justifies a high *Flight* skill. In such cases, or if dragon wings are entirely useless, PCs could be shocked when a creature with a crippled wing does not drop out of the sky.

For that matter, the dragon’s natural form could be relatively small, or could lack speed, strength, good natural weapons, or refined senses. It can compensate for those deficiencies with spells such as *Dexterity* (p. M26), *Might* (p. M26), *Keen Eyes* (p. M69), *Armor* (p. M76), *Partial Shapeshifting* (p. G11 – in several variations), or *Enlarge* (p. G19). After slaying a dragon, PCs who find the body is just a sickly, unremarkable lizard may be amused before realizing that they lack an impressive trophy.

“Breathing” Attack Spells

Many attack options, especially “Breath” and “Jet” spells, in *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Grimoire* can pass as “breath weapons.” In addition to *Breathe Fire*, *Sand Jet* (p. M31), *Air Jet* (p. M34), *Lightning Stare* (p. G28), *Flame Jet* (p. M38), *Water Jet* (p. M40), *Sound Jet* (p. M78), *Steam Jet* (p. G34), *Breathe Steam* (p. G34), *Snow Jet* (p. G35), *Icy Breath* (p. G36), *Acid Jet* (p. G37), and *Spit Acid* (p. G37) all offer dramatic possibilities. Projecting spells from their mouths instead of their hands could be a special effect of the draconic style of magic, especially if this involves innate spells or knacks.



In another approach, dragons learn magic from each other by study – probably from their parents. Their style of spellcasting is fundamentally different from humans’, involving subtle, hissed words and twisting “dances” instead of human-style gestures and chants. This may mean dragons and human wizards cannot learn from each other, at least without a great deal of difficulty. It may also emphasize the deeply magical nature of dragons, even in a game with powerful human wizards, without making the dragons too powerful.

If dragons use spells instinctively, they could be less vulnerable to having their powers negated by a shortage of essential ingredients (p. M9). In a game with “instinctive” dragon spellcasters, a GM can charge draconic wizards an Unusual Background cost.

DRAGON SCHOLARS



If dragons are wise and intelligent, and especially if they study magic, they could be scholars. (This personality applies well to Oriental myths, but seems more eccentric with Western dragons.) With its long life and intelligence, a dragon could have expertise in any topic, perhaps a sublimation of the traditional draconic hoarding instinct – information instead of gold.

Unless it can shapeshift into smaller forms, a dragon scholar may have problems conducting research in many fields. Many write letters, acquiring books and engaging in long-range correspondence by magic or through messengers. Broad-minded PCs could become a dragon's "leg men" and research assistants. Conversely, if a dragon is miserly with its knowledge, a GM might design an adventure around attempting to extract important information from the creature, or protecting duplicate copies of books from destruction.

This also explains the sight of dragons circling high over great battlefields. While humans curse it as an ill omen or a vile scavenger, the dragon might be a dispassionate historian, observing the human saga's latest incident with detached but not cruel interest.

Dragons as Scientists

Even the most versatile dragons have more interest in weird riddles and memories of ancient times than in novelty or experimentation. However, this is not a universal rule. A draconic scientist might seem bizarre, but it has a kind of logic. With long lives and reptilian patience, dragons are better than humans at some kinds of research.

In purely fantastical games, dragons might be scientists of magic, testing the limits of vast forces. With vast innate energy, a dragon can cast huge spells, beyond the capabilities of most human wizards, just to see what happens. Draconic patience and slow-burning metabolisms permit incredibly

lengthy ceremonies. Of course, this has dangers – a dragon's lab explosion could demolish a whole mountain, and something that drains an area's mana could be deadly for the magical beast itself – but it can also produce research far more involved than that by scholarly human wizards.

The University of Dragonkind?

If dragons have a culture and study magic or other lore, they could have formal teaching establishments. While the idea of a "Draconic University" might be a stretch, except in a very fantastical campaign, some small, well-hidden (or perhaps extra-dimensional) establishment might be feasible. See p. 118 for one example.

In modern games, dragons might even pursue traditional science. Of course, if they do not shapeshift, dragons could have considerable problems with fine lab work, but plenty of types of science do not require this (and human servants are good for this sort of thing).

Dragons showing curiosity about other aspects of the world might make a scientific study of human society, economics, and long-term political processes. Experimental social science has some real-world problems, which are partly practical and partly ethical – but a dragon, with a vast hoard of wealth, near-unlimited lifespan, and distinctly reptilian morality, might manage it very well. A great drake meddling in human affairs could be uncaring and curious instead of malicious – a small comfort for humans when economies are wrecked by inflationary infusions of gold, their leaders destroyed by strange rumors, or their borders threatened by barbarians acting on advice from draconic "oracles."

GAME RULES



GURPS offers many options for magic-wielding characters of any species. Most of the following assumes that readers have access to **GURPS Magic** and **GURPS Grimoire**, although there are alternatives.

If dragons are inherently magical, even those with animal intelligence could have Magery (p. B21), possibly Magery 3. (**GURPS Fantasy Bestiary** makes this assumption.) On the other hand, only unusually gifted dragons or dragons that have explored the mystical side of their natures may enjoy this option. In high-mana worlds, dragons could gain reputations as spellcasters even if only a minority learn useful spells.

Innate Spells

As noted above, dragons and similar creatures may use spells intuitively, having acquired them through racial memory, an inherent understanding of magical forces, or a gift of the gods. In game terms, these can be *innate spells*.

An innate spell forms part of a creature's racial template, and does not apply to spells learned by study in play. Species templates must include Magery if they have innate spells, and cannot include Magic Resistance. (The GM may relax this rule in worlds that are entirely high-mana. However, in that case, characters without Magery cannot use innate spells if they stumble

into lower mana zones.) Any spell can be innate, but GMs should be careful when granting powerful spells to PC dragons in this way.

The minimum cost for an innate spell is the number of points necessary to bring it to skill 12, based on the template's Magery and default IQ. This can never be less than 1 point. Creatures whose skill with an innate spell is 15 or higher get the usual reductions to casting time and energy cost.

If a creature's IQ lowers until his skill with an innate spell falls below 12, the spell does not work and becomes "dormant." If the creature later has his IQ or Magery raised until the effective skill climbs to 12 or more, the ability starts working again.

Dragon Language and Magic

Created by an ancient and magical race, draconic speech may have its own unique power. A secret draconic language of magic (maybe the oldest language in continual use in the world) could explain their power, but at a small cost, forcing a dragon to speak when casting spells. Treat this as equivalent to *Song Magery* (p. C140). Human PCs would only have access to this style of magic if they had a very Unusual Background, and might have to learn the Very Hard language of dragons at the same level as their spells.

Rituals

Since innate spells are intuitive, a dragon does not need gestures or conventional magic words to use them. They still require concentration and take the usual amount of time to cast, which may require glaring impassively, hissing, and clawing the air, murmuring strange words in ancient draconic languages, meditating atop a hoard, sacrificing prey, or rearranging their hoards.

Prerequisites

The only prerequisite to cast an innate spell is a personal skill of 12 for the spell. Usually, you should disregard normal prerequisite spells, advantages, and attributes. In certain situations, normal prerequisites become important, however:

1. Before someone can increase his skill with an innate spell, he must acquire all of the spell's normal prerequisites. *Example:* a character has the innate spell Panic-13. Before he can raise the skill to 14, he must learn the prerequisite spell, Fear. (But if he increases his IQ or Magery, his skill with innate spells rises automatically without his needing to worry about prerequisites.)
2. Before someone can use an innate spell as a prerequisite, he must acquire all its normal prerequisite spells. *Example:* a character has the innate spell Darkness. He wishes to learn Shape Darkness, which lists Darkness as a prerequisite. Therefore, he must learn the spells Continual Light and Light, the normal prerequisites of Darkness.
3. Before someone can teach the spell, both the pupil and teacher must have acquired all the normal prerequisite spells.

Preferred Spells

Dragonkind's image forever swings back and forth between raw power and inhuman subtlety, and dragons' choice of spells can reflect either or both of these. Dragons may slay their foes with magical blasts, or they may be cleverer (with deadlier effect).

Smart dragons do not bother much with the sort of combat spells beloved of human PC wizards. After all, an archetypal dragon has iron-hard scales, devastating fiery breath, and terrifying strength behind its claws and teeth. Why should such a creature bother with fireballs – which do less damage, for more effort, than its innate resources?

Divination: Hoard-Reading

This is a version of the Divination spell (pp. M55-56) intended for use by dragons. It is strictly optional, and should be limited to dragons (and possibly "dragon-blooded" characters). In some campaigns, Divination Talent (p. CI36) with this spell may be common among dragons.

It requires a hoard of gold, silver, and precious gems worth at least five times the campaign's average starting wealth level. This is the plain material value – extra value from craftsmanship, enchantment, etc., does not count! The dragon spends the casting time adjusting and manipulating the treasure; the patterns that form suggest the answer to the question. *Prerequisite:* Being a dragon.

Actually, the dragon's powerful attacks, notably its breath weapon, might be spells themselves. See p. 84 for some possibilities.

Spellcasting dragons often prefer subtle spells. Some stories credit them with a taste for illusions, which makes sense. This

magic could conceal a lair from tiresome would-be slayers, or distract or blindside enemies. Useful possibilities include Simple, Complex, or Perfect Illusion (all p. M51). Dragons wanting to track items stolen from their hoards, or monitor potential threats, may favor scrying and other "informational" spells; see p. 40. Of course, those who pass among other races, for amusement or to learn of plans and activities, study shapeshifting techniques.

A dragon bound to a specific role may have magic related to that aspect of reality. One embodying the element of fire, or who rules a lake, may have limited uses for Elemental Fire or Elemental Water spells, but know the full set regardless – and occasionally use them. A guardian of knowledge could be adept with several kinds of Divination, or a "lord of the beasts" could be an expert at Animal College spells.

Given all this, it is difficult to compile even a suggested list of innate spells. However, the notes on Magical Lenses and Variations (p. 89) offer some possibilities.

Knacks

Described by *GURPS Compendium I* (p. CI38) and *GURPS Magic* (pp. M96-97), knacks – individual spells treated as character advantages – provide simpler but less flexible options than innate spells. Knacks can be used for dragons that lack any methodical, organized knowledge of magic, but can produce one or two spell-like effects. They are also useful when determining point values for mythical creatures with unusual supernatural abilities, even if these are not really "spells." If no other advantages serve, find a spell with the right effect and buy it as a knack.

Problems in Casting

The *GURPS* spell rules' design assumes that the characters are more or less human. Draconic spellcasters may experience certain problems, at least under the basic version of the system. However, this is not a problem with the rules as much as a reflection that most ideas about magic assume human users.

Gestures, Incantations, and Other Requirements

Dragons may cast spells differently from human wizards. Dragons with relatively low skill in a spell may perform rituals to cast it (pp. B147-148 or pp. M7-8). While partially a matter of game mechanics, this rule does reflect a general point about how most people imagine magic to work. Talking dragons (and spell-using dragons most likely will speak) can certainly speak magic words, and reasonably limber dragons can manage some gestures (writhing of necks, twisting of tails, and flurrying of wings), but mute and limbless wyrms might have problems. Human-sized spell books also may present difficulties.

An advanced knowledge of spells – not requiring ritual procedure – could circumvent this problem. If the dragon's IQ and Magery allow it to reach this level of effectiveness, it might not need rituals. Most people assume that learning a spell involves working through some ritualistic procedures – and there remains the question of general research and study. Of course, a dragon mage could employ human minions to read from human-scribed books and perform thaumaturgical experimentation, but it seems a little undignified. It could also expose the dragon to the danger of disgruntled servants.

Enslaving human wizards, or teaching magical techniques to “mundane” slaves, seems particularly unwise.

In the extreme case, dragon spells might be structured and cast completely differently from human spells. (See the notes above on innate spells for some ideas as to how they might work.) In this case, human wizards and dragons might not be able to learn anything from each other. Strict GMs could require shapeshifting dragons to learn the same spells in multiple versions, one for each form.

Learning Spells

If dragons have to learn spells, instead of knowing them through innate powers or racial memory, they must be less solitary than tradition suggests. Of course, they may learn everything in infancy, in nests far from curious human eyes. If dragons learn their spells from their parents, there might be strong “bloodlines” and “family traditions” in dragon magic.

Magical Advantages

Dragons can embody many of the occult and paranormal advantages defined in *Compendium I*. Some are especially appropriate. (The rules given here for shapeshifting supersede that book, however.)



Dragons Changing Shape

In some stories, dragons can shift to human (or other) forms. This obviously requires magic. *GURPS* game mechanics provides three basic approaches.

The first assumes that shapeshifting is an innate power, and uses the Morph or Shapeshifting advantages (drawn from *GURPS Shapeshifters*) on p. 79. This book generally uses this approach throughout.

Second, the dragon may use a spell. One who knows Great Shapeshifting (p. G12) can take human (or many other) forms with little difficulty, although that spell needs an exceptionally high level to maintain indefinitely. (Skill 30 reduces the energy cost to maintain the spell to zero.) GMs can define a new version of the Shapeshifting spell (p. M25), and also Shapeshift Others (p. M25) and Permanent Shapeshifting (p. G12), all of which change a nonhuman creature to human guise. The usual problems of IQ loss do not affect a dragon changed to human shape as strongly – although a dragon with a high intellect might be irked to find its IQ falling toward the human average. If dragons adopt other guises, other versions of the spell may exist. Human wizards cannot learn, or at least use, “Shapeshifting (Human).” If “Shapeshift Others (Human)” exists, they might employ it, but it does not work on creatures of less than human racial IQ. This type of spell can shift beings down the IQ scale, but cannot grant previously nonexistent mental powers.

The third option assumes that the dragon is a spiritual being which adopts many different material forms. It favors the “big flying lizard” option, without renouncing other possibilities. The Spirit Form advantage from *GURPS Spirits* (pp. SPI33-36) with enhancements and limitations (especially Unlimited Lifespan and Easy Materialization or Physical Form) can represent this ability. It is most appropriate for dragons imagined as powerful spirits or demigods, such as many in Chinese myth.

Awareness (p. CI33): A dragon with uncanny, supernatural perceptions can use this advantage, even if the dragon lacks spell-casting powers.

Harmony With The Tao (p. CI38): Appropriate for a dragon somehow attuned to the universe, represents a blend of natural intuition and intellectual power.

Inherent Magic (Knacks) (p. CI38): See p. 86.

Magery, Limited (p. CI39): “One College Only” Magery can give dragons effective but limited magical powers, arising from a mystical association with one specific element. “Solitary Magery” might explain dragons’ traditional preference for living alone, in remote caves or on mountaintops.

Natural Spellcasting (p. CI41): This alternative is a very appropriate and even logical explanation of dragon spell acquisition, with no need for teachers – and could make dragons’ spell lists patchy and dangerously unpredictable.

Oracle (p. CI42): This suits dragons with especially subtle, mystical understandings of nature, fate, and the world around them.

Second Sight (p. CI43): Another advantage appropriate to magically sensitive creatures.

Ritual Magic

If a campaign uses the Ritual Magic system from *GURPS Spirits* (pp. SPI81-106) as its main or only form of magic, dragons could be capable of that art. Of course, they have problems with some forms of ritual, but the Ritual Adept advantage (p. SPI75) – which could be innate in dragonkind – can help here. Dragons employing ritual magic will probably have Ritual Aptitude.

Such dragons might dedicate their lairs as sacred spaces, and given draconic longevity, an older lair could give a respectable bonus. Dragons are unlikely to bother with Mystic Symbols (p. SPI75), if only for practical reasons. If there were to be such a Symbol within the dragon's hoard (or if it *is* the hoard!), the dragon would be even more effective in its lair. Likewise, a hoard might include charms or fetishes. Dragons could have their own traditions (for specialization purposes), or share ones with humans.

*Dragonkind's image forever swings
back and forth between raw power and
inhuman subtlety . . .*

Paths

Dragons have particular uses for certain paths. The Paths of Cunning and Dreams could be enormously useful to subtle, manipulative dragons. The Path of Knowledge includes several rituals that could track items lost from a hoard. (See also Loyal Item, from the Path of Luck.) A dragon with the status of a lord among beasts should know the Path of Nature, while a cautious creature with enemies using such powers would pursue the Path of Protection (also good against physical threats). Lastly, *GURPS Shapeshifters* adds the Path of Form (pp. SH45-46), which could support draconic shapeshifting.

THE MAGICAL NATURE OF HOARDS

Dragons are, traditionally, obsessed with the accumulation of treasure, despite the fact that they have no obvious use for it. Various possible explanations exist (pp. 39-40), but the draconic use of magic raises an interesting option: a dragon might draw power from its hoard.

Various kinds of doubletalk justify this. Hoarding could be a strange magical ritual that only works for a dragon, focusing its mind and will in a way that augments magical activity. Perhaps the human and draconic desire induced by all that loot creates enough emotional turbulence to “spill over” in the form of magical power. Gold and gems may have a little innate “mana” of their own or act as a “lightning rod” for minor magical forces –

Dragons and Spirits

How would dragons interact with intangible, spiritual supernatural beings, assuming that they are not supernatural themselves? It depends on the dragon and the nature of the setting.

Some dragons are wild animals; and wild animals are faintly aware of spiritual beings but only interact with those that have direct interests in the natural world. If dragons are mere brutes, they may be unaware of the spirit realm, and hence wide open to spiritual powers and attacks.

On the other hand, some dragons – powerful, knowledgeable wielders of supernatural power – may interact routinely with spirits and even command some of them. A proud dragon could consider negotiation with ghosts and petty elementals beneath its dignity, but it could help save some effort. Advantages, ritual magic (pp. SPI81-106), or spirit spells (pp. SPI106-108) can represent this.

For the most part, “mundane” dragons should probably not interact with spirits much. This is a matter of symbolism and style; dragons epitomize the physical, while spirits represent the intangible. Conversely, powerful, demi-divine dragons (on the Chinese pattern) are unstoppable forces within the spirit realm.

Psionics

In settings where psionics exist with or in place of magic, dragons can employ psi instead of spells. In fact, psionics may fit the general “style” of dragons slightly better than spell-based magic. A dragon is a creature with overwhelming willpower; this might influence the world directly. The traditional hypnotic gaze and uncanny senses could represent psi powers such as Suggest (p. P24), Telecontrol (p. P25 or B171), Telescan (p. P26), Psychometry (p. P14 or B174) or Seekersense (p. P15). Dragons might use Pyrokinesis (p. P18 or B173), and, especially if the “breath weapon” is a garbled rumor, Aspect (p. P20) or Illusion (p. P21). *GURPS Psionics* also has a number of enhancements and limitations (pp. P27-30) that may apply to dragon characters, including Eye Contact Only.

If psionics exist but dragons do not use them, draconic templates might have several levels of Psionic Resistance (p. B22), reflecting these creatures' power and resilience and preventing them from being defeated too easily by a psionic PC with a minor but insidious talent.



not carrying much power, but enough for a knowledgeable creature with enough loot to harvest. Dragons also could winnow their loot for minor or defunct magical artifacts, extract the remaining virtue from them, and keep the rest of the stuff because it looks nice and impresses the neighbors.

Here are some ways to represent this magical hoard in game terms. The Mana Hoarder advantage (see box) offers one optional rules mechanism. Alternatively, the act of accumulating or organizing a hoard could be a magical ritual, or the hoard could contain or be a Mystic Symbol. Magic items or Powerstones within the hoard could be treated in the usual way.

Mana Hoarder

15 points

This advantage taps large accumulations of relatively mundane materials for fatigue for use in casting spells. Unfortunately, these materials hold extreme value for ordinary purposes; they include gold (of a fairly high purity) and certain crystalline minerals (such as gemstones). The materials cannot be otherwise enchanted or magical. Your interest in such substances may be misunderstood.

As a rule of thumb, each amount of treasure equal to the campaign's average starting wealth provides one point of energy. (This is an approximation; the energy content of a hoard does not change if market forces cause a shift in the price of gold or gems!) At the GM's option, certain materials or items may grant more (or less) energy than their cash value implies. Once this discrepancy becomes widely known, supply and demand will bring the values into line. A dragon must have unconsciously "attuned" to the materials by staying within 15 feet of its hoard continuously for at least one of the last six months and must be within the same distance to draw the energy.

Only one character can attune to a quantity of material at a time. If a second character attunes to it, the first attunement is lost.

After use, the materials regain their charge in the same way as a Powerstone (p. B161 or p. M47). A dragon can sense how much energy remains accessible in a hoard, as a free action, if it is within 60 feet.

This advantage is designed for dragon characters. GMs may prohibit it entirely, limit it to dragons, or permit it to nondragons only with a large Unusual Background. GMs can modify the definition to produce different dragon behaviors. For example, if the power comes from the psychic effects of desire and greed, instead of the physical nature of gold and gems, the hoard could contain valuable works of art or fine trade goods. If the power simply requires any crystalline mineral, with storage ability based on mass instead of cost, dragons might collect nothing but glittering gemstones, making no distinction between fine diamonds and cheap quartz.

MAGICAL LENSES AND VARIATIONS



GMs may augment most of the dragon templates in the previous chapter (pp. 50-64) to represent a magically adept creature. The following "lenses" can use standard *GURPS* spell magic. GMs can incorporate them into templates for creatures with inherent power, or take them as convenient quick lists when creating new spell-wielding dragons. The spells are from *GURPS Magic*, with some optional additions from *GURPS Grimoire*.

These lenses assume that dragons learn spells, and probably possess Magery, like human wizards. Obviously, if a game uses some of the options suggested above, the lenses may need adjustment. In particular, if dragon magic is treated as *innate spells* (pp. 85-86), these lenses must be known to at least skill 12 by a dragon with default levels of IQ and Magery (but some prerequisite spells with more powerful effects can be deleted).

The costs of the lenses assume that the dragon has spent one point on each spell, enabling its casting at IQ+Magery-2 for Hard spells, IQ+Magery-3 for Very Hard. This should raise most draconic spell users' skill with each spell to 12 or better, as required for prerequisites or innate spells. If not, GMs will have to adjust the lenses (or the dragons' IQ or Magery) accordingly.

Petty Magic

10 points

This is a modest but useful array of magical techniques for a low-powered draconic spellcaster. The *Basic Set* describes all of these spells.

Spells: Sense Life; Sense Foes; Sense Emotion; Truthsayer; Seek Earth; Seek Water; Light; Continual Light; Darkness; Blur.

Minor Magic

25 points

This more extensive selection of spells (all again drawn from the *Basic Set*) can act as a "force multiplier," or assist in subtle plans when deployed cleverly. It combines with the more specialized lists below to good effect. A dragon must have Magery and IQ 12+ to take this full list.



Spells: All the spells in the Petty Magic list, plus: Beast Soother; Reptile Control; Mammal Control; Persuasion; Lend Strength; Recover Strength; Detect Magic; Seeker; Trace; Identify Spell; Analyze Magic; Flash; Fear; Foolishness; Daze.

Illusionist **5 points**

This lens permits a dragon to produce minor but effective illusions and sounds. They may not seem like much, but can give a clever dragon a crucial moment of surprise in combat. This list combines well with Petty Magic or Minor Magic, too. It requires that the dragon have IQ 11+.

Spells: Simple Illusion; Complex Illusion; Know Illusion; Sound; Voices.

Master of Fire **10 points**

Dragons' obvious association with fire may express itself as, among other things, a limited but potent magical aptitude. As many of these are Area spells, a dragon's vast energy reserve allows spectacular use. Since all the spells come from one college, this lens works with Single-College Magery.

This lens could replace the breath weapon. In that case, it could include the spells *Flame Jet* and *Breathe Fire*, increasing the cost by 2 points.

Spells: Ignite Fire; Create Fire; Shape Fire; Extinguish Fire; Fireproof; Heat; Cold; Resist Cold; Resist Fire; Essential Flame.

For an enhanced version of the list, add the following spells from *GURPS Grimoire*: Slow Fire; Fast Fire; Flameturning; Warmth; Smoke; Rain of Fire. This costs another 6 points, and requires Magery 2.

Master of Water **15 points**

The other classic draconic mystical association is with water. Many dragons live in rivers, lakes, or the sea, and may rule such places. If expressed as a mystical talent, this lens can represent the association. Again involving a number of Area spells, it can be especially useful when powered by draconic levels of energy. Its effects are relatively subtle, but useful. The dragon may also have some Animal College spells, giving it power over fish or other water creatures.

Spells: Purify Air; Create Air; Destroy Air; Breathe Water; Seek Water; Purify Water; Create Water; Destroy Water; Breathe Air; Shape Water; Essential Water; Walk on Water; Fog; Water Vision; Umbrella.

For an enhanced version of the list, add the following spells from *GURPS Grimoire*: Resist Water; Whirlpool; Current; Waves; Tide. This costs another 5 points.

Master of Beasts **10 points**

This selection of powers suits a dragon that, by office or inclination, takes the role of ruler among lesser animals. Since all the spells come from one college, it works with Single-College Magery. Many Beast Lords also have the Master of Water list (above).

Spells: Beast-Soother; Master; Beast Summoning; Insect Control; Fish Control; Mollusk Control; Reptile Control; Bird Control; Mammal Control; Beast Speech.

For an enhanced version of the list, add the following spells from *GURPS Grimoire*: Worm Control; Crustacean Control;

Arachnid Control; Amphibian Control; Hybrid Control (VH). This costs another 5 points.

Master of Secrets **20 points**

A dragon using magic for subtle, informational purposes, perhaps as an aspect of its guardianship of hidden knowledge, will have this package. It would also be useful to a draconic politician or strategist who believes in knowing his enemies. It requires Magery and IQ 12+.

Spells: Sense Life; Sense Foes; Sense Emotion; Truthsayer; Mind-Reading; Mind-Search (VH); Seek Earth; Seek Water; Simple Illusion; Know Illusion; Detect Magic; Aura; Seeker; Trace; History; Ancient History; See Secrets; Identify Spell; Analyze Magic; Glass Wall.

For an enhanced version of the list, add the following spells from *GURPS Grimoire*: Seek Fire; Memorize; Recall; Seek Magic; Images of the Past. This costs another 5 points, and requires Magery 2.

Storm Lord **25 points**

This selection of spells is for a powerful dragon – a demigod, with power over the seas and rivers, lesser forces of the earth, and the weather, if it uses these spells with a lot of energy added. (For additional ease, raise some of the spells beyond the 1-point level.) The dragon can also negate other spells through its sheer supernatural power. Add the Master of Beasts list if the dragon rules the creatures of its element as well.

This selection requires Magery.

Spells: Seek Earth; Shape Earth; Purify Air; Create Air; Shape Air; Destroy Air; Breathe Water; Clouds; Rain; Windstorm; Seek Water; Purify Water; Create Water; Destroy Water; Breathe Air; Shape Water; Essential Water; Fog; Water Vision; Umbrella; Frost; Snow; Hail; Counterspell; Dispel Magic.

For an enhanced version of the list, add the following spells from *GURPS Grimoire*: Wall of Wind; Essential Air; Wind; Storm; Resist Lightning; Dry Well; Create Well; Resist Water; Whirlpool; Current; Waves; Tide. This costs another 12 points. The most spectacularly powerful demigods of the winds and weather may have yet more spells, such as Body of Air, Whirlwind, and Air Vortex.

Subtle Wyrms **40 points**

A dragon with this selection of powers uses magic extensively and intelligently, misdirecting and dominating “lesser creatures” instead of crushing them. It may disdain physical force as an inelegant and boring last resort, enjoy playing with defenseless foes after confusing them magically, or seek enlightenment and regard any sort of violence as spiritual pollution while recognizing the need for self-defense. It requires Magery and IQ 12+.

Spells: All the spells in the Petty and Minor Magic lists, plus: Master; Fish Control; Bird Control; Mind-Reading; Mind-Sending; Simple Illusion; Conceal Magic; Scryguard; Scrywall; Counterspell; Dispel Magic; Panic; Sleep; Sense Danger; Watchdog.

For an enhanced version of the list, add Disorient and Fascinate from *GURPS Grimoire*, for another 2 points.

CHAPTER

6

SLAYERS AND SERVITORS

*Stout by the stone-way his shield he raised,
Lord of the Geats, against the loathed-one;
While with courage keen that coiled foe
Came seeking strife.*

– *Beowulf* (trans. Francis B. Gummere)



In settings with dragons, the dragons are never more than half the story. The chances are that the majority of important people will still be human; certainly, there will be human characters of some kind. This chapter defines them.

LIVING WITH THE BIG LIZARDS



Humans (and members of similar races) living with the possibility of encountering dragons usually have large problems. If dragons are powerful and violent, humans will logically run, hide, and generally avoid them, while developing strategies to placate or destroy them. If dragons are common, this makes for a “survivors” world of huddled villagers with alarm systems and the odd suicidal slayer. If dragons are rare, they become a terror in the night, something needing mapping and analyzing.

However, even if dragons are neutral or friendly, there are difficulties. Anything powerful is an unstable factor. Even a “good” dragon is frightening. A “nice” dragon with a strong moral sense is fearsome to people who do not follow the same code. Dragons can distort whole economies by their purchases, and if they symbolize the elements or the animal world, their actions may indicate a shift in the balance of nature.

At the very least, powerful dragons might end up with a practical status similar to human lords’ status. They may have wealth, influence, and knowledge, employ servants, and need

large, defensible dwelling places. Even weak, un-intelligent dragons with no tendency to rampage will be features in a neighborhood. Avoided or exploited, they may also attract many would-be slayers. A dragon might even gain the status of a “tourist attraction” and require protection from hunters who want its head for their trophy rooms. At the same time, locals and specialist scholars learn useful information about dealing with specific dragons, or the species in general.

Remote Terrors vs. Immediate Dangers

If dragons are commonplace, few characters will ignore or dismiss reports of draconic attacks, and may blame dragons for problems caused by something else. If, on the other hand, dragons are rare, humans might ignore or dismiss reports of draconic activity until the problem becomes too clear – even those who believe may respond with more curiosity than caution. Even if dragons are essentially benevolent, humans with no previous experience will probably respond to encounters with nervous caution.

In game terms, common, familiar dragons could be a defining feature of a campaign, whereas remote creatures might appear as occasional exotic encounters. Even absent dragons can be a campaign theme, with PCs seeking to slay, study, or interrogate them, or attempting to acquire some dragon-related lore or artifact.

Terrible Compromises

One common theme of dragon stories is the sacrifice – usually a human victim offered to assuage the dragon’s hunger, or sometimes the wrath of the gods who sent it. Even if the creature is content with lesser meals such as cattle or milk, it may demand more than the human community can afford, causing hardship and hunger. The dragon may not actually need what it demands (either as food or for more exotic magical reasons – see p. 86), but may be cruelly amused by human behavior, or by playing god. A typical dragon can terrorize a village or small town; a truly great fire Drake can demand tribute from a whole kingdom (although, of course, fantasy or fairytale “kingdoms” sometimes consist of an oversized castle-palace and one attached small town).

The local humans often find themselves faced with a terrible decision: either send another human to a horrible death (or a fate worse than death – see p. 33), or refuse and be wiped out entirely. This offers opportunities for melodramatic tales of bravery and moral debate, traditionally ending with the sacrifice, sometimes on a regular basis until the requisite hero appears. Situations along these lines set up the horror movie staple plot of terrible things being done to unfortunate travelers, because the locals would rather lose an outsider than their own.

Such hard choices are not limited to communities faced with intelligent and vicious monsters. Such stories are metaphors for the hard compromises, a feature of many human lives. A dragon’s presence in an inhabited area, even a mere animal, forces

Etiquette: How to Approach a Dragon

Very, very carefully.

Even if you are a dragon yourself.

Dependent on the setting, dragons may not only be benevolent or cruel, short-tempered or cryptic, they can have very different experiences with humans, as prey, slayers, thieves, or priests. Taking general, – or, ideally, specific, – advice from a dragon expert is strongly encouraged. It also may be useful or essential to acquire appropriate gifts, sacrifices, or talismans. Bribes may not always work, especially not small ones offered to arrogant dragons who feel that they can get wealth any time they choose.

Western-style dragons traditionally enjoy flattery, riddles, and large meals. Oriental types usually behave with the calm dignity appropriate to an agent of higher powers – at least once they achieve adulthood (even then they may sometimes be eccentric or whimsical). Of course, if they are as intelligent, wise, and perceptive as legends claim, dragons should recognize flattery or when they are having their weaknesses exploited, but even a very shrewd creature can have its blind spots. Being long-lived, with a reptilian calm about them, dragons may not be hasty in conversation or when making decisions. On the other hand, dragons may not appreciate having their time wasted by “lesser beings.”

If humans attempt to slay dragons often, it may be unwise to approach their lairs with visible weapons if one is trying to parley. Then again, with their own scales, claws, and teeth, dragons may barely notice that a human is bearing arms or armor, or may regard it with mild amusement. Dragons may consider any use of magic or attempts to speak draconic languages flattering, polite, amusing, or even insulting. Once again, GMs will have to decide what works, and whether dragon responses are predictable or highly variable (using the *GURPS* reaction table as much or as little as they wish). PCs who are at all unsure should do as much research as they can.

See p. 42 for discussion of etiquette within dragon society, and the box on p. 42 for the issue of cultural familiarity between humans and dragons.

people to make decisions. Either they fight it, risking death or severe injury; they avoid it, at a high cost in effort and resources and no guarantee of success; or they live with it, skirting the edges of its hunting range and tolerating occasional losses of cattle, people, or whole farms.

Violent Solutions

When faced with a dragon's demands, countryside rampages, or the just mere report of a threat, humans will naturally consider removing the problem permanently. Of course, if the town believes dragons are utterly unbeatable, or has witnessed the slaughter of countless capable and determined would-be slayers over the years, the community may dismiss the idea without much thought, but even then, it may remain in the back of people's minds. Only a community in servitude for decades, which has never heard tales of dragonslayers, will find the idea entirely inconceivable.

People with an agreement with a dragon, however unpleasant, may rationally be very frightened of its reaction to an unsuccessful slaying attempt. Trying to convince community leaders to accept this risk could prove difficult, especially if hotheaded would-be heroes accuse anyone of cowardice. Often, key members of a community change their minds after the dragon destroys something or someone they valued. Smarter dragons may restrain their depredations for exactly this reason.

Traditionally, dragonslaying calls for a hero. Group assaults on dragons often go badly, as a dragon is often powerful and tough enough to defeat and slaughter any number of minor assailants, whereas one hero with the right skills, magic, or knowledge may get through and find its weak spot – persuade it to swallow poison, for example. Still, in role-playing games, with their traditional “party” structure, a small, capable team could perform the job.

Armies sometimes threaten dragons and, given courage, heavy weapons, or siege artillery, may succeed. Relatively weak, sensible dragons might limit their depredations to small communities on the edge of human lands, departing if any



Selecting the Sacrifices

A community that gives victims to a dragon (as discussed on p. 92) needs a system to select them. The process depends on the details of the creature's needs and demands, and the bargain struck. If the dragon refuses to accept anything but the king's only daughter, the situation permits no ambiguity. However, if the dragon demands a princess, a desperate king may send kidnappers into neighboring lands. Humans sometimes successfully negotiate the deal, and manipulate the wording, but usually the dragon sets the terms and permits no discussion.

Many communities choose their sacrifices by a lottery or other random choice, but others let the monster make its own choice, either choosing carefully from a crowd of potential victims or by swooping down from the sky when it is hungry. The towns could raise some unfortunate child just to sacrifice, or ask for volunteers (some people could believe that being sacrificed is an honor). In an informal, semi-random system, towns may abduct naïve visitors or other outsiders.

Occasionally, a brave volunteer, acting as a sacrifice, tries to end killings. In Greek myth, the hero Theseus joined a party of 14 sacrificial youths and killed the Minotaur. In the stories of the *Arabian Nights*, Scheherazade volunteers to marry a king who always executes his wives the morning after marrying them, and distracts him with 1001 stories that eventually end his madness. A heroic PC may want to emulate this procedure – assuming that it works, of course. It is wise to research one's dragon carefully first.

Sometimes, dragons specifically require virgin sacrifices. GMs can interpret this requirement with a literal modern definition or put the term in a historical context, meaning that the victims should be young or unmarried women. Either way, it seems the dragon's dietary needs are mystical instead of physical (p. 17); magical sacrifices are more powerful if they are “pure.”

substantial force shows up. Minor heroes who know that they cannot defeat a dragon themselves could have interesting adventures trying to persuade the king to send a force to help their village, or recruiting an effective band of slayers.

AMICABLE COEXISTENCE



Despite the traditional (Western) idea of dragons as monsters, some games could feature a relationship between humanity and these creatures that is more subtle, even friendly. Chinese myth, with its demi-divine dragons, provides one model. In another possibility – based on assumptions such as that dragons are intelligent and rare, can survive without eating intelligent prey, and can be killed by humans – the two sides have an understanding based on enlightened self-interest.

Coexistence could be easiest if dragons are either reasonably virtuous or moderately powerful and acknowledge the real threat from a sufficiently angry, determined, skilled, or lucky human. If the dragons are very powerful but neutral in attitude – and do not regard humans as tasty snacks – a peaceful equilibrium is possible, but it will be fragile. As the cliché goes, power corrupts, and powerful dragons will probably find some reason to be nasty to humans sooner or later, particularly if the humans are powerless.

Powerful dragons living a long way from human communities with no cause to travel could be just a dangerous but mostly irrelevant curiosity. Humans visiting such creatures should research draconic etiquette. If a human slips up, a dragon's negative reaction may expand past personal hostility. Tactless visitors may not only die, but may curse generations thereafter.

Dragons in Society

Dragons could integrate into a society with human beings. This is easiest if they are not too large, can shapeshift into human guise, or have powers that are not too vast. In some settings, they could be very powerful but inflexible wizards; in others, they could operate in magical disguise, covertly embodying secret rulers and subtle demigods. If they are smart enough to talk instead of attacking humans on sight, and their tastes and needs are not too inhuman or weird, many arrangements could work.

Dragons will probably have high status in a mixed society; they traditionally exhibit wealth, power, and arrogance – qualities all associated with human upper classes. Indeed, they might well rule areas as feudal lords; see pp. 36-37 for campaign suggestions. Then again, in a high-power fantasy game featuring potent wizards, great heroes, and other intelligent creatures, dragons of strictly average intellect could be oversized brawlers and vagrants – impressive, but not unbeatable, and crass compared to some of the other denizens. Their taste for treasure might even lead to careers as mercenaries or enforcers.

Any understanding between humans and dragons implies the possibility of lapses on one side or the other. Only in idealized high fantasy could an entire human culture reach an agreement and have every single member support it for years, despite temptation to raid dragon hoards or skimp on tribute, and dragons could be worse. Lapses would be punished. Humans might consider a thief who got himself incinerated or even eaten while burgling a lair no great loss. They might not even worry about legal niceties, unless a dragon seemed to get too cavalier when doling out punishment. They could enforce laws against captured treaty-breakers.

Dragons, if solitary with no formal social system, might not punish their own lapses, letting humans hunt down draconic renegades. But then, the promise of first pick from an older dragon's hoard might entice a young drake onto the human side or societal contempt could keep other dragons from assisting the ignoble oath-breaker.

If dragons are too independent to make viable treaties, enough of them might accept the use of spells such as Great Geas (p. M68) or Oath (p. G77) to make the system work. Then again, dragons could possess a ferocious sense of honor, and be willing to give and stand by their word.

Serving a Dragon

Dragons regarding humans as more than lunch on the hoof may have humans working for them. These mortals may be enslaved or willingly serve a draconic master, either for pay or out of true loyalty. Dragons might demand service from would-be students (p. 100), or from hapless thieves caught trying to steal from their hoard.

Typical tasks given to minions could include domestic duties around the lair, cleaning the dragon's scales, or providing company. Cunning, manipulative dragons with interests in human affairs (beyond demanding tribute) could have many mortal intermediaries, ranging from lawyers to accountants to spies.

DRAGON SLAYERS

Sometimes humans just think they have ride out and kill the beasts. This may be a serious necessity – if a dragon ravages the countryside and demands virgin sacrifices in the old style – or an ostentatious display of machismo or virtue. In any case, since dragons are tough foes, the job demands a special sort of human.

Types of Dragon Slayer

Of course, the many varieties of dragon imply an equally wide range of techniques and styles. For some slayers, killing the monster is the immediate, instinctive response to seeing fields burned or loved ones slaughtered, while others, with

Taming a Dragon

In some stories – more in modern fantasy than in myth – dragons actually serve humans as riding beasts or pets. This raises the question: How do you tame a dragon?

One option uses magic – which is perfectly feasible, although it requires a lot of power to dominate large and (traditionally) strong-willed creatures, as the **GURPS** magic system reflects. This raises the unpleasant possibility of the spell wearing off unexpectedly, although a clever wizard could use spells only to start the taming process.

If raised in captivity, the dragons would be accustomed to treating humans with respect (a trick which works with some but not all real animals). However, this does not explain how the first captive breeding dragons were acquired and implies the dangerous profession of dragon egg thief.

In any case, dragon training would be complicated and potentially dangerous. Training carnivores presents problems because natural weapons and reflexes could harm humans, even without intent. Add a flaming breath weapon and a reptilian intellect, and the trainer will surely require special knowledge, years of experience, and some special protective equipment. (In **GURPS** terms, all rolls may be at a penalty – perhaps as high as -5.) On the other hand, intelligent creatures, once properly trained, have a greater range of capabilities.

Two other possibilities remain. In some stories, dragons have innate telepathic powers and bond with handlers, often at hatching. Some kind of mental communication certainly helps when training such a powerful creature. In **GURPS** terms, this implies that the trainer or the dragon, or both, have the Telepathy power and Telesend and Telereceive skills, or at least Emotion Sense. The Mindlink advantage (p. CI41) is also highly appropriate. A reliable psychic link would grant large bonuses to Animal Handling rolls: +5 for having any one skill active, +10 for using Telesend and Telereceive simultaneously.

Finally, the idea of hiring dragons, or buying their hatchlings off them, may seem ludicrous, but these creatures symbolize greed in some mythologies. Dragons would not come cheap – they would know the value of themselves and their young – but perhaps everything has its price!

In **GURPS** terms, human agents may keep their true allegiance as a Secret, as well as having a Duty (or perhaps a Sense of Duty). Alternatively, a dragon with its own cult could find many devoted minions among the priesthood; some cults may spring up without any initial encouragement!

equally personal reasons, spend years in training and preparation. Others may be career slayers, simply pursuing a high-risk, high-return profession of arms. More than one slayer in folklore was a condemned criminal – offered life and freedom in exchange for taking on this mission – an interesting possible PC background.

In all cases, dragon hunting is a risky occupation that demands a stout heart and a limited sense of self-preservation. Weapon skills and tactical knowledge, or useful spells, are part of the well-prepared slayer's arsenal, but a silver tongue and quick wits may prove just as useful. The templates on pp. 100-105 cover some of the possibilities.



Peasant Heroes

When a rampaging monster oppresses the peasantry, or the aristocracy and professional warriors have demonstrated that they are not up to the job, a hero can step forth from the common people (or volunteer from the condemned cell). Sometimes his luck or skill matches his confidence.

Peasant heroes lean more on cleverness and trickery than other monster slayers. Ambushes, traps, and poison all appear in legends and folklore, and usually work. The dragons in these tales are animalistic, and low-intelligence. Even the ones that talk may fall for the fluent verbal trickery of a smart rustic, and will usually eat something unwise. Sometimes these tales end with the dragon's poison blood or splattered venom killing the unfortunate hero shortly after the battle.

Knights in Shining Armor

Dragon myths mostly build *archetypes*, so the slayers are often trained specialists with good equipment and nice manners. Noble warriors tackle dragons and monsters in Greek, Persian, and Northern European myths, with similar success. Some heroes, like St. George, are also deeply pious, and the tale becomes a religious parable as much as an action story. But other dragon-slaying knights are simply good fighters.

If the knight charged home on horseback with couched lance, it could certainly do a *lot* of damage. However, the knight would need a reliable warhorse willing to charge in close to a huge, fire-breathing carnivore, and even after the charge, the dragon could still be standing. The hero often ends up on foot, hacking the beast to death with a heavy blade. Truly epic fights go on for hours or days. Even allowing for poetic exaggeration, heroes should have high degrees of fitness and reserves of fatigue.

Armies

Monsters could be taken down by sheer force of numbers. This gets messy; the creature will probably chew through much of the rank and file before blood loss and lucky shots finally kill

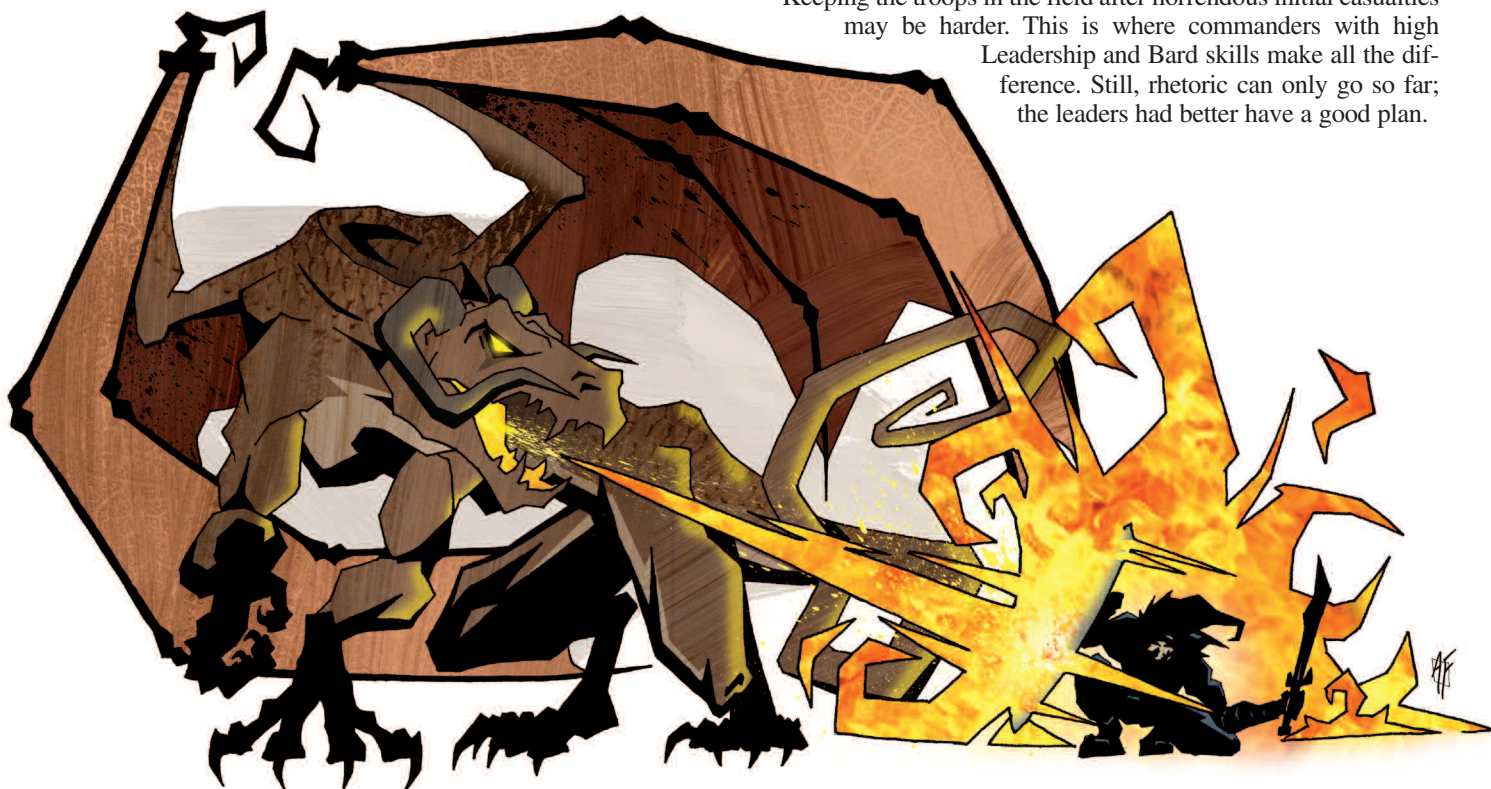
The Significance of Slaying

If dragons are special – more than just big, tough monsters – then killing one makes you significant, too. Conventionally, heroes who kill dragons are destined for greatness. Perseus (p. 9) was a son of Zeus, while Siegfried (p. 12) became the central figure of a great story-cycle. In many Christian tales, only saints could defeat dragons. Presumably, dragons were transcendently evil, only countered by supreme virtue. Several English towns and villages have traditional stories in which a terrible wyrm was slain by a knight who then founded a leading local family (possibly developed as explanations of the mythical beasts on the local lords' coat of arms, or of some odd place name). Similarly, in tales such as Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, killing a dragon is a quick way to become a ruler.

Incorporating this principle into RPGs may be hard, although it should serve as a reminder that dragons are special, only deployed by a GM needing a memorable fight scene. However, if one PC has the Destiny advantage, a GM could maneuver that character into the starring role, even if dragon-slaying is not his Destiny in itself. Likewise, a Reputation as a dragon-slayer (merited or not) is often good for a +2 or better reactions.

it off. If the dragon's resilience lies more in soaking up damage than in bouncing it off invulnerable scales (in *GURPS* terms, lots of hit points instead of high DR), the mass assault may work. Also, if it is only vulnerable to lucky shots to a small weak point (p. 71), having plenty of people attacking means that chance should eventually favor the human side.

Mustering and heartening an army to attack a dragon will be difficult, but if the beast has been devastating the land, or has a huge hoard, a little impassioned rhetoric should do the job. Keeping the troops in the field after horrendous initial casualties may be harder. This is where commanders with high Leadership and Bard skills make all the difference. Still, rhetoric can only go so far; the leaders had better have a good plan.



Before the battle, some brave scouts, preferably with knowledge of the country, may need to locate the foe. Bringing it to battle may be easy or hard; some dragons may respond to the sight of humans in large groups by attacking automatically, while others may be smart enough to fear and avoid armies. Forcing a dragon – especially a flyer – to give battle may require threats to its lair or hoard, or tricks such as drugged bait.

Battlefield tactics against a single huge monster will be different from those suited to enemy armies. Versatility and imagination will be very important if no one has handled such a problem before. Skirmishers and front-rank troops might keep the creature distracted – possibly at terrible cost – while heavy weapons, from two-handed axes up to siege engines, position to attempt a killing shot. The siege engines may need adaptation for ground-to-air use (realistically, a very difficult prospect) to bring the dragon down to melee in the first place. Spellcasters, even those of limited power, could be an enormous help, being able to locate, confuse, and distract the dragon at crucial moments even if they cannot hurt it.

Wizardly Slayers

If humans have access to magic – especially the overt, fast magic useful in fights and common in RPGs – then why not use it against dragons?

One answer might be that dragons are immune or highly resistant to magic. Dragons that combine exceptional cunning and superhuman senses might dismiss illusions with a glance and shrug off attempts to control their minds. However, the occasional wizardly slayer does seem plausible.

Of course, killing a dragon by magic alone demands very powerful offensive spells. The “combined arms” approach, in the best fantasy RPG tradition, might achieve the most. If the wizard can locate, and then befuddle, confuse, or stun the dragon, a fighter’s chances of finishing it off will considerably improve. If a wizard’s potent killing spell has a limited range and a long casting time, warriors may need to harass and distract the beast – at great personal risk – until the wizard completes the job.

One common use of supernatural (if not technically “magical”) power against dragons in European folklore is the ability of Christian saints to tame a dragon with a word of prayer and the sign of the cross. This may not be appropriate for all games, but diabolical dragons could be tackled with religious and holy powers in some campaigns.

Mercenary Slayers

If competent human warriors can slay dragons, and enough dragons make trouble, then some experts may take up slaying as a profession. These may be bands of well-armed toughs leading short, merry lives, knights in shining armor with just enough practicality to accept fair payment for their efforts, or even technical specialists with clever or relatively high-tech weapons.

Rates of pay for mercenary slayers should rise in proportion to the risks faced, although overall income will decline if the total dragon population decreases significantly. Eventually, slayers could find themselves as endangered as their former prey. Shrewd slayers might even carefully refrain from killing too many dragons, especially females in the breeding season – although wise professionals probably treat this policy as a trade secret.

Thieves and Treasure-Seekers

Sometimes slaying a dragon may be an accidental consequence of another plan – even a mark of failure or desperation.

An expert or overconfident thief may attempt to remove choice treasures from a dragon’s hoard without fighting the beast. He might be the wealth’s original owner, its rightful inheritor, or the employee of either. If a dragon triumphantly hoards a prize whose loss could cause political ructions (tribute owed by one kingdom to another), or something of sentimental or political importance (a ruler’s highly symbolic crown), a king might hire adventurers to retrieve it swiftly, preferably without provoking the devastating wrath of the wyrm. For that matter, other dragons, jealous of a noted hoard or involved in dragon politics, might employ human thieves – perhaps to maintain “plausible deniability.” Indeed, adventurers contacted through agents might not know who is paying them.

And if a plan goes wrong – the dragon wakes up or comes home unexpectedly – thieves who are not very, *very* quick, clever, or silver-tongued will have to fight, and may be lucky enough to win. Whether they claim the glory of dragon-slayers, or slip away from a messy situation, is up to them.

Saints

Early medieval European dragon-tales describe another curious type of slayer: the non-warrior saint. This character type is specialized and largely symbolic. Diabolically inspired dragons are sometimes incredibly susceptible to such powers, and their subsequent collapse is very good for the image and power of the church.

How to Find Your Dragon

Follow the trail of destruction.

That may be a little glib, but if a dragon causes enough trouble to justify the effort of slaying it, you should not have trouble determining its general location. On the other hand, a fast flyer prone to attacking random targets may be trickier to track back to its lair or otherwise bring to battle. Magic helps. Scrying spells can locate it; flight enchantments can pursue it. Even a mundane scholar may research history, folklore, geography, or the nature and habits of dragons, to narrow the search.

Given the draconic habit of occupying mountain caves, finding the lair may entail a long, hard, and dangerous effort. Practical slayers may employ scouts and guides, even if cutting into their profits.

Rewards

The payments made to slayers vary. A competent professional may negotiate a rate beforehand, while a truly noble knight could tackle a monster as a moral obligation (or for the glory), and a criminal might bargain for life or freedom. Many communities devastated by a dragon could be short of funds. Fortunately, tradition offers alternatives.

Marriage to the local ruler’s daughter is one, although that may present an obvious problem with parties of slayers working together (and may not appeal much to too-cynical or too-romantic modern gamers). Another is land and status in the community, and perhaps a position as its feudal lord. (Some locals may feel this merely exchanges one oppressor for another, but others might argue that it provides a defender of proven

ability.) These solutions often create folklore explaining a noted family's origin, or may appeal to heroes looking for a base of operations.

Other Consequences

If victory is not the story's climax, dragon-slayers may face other complications. Once word gets out, the fight's location

101 Things to Do with a Dead Dragon

Once the dragon has been slain, what then?

This is the most fabulous of fabulous beasts. The corpse surely can be exploited. Here are just a few of the many uses draconic body parts have had in myth and legend:

Blood – An ultra-potent poison (Norse).

Bones – Medicinal (Chinese).

Eggs – Shells are fantastically tough, and the eggs are popularly supposed to bring good luck and long life (Chinese).

Eyes – Used in medicine to prevent nightmares (Roman).

Head – Buried, makes a location verdant and pleasant (Persian). Used as a component in an invisibility spell (Roman).

Heart – Eating this grants bravery (Persian) or understanding of animal speech (Norse). The fat can be used in a charm to ensure success in lawsuits (Roman).

Hide – Used to make magic armor (see below).

Pearl – Cures all ills (Chinese).

Scales – Used to make magic shields.

Skin – Cools the passion of love (Persian).

Teeth – Grow into an army of soldiers when planted in the ground (Greek). Act as a charm to ensure mercy from rulers (Roman).

Using any of these effects (especially the more powerful) in a campaign may have interesting consequences. GMs should only let dragon remains have impressive, simple uses if dragons are rare and very hard to kill. (If dragons are common and easy to slay, and a drop of fresh dragon blood grants permanent understanding of the speech of birds, every hero worth his salt will have this talent.) GMs can rule that legends are slightly simplified, and the ingredients require special preparation – or only the very greatest dragons are this magical.

Alternatively, draconic remains may have useful properties related to its original abilities – a skilled alchemist or master smith would be needed to draw out these virtues. A dragon's tongue could contribute fire-breathing potions, or its wing membranes could make a fine cloak of flying. If item enchantment is rare in a campaign, any act of magical creation could require draconic ingredients, and dragon-slayers could find regular employment from magical artificers.

If item manufacture is common, but the GM wants to make dragons profitable to kill, then dragon remains may provide mana, something like a one-use Powerstone, but only for a single appropriate enchantment. (This fits with the idea that parts of a dragon are "mana organs" – see p. FB113.) The mana provided could range from a couple of points in a single tooth, up to hundreds or thousands of points in a complete hide or skull.

Even if the corpse has no power, all parts from skulls and sinews down to chips of bone and pieces of offal could still be in demand. Dragons are awe-inspiring and terrifying, so people will want a souvenir or a small connection with the beast's mythical might. In a fantasy campaign where humans have advanced past dragon defenses, they may hunt dragons to extinction for rare spell components, or their hoards of gold and magic.

See also *GURPS Cabal*, p. CB107, for multiple uses of dragon blood, and insurance that its acquisition remains difficult.

Dragonhide Armor

The following are suggested rules to handle dragonhide made into armor:

After proper preparation, dragonhide grants PD equal to the creature from which it came, and DR equal to that of the creature +2. These items weigh as much as heavy/boiled (DR 2) leather, +25% for every point of DR above 2. (Treat items listed as "negligible" weight as being half a pound.) The hide of an adolescent western dragon with a PD 2, DR 3 could become PD 2, DR 5 armor. Heavy leather torso armor weighs 10 lbs. (p. B210); adolescent dragonhide covering the same hit locations would weigh 17.5 lbs.

Dragonhide is difficult to work. Apply a penalty to Leatherworking skill rolls equal to the DR it provides. A dragon corpse provides one pound of finished material for every hit point originally possessed by the creature (less if slain in a particularly messy fashion – GM's option). A typical 33 hit point adolescent firedrake will not provide enough hide for two sets of torso protection. Armor usually sells for around \$300 per lb., because it is light for provided protection and it adds notable prestige. A torso piece could go for \$5,250, while an adolescent firedrake could provide up to \$9,900, given a craftsman who can overcome the -5 skill penalty.

Protective spells can easily enchant dragonhide armor. Spell types should match the type of dragon (for example, firedrake hide for Resist Fire effects). The normal energy cost for item enchantment is reduced by 50%. GMs may rule that only torso or full suit armors get this benefit; a pair of gauntlets is not enough to provide superior protection!

Of course, dragons could react at -3 or worse to anyone wearing dragonhide armor. In some cases, they may actively hunt down such humans. This may bring the market price down.

(These rules can supersede those in *GURPS Magic Items 1*, p. MI25.)



could become a magnet for treasure-seekers or other opportunists, while the corpse may attract all sorts of scavengers. Sudden wealth is often hard to manage, even if one can hold onto it in the face of con artists, tax collectors, and former owners. Realistically, a large enough hoard could even lead to local price inflation. If the dragon was part of a stable system, protecting its prey from other predators, more fights may ensue. If it engaged in trade or entered into contracts, the complications will be subtler but no less tiresome. If it had vengeful relatives, or if other dragons are looking for lairs, future dragon slaying may be necessary.

TACTICS FOR DRACONICIDE



Stories about the slaying of dragons always face the old problem of the irresistible force and the immovable object. The dragon must be truly fearsome, but the hero must win.

When the hero is an upper class, knightly type, he often uses the weapon of his class, and after a drawn-out, straightforward battle, the beast is slain. Even the noblest knight may seek the blessings of the church first, and commonly borrow a magical artifact or blessed weapon. Even a barbarian hero takes the best available equipment; for example, Beowulf (p. 13) acquires a large iron shield, because a fire-breathing dragon would quickly burn away the standard wooden type. During the fight, the dragon should emphasize its potency – its screams are heard across 12 counties, the lashing of its tail generates earthquakes, and other effects – but the hero still wins.

Other slayers use trickery and native wits to best the monster. Common scams, usually (but not always!) associated with lower-class heroes, include:

- ☞ Blocking up the entrance to the dragon's lair.
- ☞ Killing the dragon while it is sleeping.
- ☞ Stopping up the dragon's mouth just before it breathes flames (or giving it a sticky sweet that seals up its jaws).
- ☞ Attacking from ambush.
- ☞ Animals of special power (such as the Danish bull which killed a lindorm, p. 13, or the weasel which can kill the basilisk, p. 14).
- ☞ Being swallowed whole and then attacking the dragon from the inside.
- ☞ Spiked armor or similar (p. 99). In other cases, a hero may wear garments sealed to protect from venomous spittle or blood. For example, the Danish hero Ragnar Lodbrog ("Hairy-Britches") took his nickname from the hairy, tar-soaked garment he wore when fighting one wyrm.

If these tactics appear in tales, the storyteller usually first describes the dragon's raw power and violence, making it clear that the hero is doing what is necessary to rid the world of a rampaging menace. Quite ignoble tactics may be justified when dealing with the monster – poisoning its prey, or giving it strong wine to make it sleep. Some heroes use fire against dragons, loading a spear-point with a mass of peat, adding pitch or resin, setting fire to it, and then thrusting into the dragon's face or maw so that the irritating fumes cause the creature to recoil or even choke.

Protective Clothes

PCs wishing to emulate the Viking hero Ragnar Lodbrog may request garments sealed well enough to protect against venomous spittle or blood. The best choice would probably be standard heavy (winter-quality) clothes, soaked in tar or heavy wax. This would increase the price, but double the weight and ruin the clothes for normal wear. GMs may rule that these preparations work as long as the venom only strikes the locations covered by the garment, or decide that viciously acidic venom burns through in a few rounds.

"Realistically," low-tech hunters pursuing very large prey resort to much stealth and cunning. GMs using optional rules for hit locations and possibly bleeding (though the rule for the latter on p. B130 is intended for approximately human-sized characters) permit competent fighters with heavy weapons to maim and disable dragons with well-placed attacks. Of course, for fairness, such rules should also apply to the hunters. "Realistic" dragon hunting is a high-risk occupation, leaving many scarred and mangled hunters.

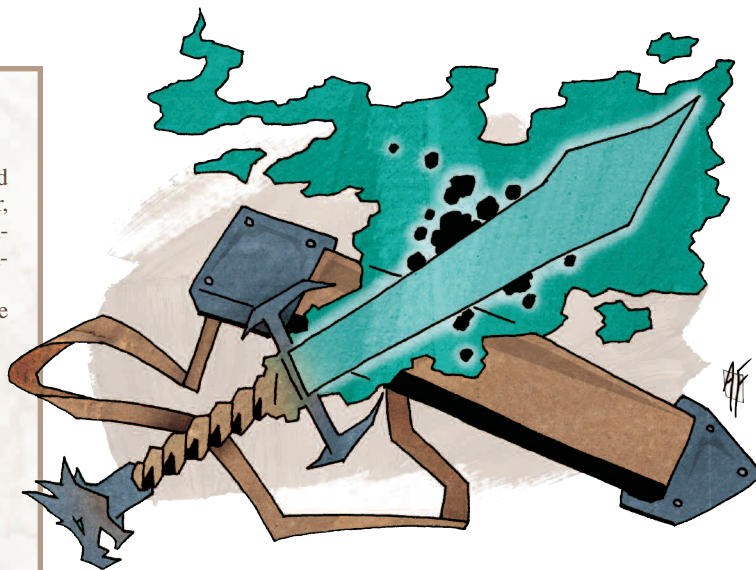
Dragonslaying Swords

Given most dragons' sheer power, any sort of enchanted weapon will give slayers a very welcome advantage. However, for heroes performing, or paying for, the enchantment themselves, and for anyone with a sense of style, a dedicated dragonslaying sword is especially appealing.

In game terms, this requires the enchantment spell Bane (p. M45). It can augment the effectiveness of enchantments of Accuracy and Puissance, and those that create Dancing, Flaming, or Icy swords. When used against dragons, a specialist sword may be more accurate, do more damage, leap from the wielder's hand and fight on its own, or glow with flame or cold.

Bane reduces the energy cost of other enchantments substantially (to one-third of normal, if the magic is to work only against dragons), but no enchantment is truly cheap or trivial. Such blades may only exist if dragons are a major problem, or the wizard or his employer has a particular grudge. A dragonslaying sword might come with a story – or a legend – attached.

GURPS Magic Items 3 has a number of alternative systems for handling enchantments. The rules for enchantment through deeds (pp. M11123-24) offer an interesting alternative source of dragonslaying blades. An ordinary sword used once or twice in slayings may spontaneously become magical, and better at killing dragons.



True saints employ nothing but divine favor, subduing the dragon with the sign of the cross or a dash of holy water. As with "trickster" stories, a GM should emphasize the beast's deadly behavior, with strong hints that it is actually diabolical. Aggrieved by its past activities, vengeful common folk often kill the subdued beast – leaving the saint unstained by even the most justifiable acts of personal violence.

Machinery

Modern writers and gamers, used to the power of the machine, may attempt a mechanical approach to the dragon problem. Medieval storytellers rarely used these devices, at least not before gunpowder's appearance. Some of them would have seen siege engines, but these were cumbersome contraptions, barely moveable, with slow rates of fire, designed for battering down walls over days instead of targeting individual living foes. Siege engines could be useful with ingenuity and tricks – as far back as Roman times, some tales described armies with siege engines slaying giant snakes (p. 14).

For games, this requires engines with a fairly flat missile trajectory. Onagers and trebuchets, which throw stones in a high arc, are impractical for use against moving targets. Still, if PCs get a trebuchet placed and tested so that they know where a shot will go, and can trick a large dragon into crossing that spot, good luck to them.

Certainly, in any game where clever PCs target monsters with such powerful weapons, the trick demands a little tactical ingenuity. First, warriors must move the “engine” into range of the dragon, with a clear shot at a preferably slow-moving (and ideally unaware) target. A typical small bolt-thrower has a snap shot number of 20 and takes many turns or minutes to reload, so the best approach is to site the thing, take careful aim at a fixed point, and then trick the dragon into crossing its line of fire.

Even then, a typical small engine may only do 3-5 dice of impaling damage – not enough to kill the largest dragons. Slayers may need complex plans and multiple weapons, or perhaps oversized engines. Players can use the design rules in *GURPS Vehicles*.



SPIKED ARMOR

One dragon-slaying trick uses spiked or bladed armor. When a “constrictor” dragon tries to crush the wearer, it impales itself, or cuts itself to pieces. This technique appears in the famous story of the Lambton Worm and several other English folktales. In one case, the spikes were actually retractable. Even spiked dummies could work against less intelligent dragons. In the Persian epic the *Book of Kings* (p. 10), the lesser hero Isfandiyar tackles a dragon by having a wooden carriage embellished with spikes and blades. When the dragon swallows it (and the horses drawing it), the carriage lodges in the beast's throat, and Isfandiyar cuts its head off at leisure.

Creating spiked armor requires the services of a skilled craftsman, with at least Armoury-15. (He may specialize in armor, but few craftsmen do so; only large cities and armies support such expertise.) The armor must be plate; adding spikes triples the cost, and the manufacturing time. (Using the rules in *GURPS Low-Tech*, p. LT41, this takes the base time from 3 hours/pound to 9 hours/pound, modified by circumstances.) Adding spikes to an existing suit does not save significant cost or time, as it requires so much work.

Spikes add nothing to DR, and actually give the armor -1 PD, as the spikes catch blows. Realistically, they would represent weak points, and severely increase maintenance and repair costs for the suit. Armor with retractable spikes is highly cinematic, but if permitted, would require skills of 15+ in both Armoury and Mechanic (small gadgets) from the craftsmen, and cost seven times the usual price. Fitting a rugged man-sized barrel with spikes and blades is easier, as no articulation is required. It costs around \$500, and has DR 6 to resist being crushed or smashed. Fitting a carriage or similar vehicle costs about \$500 per ton of vehicle weight.

GMs should administer fights involving this sort of equipment carefully, assessing its effectiveness at any point, but as a guideline, a blow against this sort of armor has a 4 in 6 chance of hitting a spike. Metal or wooden weapons will not take serious damage, but animals, fists, etc., suffer cutting damage based on the attack's ST,

using the table on p. B140. A creature biting on spiked protection has only 1/10 its normal DR (the interior of the mouth is rarely well armored) and one foolish enough to swallow a metal-spiked object takes 2d cutting damage per 100 lbs. of the object's weight every turn, with no DR applying. (So swallowing a typical human warrior, about 200 lbs. in full armor, causes 4d internal damage per turn.) The thing also could stick in its throat, causing it to choke: on each turn, it must make a HT roll or lose 20% of its maximum fatigue points; if its fatigue reduces to zero, it loses consciousness and 1d hit points per turn. Ordinary animals would die, or regurgitate the unwise meal, before the damage stops, but draconic stomach acids could be powerful enough to corrode metals and make the spikes ineffective after about 3d turns, at the GM's option.

A constrictor wrapping around someone in spiked or bladed protection takes 1d+1 attacks per turn. Each spike inflicts cutting damage based on the ST the dragon uses to squeeze and the table on p. B140. If only parts of the armor have spikes or blades attached, check hit locations for each blow. A dragon swallowing the wearer, or a constrictor, takes reduced damage roughly in proportion to how much of the wearer's body is appropriately protected.

Fully intelligent, rational dragons will recognize this trick and fight carefully, preferably at range. However, even smart dragons are not always rational: some go Berserk, and attack without regard to safety. Those with Bad Temper, Bloodlust, Bully, or Sadism may be so accustomed to treating human opponents with contempt that they have to make Will rolls, possibly at a penalty, to refrain from using usual tactics.

The wearer can also kick or punch with convenient short spikes or edges, doing standard damage, with the +1 bonus for heavy boots on a kick – but the damage is considered *cutting*. This sort of armor causes at least +1 to Intimidation rolls against intelligent foes.

Of course, the wearer has to be extremely careful in other circumstances. GMs may require many DX rolls to avoid damaging friends, furniture, and even oneself if removing the gear in a hurry (usually causing 1d-2 cutting damage).

He Who Fights Monsters . . .



The following templates represent human characters who interact with dragons. These are purely suggestions, and many dragon-oriented campaigns include humans who do not fit any of these stereotypes. Designed primarily for low-tech fantasy or “fantasy historical” games, many of the templates can adapt to other settings.

Barbarian Dragon-Slayer 175 points

A hero of the old school – a big, very tough warrior who attacks monsters and slays them with above-average strength, skill, and determination. These hard fights may mean a heroic death for the slayer as well as the beast, but that brings glory. The type goes back to Beowulf, if not further, and enjoyed a 20th-century resurrection in sword-and-sorcery tales featuring brawny heroes.

Attributes: ST 14 [45]; DX 13 [30]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 14 [45].

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Strong Will +2 [8]; and a total of 30 points in any of +1 or +2 to IQ [10 or 20]; Alertness [5/level]; Ally Group (Warband) [Varies]; Claim to Hospitality (Family, clan, etc.) [Varies]; Danger Sense [15]; Daredevil [15]; Disease-Resistant [5]; Extra Hit Points [5/level]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Fit [5]; Hard to Kill [5/level]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Intuition [15] Luck [15]; Night Vision [10]; Rapid Healing [5]; Reputation (Mighty warrior) [Varies]; Resistant to Poison [5]; Status [5/level]; additional Strong Will [4/level]; Toughness [10 or 25]; or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Pirate’s) [-5], and a total of -20 points in any of Attentive [-1]; Bloodlust [-10]; Callous [-6]; Compulsive Carousing [-5]; Disowned [-5 or -15]; Distractible [-1]; Glory Hound [-15]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Obnoxious Drunk [-1]; Overconfidence [-10]; Personality Change (When drunk) [-1]; Poverty [Varies]; Proud [-1]; Sense of Duty (Allies, family, clan, or similar) [Varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5]; or Vow (To slay monsters or defend people) [Varies].

Primary Skills: Broadsword (P/A) DX+1 [4]-14; Shield (P/E) DX+1 [2]-14.

Secondary Skills: Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-13; Naturalist (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-9; Riding (Horse) (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12; Survival (Home area environment) (M/A) IQ [2]-10.

Dragon Students

In some campaigns, especially when dragons are “keepers of secrets,” some humans may study under dragons. Character features appropriate to such students vary, depending on the campaign, but provide an interesting excuse for an Unusual Background. They may have Trained By A Master, especially in an Eastern-flavored setting where wise dragons shift into human shapes, demonstrate exotic martial arts, and have control of chi. The character also could learn exotic spells or supernatural abilities. The dragon might demand appropriate payment from the student, perhaps taking the form of a Duty – and having trained under a notorious monster, or any master as *strange* as a dragon, might justify a negative Reputation or a Secret.

Background Skills: A total of 15 points in any of Agronomy (M/A), Animal Handling (M/H), Area Knowledge (home-land) (M/E), Axe/Mace (P/A), Axe Throwing (P/E), Bard (M/A), Boating (P/A), Camouflage (M/E), Carousing (P/A:HT), Climbing (P/A), Detect Lies (M/H), First Aid (M/E), Games (M/E), Hiking (P/A:HT), Intimidation (M/A), Jumping (P/E), Knife (P/E), Leadership (M/A), Orienteering (M/A), Running (P/H), Sailor (M/A), Seamanship (M/E), Spear (P/A), Spear Throwing (P/E), Stealth (P/A), Swimming (P/E), Tactics (M/H), Tracking (M/A), Two-Handed Axe/Mace (P/A), or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

Dragon-Blooded Human 50 points

A human who somehow possesses dragon ancestry. These individuals are often enigmatic, with interesting powers (often including magic). The template offers a range of choices instead of firm definitions. However, the character should possess some measure of augmented intelligence and vigor.

In many games, the character template will also need an Unusual Background, which can justify further unusual features. Also, in some campaigns, dragon-blooded characters might merit a full racial template.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 11 [10].

Advantages: A total of 40 points in any of increased Attributes [Varies]; Absolute Direction [5]; Alertness [5/level]; Animal Empathy [5]; Attractiveness [Varies]; Awareness [15 or 35]; Collected *or* Composed [5]; Cool [1]; Deep Sleeper [5]; Disease-Resistant *or* Immunity to Disease [5 or 10]; Eidetic Memory [30]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Hard to Kill [5/level]; Harmony with the Tao [20]; Imperturbable [10]; Intuition [15]; Longevity [5]; Magery [Varies]; Magic Resistance [2/level]; Natural Spellcasting [15]; Night Vision [10]; Patron (Secret) [Varies]; Rapid Healing [5]; Second Sight [2 or 5]; Single-Minded [5]; Status [5/level]; Strong Will [4/level]; Toughness [10 or 25]; or Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: A total of -25 points in any of reduced Appearance [Varies]; Attentive [-1]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Callous [-6]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Extra Sleep [-3/level]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Gigantism [-10]; Greed [-15]; Loner [-5]; Low Empathy [-15]; Miserliness [-10]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Oblivious [-3]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (Usually for weirdness) [Varies]; Secret (Strange family history) [Varies]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Sterile [-3]; Uncongenial [-1]; Undiscriminating [-1]; Unnatural Features [-5 each]; or Xenophilia [Varies].

Skills: A total of 5 points in any of Augury (M/VH), Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (M/A), History: Esoteric (M/H), Intimidation (M/A), Languages (Usually exotic or secret draconic tongues) (Varies), Lucid Dreaming (M/E), Meditation (M/VH or M/H), Stealth (P/A), or Weird Magic (M/VH).

Dragon Riders

In some settings, some human (or similar) characters ride dragons – not just as an occasional favor from the beast, but as part of a continuing partnership.

The nature of a “typical” dragon rider, and appropriate game details, can vary considerably with the setting. If dragons are only moderately powerful, dragon riders may be just elite heavy cavalry. GM may design these as most warriors (see the Cavalryman template in *GURPS Warriors*, pp. WA36-38), probably with a level or two of Status, and some minor skill adjustments (as striking from a dragon’s back could require a long spear or a missile weapon). If the partnership is equal, the rider may lack specific training – use the “Dragon-Friend” template from this chapter, with a few points in Riding (Dragon) and probably some weapon skills.

Dragon riders might also psychically link to their mounts (see p. 94 for this relationship with trainers). Others may be members of specific bloodlines, or invoke ancient pacts with dragons. GMs may charge a *large* Unusual Background to any character with this association.

Lastly, some campaigns might permit the buying and selling of dragons like riding horses. However, a dragon’s cost should be phenomenal and reflect the vast expense of raising and training a large, long-lived, dangerous carnivore.

Riding Oriental Dragons

Chinese dragons occasionally permit mortals to ride on their backs, often as a great favor to someone who venerates them correctly, but this is dangerous for several reasons. Apart from anything else, if a rider touches a scale imbued with Yin energy (p. 62), the dragon could turn savagely on the rider. The rider must make a Riding roll once per hour. On a failure, he touched a Yin scale. Generous GMs may permit a roll against DX at -3 to avoid the dangerous scale at the last moment (although a fright check may be indicated), or may make a reaction roll for the suddenly Yin-influenced dragon at -7, giving the human some chance of charming his way out of the situation.

Dragon-Friend

50 points

This simple character has almost any background and abilities, and combines easily with many other templates. This PC’s defining feature is simply that it has a very big friend.

How this situation exists is up to the player, but it may have involved courage, luck, ancestry, or personal charm. (It might also involve an Unusual Background.) Being allied with a dragon could bring social standing, wealth, or fame – for good or ill.

The template’s attributes and skills can be modified further to reflect the character’s history and career. A character who is friends with a petty drake (p. 54) or similar small dragon might also use this template, but replace Patron with Ally or possibly Familiar.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 10 [0].

Advantages: Patron (Powerful individual, special abilities, appears often) [30]; plus a total of 30 points spent on increasing the power or appearance frequency of the patron, or on any of Alertness [5/level]; Animal Empathy [5]; Charisma [5/level]; Collected [5]; Common Sense [10]; Cultural Adaptability [25]; Daredevil [15]; Empathy or Sensitive [15 or 5]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Imperturbable [10]; Intuition [15]; Language Talent [2/level]; Luck [15 or 30]; Pious [5]; Pitiable [5]; Reputation (Among dragons as a friend, or among humans

as someone not to cross) [Varies]; Sanctity [5]; Serendipity [15 or 30]; Second Sight [2 or 5]; Spirit Empathy [10]; Status [5/level]; Strong Will [4/level]; True Faith [15]; Voice [10]; Wealth [Varies]; or Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 points in any of Broad-Minded [-1]; Bully [-10]; Chummy [-5]; Congenial [-1]; Curious [Varies]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Low Status [Varies]; Nosy [-1]; Overconfidence [-10]; Poverty [Varies]; Responsive [-1]; Sense of Duty (to the dragon or to all dragons) [Varies]; Reputation (Monster-lover) [Varies]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Undiscriminating [-1]; or Xenophilia [Varies].

Skills: A total of 10 points in any of Animal Handling (M/H), Appreciate Beauty (M/VH), Artist (M/H), Bard (M/A), Bardic Lore (M/H), Chess (M/E), Diplomacy (M/H), Fast-Talk (M/A), Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (M/A), Jeweler (M/H), Languages (Usually exotic or secret draconic tongues) (Varies), Musical Instrument (M/H), Poetry (M/A), Riding (Dragon) (P/A), Savoir-Faire (M/E), or Singing (P/E).



Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore)

Some of these templates include the Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) skill. This grants knowledge of the hierarchies and arrangements of dragon society, and probably some details of dragon behavior and biology not normally known to other races. In settings where dragons have no serious secrets, this skill does not exist.

Hidden Lore skills are not always available to starting characters, but this one may be appropriate to individuals who have had exceptionally close contact with dragons, with GM permission.

Hoard Raider

50 points

This template represents an especially bold, lucky, or foolish thief – one who steals treasure from dragon lairs, once or repeatedly. This implies some measure of skill or luck, but can lead to all sorts of trouble as well as to personal wealth. A robber who has stolen from more than one dragon and lived uses this template as a basis, but probably adds a lot more points!

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 11 [10]; HT 10 [0].

Advantages: A total of 20 points in increased attributes [Varies], or any of Acute Hearing [2/level]; Alertness [5/level]; Composed [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contacts (Street) [Varies]; Cool [1]; Danger Sense [15]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Imperturbable [10]; Intuition [15]; Literacy or Semi-Literacy [Varies]; Luck [15]; Manual Dexterity [3/level]; Night Vision [10]; Serendipity [15]; or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: One of Glory Hound [-15], Greed [-15], Trickster [-15], or Overconfidence [-10] plus Loner [-5], plus a total of -10 points in any of Curious [Varies]; Enemies (Past victims, human or dragon) [Varies]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Nosy [-1]; Oblivious [-3]; Poverty [Varies]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (Reckless and/or criminal) [Varies]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; Uncongenial [-1]; or Vow (To acquire or recover some item) [Varies].

Primary Skills: Stealth (P/A) DX+1 [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Camouflage (M/E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Climbing (P/A) DX [2]-12; Traps (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10.

Background Skills: A total of 16 points in any of Appreciate Beauty (M/VH), Archaeology (M/H), Area Knowledge (any) (M/E), Blackjack (P/E), Brawling (P/E), Camouflage (M/E), Cartography (M/A), Fast-Talk (M/A), Filch (P/A), Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (M/A), History (M/H), History: Esoteric (M/H), Jeweler (M/H), Jumping (P/E), Knife (P/E), Lockpicking (M/A), Orienteering (M/A), Prospecting (M/A), Shortsword (P/A), Streetwise (M/A), Survival (any) (M/A), Tracking (M/A), or any Primary or Secondary Skill.



Knight in Shining Armor 120 points

A contrast to the Barbarian Dragon-Slayer, the Knight in Shining Armor is a refined figure, motivated by high ideals. This template represents a courageous, skilled paladin, not just any random gentleman with good weapons. His advantages may come from training, or he may be an authentic saint, favored by higher powers for his selfless virtue.

Becoming a Dragon by Choice

Some human characters may not wish to slay dragons or to coexist with them; they may seek to *become* dragons, temporarily or permanently.

In *GURPS* terms, the simplest approach involves the Great Shapeshifting spell (p. G12). Using this to adopt the shape of a Young/Very Small Dragon of the Western type (p. 57) involves an increase of around +10 ST, +1 DX, +5 HT, +2 DR and +1 PD, manageable by anyone who knows the spell to as little as skill 10. However, an Adult/Large Western Dragon form (p. 57) might imply +40 ST, +4 DX, +5 HT, +6 DR, +4 PD, and +7 Flight Move – requiring Great Shapeshift-33! And, in these cases, the spell does not grant a breath weapon, leaves the character's hit points equal to HT, and has a significant fatigue cost as well as extensive prerequisites.

Alternatively, the would-be dragon may employ a matched set of lesser spells; combining several variations of Partial Shapeshifting (p. G11) with Breathe Fire (p. M38), Flight (p. M71), and Enlarge (p. G19) could work, if the wizard has enough skill and energy. See p. 137 for a campaign built around this idea.

Of course, some wizards may simply cheat, casting the *illusion*. This requires Illusion Disguise (p. M52) plus another illusion spell, and ideally Enlarge so that caster can look like a more-than-human-sized dragon. Breathe Fire, Flight, and other spells could augment this effect.

GURPS Shapeshifters Rules

A talented human with innate shapeshifting ability could use the “were-form” rules in *GURPS Shapeshifters* (pp. SH19-37). Combine the listed Shapeshifting advantage with the templates in Chapter 3 for the effect – the result may be expensive. Even the power to become a Petty Drake (p. 54) with a reduced IQ, would cost a base 93 points, while becoming a “Small” Western Dragon would cost 583 points before any modifiers.

Items granting these powers can use super equipment rules from *GURPS Supers* (pp. SU68-70). For example, a helmet capable of transforming the wearer into a Small Western Dragon might have the limitations Breakable (-15%), Can Be Hit at -6 to attack rolls and the item disappears while the wearer is transformed (-5%), Can Be Stolen by stealth while the owner is in human form (-5%), and Unique (-25%), giving a net cost of 291 points.

Incidentally, the legendary story of Fafnir's voluntary transformation (p. 12) involved the *tarnhelm*, a magical artifact of extraordinary power. Items such as this, capable of accomplishing results beyond any normal wizard's spells, can be the central features of epic tales.

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 13 [30]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].

Advantages: Fearlessness +3 [6]; Status +1 [5]; Wealthy [20]; and a total of 25 points in any of +1 to ST, IQ, or HT [10]; Allies or Ally Group (Squire, Retinue, etc.) [Varies]; Appearance [Varies]; Claim to Hospitality (Family or fellow nobles) [Varies]; Charisma [5/level]; Composed [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contacts (Military) [Varies]; Cool [1]; Daredevil [15]; Extra Hit Points [5/level]; additional Fearlessness [2/level]; Fit [5]; Heir [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Legal Enforcement Powers (“Low justice” – broad jurisdiction) [10]; Literacy or Semi-Literacy [Varies]; Magic Resistance [2/level]; Pious [5]; Rapid Healing [5]; Reputation (Heroic warrior) [Varies]; Resistant

to Poison [5]; additional Status [5/level]; Strong Will [4/level]; Toughness [10 or 25]; True Faith [15]; or additional Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Chivalric) [-15]; and a total of -15 points in any of Cannot Harm Innocents [-10]; Charitable [-15]; Compulsive Vowing [-5]; Dependent (True love, young squire, etc.) [Varies]; Distractible [-1]; Dreamer [-1]; Fanaticism (Religious faith) [-15]; Glory Hound [-15]; Honesty [-10]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Loner [-5]; Lover's Distraction [-15]; Overconfidence [-10]; Proud [-1]; Sense of Duty (To family, kingdom, or religion) [Varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5]; Uncongenial [-1]; or Vow (To defend the right, slay monsters, etc.) [Varies].

Primary Skills: Broadsword (P/A) DX+1 [4]-14; Lance (P/A) DX [2]-13; Riding (Horse) (P/A) DX [2]-13; Shield (P/E) DX+1 [2]-14.

Secondary Skills: Heraldry (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Savoir-Faire (M/E) IQ [0]-10 (Free from Status); and any two of Axe/Mace (P/A) DX [2]-13; Flail (P/H) DX-1 [2]-12; Leadership (M/A) IQ [2]-10; or Tactics (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-9.

Background Skills: A total of 9 points in any of Animal Handling (M/H), Appreciate Beauty (M/VH), Area Knowledge (Homeland) (M/E), Bard (M/A), Brawling (P/E), Carousing (P/A:HT), Chess (M/E), Combat/Weapon Sport (Any "knightly" weapon) (Varies), Dancing (P/A), Falconry (M/A), Games (M/E), Leadership (M/A), Naturalist (M/H), Spear (P/A), Tactics (M/H), Tournament Law (Tournaments) (M/E), Tracking (M/A), Two-Handed Sword (P/A), or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

Notes: In some worlds, even if Illiteracy is the norm, Literacy may be standard for characters of knightly status. Similarly, the minimum required Status for a mounted knight might be higher or lower than +1.

Reckless Scholar 65 points

This learned student of dragonkind insists on examining the subject first hand and close-up. The template provides exceptional cleverness, a lot of luck, or other skills or advantages.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 11 [10].

Advantages: Literacy [10]; Status +1 [5]; and a total of 20 points in any of +1 DX or IQ [10]; Acute Vision [2/level]; Claim to Hospitality (Fellow scholars) [Varies]; Collected or Composed [5]; Cool [1]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Fit [5]; Higher Purpose (Raise human knowledge of dragons) [5]; Imperturbable [10]; Intuition [15]; Luck [15]; Patron (University or rulers) [Varies]; Reputation (As a sage, among scholars) [Varies]; Sanctity [5]; Serendipity [15]; Single-Minded [5]; extra Status [5/level]; Strong Will [4/level]; Tenure [5]; Unfazeable [15] or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: One of Fanaticism (Scholarship) [-15]; Obsession (Knowing *all* about dragons) [-15]; Vow (Unlock *all* the secrets of dragonkind) [-15]; or Code of Honor (Scholarly – credit sources, never lie about facts, etc.) [-5]; and Overconfidence [-10]; plus a total of -10 points in any of Age [-3/year]; Attentive [-1]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Clueless [-10]; Curious [Varies]; Easy to Read [-10]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Loner [-5]; Nosy [-1]; Oblivious [-3]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (Suicidal lunatic) [varies]; Skinny [-5]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5]; Uncongenial [-1]; Undiscriminating [-1]; or Xenophilia [-5].

Primary Skills: Any three of Bardic Lore (M/H) IQ [4]-12; Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13; History: Esoteric (M/H) IQ [4]-12; Naturalist (M/H) IQ [4]-12; Occultism: Demonology (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13; or Theology (M/H) IQ [4]-12.

Secondary Skills: Any four of Area Knowledge (wilderness) (M/E) IQ [1]-12; Camouflage (M/E) IQ [1]-12; Climbing (P/A) DX-1 [1]-9; Hiking (P/A:HT) HT-1 [1]-10; History (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Orienteering (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Research (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Stealth (P/A) DX-1 [1]-9; Survival (any) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; or Teaching (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

Background Skills: A total of 9 points in any of Alchemy (M/VH), Appreciate Beauty (M/VH), Archaeology (M/H), Artist (M/H), Augury (M/VH), Cartography (M/A), Chess (M/E), First Aid (M/E), Geology (M/H), Literature (M/H), Meteorology (M/A), Jeweler (M/H), Languages (varies), Philosophy (M/H), Riding (P/A), Thaumatology (M/VH), Tracking (M/A), Veterinary (M/H), Weird Magic (M/VH), or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

Notes: The template cost assumes a "medieval fantasy" world where Illiteracy is the norm; adjust the cost accordingly if PCs receive Literacy or Semi-Literacy for free.

Many scholars – especially those who survive long enough to write up their experiences – may also have a practical knowledge of magic. In that case, add Magery and some spells, or combine the template with almost anything from **GURPS Wizards**.

Sacrifice Survivor 40 points

Given a tradition of tying maidens to stakes for dragons to devour, it seems plausible that a few might survive, through wit, charm, divine protection, or sheer luck, and develop some kind of working relationship with the dragon. This template covers a range of possibilities: the relationship may be friendly, businesslike, or terribly fragile.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 10 [0].

Advantages: Pick one of Charisma +3 [15]; Serendipity [15]; True Faith [15]; or +1 IQ [10] and Charisma +1 [5]; then add a total of 15 points in any of +1 to DX or HT [10]; Animal Empathy [5]; Appearance [Varies]; Claim to Hospitality (Family or dragon) [Varies]; Collected or Composed [5]; Cool [1]; Empathy [15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Imperturbable [10]; Intuition [15]; Literacy [Varies]; Luck [15]; Patron (Dragon) [Varies]; Pious [5]; Pitiable [5]; Reputation (Various) [Varies]; Sanctity [5]; Status [5/level]; Strong Will [4/level]; Voice [10]; or Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 points in any of Broad-Minded [-1]; Charitable [-15]; Duty (To dragon) [Varies]; Honesty [-10]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Overconfidence [-10]; Parthenomania [Varies]; Proud [-1]; Responsive [-1]; Sense of Duty (To dragon, family, or community) [Varies]; Reputation (Collaborator/dragon-lover) [Varies]; Selfless [-10]; Social Stigma (Valuable property) [-10]; Truthfulness [-5]; Undiscriminating [-1]; Unfit [-5]; or Xenophilia [Varies].

Primary Skills: Pick any two of Bard (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Diplomacy (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11; or Fast-Talk (M/A) IQ [2]-12.

Secondary Skills: Add another 2 points to any of the Primary Skills options.

Background Skills: A total of 4 points in any of Acting (M/A); Agronomy (M/A); Appreciate Beauty (M/VH); Area Knowledge (Vicinity of lair) (M/E); Cooking (M/E); Dancing (P/A); Detect Lies (M/H); First Aid (M/E); Fortune Telling (M/A); Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (M/A); Musical Instrument (M/H); Naturalist (M/H); Needlecraft (P/A); Psychology (M/H); Riding (Dragon) (P/A); Savoir-Faire (M/E); Savoir-Faire (Servant) (M/E); Sex Appeal (M/A); Singing (P/E:HT); or Survival (Local terrain type) (M/A).

Notes: Many characters using this template will take Charisma, which may modify some of the skills.

Servile Minion **40 points**

This template is mostly suitable for an NPC, but some players might find it amusing to play a scurrying, cringing underling to a *really* big boss.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 11 [10]; HT 11 [10].

Advantages: A total of 20 points in any of +1 to any attribute [10]; Acute Hearing [2/level]; Claim to Hospitality (Dragon or its allies) [Varies]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Cool [1]; Disease-Resistant *or* Immunity to Disease [5 or 10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Literacy or Semi-Literacy [Varies]; Patron (Dragon) [Varies]; Pious [5]; Pitiable [5]; Rapid Healing [5]; Resistant to Poison [5]; or Toughness +1 [10].

Disadvantages: Duty (To dragon; either often, or all the time but not dangerous, or fairly often and Involuntary) [-10], plus a total of -15 points in any of increased Duty [Varies]; Alcoholism [-15]; reduced Appearance [Varies]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Bully [-10]; Callous [-6]; Careful [-1]; Cowardice [-10]; Dull [-1]; Edgy [-5]; Greed [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; Humble [-1]; Hunchback [-10]; Intolerance [-10]; Low Empathy [-15]; Low Pain Threshold [-10]; Low Self-Image [-10]; Nightmares [-5]; Oblivious [-3]; Odious Personal Habits [Varies]; Poverty [Varies]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (Monster's pet) [Varies]; Sadism [-15]; Selfish [-5]; Selfless [-10]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Staid [-1]; reduced Status [-5/level]; Uncongenial [-1]; Undiscriminating [-1]; Unfit [-5]; Unluckiness [-10]; or Xenophilia [Varies].

Primary Skills: Savoir-Faire (Servant) (M/E) IQ+2 [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Any two of Accounting (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Acting (M/A) IQ [2]-11; Area Knowledge (Vicinity of lair) (M/E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Beverage-Making (ME) IQ+1 [2]-12; Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (M/A) IQ [2]-11; Intimidation (M/A) IQ [2]-11; or Stealth (P/A) DX [2]-11.

Background Skills: A total of 7 points in any of Blackjack (P/E), Brawling (P/E), Cooking (M/E), Detect Lies (M/H), Diplomacy (M/H), Fast-Talk (M/A), Heraldry (M/A), Holdout (M/A), Knife (P/E), Scrounging (M/E), Survival (Local terrain type) (M/A), Traps (M/A), or any Primary or Secondary skill.

Notes: In truth, while this treatment slightly plays up the servility of the type, a dragon's human servant might be something more than a mere toady – especially if the dragon's behavior and dietary requirements are not vile. Some people would say that working for a dragon that takes just a few cattle and fights humans only in self-defense is no worse than working for a human nobleman. For that matter, even a real monster's servant

may not have chosen the job, and may be making honest efforts to divert the dragon from its worst inclinations. Players with a melodramatic streak could always play a minion who recovers his dignity and courage over the course of the game.



Slayer's Advisor

60 points

This template represents a character – perhaps a local wise-woman or specialist scholar – who advises a slayer on draconic behavior or useful tactics. It focuses on relevant knowledge, although can expand in many directions.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 11 [10].

Advantages: A total of 20 points in any of +1 DX [10]; +1 IQ [15]; Bardic Immunity [10]; Claim to Hospitality (Fellow scholars) [Varies]; Collected *or* Composed [5]; Common Sense [10]; Cool [1]; Empathy [15]; Imperturbable [10]; Intuition [15]; Literacy or Semi-Literacy [Varies]; Longevity [5]; Reputation (For wisdom) [varies]; Sanctity [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Status +1 [5]; Strong Will [4/level]; or Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 points in any of Absent-Mindedness [-15]; Age [-3/year]; reduced Appearance [Varies]; Attentive [-1]; Bowlegged [-1]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Code of Honor (Scholarly – credit sources, never lie about facts, etc.) [-5]; Edgy [-5]; Imaginative [-1]; Lamé [Varies]; Loner [-5]; Nosy [-1]; Proud [-1]; Reduced Manual Dexterity [-3/level]; Reputation (Creepy eccentric) [Varies]; Secret (Various) [Varies]; Sense of Duty (To scholarship or local community) [Varies]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5]; Uncongenial [-1]; Undiscriminating [-1]; or Unfit [-5].

*Let the knight-errant explore the
corners of the earth and penetrate the
most intricate labyrinths, at each step let
him attempt impossibilities, on desolate
heaths let him endure the burning rays
of the midsummer sun, and the bitter
inclemency of the winter winds and
frosts; let no lions daunt him, no mon-
sters terrify him, no dragons make him
quail; for to seek these, to attack those,
and to vanquish all, are in truth his main
duties.*

– Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

Primary Skills: Any two of Area Knowledge (Local) (M/E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Augury (M/VH) IQ-1 [4]-12; Bardic Lore (M/H) IQ [4]-13; Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14; History: Esoteric (M/H) IQ [4]-13; Occultism: Demonology (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Tactics (M/H) IQ [4]-13; or Theology (M/H) IQ [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Any three of History (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Naturalist (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Physician (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Research (M/A) IQ [2]-13; Teaching (M/A) IQ [2]-13; or Thaumatology (M/VH) IQ-2 [2]-11.

Background Skills: A total of 6 points in any of Alchemy (M/VH), Appreciate Beauty (M/VH), Archaeology (M/H), Bard (M/A), Cartography (M/A), Detect Lies (M/H), Diagnosis (M/H), Fast-Talk (M/A), First Aid (M/E), Geology (M/H), Heraldry (M/A), Literature (M/H),

Meteorology (M/A), Prospecting (M/A), Languages (varies), Philosophy (M/H), Riding (P/A), Stealth (P/A), Survival (any) (M/A), Tracking (M/A), Traps (M/A), Weird Magic (M/VH), or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

Notes: Once again, this template cost assumes a “medieval fantasy” world where Illiteracy is the norm; adjust the cost accordingly if PCs receive Literacy or Semi-Literacy for free.

Some advisors have magical powers; although these should be limited or slow in use – otherwise, why does not the advisor help the slayer more directly? To represent this, add Magery and some spells, or combine the template with something from *GURPS Wizards*.

Thoughtful Dragon-Slayer 100 points

This template represents the slayer as technician, perhaps using siege engines and smart tactics, perhaps just “Jack the Giant-Killer” trickery and peasant cunning. Using *gadgets* against dragons may seem modern, but is not entirely limited to lower-class or anachronistic figures. Even noble heroes in Persian myth or the tale of the Lambton Worm employed clever devices to defeat especially powerful monsters. Chivalrous heroes do not necessarily see anything ignoble in using ingenuity to slay a ravaging beast.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 11 [10].

Advantages: A total of 25 points in any of +1 to any ST or HT [10]; Collected [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Common Sense [10]; Composed [5]; Cool [1]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Gadgeteer [25]; Intuition [15]; Literacy or Semi-Literacy [Varies]; Luck [15]; Manual Dexterity [3/level]; Night Vision [10]; Reputation (Monster-slayer) [Varies]; Status (Up to +2) [5/level]; Strong Will [4/level]; Toughness +1 [10]; Versatile [5]; or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 points in any of Careful [-1]; Greed [-15]; Imaginative [-1]; On the Edge [-15]; Overconfidence [-10]; Poverty [Varies]; Sense of Duty (To allies, family, or community) [Varies]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Trademark [Varies]; or Vow (To slay monsters or defend people) [Varies].

Primary Skills: Any two of Armoury (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Camouflage (M/E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Gunner (Arbalest) (P/A) DX+1 [4]-13; Poisons (M/H) IQ [4]-13; or Traps (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14.

Secondary Skills: Any three of Acting (M/A) IQ [2]-13; Animal Handling (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Blacksmith (M/A) IQ [2]-11 (Including penalty for low ST); Crossbow (P/E) DX+1 [2]-13; Fast-Talk (M/A) IQ [2]-13; Harpoon (P/H) DX-1 [2]-11; Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (M/A) IQ [2]-13; Polearm (P/A) DX [2]-12; Stealth (P/A) DX [2]-12; Tracking (M/A) IQ [2]-13; Two-Handed Axe/Mace (P/A) DX [2]-12.

Background Skills: A total of 11 points in any of Axe/Mace (P/A), Bolas (P/A), Carpentry (M/E), Engineer (Various) (M/H), First Aid (M/E), Lasso (P/A), Mechanic (Wagon) (M/A), Merchant (M/A), Naturalist (M/H), Net (P/H), Netmaking (P/E), Occultism: Demonology (M/A), Orienteering (M/A), Riding (Horse) (P/A), Research (M/A), Scrounging (M/E); Survival (Local terrain type) (M/A); Tactics (M/H), or any Primary or Secondary skill.

Notes: While most of this character’s skills focus on killing by cleverness, often at range, the slayer may occasionally have to finish the job with heavy melee weapons. Check prerequisites when selecting skills.

THE DRAGONS
RETURN

This and the next two chapters detail one example of a dragon-centered campaign – one heavy on “big reptile politics,” but also featuring opportunities for action, adventure, and mystery. The basic version is set in the Edwardian period (around 1901-1914), but in an alternate history in which dragons have returned – or perhaps simply arrived. Chapter 9 projects this history forward to the present day.



What is the great dragon which the spirit is no longer inclined to call Lord and God? “Thou-shalt,” is the great dragon called. But the spirit of the lion saith, “I will.”

“Thou-shalt,” lieth in its path, sparkling with gold – a scale-covered beast; and on every scale glittereth golden, “Thou shalt!”

*– Friedrich Nietzsche, **Thus Spake Zarathustra***

THE COMING OF THE REPTILES



This campaign world has a history, for practical purposes, the same as our own – until early 1878. In that year, over a month's period, the dragons appeared.

They slithered from cave mouths on rocky coasts, and crawled elegantly from especially beautiful pools in rural China. One erupted dramatically from Mount Etna, startling a party of American tourists, while another, one of the smallest, emerged from a cave high on Mount Pilatus, in Switzerland. Sea serpents rose from the deeps, while slightly smaller creatures slunk through the mists in Scottish lochs and Canadian lakes. Even a tribe in the Arabian deserts reported the loss of many camels to a terrifying new predator.

The strange thing was, although many people certainly saw this happening – or at least, saw individual dragons – the general public did not notice it. Readers treated individual newspaper stories as wild and ludicrous stunts or hoaxes. It helped that each dragon lay low at first; by the time anyone investigated any particular sighting, the dragon was gone. And a few scorched fields and half-eaten cows are not scientific proof of anything. A few photographs existed, but intelligent people knew that photographs could be faked. Some reports were substantial enough that learned scientists were prepared to discuss the behavior of hitherto undocumented species of large lizard, but not much more.

In fact, by the end of the century, the dragons' existence becomes something of an open secret. They are too embarrassing for too many people. Not only scientifically impossible, dragons do not fit in most theologians' understanding of things. Even self-proclaimed spiritualists and magicians cannot explain them. A certain doctor in Vienna (a nerve specialist, clever enough to admit that dragons evidently do exist) talks about widespread "psychological repression" or "subconscious denial." Wits make jokes about dragons, although not everyone laughs.

Categorization

This setting defines the categories from pp. 36-37 as follows:
Dragons Are: Powerful to Very Powerful, Quite Rare, Intelligent, and Very Exotic.

Dragons Represent: A paradox, a mystery, and a wild card in world events. Often expert politicians, they may also symbolize an old order of power and tradition, in conflict with modernity – or a new era of strangeness and uncertainty, and the failure of old ideas of a "clockwork universe."

The PCs Are: Humans working for or against the dragons in their globe-spanning plots; researchers (usually human) probing the new mysteries or draconology and sorcery; or dragons, plotting and politicking in pursuit of power, wealth, and security.

There are not many dragons. No one knows how many there are; members of the Circle of Pliny (p. 110) only agree there are between 100 and 5,000. (If that seems a wide variation, one must understand that there is much disagreement about how well dragons can hide, and how many may have appeared unnoticed in remote wilderness areas.) They remain secretive – none have adopted their draconic form in front of large groups

of people, or destroyed anything larger than a small village or ship. In fact, many seem mild-mannered, although their tempers are uncertain. Over the years, five or six have been killed, leaving their remains to be dismissed as fakery or used as evidence for the existence of large animals of previous species.

Strategies

Dragons work together when necessary, but most are essentially solitary. While they are physically extremely diverse, they have several attributes in common. They are physically powerful. They possess extraordinary mental gifts, including perfect memories. While they seemed naïve and uninformed at first, they learned very, very quickly. Many display traditional "draconic" personalities – proud, selfish, acquisitive – but others seem less solipsistic, or perhaps better at concealing their true inclinations.

They were naturally cautious at first, entirely aware that humanity massively outnumbered them. Their strategies were accordingly thoughtful. Shortly after they first appeared, they infiltrated human society, parlaying raw power and subtle intelligence into wealth and influence. Some turned to crime, or at least worked on the less respectable edges of human society; a few used especially vicious or ruthless tricks, such as large-scale violent theft or assassination, but this was too risky for most of them. Many acquired loyal groups of human followers, and the discovery that they could assist in the development of sorcerous skills (p. 108) enabled several to build alliances in mystical or spiritualist circles. Their own powers, and their followers' sorcery, enabled some to pursue profitable investments, or to locate and salvage lost treasures in remote areas. Hence, most became tolerably wealthy by around 1900.

Today, they are scattered around the world, building their power and influence further. As far as human observers can tell, they are not breeding (though this impression is wrong), nor does age slow them. Whether they are most concerned with personal power or wealth, self-defense, or some other goal, remains painfully unclear.

The Hidden

One reason no one can even approximate how many dragons exist is that no one knows how many have "gone completely native," permanently adopted human shapes, settled in human society, and have nothing to do with other dragons.

Of course, these "Hidden" take measures in the long term to prevent their agelessness causing problems, and many other dragons regard them as weaklings and cowards.

Two cases of fatal accidents exposing these hidden beings – dragons revert to their true shape on death – resulted in panic and confusion. Perhaps fortunately, both occurred in relatively out-of-the-way locations (one in rural Greece, one in a small town in the American Midwest), and could be covered up by, in effect, *ad hoc* alliances of other dragons seeking to preserve secrecy, and governments fearing civil unrest. One thing driving the formation of political alliances among dragons is the wish to make cover-ups easier and more certain in the future, as the next accident may happen somewhere less obscure.

The Nature of Dragonkind

So – what are these dragons, and how did they appear on Earth?

The quick answer, and the one that players of dragons should take as the basis for their characters' behavior, is that nobody knows – not even the dragons. These creatures appeared with a sensation akin to awakening from a deep sleep, a working knowledge of at least two languages (one human, one draconic), a strong instinct for self-preservation that immediately made them cautious, and not a single clue as to how or why they appeared. Some of them drop hints to human scholars, but that habit comes from their often deeply devious natures, a proud hatred of appearing ignorant, or sheer mischief.

In truth, dragons espouse almost every theory on the subject developed by human scholars, although some theories are more popular with humans than with dragons. Among the most widespread are:

1. Dragons existed in the past, but went into magical hiding for a while, and have now been “awoken” by the passage of time or some unidentified event. This explains their appearance in myth, but leaves many other questions open – not least, why dragons themselves are not able to confirm the theory. It also fails to explain their defiance of scientific law.

2. Dragons are figments of collective human imagination or “subconscious,” granted physical form by some unknown process. Possibly, when human population numbers soared, they passed some critical threshold. Why only dragons manifested, and not unicorns or fairies, is uncertain. Perhaps the creation of the dragons drained some essential reserve of psychic energy, temporarily or permanently. (Or perhaps these other beings also appeared, but are better at hiding than dragons.) This would certainly explain why many dragons resemble the mythical beasts of the regions where they appeared.

3. The dragons were summoned by a magical ritual cast by an unknown sorcerer – presumably, one that ran wildly out of control. (See below for more on sorcery.) Where they may have been summoned from remains unclear (see some of the other theories). This scenario could discuss the whole nature of sorcery – another difficult topic.

4. Then again, perhaps these creatures were summoned without conscious working. A sufficient violation of previous psychic or psychological norms may have caused the universe to respond, or even to revolt, throwing up this breach of logic. Among the possible “triggering violations” suggested are widespread acceptance of the Theory of Evolution, cultural interactions caused by greater international travel and contact, the terrible casualties in the Russo-Turkish war of the 1870s (although many previous wars were bloodier), and the women's suffrage movement.

5. Some other physical phenomenon somehow caused dragons to manifest. One suggestion is that the extensive burning of petroleum fuels in modern inventions released “ghosts” – residual life-force manifestations – from the age of the dinosaurs, which then took a physical form borrowed from human minds.

6. Dragons are demons, disguised to confuse humanity, so that they can tempt would-be sorcerers and wield diabolical levels of destructive power. Increasing levels of sinfulness and atheism (usually manifested in whatever the theorist

“Dracontology”

“Dracontology” is the informal name for the study of dragons given by academics who take the subject seriously. At present, it is a very young, undeveloped science, entirely at the stage of gathering observational data.

(Dracontologists cannot resist theorizing on the origin and basic nature of dragons. See the main text for some theories that have developed on this topic, and notice none have much supporting evidence.)

In game terms, “dracontology” is a mixture of Occultism (p. B61, representing the study of older beliefs about magic and the supernatural, which contain a tangled mixture of the useful and the extremely misleading) and a specialization of Hidden Lore (“Dragon Society” – see p. CII47). The latter is not especially secret, but is not the subject of many books or university courses. Most dracontologists have a range of other mental skills.

Since dragons began aiding humans in working effective magic, a few human scholars have attempted to derive a set of general principles regarding magic. In game terms, this is Thaumatology (p. CII49). Enough knowledge of the subject does not exist for anyone to gain more than 2 points in this skill. Thaumatology is distinct from Occultism and all types of Hidden Lore, although most thaumatologists also have at least some knowledge of Occultism.

disapproves of most, such as Darwinian theory or female emancipation) or the imminence of the Apocalypse enabled their ability to travel from Hell to Earth. This theory is most popular with a certain type of devoutly fundamentalist religious believer, but is not generally popular with dragons. They know (or think they know) they are not demons, dislike being described in this way, and fear the consequences should the theory become widespread. Still, dragons are not the most pious or virtuous of creatures.

Obviously, many of these theories can overlap or combine. For example, some people could believe that dragons were manifested by the human racial imagination in reaction to the widespread violation of psychological norms, while others could believe that they are demons deliberately summoned by some mad and evil sorcerer.

SORCERY

At some point, not long after their first appearance, a dragon taught a human servant the rudiments of the draconic language. The human, a casual student of the occult, noticed that some of the vocabulary resembled – or resonated with – certain old rituals, and on a whim, began to experiment with hybrid “spells” in his spare time. The results were startling.

It turned out that the draconic language was, in some sense, the “true language of magic.” To humans, it seems incredibly verbose and pedantically rigorous. Researchers believe that it describes reality with a precision that no human tongue approaches. Used ritualistically, it commands the universe in ways that reality cannot gainsay. Those rituals actually work – more of the time than any other attempts at magic, anyway.

To their intense annoyance, however, the dragons find that they cannot work “sorcery,” for all their command of the words. For them, their own language is simply a form of communication. They describe reality as it is, from a subtly supernatural point of view, and for them, to describe is not to

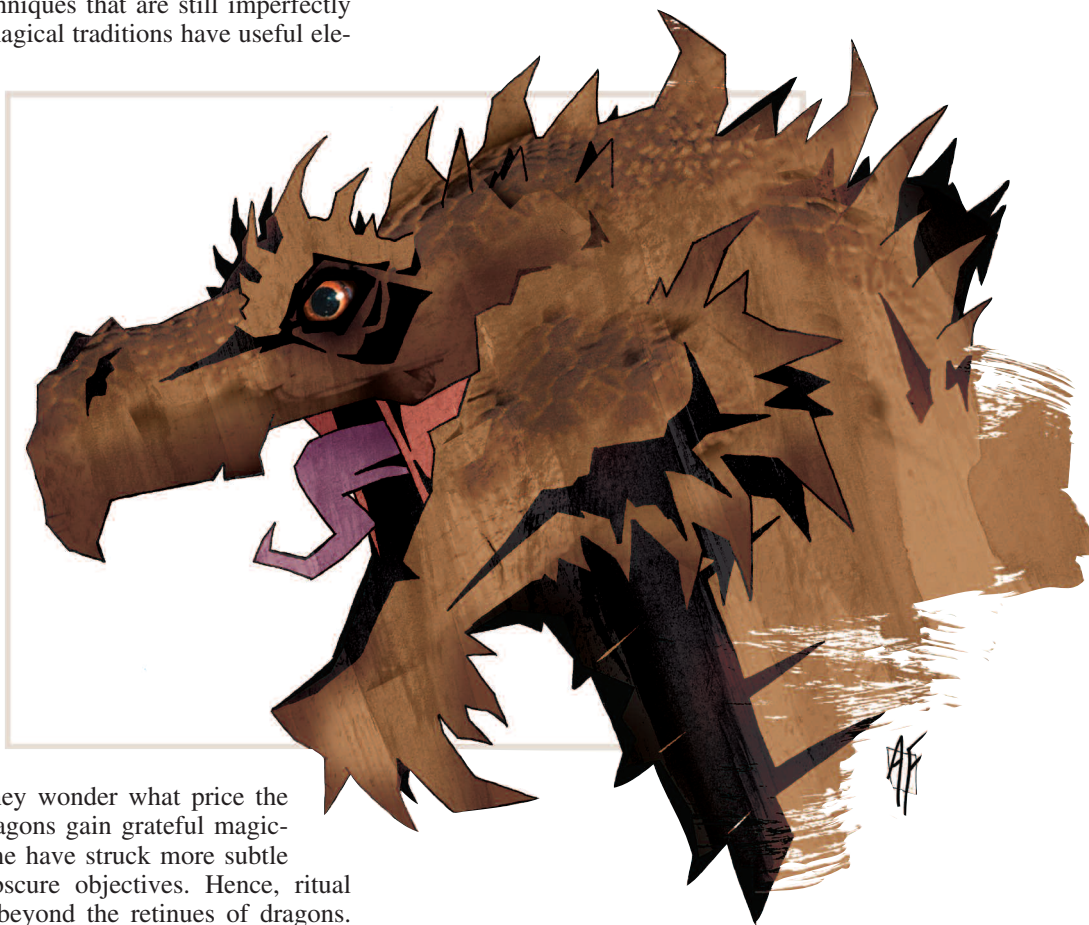
change. Perhaps it takes a human will behind the words to make them effective, or perhaps the considerable effort of learning the language instead of knowing it instinctively is part of the process of acquiring power. (Dragons can always recognize what a ritual is designed to do, though, because they understand the important words. They are also strongly resistant to its effects, though not immune.) This puts dragons in a peculiar position, although one with advantages: they are the world's primary teachers of sorcery, but never its practitioners.

Merely speaking words in the draconic language is not enough to work magic, though. Humans must work it into rituals, using theories and techniques that are still imperfectly understood. Many ancient magical traditions have useful elements, although few work in their original form. (This has led to theorizing about past "ages of magic," when spells worked in any language.) Effective rituals have been scrambled together from scraps of Hermeticism, alchemy, Chinese sorcery, and Japanese Shinto ritual – interestingly, often those which happen to mention dragons.

Some human sorcerers claim to have created rituals alone, through skill and insight, once they learned some of the language (perhaps at second hand), but most effective occult research still involves the direct aid of dragons. This makes many people nervous, as they wonder what price the creatures charge. Mostly dragons gain grateful magic-wielding servants – but some have struck more subtle bargains, or have more obscure objectives. Hence, ritual magic is slowly spreading beyond the retinues of dragons. Not all sorcerers are (knowingly) dragons' minions, just as most draconic minions are not sorcerers.

But despite all their boasts, whatever the source of magical power, no human has much of it. Either information remains very incomplete, or magic is limited. Research continues.

Amongst the proven sorcerers are the arrogant and self-aggrandizing Aleister Crowley, whose willingness to take considerable experimental risks has so far paid off; the Austrian "anthroposophist" Rudolf Steiner, who has synthesized the vast, disorganized body of sorcerous lore left by the late spiritualist Helena Blavatsky with philosophy derived from studying Goethe, and now educates others in his subdued style of spiritual perception-magic; and the poet-magician William Butler Yeats, whose distaste for the modern technological world may derive from his close association with wild-spirited river dragons dwelling in his native Ireland.



(The subject becomes more confusing when Crowley hints that he is a dragon himself. He is, as so often, lying.)
See p. 115 for game rules for sorcery.

THE HUMAN RESPONSE



Although many humans avoid thinking about dragons, and many dragons encourage this, the evidence of their existence is just a little too clear. Different groups and individuals react in very different ways.

Most, but not all, classify dragons as a problem. They are powerful, unpredictable, and generally amoral. It takes complacency not to see them as a possible threat. On the other hand, they have not conquered or destroyed the world, or even killed very many people. They are evidently unorganized, with widely divergent plans and ideas. It seems that they do not even agree

on their own nature. Hence, cautious or thoughtful folk believe they should be studied a lot more before anyone makes any firm plans.

Most human governments, or at least their military or law enforcement elements, have formal or informal groups dedicated to "the Dragon Question," and, given this period's informal and simplistic nature of intelligence handling, such groups have accumulated a fair amount of data. A number of independent scholars and groups also have made detailed studies of dragons, with varying but often considerable effectiveness.

The Circle of Pliny

The “Circle of Pliny” is not an organization at all. It is, instead, an informal correspondence circle, created by academics in Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, Berlin, Harvard, and elsewhere. All that they have in common is acknowledgement of the existence of dragons, and a wish to reach a rational understanding of the phenomenon.

The Circle evolved after 1878 when various scholars moved from tentative references to the new phenomenon in their private letters to a more overt and relaxed process of discussion. Various groups formed, recruiting new members and linking up as they went along. One member coined the name some time in the late 1880s.

Members of the Circle include Nikola Tesla, Marie Curie, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and various members of the Huxley family. The authors Rudyard Kipling and H.G. Wells are on the edge of the group, the latter introduced by his late mentor T.H. Huxley.

Members of the Circle are, emphatically, in total agreement about absolutely nothing except that dragons do exist (and some of them have odd ideas about the definitions of “dragons” and “existence”). Some see these creatures purely as a phenomenon to study; some wish to promote peaceful understanding between humanity and dragonkind; a few have odd religious beliefs (one or two hold that the coming of dragons represents a sign of the imminence of the Apocalypse); and some see dragons as a threat, and study as the first step towards elimination.

Some of the latter individuals are members of Hiram Maxim’s smaller, marginally more formal organization, or at least receive funding from him. Others within the Circle see Maxim as a dangerous warmonger or even a maniac, and are highly critical of his activities. This division has placed the Circle under some stress, and could cause it to fragment. However, its very informality makes it robust; no one is in a position to dissolve it or set formal policies over which anyone would resign.

In game terms, Circle members could make useful Patrons or Contacts – their contact with other members making them more valuable. However, the Circle as a whole is not organized enough to serve as a Patron. Scholarly PCs might be invited to join, and could then acquire other members as Contacts.

Understandings

Any number of humans and human groups aim to work with dragons, often successfully – although the dragons often try to dominate such relationships. Aside from pure business dealings and the peculiar relationship between dragons and sorcerers, humans may either seek to share various sorts of power, or simply create mutual trust and friendship. These people range from power-hungry and amoral schemers to idealistic pacifists. As dragons too are varied, the ensuing interactions are unpredictable.

“Dracontologists” believe several governments have struck bargains with individual dragons. Many believe the Germans in particular have done so, and some evidence supports this, although this belief may owe much to stereotyped views of German leadership. High-ranking individuals in the Chinese and Japanese governments may have also collaborated with local dragons, although these may be informal relationships instead of formal treaties. (Human negotiators have to understand that dragons do not represent a single group in negotiations. Some may pretend to be representatives of their race, out of vanity, arrogance, or confidence trickery.)

Opposition

Meanwhile, other groups and governments view dragons with intense suspicion or hostility. These reactions range from being simply cautious to thinking that dragons are actually diabolical. No government has “declared war” on dragonkind, and major churches still have a confused set of doctrines on the subject, but plenty regard dragons as a possible enemy – and plenty of humans are in conflict with individual dragons.

Inventor and armaments manufacturer Sir Hiram Maxim has created the most formidable organization opposing dragonkind. An American-born naturalized British citizen, Maxim is not as violently hostile to dragons as he is intensely suspicious. He comments that, in his experience, power may not corrupt, but it certainly is used sooner or later. He has therefore employed a portion of his wealth, and donations from wealthy associates, to create an organization that observes and documents draconic activity. He both sponsors and undertakes practical research into science and technology that could fight them. Maxim insists that his intention is merely to ensure that humanity can defend itself if necessary, but his attitude may inevitably lead to conflict with dragonkind.

As human ideas and technological progress run wild, dragons begin to worry and generate internal conflicts over their place in the industrialized world.

Inventions developed or assessed by Maxim include lighter and more flexible versions of his own famous machineguns and heavier-than-air flight (to negate what Maxim regards as a large dragon advantage), and he has a laboratory dedicated to researching draconic biology. The existence of magic concerns him – an engineer’s distrust of anything irrational – but access to magical powers for study could compromise his organization’s security. Although he has a few expert occultists on retainer, his group includes no actual sorcerers.

Maxim’s organization might make a useful Patron (a reasonably powerful organization, thanks to its resources, knowledge, and dedication, for a base 15 points; in time, it might develop special equipment, for +5 points), but would generally impose a Duty in return. It is not as powerful as any national army, but much more focused and flexible. In the event of any large-scale, overt confrontation between humans and dragons, it would certainly become involved.

Dragons in the Americas

As far as research can determine, dragons are relatively rare in both North and South America. Those that appear are an odd mixture of European types and strange entities from native mythology, and a handful that have migrated to the New World. A few “Oriental” creatures might hide among the various immigrant Asian communities, although these would probably also be immigrants.

The lack of dragons appears to support theories that the existence and nature of dragons rely on local human belief, although in truth, most available theories adapt to fit known facts.

THE EDWARDIAN AGE



At the beginning of the 20th century, the world seems almost adjusted to the presence of dragonkind, and continues on its way. But not far beneath the surface, countless schemes and conflicts seethe and simmer. As human ideas and technological progress run wild, dragons begin to worry and generate internal conflicts over their place in the industrialized world. Their nervousness is warranted: many human leaders are both aware and deeply suspicious of the “monsters” loose in the world.

Why This Era?

The choice of the Edwardian era as the “default” period for this setting may seem odd, but there are good reasons.

This period has a lot of gaslight charm, and many possibilities of using other *GURPS* books as cross-references. On the other hand, it breaks away from the “High Victorian” stereotypes of steampunk, giving the virtue of some novelty. Without adding gratuitous implausibility or secret technology, games can involve aircraft and motor vehicles, although in small doses.

This is the tail end of the great age of exploration and imperial expansion – important to some of the campaign themes. The age also teeters on the brink of radical change, with (in our history) the terrible trauma of the First World War, which should form part of the mood.

Furthermore, this period’s military technology is formidable enough to present a threat to dragons, forcing them to operate in secret. Potentially this technology gives human PCs a real chance when fighting a dragon, while still limiting them enough that they should be very nervous. Humanity has heavy rifles and cumbersome artillery, but no helicopter gunships or tanks.

This period creates a great deal of classic children’s literature, some of it with strong supernatural elements. This too forms part of the campaign style, offsetting and balancing the possible sense of imminent doom. The Edwardian Age is the long hot Indian summer of not-quite-modern culture. In the game, the dragons should wind through this background like decorations in the margins of an old and expensive book.

The World

Europe’s empires are at their height. The last surge of expansion, the “Scramble for Africa” at the end of the 19th century, parceled out almost the entire globe. Parts of Asia retain their own governments, partially because the European powers have agreed to a mutual policy of restraint. The situation in the New World is a little more open, with imperial expansion frozen; the increasingly powerful United States asserts its “Monroe Doctrine,” claiming a unique right to influence. Furthermore, all the active European empires are relatively new; the Spanish-American War in 1898 destroyed the last remnants of Spain’s old glory, and the newer powers entertain serious discussions of carving up the small Portuguese colonies.

Meanwhile, two gigantic land-based nations have just completed their great continental expansions. The United States extends from sea to shining sea; and Russia, driving railways east to the Pacific across its vast wilderness possessions, expands southward, casting thoughtful eyes on the Ottoman

Empire, China, Afghanistan, and even India. Not surprisingly, the new political term “imperialism” is in widespread use.

Europe’s major powers vary in influence. Great Britain rules the seas and draws on (among other possessions) India’s vast resources. In the 19th century, France expanded throughout Africa and Southeast Asia (where French-based dragons engage in rooting out their Asian counterparts’ influence with cunning economic manipulation). After slowly uniting, Germany came late to the imperial table and looks to expand its limited share of the spoils (its dragons agreeing fully with its human leaders on this decision). The Austro-Hungarian Empire dominates much of central Europe, but has few colonial possessions and limited heavy industry. It suffers badly from its various peoples’ growing nationalist inclinations, and is generally regarded as moribund.

In 1908, Belgium’s national empire expands, taking over the Congo (previously the private fief of the nation’s King Leopold). A committee of European investors led by Leopold (including some dragon “sleeping partners” in the background) had exploited this region with such genocidal ruthlessness that other European powers forced this change. Holland continues to rule a scattered trade-based global empire, while Italy (another late unification) plots adventures in Africa, and the Asian-based Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, long gone in decline but occasionally struggling to modernize, retains a finger-hold on the south-eastern edge of the continent.

Elsewhere, the most “promising” powers, in most Western eyes, are former colonies, some just moving towards independence. Australia’s population is still too small to become a major force, and South Africa will remain firmly under British dominance for a while after the upheavals of the Boer War. Brazil has vast territories and potential, but is not especially wealthy, and most of its territory is wilderness, while Mexico has problems with stability. Perhaps the most promising power in Latin America is Argentina, with its considerable agricultural production – although it had some serious financial problems as recently as 1890.

Political Conflicts

Many different systems of thought contend to influence this setting, and each has a twisted mirror image among dragons.

Imperialism is more policy than ideology (although some are idealistic imperialists – missionaries and others seek to spread European culture and civilization, and patriots seek advantage for their countries). In essence, it encourages the

expansion of the Western, capitalist system across the whole planet, in search of resources and new markets. Opportunist Europeans drakes use imperialism to send cat’s-paw humans around the globe to carve out new estates and haul home new treasures. Among humans, it entangles with *Liberalism*, the principle of personal and economic freedom which began as a revolt against the old monarchies and currently reigns as the primary ideology of the capitalists and the bourgeoisie, granting them the freedom to think as they like and pursue whatever business they choose. European dragons, elitists by nature, often see liberalism as a problem – a sign of human rebelliousness and instability – causing some draconic doubts about imperial projects.



Other ideas are more violently revolutionary, and more widely regarded as threatening. *Nationalism* is a rising force. Overriding loyalty to a nation dominated Europe and the United States over the last 150 years; shrewd observers see it as a threat to great empires, starting with those within Europe but having the potential to spread across the globe. Some dragons oppose nationalism, but others tacitly support the policies – as territorial creatures, they find it appealing. Modern *Socialism* and its wilder brethren, such as anarchism and communism, are entirely human movements – reactions to the inequalities of capitalism and industrialization, a demand that society reorganize in accordance with purely human needs and wishes. Dragons are almost all repulsed by this, for the simplest of reasons – they are almost incapable of egalitarian feelings. A few have tried to exploit radical movements as pawns.

As a rule, in fact, dragons have a utilitarian attitude to political ideals, encouraging or suppressing them as convenient. They manipulate politics and society from behind the scenes, feeding resources and encouragement to whichever human factions serve their ends, and occasionally arranging the elimination of nuisances. Democracy is sometimes inconvenient, but dragons manipulate it almost as easily as any monarchy. Genuine mass movements, on the other hand, annoy them. They sometimes try blocking such developments; at other times, they subvert them, ensuring against political weaknesses from the start.

Communications and Transport

The age of steam and telegrams (late TL5, in *GURPS* terms) gives way to that of internal combustion and telephones (TL6). However, the process is slow and partial.

For long-distance travel in even moderately prosperous areas, steam most certainly rules. Great steamships plow the waves, both for civilian use and as naval weapons. Sails are

almost completely abandoned for serious use. (One of the age's supreme symbols of hubris, of course is, the *Titanic*.) On land, steam railways – trains – provide transportation for most people seeking to travel between cities in a developed country. However, over short distances and rough country, horses remain an important option. Motorcars – powered by internal combustion engines, steam, or even electricity – remain expensive, unreliable toys, at least until late in the era. Still, towns see the increasing use of motorized buses and trams. Heavier-than-air aircraft, invented at the beginning of the century, will remain experimental and severely limited in usefulness for some years.

They manipulate politics and society from behind the scenes, feeding resources and encouragement to whichever human factions serve their ends, and occasionally arranging the elimination of nuisances.

The telegraph, around for decades, has been followed by the telephone in recent years. However, these remain somewhat limited; this is still an age of extensive and frequent postal services. Characters should expect high-volume long-distance communications to involve letters, with telegrams and telephone messages only for specific purposes. Incidentally, many of the upper classes regard the telephone purely as the responsibility of their servants; this suits dragons, which may be in the wrong shape when a call comes.

THE NATURE OF THE BEASTS

To make any sense in terms of rational biology, dragons must belong to several different species. (Based on known dragon forms, scientific observers can identify at least four or five such species.) They are equally diverse in psychological terms, although with certain clear tendencies. A few things are consistent about all of dragonkind (beyond the obvious facts that they are powerful, strange, and supernatural).

Breeding

As previously mentioned, researchers believe that dragons are not breeding, and certainly do not have families. However, dragons are not actually sterile.

This subject is somewhat vague, for GMs to develop as they wish. Possibly, dragons cannot breed with each other, and must develop relationships with humanity if they wish to create families (see below). However, these intelligent creatures with extremely long lives, could also have simply not got around to breeding, and in a few more years or centuries, there will be dragon matings and clutches of eggs. (Presumably, viable matings would require a pair of the same species.) For that matter,

some humans wonder if some dragons have already produced offspring, and are simply keeping the fact very quiet. If dragon eggs have long incubation periods, or if young dragons are weak and vulnerable, such secrecy would be logical.

Half-Dragons

The Circle of Pliny knows that dragons in human form are, on occasion, attracted to humans of the opposite sex. (They theorize that the transformation has a psychological as well as physical element; the dragon becomes truly human in important ways.) Discreet enquiries have confirmed that, although no known dragon has contracted legal marriage with a human, such attraction has been expressed physically, in the traditional manner. However, the Circle has not found any evidence of such relationships leading to offspring. Most other students of dragonkind have come to the same conclusion.

However, the Circle has been deceived. Most of them are rationalists at heart and have been too quick to assume that mating between such wildly disparate species could not lead to offspring. The truth is, while “successful” matings are extremely rare, they do sometimes happen – and the first generation of



“half-dragons,” a few dozen strange beings, are just coming of age around the world, and coming into their heritage.

Relationships between both human sexes and dragons of the opposite sex can lead to offspring, but if a pregnant female dragon shifts forms at any point, the pregnancy ends. As this usually happens before she becomes aware of her condition, only two half-dragons with dragon mothers exist anywhere in the world. Most other half-dragons are unaware of their parentage (though some know there was something strange about their fathers), and are regarded as embarrassing illegitimate “accidents.” While some receive affection and care, and others turn out as reasonable people despite everything, many suffer childhoods that too easily lead to bitterness.

Half-Dragons in GURPS

All known half-dragons appear convincingly human, although often more robust than most people. Their mixed blood gives them innate magical talent. They have +2 HT [20], Ritual Aptitude 2 [2], and Unusual Background (Half-Dragon) [10], for a “racial” cost of 32 points.

The Unusual Background reflects their extreme rarity, allowing them a higher level of Ritual Aptitude than any normal human (up to the full 5 levels), and permits advantages such as a dragon parent as a Patron. Some have Unnatural Features (such as golden eyes or glossy scales on parts of their skin), but this is not mandatory.

No half-dragon was born before 1879.

In some cases, the child’s mother remained in contact with the father, and convinced him that the child was his. While different dragons’ reactions vary, some see potential advantages in acquiring family. A few half-dragons work as loyal agents to their fathers. A very few discover one great advantage of their draconic heritage: they can learn and use the draconic language easily and fluently, but are still human enough to work magic. Hence, they are naturally talented sorcerers.

Human scholars are incorrect in one other respect, incidentally. Several dragons have legally married humans, very secretly. In some cases, these were alliances of convenience, in which the humans often were unaware of their spouse’s nature, but a few were love matches, in which the dragon often revealed its true nature to its spouse. (Dragons are less prone to these affections than humans, but not entirely immune.) However, dragons are aware that any close alliance, whatever its reason, represents a vulnerability, and are very secretive about such things.

Not all dragons are aware that half-dragons are possible. A few regard the idea with disgust, disdain, or fear, and react to

half-dragons accordingly, possibly even working very hard to destroy them. Most, however, find the idea either faintly amusing or irrelevant.

Dragon Courtesy

Dragons are competitive and territorial by nature, and never pacifists.

The impulse to do each other vast damage, in person or by proxy, sometimes proves irresistible. However, if they succumb too often, dragonkind would destroy itself – and many enjoy subtle social interactions. To moderate conflicts, the wiser ones have evolved a set of social rules and taboos, largely based on human social customs, and varying from region to region.

The rules require formal declaration of conflicts, condemn the infliction of “collateral damage” on neutral parties as poor taste, respect surrenders and formal submission, and resolve minor conflicts by means of non-violent social contests. Some rules ensure that the loser preserves enough dignity to prevent losers from lashing out against third parties, while still rewarding winners.

Immortality?

In *GURPS* terms, dragons’ classification is “Unaging,” which is near enough to the observed truth for practical purposes. Since they first appeared, although some have matured and grown, dragons have not shown signs of negative effects from age. Other things being equal, dragons can probably survive unchanged for centuries, maybe even millennia.

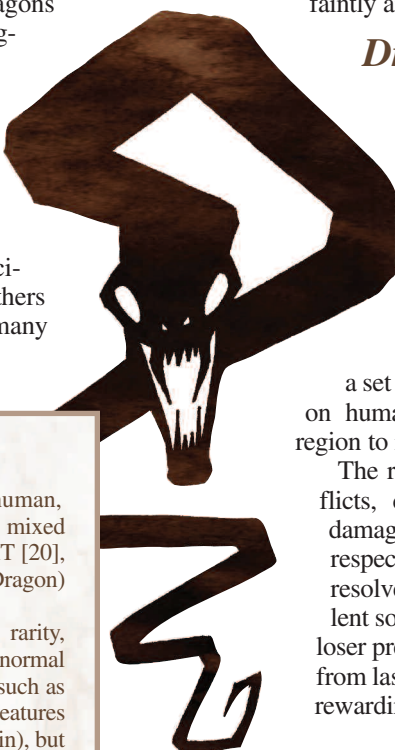
However, other things are *never* equal, and the true limits of dragon physical agelessness have hardly been tested. GMs can impose life cycles or aging effects as appropriate – although it might be fairer to remove the Unaging advantage if dragons have limited lifespans.

In *GURPS* terms, the Savoir-Faire skill covers these rules for characters with experience of draconic society. PCs who are unfamiliar with a set of dragon customs suffer a -5 unfamiliarity penalty (or worse) when dealing with these issues. For that matter, a dragon with no familiarity with human society suffers a -3 penalty or worse attempting human Savoir-Faire, usually appearing stiff, formal, and touchy. Many specializations of Tournament Law and even Performance/Ritual cover the procedures of specific areas of draconic societies.

DRAGON CHARACTERS

Dragons are extremely diverse, but usually follow patterns defined by myths and legends. While some scholars believe this proves that those myths describe previous encounters with the creatures, many others think that the dragons are the product of human imagination or dreams. (The German nerve specialist Carl Jung, an enthusiastic, if eccentric, Circle of Pliny member, has developed an intricate theory concerning “the Collective

Unconscious made manifest.”) However, their physical abilities are limited in some ways. While many can fly and breathe fire, and some breath air and water with equal ease, they lack more arcane, spell-like abilities as mentioned in some tales (such as control of the weather). This is particularly inconvenient for the Oriental types, who have difficulty claiming divine status. They are intelligent and cunning, with perfect recall.



Racial Templates

In game terms, the following templates from Chapter 3 define draconic characters: Crawling Wyrms (including the Small and Giant versions, and the Lindorm), Wyvern, Sea Serpent (including all size variations), Western Dragon (all sizes), Kiao, Kiao-Lung, and Kioh-Lung. (Chinese dragons at earlier stages of development should be functionally animals. None of the more mature Chinese types exist; of course, depending on their true nature, this could be a matter of time – but if so, and perhaps fortunately, such transformations may be centuries away.) In all cases, the templates need modification as follows:

1. Raise IQ to 12 if it is less.
2. Add the advantages Eidetic Memory 2 [60], Shapeshifting (to quasi-human form; damage carries proportionately between forms; no reversion when asleep or unconscious, +150%; see p. 79) [38], and Strong Will +5 (Only vs. Ritual Magic, -50%) [10].
3. Add Unaging [15], if not already present, and delete any advantages this supercedes.
4. Add one point in one local human language (usually at IQ+1).

Thus, for example, the wyvern template increases to 634 points, the Medium-Sized Western Dragon becomes 793 points, and the Kiao-Lung becomes 652 points.

A dragon's shapeshifted form appears human, but should have a racial template with IQ 12 [20] and the advantages Attractive [5], Eidetic Memory 2 [60], and Unaging [15], and one point in a local human language. (Some dragons become less intelligent in human form, although most are still smart.) This template costs 101 points. Because dragon and human physique are so different, a dragon learning unarmed combat skills must specify between use in human or dragon form. Also, a shapeshifted dragon becomes a naked human being.

The Dragon Language

Dragons have their own "native" language, unknown to any human before their appearance; scholars suspect it shares features with both Sumerian and archaic Chinese languages, and even Navajo or Classical Mayan – but this is very controversial. There are local "dialects" among dragons in different regions, notably in China, Japan, and northwest, eastern, and southern Europe. Each includes accents and a few loan words from local human languages. Dialects default to each other at -1.

Example Dragon Character

Ossian

750 points

The dragon called "Ossian" manifested in a cave in the Western Isles of Scotland in 1878, and adapted quickly to his circumstances, displaying common draconic caution. He instinctively shifted shape when he first saw human beings, and after causing a small stir in the first village he found, stole some clothes off a washing line and spent a little time spying on humanity. Then, realizing that he had caused a little too much commotion, he flew to Ireland, where he befriended a pair of itinerant farm laborers. He revealed his true nature to them, and they helped him with a series of petty crimes until he was able to afford a smart suit.

Under their guidance, he talked his way into a local spiritualist group, and helped one of their brighter members master some minor magical rituals. Soon, he was wandering between the houses of gentlefolk with vaguely artistic or mystical inclinations, trading off his air of mystery and discovering an impressive knack for dealing with people. He also kept and expanded his more dubious connections: burgling one or two of the houses where he felt mistreated, and accepting the help of a Dublin forger who created a sustainable legal identity. Unfortunately, somewhere along the line, he also made a bad enemy of some influential human or human group, with enough cunning to move against him subtly.

"Ossian O'Dare" is now an accepted figure in Irish and increasingly English society, although with a slightly odd reputation that makes him more interesting. (Some have already noted his failure to age; one famous Irish writer commented on it very early.) One of several dragons cultivating various would-be mystics and poets (they are aware of each other, and their relationships range from friendship to armed neutrality), Ossian is a lesser influence on William Butler Yeats. Because he is careful to keep his true nature quiet, he is less well regarded than some dragons whose nature is an open secret in those circles.



To ensure his own security, Ossian wishes to acquire substantially more wealth, and suspects that crime on the necessary scale would be too risky. He therefore looks for high-risk investments that his powers and resources could transform into certain bets, and is open to many lucrative ideas.

ST 31 [-10]; **DX** 14 [20]; **IQ** 14 [20]; **HT** 17/35 [20].

Advantages: Small Western Dragon [677]; Ally Group (shady associates: small group, 75-point characters, 12 or less) [20]; Charisma +2 [10]; Comfortable [10]; Contact (Dublin fence: Street, unconnected, available often, usually reliable) [4]; Reputation +2 (Interesting fellow, among high-class mysticism enthusiasts dealing with his human form) [3]; Reputation +2 (Trustworthy, in the Dublin underworld, 10 or less) [2]; Status 1 [5].

Disadvantages: Enemy (Unknown) [-10]; Reputation -2 (For slightly uncertain background, among respectable society folk dealing with his human form) [-5]; Secret (Criminal connections) [-10]; Secret (dragon operating in human society) [-20].

Quirks: Brutally straightforward in physical combat; Careful; Pursues wealth as a source of security; Uses criminal associates for revenge on respectable types who annoy him. [-4]

Skills: Acting-15 [1]; Appreciate Beauty-14 [2]; Area Knowledge (Ireland)-15 [1/2]; Bard-16* [1/2]; Brawling-15 [2]; Calligraphy-12 [1/2]; Carousing-17 [2]; Dancing-13 [1]; Filch-12 [1/2]; Guns/TL5 (Shotgun)-15 [1/2]; Holdout-15 [1]; Literature-14 [1]; Occultism-15 [1]; Riding (Being ridden)-12 [1/2]; Riding (Horse)-13 [1]; Savoir-Faire-14* [0]; Streetwise-15 [1]; Teaching-14 [1/2].

Languages: Northwestern European Draconic-14 (native) [0]; English-15 [0]; French-14 [1/2]; Gaelic (Irish)-15 [1].

* Includes Charisma bonus.

* Free from template or Status.

Notes: Ossian's DX and physical skills are reduced by 2 when he is in human form. Likewise, his HT and Carousing are reduced by 5.

Humans can learn this language as a Very Hard skill, but only if the human (a) is a dragon's trusted friend or servant, (b) has studied Ritual Magic (in which case his maximum is one point in one dialect of the language), or (c) has a 5-point Unusual Background (representing contact with a suitable human teacher).

Personalities

Dragons came into the world in 1878 with distinct and variable personalities, so no major mental disadvantages exist in their templates. However, many do fall into strong psychological patterns, as represented by disadvantages.

Certainly, many Western dragons suffer from Greed or Miserliness, and often both. In other words, they have the legendary draconic love of wealth. Their arrogance too can match the legends – many are Proud or Selfish, and some are Solipsists. Some have irascible, egocentric personalities represented by Bad Temper, Bully, Callous, Jealousy, or Stubbornness, although most have these flaws at the quirk level, if at all. Their sheer power usually saves them from Paranoia, although growing awareness of the modern world sometimes overcomes this, and smart dragons are often Careful. Oriental dragons seem more refined, although some observers believe they are merely more subtle about desiring luxurious surroundings and power over others. Those from other continents are less susceptible to generalizations, although arrogance seems common.



Also, dragon intelligence is mostly alertness and memory, instead of creativity. Some display skill in arts or sciences, but if anything, dragons are slightly less artistic than humans (although they often love to acquire the products of artistry). Indeed, quite a few are Hidebound.

Dragon Aptitudes

Dragons also manifested with, if not many *skills*, then *aptitudes*; each developed along personal lines. Most learned some social and political skills, but a dragon with extensive experience of manipulating human society and playing politics with its own species will have more, at higher levels, than one which spends most of its time in some wilderness stronghold. Few dragons have intensive combat training. Dragons' instinctive fighting abilities are usually formidable enough. Many have skills that correspond to a specific draconic image or legend (especially common in China, where most have knowledge of Philosophy, Theology, Meteorology, and Naturalist).

Aside from this, dragons' physical forms do not determine their "native abilities," although sea serpents do acquire knowledge of the ocean deeps and so on. Dragonkind includes a number of eccentrics, hermits, and even "crazed wanderers," although the latter all seem sane enough not to reveal themselves to humans. They, and the saner wilderness dwellers, often have respectable outdoor skills, notably Survival.

HUMANS AND THE SUPERNATURAL



Functional magic in this setting (except as embodied in dragons) is usually "sorcery," but in *GURPS* terms, it is Ritual Magic, represented by rules in Chapter 6 of *GURPS Spirits* (instead of by standard *GURPS* spells). Plenty of occultists, theologians, and even some eccentric scientists research other forms of power, but so far, they only have theories.

The Nature of Sorcerers

A sorcerer's psychology seems tied to how and why magic works. Sorcerers are almost invariably strange – in fact, many verge on insanity. Other scholars mutter that only the crazy attempt this nonsense, or that dragons choose to exploit the easily manipulated, but it seems to take a certain focused eccentricity to grasp the use of rituals – a mixture of concentration, obsession, and originality, combined with a willingness to take risks.

Sorcery Game Rules

A few limitations and special rules apply to Ritual Magic in this setting, in addition to the standard need for lengthy rituals and special conditions:

1. As described on p. SPI82, the Ritual Magic skill requires specialization in a specific tradition. However, all of this setting's working magic pulls from disparate sources, instead of representing genuine historical traditions. The most widespread "traditions" are *Anthroposophic Meditation* (developed by Steiner from Blavatsky's notes, combining Indian-style

meditation with a relentless focus on perception), *Crowleyan Hermeticism* (based on fragments of Western Hermetic lore, with a large accretion of whatever Crowley finds he can get away with, magically and socially), *Bardic Invocation* (a fairly meticulous reconstruction of the less bloody elements of Celtic pagan practice, augmented with a great deal of poetic chanting), and *Modern Taoist Procedures* (the best attempt to derive a working system from ancient Chinese texts, with borrowed Shinto, Tantric, and Western elements).

2. Because of known magic's still-experimental nature, the Ritual Magic skill cannot reach a level higher than 13. (If putting the mandatory 1 point in the skill would give a sorcerer Ritual Magic at more than 13, it is treated as 13.)

3. The Ritual Adept advantage (p. SPI75) is not available.

4. No fully human character has more than 3 levels of Ritual Aptitude (p. SPI75). Hence, all such characters will use rituals at -2 or worse. Half-dragons can take up to the full 5 levels.

5. No known "sacred space" grants any bonus to rituals. (It is possible that such places exist, but attempts at Stonehenge, various churches and cathedrals, and one or two dragon lairs, have not been successful.)

6. The only Paths currently available are Cunning, Knowledge, Luck, and Protection. Research continues into other possibilities. (If PCs decide to pursue such research, the GM determines the results. Suggested minimum requirements for research teams are characters with Ritual Aptitude 2+, Research skill at 15+, and the draconic language at 14+.)

THE WORLD,
WITH DRAGONS

The previous chapter defined this campaign world's background and assumptions. This chapter considers the state of play in the Edwardian era, some of the most significant characters, and some ideas for campaigns.



Psychoanalysis has revealed to us that the totem-animal is really a substitute for the father, and this really explains to us the contradiction that it is usually forbidden to kill the totem animal, that the killing of it results in a holiday, and that the animal is killed and yet mourned.

*– Sigmund Freud, **Totem and Taboo***

IN THE PRESENCE OF DRAGONS



The dragons do not control everything in this world. They lack the power to achieve that, and trying would make it impossible to preserve secrecy. What they can do is use their wealth, physical power, and ability to aid sorcerers, to influence, inspire, and block human plans and actions. Meanwhile, they pursue individual political schemes and agendas. They are not unified, although some provocations could make them put aside their rivalries.

Dragon Power

Although individually very powerful, dragons are a long way from invulnerable – in some ways, they are terribly fragile. Their real power lies in their command of hearts and minds – and in their knowledge and wealth. They are, primarily, manipulators.

Many not only have wealth, but all that comes with it – contacts, influence, and social position. Their reclusiveness and occasional difficulty maintaining a human façade are problems, so they work through layers of underlings. Most have at least a few trusted human agents.

Crossing a dragon can be dangerous, although some are more vengeful than others. The consequences are long in coming and hard to trace. Some dragons prefer to transform human enemies into pawns – some take an active pleasure in counting their crushed and terrified former problems. However, most consider this strategy dangerous; it often leads to coalitions of desperate and determined foes.

Draconic Factions

Dragons are not a unified species. Inevitably, with their combination of power and ego, they fall into factions. These are not organized “political parties” – a great deal of vagueness and overlap exists – but certain groupings are recognizable and widely acknowledged. Facing human threats, and the complications of a rapidly changing world, the following philosophies compete for influence.

Conservatives

Some dragons like the way things are, and see no reason to change their behavior. They do not recognize or believe that the world or humans require measured interaction, or think any problems are exaggerated. In extreme cases, some think that dragonkind can do exactly as it chooses without serious difficulties.

These “Conservatives” are only a faction by default. Each has its own motives for refusing to worry, ranging from reasoned analysis to sheer obstinacy. However, they do unite politically on occasion. Generally, any suggestion of immediate or radical action makes them immensely suspicious.

Conservatives believe most other factions are hotheaded fools that might destroy dragonkind if not checked or dissuaded. They will ally more happily with the Retreaters than most others. The Teachers and Enslavers deeply concern them.

Integrators

On the other side of the coin, some dragons hold that the best – perhaps the only safe – option is to become a part of human society, avoiding any more attention than is absolutely necessary. The most extreme “Integrators” are effectively invisible to human and draconic society, having gone completely “native” while remaining permanently in human guise (p. 87). But others still revert to dragon shape from time to time, if only to argue with their fellow dragons.

While Integrators might seem to agree with Conservatives or Teachers, they believe those factions cause too much trouble, make too many waves, and use their powers too brazenly to dominate humans. In fact, Integrators have more in common with Retreaters (who they see as mostly harmless) and a few Americans (who share some of their opinions).

Teachers

Dragons’ ability to teach the “language of power” to human sorcerers is the key to this philosophy. Whereas other philosophies believe this practice gives humanity too much power and entangles dragonkind in human concerns, “Teachers” emphasize its use as a way to acquire powerful, grateful human allies. They also think that magical research, aided by human partners, could give dragons even more personal power.

Teachers see most other factions as overly nervous and silly, apart from the Enslavers and some Conservatives and Americans, who they class as brutish tyrants. They proselytize their ideas to any dragon in earshot.

Retreaters

These dragons propose a cautious, defensive strategy. The “Retreater” philosophy suggests that dragonkind should withdraw into secluded fortresses and wildernesses, play it safe and build defenses against the new human age.

Other dragons regard this as untenable and unsustainable, or dismiss it as despairing cowardice, but the Retreaters are not entirely irrational. They argue that humanity is becoming more formidable, and given the power that human warriors and nations already wield, any open conflict would be disastrous for both sides – and any failure to play safe could lead to exposure, and hence to conflict. Moderate Retreaters want to develop dragon influence for a few decades, prior to a cautious return to positions of power, or urge the creation of secure, durable emergency “redoubts” in remote areas. More straightforward extremists believe secure retreats can be sustained indefinitely. A few pessimists secretly think dragonkind is doomed, and wish to make the species’ slow death as painless as possible.

Some Retreaters are already building redoubts, practicing what they preach. Others move through draconic society, trying to build support to make their plans more viable for the entire race. This faction sees most others as dangerously brash or willfully blind, but may find common cause with anyone who can agree on a few priorities, at least temporarily.



Dragon Hoarding

Most (though not all) dragons, especially Westerners, display the legendary hoarding instinct. They are acquisitive, miserly, and precise about their wealth. Some have refined tastes and an appreciation of fine art and elegance. However, almost all have adapted these tastes to modern reality.

Very few dragons sit on top of heaps of gold and jewels, even in private, but many spend time contemplating their wealth – whether living in houses full of carefully chosen art or taking a few minutes every morning to browse their bank accounts and share portfolios. Some have sublimated this impulse further, into a collecting instinct that may focus on items of limited cash value but great rarity, or even human employees and associates of talent and personal interest.

Sea serpents do not have such a strong hoarding instinct, although some maintain large collections of waterproof items, fine coral and pearls, and items salvaged from wrecks in their underwater lairs. In accordance with the legends, Oriental dragons display less flagrant concern with acquisition, but live in beautiful, glittering palaces if possible – many Western dragons and human observers mutter that they are just less honest about hoarding.

Enslavers

Psychologically opposed to the Retreaters, though sharing much of their analysis of the essential problem, the “Enslaver” faction consists of aggressive radicals proposing a solution as vast and immediate as the problem. In short, they want to break all secrecy and take over the world.

This is a small faction, and dares not violate the functional taboo on public exposure – Enslavers recognize the need to carefully and secretly plan any war. However, they make dangerous firebrands in dragon councils, forever promoting relaxation in protocols of secrecy and aiding other dragons with plans that lead to greater power over humans. This tactic does sometimes make them useful friends.

Enslavers without diplomatic finesse tell members of all other factions that their cowardice will doom their species. The more tactful will keep their opinions to themselves. Some try to manipulate others with a little subtlety.

Others, while not entirely joking, say that he is actually the model for all those wild human fictional images of scheming Chinese master criminals.

Americans

History and geography identify the last faction as much as anything else. Many of the dragons that emerged in the New World are strange, with brash and unstable personalities as well as peculiar shapes. They lack a clear sense of identity common in other dragons, and compensate by taking habits of thought from their human neighbors. In North America especially, this gives them the psychology of the pioneer, the frontiersman, the “can-do” tinkerer, or the robber-baron capitalist. The faction, primarily from the north, but with a leavening of eccentrics from South America, promotes a bundle of schemes and ideas for the transformation of dragonkind.

“American” schemes include: the creation of communities in remote areas where dragons can meet, live, and operate openly, the manipulation of human laws and trade to augment the wealth of dragon-run corporations, and the cultivation of carefully prepared partnerships with humans who are seen as “dragon-like.” American dragons are moderately democratic, meritocratic, and highly plutocratic, even by dragon standards.

This is a small and disorganized faction, short on influence, but its dynamism, diffuse organization, and most importantly, access to the growing wealth of the United States, grants it a disproportionate degree of potential. Americans see other factions as inflexible and clueless, although like some Enslaver or Teacher proposals – not as solutions to a problem, but as good, boldly profitable strategies in themselves. Still, any other dragon that possesses energy or skill can earn their respect.

The College

The *Cercamon-Lind-Hochschule* at Worms, in Germany, is a very special place. A small private college where members of wealthy families acquire a gentlemanly education, it prepares its students for life in the modern world. Founded by an alliance of influential people, some aristocrats and some “new men,” who wished to ensure that Germany was well equipped to take the lead in the 20th century, the college helps children become leading figures. Its founders and governors have very influential contacts, including some of its own graduates, enabling it to survive and prosper, despite some eccentricities and a relative shortage of military elements in its curriculum, in the regimented society of post-Bismarck Germany.

Few know that the founders included both dragons and humans who owed their advancement to draconic patronage. The *Hochschule* serves a dual purpose: to assist dragons in learning their way around the human world and acquiring useful skills, and to teach sorcery to a select cadre of young, talented, malleable human students, while researching the cutting edge of that field.

Its scholars occasionally publish work of undeniable excellence, and it receives some carefully selected visitors from other lands – both scholars of distinction and students of wealth and social importance, giving it special prestige. No current member of the faculty is a full member of the Circle of Pliny – the conflict of interests would be too obvious – but members of each group have had contacts with the other. Most of the Circle have at least some idea of the true nature of the *Hochschule*, and regard it with intense suspicion. Hiram Maxim knows only that he probably ought to investigate the place some time soon.

Stories within dragonkind – and within the *Hochschule* itself – claim it is modeled after the fabled “Museum” of classical Alexandria. However, that is mostly vanity. Dragons are not immune to the lure of myth-making. In style, the *Hochschule* actually resembles an old-fashioned European university, in the tradition of Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, and Heidelberg, although much smaller. In order to survive its students’ and teachers’ idiosyncratic, self-centered personalities, it has developed many slightly bizarre traditions, procedures, and rules. It holds many secrets, peculiar competitions, some secret passages installed by borderline paranoid founders, and student societies only mentioned in whispers.

Campaigns set in or around the *Hochschule* should be at least as much about the pursuit of secrets and political plots as about either education or having an entertaining time. Students may spend most of their time cultivating connections and seeking to humiliate their enemies. Physical duels among students must be conducted very formally, in human form if the participants are dragons, and to first blood only, at pain of ignominy and expulsion. However, *social* combats are another matter.

DRAGON CONFLICTS



Given the small number of dragons, the other problems they face, and the lack of a strong draconic mating instinct (if they can breed at all), the idea of them fighting each other might seem foolish. Indeed, many dragons would agree. However, something in dragon nature leads to clashes; in particular, unstable tempers can often convert political arguments into private wars.

Direct physical combat in dragon form, or even in human form, remains very rare, and even commissioned assassinations are unlikely. While they are feasible, if they succeed, the victim's body reverts to dragon form, which often leads to immense complications. Few dragons' hatreds are passionate and irrational enough for them to accept this risk, although some come close at moments of rage.

On the other hand, indirect assaults on other dragons' wealth, political position, and alliances are all commonplace. Humans who ally with a dragon should know they become possible targets for another dragon seeking to score a point. And while some

dragons think enough of their human allies to seek to shield or avenge them, this cannot always be guaranteed.

Attacking a Hoard

Of all the possible targets in dragon conflicts, though, the opponent's hoard – their wealth and possessions, in modern terms – is by far the most appealing in most cases. While draconic possessiveness varies widely, only a very rare dragon neither values wealth nor suspects his foes of valuing it.

An enemy's hoard represents both vulnerability and temptation. Some dragons see the theft of another's hoard as a low and dubious tactic, especially if it involves commissioning human thieves – but it is also a nice way to enhance one's own wealth. Loss of a hoard can be more than inconvenient. It is traumatic, an assault on the sense of self. It also provides a very precise and objective way of keeping score in contests.

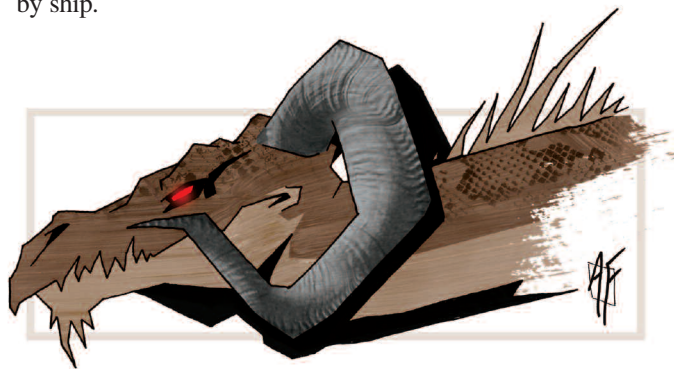
NOTEWORTHY DRAGONS



The following are a few powerful dragon NPCs – the type PCs might occasionally confront. Each is formidable physically, psychically, and socially.

Ambassador Lung

Shortly after they first manifested, a group of Chinese dragons, impressed by the substantial power of the West, decided to establish regular formal contact with dragons from those remote realms. They selected a dragon who was impetuous and adaptable enough to endure this duty, and he made his way to Europe by ship.



However, “Ambassador Lung” (as he has become known) has since become westernized. He retains a *theoretical* loyalty to his kin in China, but his operations on their behalf are vague and intermittent. He is a capable actor, skilled enough to travel among humans for months at a time, gaining their trust. But he rarely bothers these days, instead moving occasionally between his various homes in European Chinatowns and remote areas of attractive wilderness in draconic guise, shielded by his loyal human and dragon followers. Some dragons think of him as a lazy, harmless aesthete. Others, while not entirely joking, say that he is actually the model for all those wild human fictional images of scheming Chinese master criminals. The truth is hidden behind his stereotyped but undeniably inscrutable half-smile.

The Ambassador is a Kiao-Lung with numerous Allies, a large Ally Group, and high levels in Acting and Appreciate Beauty.

Bex the Green, Antiquarian Extraordinary

On those rare occasions when the chief librarians of the British Library, the Library of Congress, the Bodleian in Oxford, the Vatican, or the Hermitage Palace, meet or correspond, their conversation sometimes turns to another correspondent whom they all share – the fellow who merely signs himself “Bex.” His knowledge, they agree, is wonderful, and his interests most curious; but these discussions never end satisfactorily, because none of them have ever met him. Nor have the chief archivist at the Topkapi Palace, or the library clerks of the Imperial Palaces of Peking or Edo, although they too know of his letters. A patient detective might deduce that the fellow likely lives somewhere in Europe, although his envelopes bear many different stamps and postmarks. Some members of the Circle of Pliny have corresponded with him briefly, but have not thought to invite him to join or to mention him to others.

Some dragons could tell a little more again, but would not in do so. For mild-mannered Bex the Green is something of a worry to them. The fact is: they think he might be more powerful than any of them. They are not *sure*, but they prefer not to take the risk. There are rumors.

Bex *does* have extraordinary power, of a sort; it takes the form of knowledge. He achieved this by intense focus and subtlety. Actually, those human librarians may have a better idea of his personality than his fellow dragons.

On the other hand, his accumulation of power has been by no means accidental. He understands the value of information better than most dragons. His physical power is below average, and he has trouble maintaining his human guise, but his other skills, social and strategic, and his theoretical knowledge of occultism, are all unequalled.

Bex is a Medium-Sized Western Dragon with below-average strength (leaving him very weak in human guise) but above-average intelligence. Ever since 1878, he has turned his truly draconic hoarding instinct toward accumulating information by studying anything he can acquire. His goals are his own survival, and that of knowledge – under his control, for preference, although that can be managed later so long as the information survives. He avoids much contact with the Circle of Pliny, suspecting that some of them might identify him as a dragon, and he values his secrecy. He would make a useful patron, to humans or even other dragons, but his “clients” should understand that one then becomes another item in his cabinet of curiosities.

Connie Drake

Miss Drake cuts quite a figure in *two* high societies – draconic and human. In the latter, she is a striking figure who may be on the lookout for a stylish European husband (or some think, a less formal liaison, if the profit was sufficient). She smiles, and dresses well, and wanders between the best parties. (The best, most enjoyable parties will accept her. She has little interest in those which would never invite her.) She vaguely hints that she is a widow, which would help explain her independence and personal wealth, although cynics mention that no one knows anything about her late husband. Her stylish costumes, charisma, and interesting reputation ensure that she is the focus of attention wherever she goes.

Among her fellow dragons, Connie Drake is an unofficial representative, or perhaps a symbol, of the American faction. In truth, even many dragons consider her a little strange, and avoid her. She regards some humans with an unusual, even tasteless, degree of affection, and treats others as disposable. She also believes that most dragons are failing to realize their potential, in some ill-defined way, and seeks unusual experiences for herself. With her many transient eccentricities, she could be an *interesting* contact for any group of PCs.



Miss Drake can be treated for game purposes as a Wyvern, although her “natural” shape has a quasi-avian cast, with a heavy beak, large eyes, and dark, elongated scales that could be mistaken for feathers, suggesting something from North American Indian imagery. She also has Fashion Sense and an eclectic range of skills, including Guns (rifle and pistol) for use in her human shape.

N’Zengar

Members of the Enslaver faction may be found anywhere, but prefer situations where they can assert power over humanity. N’Zengar finds many such places. His tolerance for physical discomfort and inconvenience is notable by the standards of dragonkind. He regards control of humans as a pleasure worth a certain amount of austerity.

He has several well-established identities in various human societies, but can be a little careless about maintaining them, relying for his safety partly on his ability to move on in another guise, but more on his wealth and skill in bribery and manipulation. His human guise is that of a mature black man, and it sometimes amuses him to adopt the role of a wealthy visitor in a place where black people are generally downtrodden, and then make trouble for anyone who insults him – though not out of any sympathy for the oppressed.

His one unchanging characteristic is an iron personal code. He never lies to another dragon, although he is capable of misdirection, and he will deceive humans on a whim . . . but he always keeps his word, once he gives it, to anyone. He seems to regard this as an aspect of his personal superiority.

N’Zengar is a Giant Crawling Wyrm with a very unusual look to his draconic form. Experts say his shape is from some obscure West African myth, with a mouth full of jagged teeth, yellow eyes with no visible pupils, and green-black scales. In game terms, he has several Alternate Identities and a personal Code of Honor or Vow. He is also very definitely a Bully.

PLAYING THE GAME



This is an extensive setting, offering many options for game styles.

Dragon PCs

Gamers playing dragons may pursue many interests and goals, from the mundane to the metaphysical, and can have many problems thrust upon them. A suggested starting level is 750 points.

Reptile Politics

To begin with, dragon society has numerous political intricacies. Political dragons might represent part of a faction, or an informal alliance with varied goals. In this type of game, mere physical power should be distinctly secondary, although it has uses; serious opponents will have powers of their own. Scenarios revolving around disputed claims to territory, debates over long-term racial policy, struggles for secret control of human institutions, or attempts to resolve personal feuds – one way or another.

Dragons in Black

Alternatively, the campaign may focus on the continual, low-level need to protect dragonkind from humans, who becoming increasingly ingenious, curious, and paranoid. This game focuses on immediate needs, not long-term objectives (although it could mutate into a “Fear of the Abyss” game), and dragons will not face opposition from their own species – most of the time.

However, they should not become too violent. Subtlety is essential, and some powerful dragons will work to rein in careless “cousins.” Leaving a trail of destruction draws far too much attention. With increasingly sophisticated intelligence organizations and human sorcerers around, the hunters may become the hunted at any point.

Fear of the Abyss

The fact is: dragonkind teeters on the edge of destruction. Dragons are few, confused about their own nature, limited in power, and disorganized, and if they can breed at all, it is a slow process. If humanity fears them enough, they will be wiped out.

In this style of campaign, the PCs recognize this, and seek to do *something* about it.

They may wander the world, seeking answers to the mysteries of their own existence (or at least good hiding places) while trying to convince other dragons of the situation's urgency, or they may run political campaigns from some secure base. Whatever solution they propose, they must argue against rival factions, and seek to make it more attainable. They may also manipulate and, if necessary, sabotage human society. This may mean political activity (perhaps conflicting with other draconic influences) or direct attacks on troublesome humans.



While the dragons may be ruthless, well-resourced, and powerful, the campaign's atmosphere should be one of mounting desperation. This is a contest between a handful of visionary heroes and the overwhelming forces of history.

Human PCs

Games with human PCs should run at a "normal" starting point level – 100 points should be sufficient, 150 will suffice for wealthy and competent heroes, and 75- or 50-point campaigns would be perfectly plausible. These games are not about humans and dragons in combat – at least, not without a lot of careful preparation and some nervousness, and preferably an elephant gun or two. They are about plausible human characters interacting with the strange and enigmatic forces that underlie the appearance of their world.

Melancholy Whimsy

For that matter, stories with Edwardian dragons are not all political scheming and twisted conspiracies. Moderately cautious humans may interact with these creatures on a fairly friendly basis. Many dragons are approachable, and PCs could befriend them, doing them odd favors in return for clues to interesting secrets.

Changing History

While this setting is technically an alternate history with a recent divergence point and only minor changes as yet, the degree of divergence may eventually increase spectacularly. The presence of giant shapeshifting dragons and effective sorcery represents a fragile secret at best, and no amount of mass denial will change that. GMs can send history on a new path at any point, and need not work to prevent changes to historical events or the lives of real figures.

On the other hand, atmosphere and convenience might benefit if GMs follow recorded history, at least for a while. And after all, the dragons and sorcerers are relatively few, cautious, secretive, and not very powerful individually. Equally, in this era of mass movements and vast political forces, it might take more than a few monsters and spells to derail the rivalries, enmities, and economic pressures which send the planet toward World War I and the terrors and transformations of the 20th century.

In long-term campaigns, it may be more effective for events to turn out much as in our history, but with increasingly odd twists and variations. The dragons may be wiped out or forced underground, while magic may prove too unreliable and dangerous to make much difference. By around 1920, history could be forced back onto a familiar track. See the next chapter for more on these possibilities.

GMs keeping the rate of divergence under control have a number of tools available. PCs can be kept away from the real levers of power, and any excessively grandiose schemes can suffer painfully plausible disasters. Powerful NPC dragons already regard various nations and great leaders as their own, and will block attacks on them. Major historical figures can also be played as having high levels of Luck when subject to attempts to divert them from real-history paths. This may seem to make PCs boringly helpless, but the campaigns should focus on subtle concerns, deeply hidden manipulations, and personal agendas, not on attempts to save the *Titanic*, assassinate Mussolini, or prevent World War I.

Cunning GMs can weave PCs' activities into "real" history – perhaps even making them cause great events (which they may even have thought that they were preventing) – or can make them investigate the layers of hidden conspiracy which prevented their first, naïve efforts from having expected results.

This should be a fairytale/children's story style of game, and could involve child PCs, if players are interested in such low-key play. Of course, even child characters may become involved on the fringes of the high politics of dragon society, and may grow up to become powerful dragon friends.

Serving the Flame

Another possibility is a globetrotting campaign – perhaps "pulpish," or heavily political – in which the PCs, knowingly or otherwise, work for a draconic faction. In the dark version of this, the adventurers eventually discover that they have betrayed their own species. In the light version, they serve a "pro-human" being or group.

Scenarios along the way could involve conflicts with other factions, tricky diplomatic missions, interventions in human politics or warfare, or efforts to acquire wealth or power for their master. These servants will usually need to earn a fair amount of trust before they receive substantial freedom of action, but a weakened, impoverished, or crazy dragon might grant some human minions the chance to make their own mistakes, as an experiment or a gamble.

Sorcerer

65 points

This typical, if powerful, sorcerer is eccentric, egocentric, and so highly focused on his "art" that he may neglect himself or many social niceties. These sorcerers are very individualistic so a great deal of variation is possible and likely.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 11 [10].

Advantages: Ritual Aptitude 3 [3]; and a total of 15 points chosen from among Autotrance [5]; Charisma [5/level]; Collected or Composed [5]; Comfortable Wealth [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Longevity [5]; Night Vision [10]; Second Sight [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Status [5/level]; Strong Will +1 [4/level]; or Voice [10].

Disadvantages: A total of -25 points chosen from among Age [-3/year]; Reduced Appearance [Varies]; Attentive [-1]; Bully [-10]; Callous [-6]; Clueless [-10]; Curious [Varies]; Edgy [-5]; Enemies [Varies]; Excommunicated [-5]; Fat [-10 or -20]; Hard of Hearing [-10]; Jealousy [-10]; Lame [Varies]; Loner [-5]; Manic-Depressive [-20]; Miserliness [-10]; Nightmares [-5]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Oblivious [-3]; Obsession (Related to sorcery) [Varies]; Odious Personal Habits (Obsessive or arrogant behavior) [Varies]; Overconfidence [-10]; Overweight [-5]; Paranoia [-10]; Proud [-1]; Secret [Varies]; Shyness [Varies]; Skinny [-5]; Solipsist [-10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Unfit [-5]; Very Unfit [-15]; or Voices [Varies].

Primary Skills: Draconic Language (M/VH) IQ-3 [1]-10; Research (M/A) IQ [1]-12; Ritual Magic (M/VH) IQ [8]-13.

Secondary Skills: Occultism (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12; and any two of Autohypnosis (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Bard (M/A) IQ [2]-13; Literature (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Meditation (Realistic) (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Philosophy (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Poetry (M/A) IQ [2]-13; Symbol Drawing (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Teaching (M/A) IQ [2]-13; or Writing (M/A) IQ [2]-13.

Background Skills: A total of 3 points in any of: Anthropology (M/H); Appreciate Beauty (M/VH); Archaeology (M/H); Chess (M/E); Conspiracy Theory (M/VH); Detect Lies (M/H); Erotic Art (P/H); Fast-Talk (M/A); Hidden Lore (Dragon Society) (M/A); History (M/H); Intimidation (M/A); Languages (Any) (varies); Leadership (M/A); Mathematics (M/H); Naturalist (M/H); Pharmacy (M/H); Poisons (M/H); Psionics/TL5 (M/VH); Psychology (M/H); Sacrifice (M/H); Savoir-Faire (M/E); Sex Appeal (M/A:HT); Stealth (P/A); Thaumatology (M/VH); or Theology (M/H).

Paths: Any two out of Cunning, Knowledge, Luck, or Protection, each at 13 [8 each].

Rituals: Buy off a total of 4 levels of penalties with any rituals of choice [8].

Notes: This character works his rituals at -2, due to his limited Ritual Aptitude. If he buys his IQ up, he can reduce the amount spent on Ritual Magic skill and his paths; these are capped at 13.

The Sorcerers

In this campaign framework, the PCs would be scholars of magic, perhaps assessing the magical nature of dragons, or just to learn from them – without getting burned along the way. This could involve archeology and research, and desperate races for lost secrets (perhaps finding and ransacking sites in the Valley of the Kings or the jungles of Central America just ahead of more mundane human seekers). It could also involve confrontations with neutral or hostile dragons or their minions.

If all this sounds too amoral, some sorcerers might seek to protect humanity in the face of the uncanny draconic threat, using the only weapons which can truly deal with the problem. Which can lead into another sort of game . . .

Facing the Fire

At the start of campaign, the characters are largely ignorant of the nature of their world, come to discover the truth about dragons, and about their desperate plans for humanity. From then on, the story must partly detail the PCs' struggle to survive



and fight grandiose draconic schemes that would reduce human beings to docile sheep. Negotiations and even alliances with some of the dragons is perfectly possible, but the tone of the game should be essentially confrontational.

Crossovers

Several other *GURPS* books may augment this material.

GURPS Cabal

GURPS Cabal provides a different conspiratorial version of history. All the dragons are dead – on Earth, anyway. However, a little adjustment can combine the two settings.

Taking the *Cabal* history as the basis, the dragons' return could result from a catastrophic magical accident – perhaps the work of a senior cabalist who now spends his time covering up for his spectacular error. Whether this failed spell created the dragons or conjured them from Briah, whether they are as amnesiac as they claim, and why they persist in training minor human sorcerers outside the Cabal are mysteries for curious PCs.

In this world, dragons become another independent magical faction, aware of the Cabal, and usually in a state of uneasy truce. Some might join, although it would probably be more interesting if most or all refused. Cabalists would officially view them with cautious respect, but literally lust for their blood, their secret impulses moderated only by the possibility of learning arcane lore from a living drake. The relationship between the dragons and the Serpent-Lords would best serve as one of the setting's high-ineffable mysteries.

GURPS Steampunk

This *GURPS* supplement mostly covers the era immediately before and during the Edwardian era, with special attention to weird science and wild technology. The potential for introducing steampunk ideas into the draconic campaign should be obvious. One strong melodramatic possibility would be to pit dragons against wild technology, with psychical researchers caught in the middle.

GURPS Time Travel

Time travel, or cross-timeline travel, could provide an explanation for the appearance of the dragons in 1878. Perhaps they are trans-temporal refugees from a world or time where their existence makes more sense. If they genuinely do not comprehend their own origins, perhaps this amnesia is a side-effect of the travel method. Perhaps they accepted it *voluntarily* to reduce the risk of temporal paradoxes.

For a wild campaign, the dragons of this setting, or a faction of their opponents, might access time travel, through either some kind of steampunkish machinery or the exercise of magic (and perhaps a journey through the astral plane). A weird time war could ensue, as dragons seek to eliminate the factors that threaten them, and their opponents seek to weaken their grip on the present by sabotaging their machinations in the past. An especially intricate and paradoxical plotline could then lead to their own appearance in 1878.

In the "Infinite Worlds" setting, this world could be encountered on Quantum 3. Infinity might regard it as a historical near-echo, and monitor it casually, perhaps developing it as a holiday destination for visitors obsessed by the Edwardian era, while wondering why such a mundane world is in such an odd quantum band. (And given its location, it might pose a good case for intervening to prevent the First World War.) Soon, however, a study or intervention team could discover that the

This campaign should feature horrific moral ambiguity. Ultimate victory for the adventurers could consist of starting the First World War, which will kill millions – but which may also destroy key dragon power structures.



many references to dragons in local mystical and conspiratorial texts should be taken a lot more seriously. With the timeline codename changed from "Edward" to "George," Infinity pulls the tourists and civilian researchers out, and tries to determine if the appearance of these things back in '78 was some kind of trans-temporal accident.

In Nomine

In the canonical *In Nomine* setting, all dragons are dead, wiped out in the Purity Crusade (p. 46). However, a very little adjustment might possibly merge the settings.

GMs can start with the *In Nomine* cosmology, but assume that Uriel's followers did not succeed in obliterating *all* the dragons. Instead, a few of these ancient, adaptable, quintessentially cunning creatures fled into the furthest corners of the ethereal realm. There, they recovered, brooded, and bred. Uriel's forces had slaughtered countless unlucky or incautious firedrakes, while other angels cheerfully inspired dragon-slaying saints on Earth – but that just thinned the draconic ranks, so the smart and adaptable ones rebuilt their race.

Over time, they saw the universe becoming more hostile to their kind, but this merely led to the formation of a bold plan to reclaim their place in it. Sophisticated dragons long ago became adept at shifting between flesh and spirit, in some cases spending decades or centuries in material form. The refugees preserved this skill, and in 1878, they struck deals with some unknown faction (probably ethereal, otherwise presumably diabolical – but there are other possibilities) to open a number of gates and paths.

Now, they derive Essence from belief, and ensure that belief in the simplest fashion – by demonstrably existing. They bargain for their needs with human sorcerers, offering them an alternative to the traditional unwise pacts with demons.

Heaven has been wrong-footed by this, and even Hell is a little confused. Ordinarily, solutions might be direct and violent, but the dragons curiously have some protectors among the Archangels, and Uriel's fate makes others cautious about taking up his role as persecutor of legends. Meanwhile, there are worse problems out there, and the dragons keep their heads down. Some seem respectful and even moral these days, if still terribly prone to the sin of pride.

As for Hell, it tries to exploit the returned dragons, but they know that demons just want to use them, and as cunning beings that have learned great caution, they simply will not play that game. The old Demon of Dragons, a Calabite of Belial, is long gone, and his Word has transferred to Beleth's realm (giving Belial grounds for an eternal grudge). Beleth assigned it to a competent Lilim, who tells dragons they should seek freedom from Heaven *and* Hell, while doing lots of deals with them.

An alternative adaptation would involve something having shattered the "dragon ban," and the dragons who appeared all being completely new creatures, arising in corporeal locations for no reason they know (and none that Heaven or Hell will admit to). Perhaps the dead dragons of old left eggs? Or somewhere, the very last dragon of yore has been slain, and all the Essence that maintained him has now gone to the creatures of dream?

DRAGONS Today

The previous two chapters defined a campaign setting from the Edwardian period. However, some gamers prefer a modern game. This chapter carries the theme through the 20th century.



*And I wished he would come back, my snake.
For he seemed to me again like a king,
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.*

– D.H. Lawrence, “Snake” (1923)

HISTORY IN THE SCALES



Setting a dragons game in the present depends on how history developed after 1914. Include *alternate histories*, in which the presence of dragons (widely known or not) causes events to diverge substantially from our own past, or *secret histories*, in which things look much like our world – or *is* our world – and dragons and sorcerers can operate behind the scenes. Either way, GMs can run games at any point in the intervening period.

The following notes assume events resemble our own past, at least the outline. Imagine an alternate history in which dragon manipulations prevent World War II and the rise and fall of communism. Academic research into ritual magic diverts effort from the physical sciences, preventing the development of nuclear power and transistors. The human race moves quickly into the new century.

Embers in the Hearth: The 1920s and 1930s

By the 1920s, almost all of the wilderness retreats disappear, and the world changes faster than ever – but the dragons' fortunes could rise or fall. There are still places to hide, factions to manipulate, and strange tales to tell.

Cliffhangers-and-dragon campaigns focus on these increasingly frenetic regroupings, possibly with new hope for the species. Better communications and radical new scientific ideas make all sorts of new adventures possible. Ritual magic fits right in with the traditional "feel" of the era. Adding supernatural weirdness definitely calls for a flamboyant – pulpy – attitude.

This period of wild change embraces a **Cliffhangers** approach. Dragon PCs are organizers and idealists from the Integrator, Teacher, or American factions, seeking places within the changing world. Human PCs find themselves entangled in baroque plots, perhaps fighting arch-villains (dragons of the Enslaver or Teacher or American factions). The Conservative faction fades away, while the Retreaters are still hard at work, although they have to seek out ever more remote retreats.

The War to End . . . Everything

Dragons in World War II would probably be just too garish (though see *GURPS WWII: Weird War II* for games of high garishness). More likely, any surviving dragons batten down the hatches, trying to evade the gaze of multiple well-resourced intelligence agencies, and, like most human beings, hope for a better day. Still, there are tales of courage and endurance, among dragons as among humans.

Western dragon factions see their vainglorious dreams of empire turn to bloody dust, while the Chinese lung see their

lands devastated and taken over by atheistic rulers. The Japanese dragons' idea of an empire with the best features of East and West (from the draconic viewpoint) spins out of control for a couple of decades and crashes and burns in atomic fire.

Draconic WWII games work best with human PCs using the dragons as a source of strangeness in the background. However, dragons might play out their own secret shadow wars, if the players are interested in subtle plots and moral ambiguities.

Resurgence, Perhaps: 1945-2004

In the complex postwar world, dragons and magic can retire to shadows or become just another part of the mind-bending strangeness of the world. However, they might also find new niches and options.

Western dragon factions see their vainglorious dreams of empire turn to bloody dust . . .

In a radically alternate 1950s, the dragons could become atomic horrors when their carefully constructed secrecy fails. As the world spins away from them and human weapons grow ever more terrible, they feel forced to unleash their physical powers and covert organizations (complete with well-trained sorcerers) in an attempt to conquer the world, opposed by square-jawed heroes and hastily scrambled military forces. A grittier, more paranoid treatment could have dragons as largely unthreatening – symbolic victims of prejudice when science claims supreme authority, and anything strange, magical, or foreign, becomes the target for hysterical witch-hunts.

Another possibility, with less alternate history, would be a cinematic 1960s espionage/**Covert Ops** campaign of super-spies vs. a series of master villains – bizarre figures who, having built powerful secret organizations, make implausible bids for power from hidden lairs, where they live surrounded by vast wealth and exotic minions with strange skills. "Before I kill you, there is something which I think may surprise even *you* . . ."

A more somber game style could focus on hidden plots and strange agendas among the true rulers of the world, with the well-hidden dragons as the ultimate inhuman force in a Cold War of secrets and lies. "Retreater" dragons might even construct hidden villages, playing bizarre mind games with human recruits and prisoners to determine the extent of their power.

MODERN-DAY OPTIONS



If dragons are still around at the end of the 20th century, GMs have several options, each leading to its own style of game. The default assumption is a secret history of the dragons' successful move underground (metaphorically and, in a few cases, literally), covering their existence so successfully that they are regarded as myth. This sounds implausible, but if they decided this was their safest option, the dragons' sheer amount of combined resources might have made it reality.

They and their sorcerous minions are capable of some impressive effects, and diligent research might discover great rituals capable of causing whole populations to forget or ignore evidence before their eyes. Written records present a harder problem, barring very powerful and subtle rituals, but a sufficiently powerful and determined conspiracy might be able to suppress the worst of its problems.

The Old Records

Today mainstream historians understand that “Dragon Mania” was a curious sidelight of the Edwardian period – a weird consensual fantasy in certain circles, or perhaps a matter of mass hysteria. A number of noted Edwardian eccentrics apparently claimed to be dragons or at least to have learned magic from dragons. Surviving fragments – “dead dragons” dis-

Alternative Presents (1)

The setting discussed in the main text is not the only way to bring history-with-dragons up to the present date. An “alternate history” approach could require more work, and perhaps more suspension of disbelief, but it can be managed. Other options include:

Completely Alternate History

In one sense, an entirely different world represents the simplest approach. In such a setting, the dragons remained an overt factor in the world, known to everyone. Dragons and sorcerers vastly changed the events from the beginning of the 20th century, their significance only growing with time. The expanding consequences of this divergence include: how much power the dragons acquired in each nation, what humanity might do with sorcery, and how these changes interact with the great social and political movements of the century?

A substantial tradition of alternate histories where large changes at early dates fail to trigger significant changes “down the line” is well established. In such histories, despite the presence of a huge and important fact – like dragons – many things go much as they did in our past. Perhaps in an important conflict, the new factors on each side cancel out. The “present day” could look similar to our own world, with dragons and sorcerers in positions of power and influence.

It is also possible that magic could replace some technology, which receives slightly less attention and develops slower. For example, military forces could employ less powerful strategic weapons, but use powerful rituals of devastation, or scrying rituals could replace reconnaissance satellites.

See *GURPS Technomancer* for another game world along these lines. It offers a completely different alternate history where magic returned, with some ideas how dragons and magic might fit into the present if they were publicly known to exist.

Open Secrets

Alternatively, dragons could remain an embarrassing open secret. Their place in the world is much the same in 2004 as in 1904, except they have had another century to establish power and influence. In all that time, science has failed to come up with a coherent explanation for them. Hence, they have remained the subject of jokes, throwaway remarks, and secret committees at the highest levels of government.

This might seem very implausible, implying the entire human race could remain in denial for a century, that the dragons could evade photographers for that long, and almost every university science, philosophy, and modern history department could quietly accept that their subjects were built on a lie. This approach would probably work best for a relatively lightweight, tongue-in-cheek campaign, in which most characters don’t talk about dragons unless one is standing in front of them, seemingly intelligent people refuse to discuss plain facts, and police, military officers, and government officials hastily direct certain problems to subsidiary departments run by eccentrics and obsessives. Habits of mind can be powerful things, and it might be in everyone’s interests – dragons and humans alike – for some things just to remain undiscussed.

played in various places as the craze continued – have proved to be clever fakes or mislabeled dinosaur bones, fish scales, when subjected to modern testing. (It would take a lot of investigation to discover how the relevant scientists were subverted, or how the specimens were switched in transit.)

Professional historians make jokes (mostly among themselves) about the “Dragon Mania,” and the bizarre “silly season” stories, which they sometimes find when trawling through old newspapers. The jokes come just often enough that no academic valuing his career dares take such things seriously. Since 1920, draconic agents have successfully penetrated, sabotaged, and discredited almost every group and organization that ever attempted to research dragon-lore or sorcery. (It’s amazing what can be accomplished with money, determination, and some magic, especially since much of the work was undertaken while the world was shaken by a Great War.)

Social Manipulations

Engineering this cover-up did not require every dragon to agree with the plan, just enough to pressure the rest into cooperation. Those who enjoyed the public eye were convinced to change their ways or eliminated. Dragons recruited humans who knew too much, or diverted them into various “Illuminated” groups with their own reasons for secrecy. (The Vatican knows, but has decided this is just too weird to address. Or some cardinals have slit pupils . . .)

Most dragons built powerful organizations, ranging from informal “households,” to secret (often criminal) societies with intricate initiation rites and hierarchies of secrecy, to carefully structured corporations. “Talon Holdings,” an industrial trust based out of the City of London, has a system of ownership so complex that it befuddles the finest accountants.

Meanwhile, dragons learned to parent half-dragons, and many – perhaps most – have done so, acquiring families who serve them loyally (although there are always rebels and exceptions). Half-dragons marrying humans produce human offspring, often with a touch of strangeness about them; with each other or with dragons, they produce more half-dragons. As far as anyone knows, dragons have not bred among themselves. Some conclude that they are incapable, but others – dragons and human – persist in believing it is just a matter of time.

This setting resembles our own world. The dragons as a hidden conspiracy, like all good conspiracy theories, explains a lot that in our reality is probably the product of blind chance. (If the dragons conceal their own existence this well, they have to be a powerful conspiracy – although there could other powers, and perhaps other global conspiracies.) Characters with Conspiracy Theory or History (Esoteric) skills could know something of the truth (and anyone with the Illuminated advantage *certainly* would) – although some theorists might have a fair idea of the power and influence of the hidden conspiracies, without knowing of the nonhuman nature of their leaders. *GURPS Illuminati* is a primary sourcebook for such conspiratorial games.

Dragon conspirators need some very effective agents to preserve their secrecy, if only because some dragons occasionally die, and hence revert to their true shape, in the presence of ordinary humans. These “Men in Black” would be a formidable force, with access to both substantial material resources and powerful mind-altering sorcery. Ironically, they could promote ideas about flying saucers and visiting aliens, as the cranks focusing on such things would discredit draconic conspiracy theory and distract attention from the real, magical rulers of the world.



In this setting, surviving dragons and their offspring, and by now some fairly remote descendants, keep their big secret and playing their power games. (Conflicts are rarely mortal, at least for dragons. Accidents happen, of course. Sometimes, rival dragons get a bit excited. The huge mysterious carcass that washed ashore in South America a few years ago was one consequence; covering *that* up took some work.) Meanwhile, “independent” humans deal with the secret truths about the world, and play their own games of power and curiosity.

Game Styles

When setting up a campaign, the GM should decide its general style and theme.



Strangeness and Charm

One possibility is to preserve the whimsical “children’s story” feel discussed on p. 121, but updated from the Edwardian era to the present. This would probably work best with human PCs, for whom dragons, whether overt or hidden, are a weird

problem and a powerful threat. It could also work, perhaps in a rather satirical form, with dragon PCs.

In other words, this world has all the strangeness implied by the presence of dragons and sorcery with strictly controlled doses of terror or darkness. Human PCs who discover the truth could usually adapt very promptly, much as the protagonists of children’s fantasy stories accept and deal with strange truths, which the adults around them find very hard to believe.

Revenants

For a darker game, focus on the dragons’ continuing struggle to survive in the face of vastly greater human numbers – and the ruthless policies they pursue to ensure that survival. Tragedy and danger marks their ultimately vulnerable position, and terrorizes humans caught up in their plans and machinations.

The “revenant” dragons, the formidable survivors of a brutal Darwinian process, might be forced into efficient, secretive, and paranoid actions or spared by knowledgeable human enemies, devious sorcerers, or their own kind. While some say they want peaceful coexistence, and that secrecy is necessary since humans remain irrationally xenophobic, the sense these secret masters are harshly amoral is unavoidable. Games with dragon PCs could be about secret politics and survival strategies; human PCs might be investigators and hunters – or agents of the dragons, working to maintain a precarious balance.

Alternative Presents (2)

Each of the game styles discussed in the main text applies to other versions of the dragon-filled present.

Strangeness and Charm

In an alternate history game, this approach could lead to a focus on a weird sort of social comedy, with protagonists of either race working with NPCs of different species and cultures. Certainly, such a setting would involve a lot of colorful fantasy.

If the dragons are an open secret, the chief source of comedy would be humans’ ability to ignore the evidence of their senses. Child PCs might work well here, with part of the plot being a larger version of the universal, painful discovery that one’s parents aren’t infallible or perfectly truthful. Never mind whether the emperor is really wearing new clothes; the big problem is that he is a dragon.

Revenants

The idea of dragons as an endangered remnant is incompatible with an alternate history in which they have achieved power in the world – although their human foes could be growing in strength and confidence. Another sort of alternate history might have the dragons defeated, desperate, and on the run by the start of the 21st century – a feared and hated minority. They have considerable physical powers, but modern technology is far deadlier still. Sorcerers could be accepted as a part of human society, aiding the hunters with scrying and curses, or oppressed and hunted, careless use of their powers having resurrected the old terror of witch-hunts and inquisitions under a modern guise.

By those admitting their existence, revenant dragons in an open secret campaign could be dismissed as a dying irrelevance or hunted down as a menace and kept on the run. This approach fits well with the idea of dragons as symbols of the oppressed.

Equally easily, dragons could be an inhuman threat, with brave monster-hunters defending a society that prefers not to think about the fire-breathing terrors in its midst. Dragon villains might be subtle, battle-hardened terrors, adept in both politics and raw physical violence, or deranged monsters, struggling with their own inflexibility as they seek to adapt to the high-speed, chrome-plated world for which their natures are so unsuited.

Dragons in Power

In an alternate history, dragons might rule the Earth, or might share power with the humans with sufficient force to match them. This campaign’s shape would be dictated by when and how power was achieved, and which humans are working for and against them.

In an open secret setting, humanity might be in denial because dragons are so dominant no one wants to address the situation. Such dragons are aristocrats, plutocrats, tyrants, businessmen, and politicians with a genuine long-term views and a pressing desire to avoid devastating social divisions. The news reports about their deeds never mention the true nature of this ruling class, for fear of making serious matters look trivial or ridiculous. (Of course, many reports could include hints and subtle clues, making the true nature of certain public figures clear to those who will admit the truth to themselves.) Human PCs could be a “resistance,” dismissed as crazy by dragon-run media outlets working to promote the delusion and as paranoid idealists by everyone else, or cops and special agents, working to keep peace in a world a lot weirder than anyone likes to admit. Likewise, dragon PCs might be scheming politicians or flexible peacemakers, working to preserve the safety of their people while occasionally slapping down overly ambitious, greedy, or paranoid members of their own species who refuse to accept that human denial is what is keeping dragonkind safe.

Dragons in Power

This leads to the final possibility: games focusing on the sheer political and social power accumulated by the dragons. This campaign would be *highly* conspiratorial. Some people say the dragons control everything, but others claim they merely found a space within the ancient human network of secret societies and backroom deals. (This would certainly explain how they have suppressed almost all reports and memories of their semi-public activities.) They might seem relatively benign compared to some human factions. Likewise, sorcerers might be minions of the draconic Illuminati, some of them slipping the leash to become their own faction.

Draconic PCs would be highly political movers and shakers (although they might rank relatively low in the dragon hierarchy). Human (or nearly human) PCs might be minions of a draconic patron, or once again, be involved in a struggle against inhuman tyranny – the only people to understand the truth, often digging through weird news stories and discredited academic papers from hundreds of years. Or relatives coming of age and learning their family isn't *just* rich and reclusive . . .

However, a good Illuminated campaign is often more complicated. Any supposed “resistance” turns out to be the cat's-paw of one faction or another, and those entangled in the affairs of conspirators and secret rulers sooner or later finds, themselves lied to, misdirected, and morally compromised.

Factions

The various groups and ideologies described on pp. 117-118 obviously evolved over time, whatever path history followed through the 20th century. Circumstances strengthen some positions, drive others to the extreme margins, and render some merely irrelevant.

Conservatives: From many points of view, time proved the Conservative faction wrong; dragonkind *did* face significant problems, and had to evolve large-scale strategies to resolve them. However, as far as many of the Conservatives themselves were concerned, they were proved more right than wrong; things have turned out well for dragonkind. The psychology underlying this faction seems to be innate in draconic nature. There will always be a temptation for dragons to retreat into stolid complacency; there are still draconic Conservatives in the 21st century, even if they look a little different from those of the Edwardian era.

In variant games, the Conservative philosophy may be more straightforwardly victorious. Such a campaign would be rather melancholy strangeness and charm; dragon characters would be weird anachronisms, increasingly out of place in a world that they still try to ignore.

Integrators: Conversely, many could say the Integrator philosophy triumphed. Dragons have become part of human society, mostly at the top. (Only some alternate histories – where the dragons have conquered the world, or are being hunted down and wiped out – write off Integrator ideas entirely.) Of course, exactly how much integration is appropriate, and how much dragons can be true to their draconic nature (in public or in private) will always be an issue of contention.

Meanwhile, some crucial questions remain for both dragons and humans interested in dragon activity: How many dragons have integrated completely into human society throughout the past century, passing permanently as human? What they are doing? How they are avoiding the notice of bureaucrats and their neighbors? How much trouble do they cause?

The Cercamon-Lind-Hochschule

The great draconic educational establishment (p. 118) survived the 20th century, despite violent changes in the world around it. Even before they gained their present power, many dragons committed considerable resources and influence to protect it. It closed for brief periods during the World Wars, but like many other respectable German educational establishments, it reopened without too much trouble, eventually acquiring the legal status of a private research institution. (The wyrms safely relocated in West Germany when the country divided.) The Hochschule is simply too useful for the dragons to let it die.

That very usefulness causes some brutal struggles for control and influence. Several different draconic groups have dominated the Hochschule at different times; however, all the serious contenders have always respected an unstated rule . . . no one should do anything to threaten the survival of the prize.

Some small problems appeared over the years with human graduate sorcerers who aligned themselves with the Nazis or other discredited factions, but the Hochschule disowned all such embarrassments while quietly persuading powerful friends to neutralize them. Today, humans who know of the existence of dragonkind usually know about the Hochschule, and study its publications with interest.

From the dragon point of view, it mainly trains human sorcerers, but still some dragon students study on the premises. Some of these students seem surprisingly naïve and unworldly, and their names are unknown to scholars of dragonkind. Some human staff members suspect that they are *hatchlings*, proving that dragonkind is actually breeding. Any dragons that know refuse to discuss the subject. (It is possible that the students in question are in fact just “backwoods” dragons seeking entry to the world after emerging from years of hiding.)

The Hochschule mostly functions as a school. The courses include sorcery (for humans) and political and social sciences (for dragons). But it does also perform some research in several areas. While its researchers lack the daring and flair of many independent human scholars of sorcery, it has excellent resources and provides a useful venue for peer research. Its innovations in this field are infrequent but solidly based. There are some scientific researchers on the site, and rumor is some startling unpublished papers on draconic biology and quantum physics are locked away in the Hochschule's closed library stacks.

In a campaign of strangeness and charm, the Hochschule is a great setting for weird “school stories.” If dragons are mostly seen as revenants, it could be an epicenter of melancholy strangeness, where philosopher-dragons come to terms with the fading of their species. If the focus of the campaign is dragon power, it could be their primary think tank and intellectual powerhouse, guarded from physical, social, and magical assaults by some of the most powerful secret protections on Earth.

Alternate Histories

In campaigns based on different histories, the fate of the Hochschule is open for the GM to decide. If dragons have been forced into the open, either it's been exposed as a draconic establishment early on, or its secret survived the century. It could have long since fallen under the influence of one faction or developed as “neutral ground,” absorbing human ideals of academic impartiality. It even could have become heavily human-influenced and emerged as a center of human “draconic studies” (maybe one that some dragons even trust). Then again, if its sponsors focus on intensive, ethically unconstrained magical research, it could have developed a very sinister air, becoming a place of dark secrets and dubious occultism.

The Circle of Pliny

The Circle of Pliny (p. 110) has studied and survived alongside the dragons. Too informal for dragon agents to infiltrate and subvert effectively, its members quickly learned enough subtlety and discretion to avoid becoming targets for direct attacks.

Nonetheless, it is a *little* more “regularized” today, and proud of its long tradition of scholarship. Its members have never managed a satisfactory, indisputable explanation for the appearance and abilities of dragonkind, and some of them have become a little touchy or depressed about the whole business. Academics can be patient, and most love a really meaty challenge. In any case, they certainly have acquired a great deal of knowledge along the way, some of it with practical uses. The Circle has become a quiet but powerful center of independent research into sorcery, for example. Members of the Circle shake their heads at the intellectually cowardly, blinkered human refusal to recognize important facts, but know better than to try to do much about it.

In the high-tech modern world, the Circle has gradually adopted new technologies – first the telephone and recently the Internet. (Of course, some older members grumble at such things.) “Draconic studies” can seem like a counterpart (or a parody) of science fiction fandom, with amateur publications, hotel-based conventions where clever obsessives exercise their hobbyhorses, and a geeky air. PCs researching the dragons from a position of ignorance could stumble across weird little publications and oddly named newsgroups (*alt.dragons.circle-of-pliny?*), and thereby obtain a lot of useful information . . . and some misinformation, too.

Alternate Histories

In other histories, the Circle may have become a famous institution, its members frequently called upon to assist with draconic studies – or an underground cell, hunted ruthlessly by dragons who are jealous of their secrets and fearful of humans with too much knowledge.

Alternatively, the Circle may have shrunk and faded over the years, especially in worlds in which the dragons have enforced their own secrecy especially fiercely. PCs might encounter it as a small clique of dusty, dotty old scholars with some very useful information. Some of the Circle might be rather pleased at the chance of one last adventure, and one last opportunity to exercise the curiosity and wisdom that is the Circle’s legacy.

Teachers: Those Teachers who were careful about preserving secrecy have continued to pursue their strategy. Some became leading figures in dragon and human society, thanks to their powerful human allies. Others suffered badly when they neglected to ensure the loyalty of their students, and several careless Teachers have been forcibly suppressed by other dragons who feared the consequences of carelessness.

Certainly, knowledge of draconic languages remains part of the draconic political tool kit. However, over the last century, much information on the subject slipped out into the broader magical underworld, leaving the Teacher philosophy weakened. It is now more a political methodology than a way of life.

Retreaters: Like the Conservatives, the Retreaters claim vindication, while their rivals claim they have failed. Dragons have retreated from most confrontation with humanity – but socially instead of geographically. A few holdouts remain in remote manors and villas, but today, their ideas seem all too obviously futile in a world of rapid communications, spy satellites, and computerized bureaucracies.

(In some alternate history games, successful Retreaters might be the last dragons, as those trying other strategies failed and either died or changed their minds. In apocalyptic games, dragon strongholds would have something of the nature of feudal keeps in the wilderness.)

Enslavers: The Enslaver faction is rather out of date. More refined exercises in conspiracy and manipulation superseded its unsubtle plans for overt domination. On the other hand, the basic impulse behind this philosophy never entirely disappears among dragons, though most acknowledged Enslavers murmur that, no, the time is not yet right. Others have become more subtle, saying the covert rule of mankind is better than open enslavement. Old Enslavers have often become the most violent and direct schemers, forever arguing for ruthless operations to take over centers of power and influence, and the assassination of any humans who cause dragonkind any trouble whatsoever.



Americans: The American shared identity as eccentrics from a new frontier has faded with time, leaving them with even less basis for unity than before. On the other hand, dragons, being long-lived and cautious, find it hard to break such bonds. The faction has evolved from a coherent party into a shared-interest group, dedicated to defending their New World strongholds – and often simply a social club for beings who share some memories. Still, as the United States claims the status of sole world superpower at the start of the 21st century, the northerners in this faction feel pleased with themselves.

Some say that it was an “American” strategy, tied to the rise of the United States, which gave all dragons the key to their success – though others call that vanity. (In variant games, just such a strategy may have led to a great disaster for dragonkind, transforming the faction into a group of despised outcasts.)

The Hiram Maxim Foundation

Hiram Maxim's semi-formal group, and its research into anti-draconic countermeasures, survived the death of its founder. Indeed, thanks to a carefully formulated bequest, it has grown in power and influence over the decades. It is the most powerful human organization with detailed knowledge of dragons that has avoided draconic infiltration or destruction.

The Hiram Maxim Foundation has a respectable public face as a long-established private "think tank," studying the societal consequences of new technologies (especially but not only weapons), and also broader questions of international power relations. It occasionally produces heavy, dull, carefully balanced reports which other specialists find moderately interesting. But all this is merely a convenient way of recruiting useful staff, and a good cover story for certain lines of research. Behind the scenes, a much larger organization works towards narrower goals.

This Hiram Maxim Foundation exists to provide humanity with whatever defenses it needs against dragonkind. Some of its members are actively paranoid, preaching the necessity of a war of survival. But the lack of a single, solid target, and the Foundation's relative weakness when compared to human military and law enforcement forces (who may not be dragon-controlled, but would certainly take a negative view of private vigilante armies) have ultimately ensured that the Foundation takes a more cautious, measured approach. It advises, plans strategy – and occasionally conducts small, secret, very precise strikes.

Most of the members of this secret element are still scholars, researchers, and analysts, whose job is to understand dragonkind better. However, they are more practical than the academics of the Circle of Pliny (p. 129). They think of dragons as opponents, not study subjects. Some are rather eccentric weapons designers. However, there are two more active divisions.

The Office of Paranormal Protection is made up of sorcerers, all carefully chosen for their independence from draconic teaching (and nonetheless regarded with persistent suspicion by the rest of the Foundation). As their name suggests, their role is to protect the

rest of the Foundation from magical espionage and intrusion, which they do well enough; given their limited numbers and patchy knowledge, they could not really adopt a more aggressive stance, even if they wanted to.

Aggression is very much the business of the Active Measures Division, often referred to within the Foundation as the "George Teams." They are almost all experienced former soldiers, in many cases with special forces training. Well-equipped and backed up by the Foundation's advanced knowledge and research, Active Measures have two tasks: to protect the Foundation against anyone who might object violently to its activities, and to eliminate serious threats to humanity from dragonkind whenever the Foundation's shadowy Board of Supervisors decides that the need for study is past. Not all of the George Teams are snipers or assassins, but their general attitude involves a degree of ruthlessness which often frightens the more peaceable scholar-analysts.

The Board itself is a very secret group, as Hiram Maxim himself did not wish the Foundation to be vulnerable to assault or subversion at this level. New supervisors are selected by current members when former incumbents retire or die. Most probably come from the higher managerial levels of the Foundation, but there may be exceptions.

Alternative Views

Of course, the last fact raises the possibility that the Foundation *has* been subverted. It would be very hard for anyone outside the Board to tell. Certainly, it can be played in a variety of ways, from humanity's last hope, through quiet but determined scholars with good security, to paranoid xenophobes engaged in a secret campaign of assassination and black ops against targets who just want to live in peace. In variant campaigns, the Foundation could be markedly stronger or weaker, more or less aggressive. It could even become the cadre of humanity's last resistance army, a paranoid survivalist force, or an unarmed and ineffectual study group.

PLAYING THE GAME



Many of the previous chapter's comments about this setting apply equally well if moved to the present. However, there are some new concerns and possibilities.

Dragon PCs

Once again, 750 points is a plausible starting level for dragon PCs. However, given that the dragons have had a century or so more to accumulate wealth and influence, more points might be justified. Dragons at 750 points would be low in the draconic hierarchy. (They might be youngsters in a world just aware of successful dragon breeding.)

Reptile Politics

This type of game would change little in its essentials, although the dragons have acquired new resources and faster, more efficient communications. The most important change may be that most factions are embedded deeper into human society, and accordingly stronger and more protected against assault. Thus, games should be highly political, with any conflicts played out cautiously over the long term.

Dragons in Black

Dragonkind still needs protection from humans, although most dragons have become more practiced at looking after themselves. This sort of duty is now largely delegated to human agents, although dragons may manage the work closely. However, in games with "Revenant" dragons, or with a "Strangeness and Charm" approach, dragonkind may still have limited resources, and dragon characters may find themselves working actively to protect their own species.

Fear of the Abyss

The terror of oblivion may have receded as dragonkind settled, but it has not entirely gone away. Even as rulers, dragons lack a full understanding of their own nature, and the threat of exposure and an ensuing full-scale war with the hordes of technologically powerful humans still nags at the back of many draconic minds.

Dragons actively seeking knowledge have access to advanced human science, though this may or may not do them much good. Those seeking power for use in defense of their own kind have access to greater resources – and will have to worry about more powerful technology in human hands.

Well knowne it is, that Attilius Regulus, Generall under the Romanes, during the warres against the Carthaginians, assailed a Serpent neere the river Bagrada, which caried in length 120 foot: and before he could conquer him, was driven to discharge upon him arrowes, quarrels, stones, bullets, and such like shot, out of brakes, slings, and other engines of artillerie.

– Pliny the Elder, Natural History

Human PCs

Modern-day games with human PCs can follow many of the guidelines offered in Chapter 8. However, current day adventures tackling dragons in physical combat have a reasonable chance of not only surviving but winning. Modern military weapons can certainly punch straight through most dragon hides. Whether any half-competent dragon will let enemies come that close with that sort of weaponry, instead of having them intercepted by any number of well-armed bodyguards and cat's-paws, is entirely another matter, but there is nonetheless the possibility of more combat-oriented games, possibly featuring PCs trained to the 150-200 point level.

Melancholy Whimsy

While children's stories are grittier today than in Edwardian times, magic, whimsy, and melancholy are still prevalent in the genre, and campaigns on such themes – with child or eccentric adult PCs – remain feasible in modern-day settings. They are most compatible with a focus on the “Strangeness and Charm” style of play, though the idea of dragons as Revenants can be melancholy and whimsical enough.

SURVIVORS?

The notable dragons discussed in the previous chapter provide case studies in the history of dragonkind. The following versions of the same characters in the present day are just *possibilities* . . .

Ambassador Lung: As China suffered turmoil after turmoil through the 20th century, Ambassador Lung lost the last vestiges of his desire to return home, while those who had sent him drifted away completely. Wielding his resources deftly, he constructed a series of identities as a businessman and investor, and he still prospers in a number of Western cities with substantial Chinatowns. It is rumored that, for a while in the 1960s, he initiated a few downright megalomaniacal schemes, frequently putting himself in danger of exposure or assassination by humans. But those stories are *probably* just part of the strange “Legend of Lung” which has grown up – whether because of or despite his preferences is unclear. Ambassador Lung certainly does like to be a mystery.

Bex the Green: Bex remains a subtle power in the world, his obsession with scholarship having served him well. His personal organization of clients and employees has never grown large or especially powerful. Maintaining his taste for privacy and a quiet life, he prefers to limit himself to a small group of discrete followers who he can trust implicitly, instead of “burdening himself with a vast gang of unreliable, under-informed ruffians.” However, anyone who gains a place in his circle also gains access to his considerable reserves of knowledge.

His interests seem to have grown narrower, more abstruse, and less practical over the years. He no longer corresponds with the leading librarians of Europe, but is now best known in the upper reaches of the world of antiquarian book collectors. He employs one or two experts to manage access to computer networks on his behalf, but never uses such things in person. Many dragons and students of dragonkind suspect that he is slipping out of touch and into irrelevance; a few wonder if his peculiarly arcane knowledge might still give him unique kinds of power.

Connie Drake: Miss Drake has a useful ability to learn and a strikingly adaptable nature (for a dragon). She still spends most of her time moving through high society, but occasionally vanishes for a few months or years, returning seemingly refreshed each time, with a new name and modified appearance (unless dragons can get away with less secrecy in the campaign). She no longer has to worry

about older concepts of “respectability,” which has enabled her to broaden her range of human contacts and associations.

Her quest for new experiences and ensuing strange experiments are said to have led her into danger – of exposure, and of conflict with more cautious dragons and human agencies – in the '20s and '60s, but she apparently overcame these problems by the '90s. Beneath the jet-set veneer, however, she feels a certain frustrated sadness. She is still convinced that dragonkind is failing to realize some vague potential, and her quest for conceptual breakthroughs is growing stranger by the decade. She has accumulated a respectable fortune, through competent investment and some well-judged marriages, but much of it goes to sponsor magical studies, radical research in high-energy physics, archaeological expeditions to the remote areas, and fringe human political groups of every stripe, many of them mutually hostile.

N'Zengar: Other dragons sometimes commented to N'Zengar that events had overtaken his old, crude Enslaver philosophy. N'Zengar smiled darkly, and later treated the speakers to subtle displays of disdain or contempt. He was always a bully, but this became more habit than real pleasure; as he never felt affection for the world, decades of experience left him with a depth of cynicism that humans cannot even imagine. Sometimes, he indulged in displays of wild, whimsical generosity or kindness, purely as experiments on his own nature. Similarly, he remained *mostly* true to his word, but sometimes broke it for no apparent reason. He remained an Enslaver at heart, but found it most efficient to express this through an interlocking set of organizations (political, commercial, financial, and magical) that he ruled with iron discipline through his multiple identities.

Then, in 1988, he became entangled in a particularly complex and pointless conflict with several other dragons. In the end, N'Zengar's private jet exploded over the Andes. Strangely, several dragons found that they mourned him. A few, however, remain worried: their clean-up crews found the remains of a dragon amidst the wreckage, and they are sure that N'Zengar boarded the aircraft – but there was no way of achieving certain identification. And *something* drives the companies he founded – with incredibly convoluted ownership structures – to undertake ruthless operations in fragments of the former Soviet Union where employment and work safety laws are weak.

Serving the Flame

These days, the dragons' human servants have traditions and history and experience – and possibly many resources. Globetrotting adventures are simpler in an age of cheap air travel, and these games' flavor might be less “pulp” and more “weird technothriller” – a matter for the GM and players to decide.

Of course, serving dragons is a different matter, depending on the exact place they occupy in the game world. If they are strangely charming, or fading revenants, it is different than if they are ruthless secret masters (servants would become the paid enforcers of the inhuman overlords of their own species). Perhaps adventurers serve bosses among the nicer dragons, in campaigns set against more ruthless (and maybe inhuman) Illuminati. Some humans could sincerely believe that the alternative would include hysteria, chaos, and a global war. A paranoid and morally ambiguous “wilderness of mirrors” game would set sworn loyalties against shifting evidence about what is *really* going on.

The Sorcerers

The study of magic has remained a secretive matter, but has advanced at least a little. The obvious archaeological sites and ancient texts have been identified, examined, and categorized, and most magical research is more sedate and academic than in the wild old days before World War I.

CROSSOVERS

A modern-day game makes the list of additional relevant *GURPS* books slightly different.

Cops, SWAT, Covert Ops, Special Ops

A few humans, on either side of the law, may know that dragons live among them – and may be ready and willing to engage them in combat if necessary. Dragons are formidable foes, but not immune to heavy weapons or subtle poisons. Undoubtedly, dragons would train some specialist fighters themselves, to deal with their rivals.

In a radically alternate history where dragons are widely known to exist, law enforcement and military organizations would certainly recognize them as a potential or actual problem, and acquire and train with weapons and equipment to deal with them. Similarly, in an open secret setting, a few clear-thinking specialists could make efforts to tackle the issue, even in the face of denial from elsewhere in their organizations.

Games using these *GURPS* sourcebooks extensively will bear relatively little resemblance to whimsical children's stories, but might manage some of the atmosphere of a violent action cartoon series – or they could become dark and gritty, in a cinematic way, with overmatched SWAT cops or commandos struggling in the face of draconic cunning and subtle sorcery. Of course, an effective team might possess sorcerers, or even dragons.

GURPS Cabal

Magic in the Cabal's world is powerful enough to hide the existence of dragons retroactively, given enough effort. In a history based on the ideas on p. 123, the Cabal would probably help the dragons toward this end, to preserve the secrecy that protects them both. The dragons might not be fully in charge – the Cabal is powerful competition – but have carved out a niche in magical and mundane society.

Nonetheless, the odd new discovery or reopened private library still gives small teams of dynamic sorcerers adventurous missions – and greater general knowledge means greater power, raising the stakes when conflict does arise. Styles of sorcery have evolved and been refined over time. While the tweedy book-bound academics are still around, they work alongside or against experts in advanced mathematical and semantic analysis, modern anthropology, and postmodern linguistic philosophy, using sophisticated computer systems to refine their rituals and determine the underlying laws of magic.

To reflect progress, GMs may raise the upper limit on Ritual Magic skill from 13 to 16, and make the Paths of Health or Nature available. GMs running epic campaigns of sorcerous research might even let sorcerers' efforts raise the skill limit further.

Facing the Fire

Campaigns of traumatic discovery and confrontation are certainly possible in this modern-day version of the setting, with the added paranoia-inducing possibilities offered by advanced surveillance technology, computerized bureaucracy, and century-old dragon-run organizations with fabulous wealth and refined magical power. The only problem might be keeping anyone alive – although human-run organizations such as the Hiram Maxim Foundation (p. 130), and conflicts between dragon factions, may provide just enough help to get by.



If the dragons have not reached an acceptable compromise and become members of the Cabal en masse, the two factions' relationship would be complex and unstable, with extended truces and gentlemanly agreements punctuated by occasional struggles for resources and violent raids in search of blood or secrets. Draconic expeditions to Briah could be trips home, or quests for lost racial roots.

GURPS Time Travel

The comments on p. 123 apply as well to a modern-day game as to an Edwardian one. In the “Infinite Worlds” setting, any alternate history derived from the dragons' appearance in 1878 would be a wild low-Quantum timeline giving rationalist members of Infinity headaches. A “Dragons in Power” world would demand diligent detective work and involve the menace of considerable paranormal powers. An alternate timeline that closely echoes the present or very recent past, but is manipulated from the shadows by a clique of giant supernatural reptiles, should induce bemusement – followed by mounting paranoia.

In Nomine

The notes on p. 123 about this potential crossover also apply to the “modern era” version. However, if the dragons have been active for that much longer, both Heaven and Hell will have more-established attitudes and policies on the subject. Malakite strike teams will have slain enough dragons to keep the species cautious, and dragons (who knew an overstated appeal to greed when they heard one) will have incinerated enough incautious demons to convince some angels that they are not minions of Hell. Jordi might wonder if dragons belong in his domain, Blandine might seek to tame them, Eli could exploit their wondrousness, and Gabriel could harness their blazing fire, while Novalis might think about peaceful solutions that balance the violent suspicions of Dominic and the zeal of Laurence. On the



other side, Andrealphus could see them as creatures of lust, Beleth might jealously guard a word that has long been part of her domain, Belial would wish to bring the fire into his armory, and Malphas would have classified dragonkind and its subdivisions as yet another tool.

If the old Lilim of Dragons survived this seismic change in her word, she will have prospered in the last century, and archangel pragmatists might have voted to set up an angel to counter her, whatever the metaphysical problems with trying to subsume a parasitic ethereal power into the divine symphony. The Word of Dragons might go to Gabriel or even Eli, but given that Heaven holds that dragons should remain in dreams, it could be given to one of Blandine's Ofanim or Malakim.

Supers

In a traditional four-color superhero world, a dragon might be just another superbeing, not even as impressive as nominally human characters. Such settings could support an "Open Secret" approach. In some comics, super-powered beings have been around for decades without obviously changing the world, and ordinary people ignore the subject unless violently forced to confront it.

Modern comics often take a more realistic approach, and the dragons and sorcerers in these chapters are not really compatible with the more internally consistent approach taken by *GURPS International Super Teams*. Still, GMs running Supers with more of a "four-color/golden age" attitude might consider dragons as one element. Their physical power, shapeshifting abilities, and varied motivations would ensure the production of many dangerous master villains, and perhaps one or two offbeat heroes.

Y2K

If *GURPS Y2K* is the general handbook for "catastrophe" games, a world with dragons can be at least as catastrophic as our own. The apocalypse could be a war between humanity and dragonkind, or a magical disaster caused by unwise research into sorcery. It may well have happened some time ago, generating an alternate history.

Mixed Groups

Just as in historical games, combined dragon/human PC groups would be difficult to manage, but not impossible. Dragons could be wealthy patrons or team leaders for human parties. The humans might even achieve comparable power, through advanced sorcery or, in a *Black Ops*-style cinematic game, intensive training.

Black Ops

While the history of the *GURPS Black Ops* world does not include dragons, that is easily fixed in this setting of cinematic action, horrific secrets, and wild paranormal phenomena. The dragons might be just another dark secret, and another set of targets for the ops. They might be embedded in society's power structures, forcing the Company to handle cases of "big lizard infestation" with care. (The Company might even ally with them against *worse* things – although individuals throughout the Company would disagree with that decision.) Replacing ritual magic with psionics in this case is probably best. Dragons might "awaken" human psychics with psionic energies which they emanate but cannot control directly. Half-dragons would be naturally powerful psis. Any recruited by the Company would find themselves in a very tricky position . . .

For that matter, some dragons might know about the Company, and some might even have supported its creation. The Company could provide an effective way to suppress and distract rival paranormal entities, many either as dangerous to dragons as to humans, or rivals for psychic resources. Other dragons could try to wipe out the ops, either directly or by political manipulations – or, lacking influence over the Company, could try to infiltrate. Perhaps dragon society has split into factions, one running the Company, the other working through the Lodge. Additionally or alternatively, the dragons could simply replace Mind.

Whatever the case, Science division will obsess over the dragons' anomalous biological status, and take even more risks in pursuit of research material and cell samples.

OTHER TIMES,
OTHER DRAGONS

This chapter describes several more settings, in which dragons or dragon-lore represent a central theme. In each case, the campaign uses the categories from pp. 36-37.



Of course you know that dragons were once as common as motor-omnibuses are now, and almost as dangerous.
– Edith Nesbit, *The Last of the Dragons* (1925)

FEAR AND FLAME

Dragons Are: Powerful to Very Powerful, Fairly Common, Intelligent, and Exotic.

Dragons Represent: Ravening terror, threatening to devastate human civilization and even wipe out humanity altogether.

PCs Are: Tough human or similar heroes, struggling to acquire the power, skill, and knowledge to challenge the dragons.

This campaign puts a post-apocalyptic spin on conventional fantasy games – and dragons provide the apocalypse. Traditionally, full-sized dragons are a threat and a rarity; this campaign assumes that the threat has been realized, and dragons have become too common.

The Campaign World

The simplest set up for this game's background involves two steps. 1. Take the map of a fantasy world. 2. Wreck it.

The basis should be a coherent, consistent fantasy setting, probably the usual pseudo-medieval elves-and-dwarves-and-wizards pattern. Feel free to use any published world, so long as you enjoy mangling it; Yrth (from the upcoming *GURPS Banestorm*) is a good candidate. Treat your choice the same way that post-apocalyptic thrillers treat the real world.



The Dragons

Now, add wyrms. The world probably had them before, but they probably were rare, up in the mountains and on the map's edges. But something has changed.

Precisely what triggered the disaster should begin as a mystery to the PCs, and could be irrelevant to them for some time. In fact, you do not have to decide at first yourself. The following are some possibilities:

1. Dragons control their own fertility, but normally choose to keep themselves rare, to avoid competition for lairs and hoards. However, a few years ago, after too many respected wyrms were slain by bands of nasty little human adventurers, the dragon council resolved to end the problem by going on the offensive. Now, after decades of breeding and preparation, the dragon "army" has been unleashed. The elders will sort out the dragon population problem once the war ends.

2. Dragon breeding is a subtle mystery for human scholars, who do not realize that young dragons start out very numerous and very small, resembling mundane lizards. Breeding always takes place in wilderness areas, where another predatory monster species heavily thins out the young before they sprout wings and fly to mountains in search of lairs. Unfortunately, humans (or orcs, or dwarves, or somebody) consider the natural predator a problem, and a few years ago, a strong king organized a campaign of extermination. This ignorant mistake's effects created a generation of young firedrakes.

3. A wizard (or possibly a powerful, magically adept dragon) recently attempted a great spell – which suffered a disastrous failure. It opened gates to one or more worlds where dragons are common, or perhaps pulled the dragons through from several other worlds. (This could well be related to the "Banestorm" of

Yrth; if the game is set on Yrth, the Dark Elves may have tried their great spell again, even more disastrously than before.)

Other options and variations are possible; for example, the elder dragons from (1) could have sought a magical solution to their problem, leading to the great summoning of (3). GMs can get as complicated as they wish.

In any case, the dragons have now appeared – and attacked. The result is hardly a "war," as the dragons have no overall strategy. In some places, solitary dragons wander at random, plundering and destroying; in others, groups (perhaps families) of dragons work together methodically. Some dragons accept surrenders, and employ humans as slaves (though never as anything better). Others seek only to destroy. In some places, human heroes or armies have scored victories, and some communities are holding out, although they have a hard task defending their fields, but the fury and power of the sudden eruption, from so many directions, wrecked any initial chances of an organized defense.

Now, human forces are beginning to coordinate, but squabbles between leaders and uncertainty over the best strategy complicate matters – and far worse, some dragons, too, seem to be cooperating to plan their next moves.

Dragon Types

GMs should pick a dragon species from Chapter 3, perhaps with a range of sizes or ages, for use as the main opposition. The standard Western Dragon (p. 56) is the obvious candidate. If the chosen back-story permits the involvement of multiple species, things can become more unpredictable for PCs.

Fighting wyrms on the plains, small flying dragons in the mountains, and sea serpents on the oceans, would call for a greater range of tactics, and may increase the sense of viciously hostile world.

CHARACTERS

This straight-down-the-line dragon-slaying campaign pitches bands of heroic human (and other) adventurers against lots of big lizards. There will lots of combat, lots of glory, and almost certainly lots of dead heroes. Bloodthirsty slayers simply wanting combat will have every opportunity, but diplomacy, strategy, and planning, will all be necessary as communities struggle to organize.

1. Take the map of a fantasy world.
2. Wreck it.

Players should therefore be competent and combat-oriented. The optimum starting point level depends on the campaign style and the average dragon's power level, but 150-200 point characters may fare better than the usual 100-pointers. Overwhelmed individuals may have to be disposable – but hey, they get to try to kill dragons. A lot. Groups consisting entirely of tough or canny warriors fit the post-catastrophe theme, but leavening these with a few wizards and healers may make for better survival chances.

Nonhuman (Humanoid) Races

Most fantasy worlds have other humanoid races besides humans, and this setting is no exception. The dragons will hunt down the dwarves in their mines (and steal their gold), and burn away the elves' beloved forests, so everyone has a motive to hit back.

Of course, if one race gets off lightly, let alone if *any* suspicion circulates that some individual or race was responsible for the current mess, races will experience lots of mutual suspicion and backbiting. GMs can add Reputations, Social Stigma, or Intolerance to racial templates to reflect this. Reptilian races may be subject to suspicion and prejudice.

This campaign can also include PCs from usually "villainous" races. If the dragons also hunt down and slaughter orcs and ogres, everyone is in this together. This does not mean that aggressive, sordid, or cannibalistic beings will be regarded as *nice*, but there is nothing like a fight with a dragon to make people adjust their priorities. This could make for interesting role-playing opportunities, involving a lot of grunting and big axes.

Storylines

This campaign could move fantasy games back to the roots of the genre – desperate fights against big monsters to save the world. Hence, the overall plot will probably be straightforward – nail the reptiles before they crush humanity! – although plenty of distractions may exist along the way. Also, traditionally, these stories shift from raw survival to rebuilding, and the embittered warriors sometimes need reminding that preserving peaceful folk and communities is what justifies the fighting in the first place.

Scenarios can come from post-holocaust movies and novels, and perhaps from westerns, as much as from mainstream fantasy. Escorting refugees, or perhaps diplomats or scholars who are attempting to organize the human resistance, or defending a farm or village against one big or several medium-sized dragons, are the default plots. Hunting an especially troublesome drake down in its lair is also plausible. Working with the rulers of larger surviving communities may be interesting, if tricky. If a part of the world exists where dragons have not attacked, its people or rulers may have to be convinced that their good fortune is simply a matter of time, and helping to fight makes good sense, instead of being pointlessly provocative.

THE WISDOM OF PEARLS



Dragons Are: Very Powerful to Godlike, Moderately Common, Intelligent to Super-Intelligent, and Very Exotic.

Dragons Represent: A hierarchical natural order, and something of an enigma. The essence of elegant high fantasy.

PCs Are: Either dragons, engaged in polite games of supernatural politics, their human servants and priests, or human adventurers somehow entangled in the draconic affairs.

This campaign's setting is a very fantastical, "fairytale" version of Bronze Age China. It can draw on real-world history for place names, but is pseudo-historical at best, with a casual attitude to anachronisms. Style and atmosphere is all-important. Use *GURPS China* as a reference.

History and realistic geography are largely irrelevant. Chinese mythology is much more crucial. The dragons in this world are enigmatic demi-divine beings, the supervisors of rivers, seas, and the weather. They are also active; even ordinary people glimpse one occasionally, and human heroes, wizards, and priests can expect to interact with them regularly. Heaven, and the greater gods of Chinese mythology, are more remote, although they ultimately assign roles to the dragons.

The game plays on various levels, with humans serve as minions or very cautious adversaries to dragons, human heroes and wizards or young dragons seek to do great deeds and obtain offices from the gods, or older dragons attempt to shape the land to suit their own philosophies. Obviously, starting point levels will be much higher in the latter case, but even lowly servants may be in the 150-250 point range, permitting them to be impressive warriors and great wizards. They will still be inferior to most dragons, although some games could have human and kiao PCs of the same point level working together. If the characters are human, the game can include martial arts, increasing the "Fairytale China" feel.

Another option requires each player to run both a single dragon and one or more human servants or allies. Some adventures

may involve all the dragons cooperating to deal with a great threat; others might involve human parties looking after routine business beneath the dragon-lords' notice; and others again may involve a single dragon supervising a band of human servants.

The Dragons

Dragon characters should use the Chinese Dragon templates (pp. 59-62). If the PCs are dragons, their starting point level determines what ages and status levels are open to them. Given a long enough campaign, and generous experience awards, the game can incorporate their progress through the draconic hierarchy and perhaps through the Celestial Bureaucracy. GMs can add the option of *Dragons as Spirits* (p. 88) to P'an Lung, Shen Lung, and Tien Lung, and possibly to Li Lung and Lung Wang, if they wish to emphasize the dragons' otherworldliness.

Although dragons may have fully differentiated personalities with distinctive habits and attitudes, they should fit a relatively limited range of personality types – especially if they want to succeed in their allotted roles. They may be irascible or patient, devious or honest, but if they play violent adventurers, or try to backstab their way up the hierarchy (except to a very limited and polite extent), they will be considered threats to good order or tragically deranged. Dragons are the appointed representatives of Heaven, and Heaven will act if they forget this.

If dragons are kept as NPCs, they should seem enigmatic and inscrutable to human adventurers. In fact, their objectives and concerns are usually straightforward and logical – to preserve their appointed rivers or lakes, to look after their offspring, and occasionally to steer some renegade demon or impious human back onto the proper path – but their raw power, very long-term views, magical perceptions, and inhuman aspects inevitably make them hard for mortals to comprehend.



Dragon Objectives

For the most part, Chinese dragons in this campaign structure are bureaucrats, with an office they are not supposed to leave for very long, so the opportunities for adventures with dragon PCs may seem limited. However, they are not; they are merely subtle.

First, these dragons defend their physical territory. Deranged or cunningly ambitious rival dragons may seek to take over, while the occasional demon or crazed human wizard may cause trouble. More subtly, neighboring dragons may tinker with the weather or rivers to expand their own areas of responsibility, while human communities may build problematic dams or irrigation schemes. (Even if these humans cannot challenge a dragon directly, if they are polite and pious, the higher gods may not permit the dragon to destroy their work. Negotiation and persuasion may be in order.) Also, remember that rival P'an Lung fight frequently over what sort of weather to send.

Second, dragons can and often do have families, and they should look after these and promote their welfare. Chinese culture traditionally places respect for one's family above everything else, and while Heaven's servants should not behave corruptly, they should definitely grasp the concept of familial propriety. Guiding one's offspring through ceremonies and training, and seeking favors from superiors, could be a full-time job, especially if the youngster goes through a wild phase. Likewise, younger dragons may be called upon to aid and support their parents and ancestors.

Third, dragons – particularly those lower in the hierarchy – may serve Heaven in other ways, depending on what problems arise. If demons cause trouble, local humans fail to respect the proprieties, or a senior dragon owes a favor to another supernatural being, lesser dragons may be appointed to solve the problem as elegantly as possible. A story of minor dragons and their human servants battling hopping vampires and megalomaniac sorcerers could incorporate a lot of Hong Kong movie panache. (See *GURPS Undead* for some appropriate Chinese monsters.)

Fourth, bureaucrats may be intent on moving up the bureaucracy. Intrigue and politics among dragons will be very subtle and cautious – there are centuries to play in, and if Heaven gets annoyed by some crass tactic, everyone loses – but some players may enjoy this.

Characters

Human PCs in this setting may be diplomats, warriors, spies, messengers, personal servants – or a little of each, as circumstances demand. They may also be cinematic martial artists or sorcerers, seeking enlightenment, justice, or glory.

Dragons may be young, still seeking a place in the world, or may have just found a role – either assigned by more powerful supernatural beings, adopted because a particular river or lake needs a guardian, or even taken by conquest. (Heaven prefers that offices pass from holder to holder in an orderly fashion, but also wants competent servants. Doctrine held that an emperor deposed of and replaced by another could indicate the passing of the “Mandate of Heaven”; perhaps assignments at the bottom of the Celestial Bureaucracy can work the same way.) Older dragons will usually have a very specific place in the world, although they could be tragic outcasts or roving agents of the Celestial Bureaucracy.

It seemed that the totems were all gone. Many people wasted years trying to re-contact them, and a few went mad . . .

Martial Arts

A fantastical-Chinese (“Chinoiserie”) campaign should provide room for martial arts action, even if it is anachronistic. GMs can use *GURPS Martial Arts* to consider which styles to permit. Possibilities include Chin Na, Hsing-Yi Chuan, Pakua, Pao Chuan, T'ai Chi Chuan, Wudong, and all the variants of Kung Fu except Wushu.

Some shapeshifting dragons may be experts in a style, used in human form; this might seem undignified, but such mastery could reflect an entirely appropriate spiritual grasp of the workings of things and the flow of chi. It could be possible to develop styles for dragons to use in dragon form, although dragons most probably avoid combat.

DRACOMANCY

Dragons Are: Not actually present as such. However, “dracomancers,” of human strength and intelligence, can become Powerful and occasionally Super-Intelligent (and are Very Rare and Very Exotic, in their way). If the “Dragon totem” is a conscious being, it is Godlike, Unique, Super-Intelligent, and Very Exotic or Totally Weird.

Dragons Represent: The one remaining effective magical totem in a world that thought of magic as previously defunct. A very practical manifestation of the supernatural.

PCs Are: Actual or wannabe dracomancers themselves, servants or allies to dracomancers, experts seeking to suppress or restrain dracomancy, puzzled investigators, or confused bystanders.

Magic seemed to be dead. Oh, it used to work, back in the Dark Ages and before, for a small number of talented, lucky, dedicated people, but sometime before the Renaissance, it . . .

just stopped. No one really understood how it worked in the first place, so no one knew what went wrong. A few blame witch hunts, Mongol invasions, improved blacksmith techniques leading to more cold iron, or the Rise of Reason, but none of this has stood up to examination.

The last attempt by truly knowledgeable occultists to build a science of magic started back around 1900, when they could draw on the widespread fascination with spiritualism and occultism in Europe. This attempt determined that the key to magic was access to “totems” – almost abstract, even imaginary spirit-beings invoked to lend their power to those knowledgeable and psychically sensitive enough. However, it seemed that the totems were all gone. Many people wasted years trying to re-contact them, and a few went mad; Aleister Crowley, who ended up trying to make himself his own totem, was merely the best-known casualty.



After that “Failed Dawn,” practical magic’s real history became the province of a tiny handful of dedicated antiquarian cranks (plus a small group of specialist exorcists in the Vatican, a couple of Sufi colleges in the mountains of Turkey, and a Japanese military secret society). The only reason they kept their research secret was habit from wild optimism, and the way they were mocked whether they went public.

Then, around 1990, one scholar found a miscataloged Byzantine scroll in the British Museum archives – described as a collection of liturgical procedures, it included rituals with heretical claims regarding the nature of divine inspiration. The researcher realized that, curiously, some of the text’s gaps could be filled by an obscure Chinese text on alchemical longevity. Out of habit, he derived a ritual from the combination and tried it out at home. He was pleased when he temporarily grew claws.

Dragon-Powered Magic

It appears that one totem is still accessible, even in the 21st century: the Dragon. Furthermore, it grants very real, material benefits, all corresponding to traditional attributes of the dragon myth. No one is sure if this totem was regularly exploited in the past, but – the first scholar having wanted widespread admiration more than he valued being the only magician in the world – it is widely exploited these days. Thanks to the long-established habit of secrecy, a general tacit agreement exists that keeps it away from the public, at least for now. This is proving surprisingly easy. After all, what sensible cop or serious reporter believes stories about people breathing fire or flying? Easier to talk about stage magic, hallucinations, and unreliable eyewitnesses.

But “dracomancy,” as the practice is called, grants its users seriously practical powers. As well as the claws, flying, and flaming, they can develop scales that can turn into blades and even – sometimes – bullets, and they can channel the size and strength of a “real” dragon. This is the crude and simple end of the scale, though; allegedly, the real power calls the wisdom and subtlety of dragons. On the other hand, the people claiming these powers may just be more pretentious and ineffectual occultists.

GURPS Rules

This campaign uses essentially standard *GURPS* spell-based magic rules. However, only a short list of spells is available, and the prerequisites for most are completely changed. The Earth is a high mana zone, with little or no variation. (This may sound surprising, but the only form of magic available is dracomancy, which is known to very few people. Anyone who can find out about it, can get it to work.) Magery is rare, but exists; dracomancers respect and envy anyone possessing it. Magic items are currently unknown, although many rumors circulate among dracomancers. It is possible that some survived from past ages of magic, and perhaps embody non-dracomantic effects. However, dracomancers cannot enchant items, and other totems may have been equally restrictive.

Known dracomantic spells, and new prerequisites (replacing those in the standard spell descriptions) are as follows:

Master (p. M23), *Might* (p. M26), and *Vigor* (p. M26): No prerequisites.

Compel Truth (p. M28): Prerequisite: IQ 15+.

Fish Control, *Reptile Control*, *Bird Control*, and *Mammal Control* (all p. M24): Prerequisite: Master.

Breathe Water (p. M35): Prerequisite: Vigor.

Armor (p. M76), *Breathe Fire* (p. M38), *Detect Magic* (p. M53), *Partial Shapeshifting* (p. G11: dracomancy only includes the variation for Crocodile Jaws, plus “Bat-like Arms” – equivalent to Feathered Arms in effect – and “Dragon Claws” – effectively equivalent to Tiger Paws): Prerequisites: Any three other dracomantic spells.

Enlarge (p. G19), *Fascinate* (p. G75), *Memorize* (p. G59): Prerequisites: Any six other dracomantic spells.

Aura (p. M53), *Counterspell* (p. M61), *Gift of Tongues* (p. M30), *Identify Spell* (p. M55), *Recall* (p. G59), *Recover Strength* (p. M49), *See Secrets* (p. M54), *Suggestion* (p. M68), *Watchdog* (p. M77): Prerequisites: Any ten other dracomantic spells.

Gift of Letters (p. M30): Prerequisite: Gift of Tongues.

Halt Aging (p. M51): Prerequisites: Might, Recover Strength, Vigor, and all three variations of Partial Shapeshifting.

The Price

Although not everyone realizes it yet, dracomancy has a serious problem; heavy use warps the dracomancer into a distorted and deformed image of the totem – which resembles a caricature of popular ideas about dragons.

Whenever a dracomancer attempts a spell, and either succeeds or suffers a critical failure, he must make a Will roll at a penalty equal to the base fatigue cost to cast that spell unmodified by skill. (This replaces the usual spell critical failure rules.) On a failure, he gains a temporary disadvantage (roll 1d):

1. Bad Temper
2. Bully
3. Greed
4. Laziness
5. Miserliness
6. Sleepy (at the -20 point level)



Normally, this effect lasts a number of days equal to twice the amount by which the Will roll was failed. However, if the Will roll was a critical failure, or if the character already has a full set of disadvantages (permanent or temporary) from the above list, roll another die:

1-2: A disadvantage from the above list (the one just rolled, if any) is gained permanently (reducing the dracomancer’s points total accordingly). If he already has the full set of permanent disadvantages, reroll twice on this table.

3-4: All future Will rolls the sorcerer makes following spell success or critical failure are at -2. (This penalty is permanent and cumulative!)

5: The spellcaster gains 2” in height and 5 lbs. in weight, permanently. He does not gain any added ST, and the extra weight adds to the total weight he is carrying when calculating encumbrance.

6: If he knows any variations of the *Partial Shapeshifting* spell, the dracomancer gains that feature permanently. Select randomly if he knows more than one that has not become permanent in the past. If he does not know any variations of this spell, or all that he knows have already become permanent for him, select one at random from the dracomancy list. This grants both the advantages and any drawbacks of the spell, and represents a striking unnatural feature that may make it hard for the mutated individual to go out in public. If he already has a full set of permanent changes, reroll twice on this table.

Characters

In this low-level, “gritty” campaign – one where real power is available – PCs should usually start as 100-point characters. (A campaign with 50- or 75-point characters might focus on the dark and dangerous side of things; one with 150-point PCs might focus on struggles between magical adepts and highly competent adversaries.) The GM could focus on “insiders,” who know what is going on, can start play knowing about the reality of magic, and may even cast a few spells, or “outsiders,” who do not know much, and have to take an Unusual Background if they want to know any spells. “Outsider” adventurers may fit with a dark fantasy tending-to-horror style; they should certainly be subject to many Fright Checks in the first few sessions. But GMs should try periodically to remind anyone playing an “insider” when they step outside the limits of rationalism; they might be required to take a -5 point Odious Personal Habit (“spacey,” “flaky,” or “aggressively smug”) to reflect their weirdness.

Character concepts could include: confused cops or PIs trying to discover the truth about some seriously screwy museum burglaries or murders, petty crooks colliding with some strange stuff, solipsistic scholars stumbling across an inside line to the truth, wandering Sufis passing as imams in Muslim communities while filling the special requests of their teachers, professional deprogrammers suddenly hitting cults that do not fit the standard patterns, exorcists researching recent reports with access to the Vatican’s sealed files, reporters knowing what they saw, or bodyguards and security experts getting twitchy after being hired by museums.

This being a contemporary, early 21st-century campaign, some TL8 skills may be available, but given the gritty, street-level style, TL7 should be the norm. Still, PCs should have full access to reasonable modern technology. Web searches and Teflon-coated bullets are part of the game. Dracomancers have to recognize that their edge over the modern world is highly conditional.

FIRE IN THE SKY

Dragons Are: Roughly at the human level in power (though very unlike humans), Fairly Common, (Fairly) Intelligent, and Rationalized.

Dragons Represent: An important piece of exotic and interesting “furniture” in an alien world.

PCs Are: Rugged colonists, off-world visitors, dragon wranglers, or clever kids.

This SF campaign takes a relatively “hard” approach, although it involves interstellar travel (not necessarily FTL). It is set on a “lost colony” world where human technology has either regressed or been held back by the practical difficulties of a small population in a strange environment and an ideological preference for non-disruptive development. In many ways, the human communities are “post-technological,” choosing to live simply but with substantial underlying intellectual resources. Still, the colony has introduced some radical new factors into the world’s ecology.

This world has relatively low gravity (perhaps 0.3-0.6 G), unusually combined with a denser-than-terrestrial atmosphere. It also has a highly dynamic ecosystem, with a lot of energy flowing through and a wide range of chemical processes. Although compatible with many terrestrial organisms, including humans, there are many minor difficulties.

Storylines

In this modern-day urban fantasy, magic works and grants real benefits, but is low-level. There is a race to exploit it. Small factions continuously form and fragment as the last remnants of the world’s occult community, suddenly reinvigorated, battle for knowledge and access to the totem.

Finding the Secret: The PCs may show interest in dracomancy, out of curiosity or the lust for power, or simply to explain recent events. However, even if they are “insiders,” tracking down obscure texts or evasive informants and conducting some potentially dangerous experiments will be parts of the game. If they are completely naïve, they will have to induce some very suspicious, mildly deranged people to talk to them, and deal with opponents with uncanny abilities along the way.

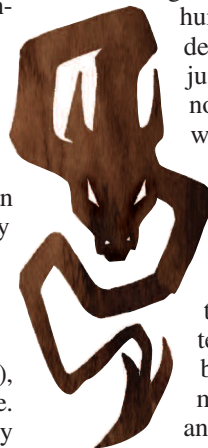
Keeping the Secret: Some dracomancers keep their “art” a secret; others may find it hard to convince anyone it does exist. However, the subject will acquire increasing urgency as the cost of dracomancy becomes clear. This magic transforms its users into monstrous, demonic-looking creatures, and produces significant mental derangements as well. Anyone determined to keep the secret, or hired to assist, will spend a lot of time and effort tracking down breaches of secrecy and dealing with them. The temptation to use magic along the way runs the risk of making things worse instead of better.

Using the Secret: This stuff is a source of power – but what can anyone use it for? Crime is one possibility, although other mystics will consider the criminal an unsubtle dolt and possibly a threat to secrecy. Subtle alternatives include any number of commercial moneymaking schemes (exploiting magical boosts to memory or perception), bodyguard work, or treasure hunting. Or one can just seek to boost one’s magical power, seeking yet more dracomantic spells in the quest for bizarre perfection.



The Dragons

These creatures are as thoroughly rationalized as possible (as the aim is logical fairly hard SF). They are the product of genetic engineering, part of a long-term plan for human development of the planet. However, the developers of the scheme were subtle, or perhaps just weird, and most observers admit that they do not understand what the long-term goal is (or was).



In short, the “dragons” are organic hydrogen balloons, living in social symbiosis with humanity. They breathe fire – very, very carefully – and preserve a tricky biochemical stability, only going “boom” on rare and unfortunate occasions. Use the “Realistic” Dragon template (p. 62), with the addition of Illiteracy but no other mandatory disadvantages. Dragons may be feral and unpredictable, or domesticated and even gentle (buying off Bestial). However, many (but not all) have substantially higher IQ levels than the template baseline, some approaching the human norm. Their designers made them quite varied.

Characters

As this game's setting often focuses on the practicalities and politics of settling a world and maintaining quasi-symbiosis with the native and genetically engineered life, characters will probably be human, and should be around 100-150 points, with few disadvantages. These products of a sophisticated, if peculiar, post-technological society enjoy good health, reasonable resources, and stable personalities.

Gamers may also play truly exceptional dragons, with IQ well above the norm and some other exceptional abilities – living demonstrations of the species' variability. Given that they will have low point totals, any humans in the same group might be children or adolescents, giving the game a “juvenile SF with smart pets” feel. Alternatively, adult humans might have dragons as low-point Allies.

Storylines

This setting supports countless low-key games of exploration and ecological preservation. (Humans could map the planet from orbit, and explore it with robot probes, but the colony takes its time to form a real bond with the world.) However, more dynamic possibilities also exist.

OTHER CAMPAIGN IDEAS



GMs will need to develop the following short ideas, but they show some more possibilities in dragon-centered campaigns.

Hatchling Night

Dragons Are: Powerful, All Too Common (at least right now, locally), Nonsapient, and Exotic.

Dragons Represent: Horror – vicious monsters, (currently) dangerous more for numbers than for individual power.

PCs Are: Ordinary or tough humans (or similar) – typical “survival horror” heroes.

This short-term horror campaign, or dangerous incident in the middle of a larger game, can catch the “survival horror” feel in full if it presents a very real chance of several PCs dying during the course of play.

The story begins when scores, hundreds, or thousands of small dragons appear more or less simultaneously. There could be many explanations for this: it could be the result of a curse or magical accident, or perhaps it is just something that happens every few thousand years when all the worst astrological alignments coincide. It probably reflects some quirk of dragon reproduction, or at least, one dragon's behavior. Perhaps a great she-dragon was slain a century ago, and burrowed through the earth as she died, scattering her eggs in caves and hidden places, spending the last of her life-force to produce and leave so many of them psychically saturated with her pain and malice.

This campaign's setting is very flexible. With little adjustment, it could run in the modern world, as alternate history, or dark fantasy (perhaps trashing an existing fantasy world that was stale). The dragons are the key; the players, involved by accident, simply fight for survival.

The game should describe dragons as horribly dangerous, scaly, unrelentingly hostile creatures, while drawing on modern horror movies for their tactics. They should erupt from the earth or from hiding places at the worst possible moments, and attack

First, the dragons vary a lot, psychologically – and some human colonists may have regressed ethically, desiring power and conquest. Battles against invading hordes of dragons and dragon-riders may seem less dramatic when the dragons are balloons that bob along in the breeze, but when both sides access extraordinary (TL12+) knowledge, things soon get messy and violent enough for any tastes.

Second, some of the planet's life may be stranger, and perhaps smarter, than anyone has yet realized. A first contact story could be a complex puzzle or a tense confrontation – and the dragons represent a weird additional factor. Perhaps their creators designed them to intermediate between humans and “aborigines” – but what if they prefer the latter?

And third, other humans exist elsewhere in the universe, and may have their own ideas about developing the planet. PCs could be visitors, pursuing their own goals and trying to comprehend the weird two-species civilization evolving here, or native humans, dealing with tourists, diplomats, and would-be exploiters. Human space could be dominated by a tyrannical empire, an exploitative corporate hegemony, or an idealistic federation that wants to prevent ecological vandalism on colony worlds. The colonists and dragons are unlikely to resist a full-scale interstellar invasion without help, but may have their own unique resources, or offworld allies. Offworld nonhuman aliens could really complicate the issue.

until they are hacked to pieces. Obviously, if the adventurers have the slightest chance of survival, each individual dragon should be fairly weak; use the Petty Drake (p. 54) or Hatchling/Man-Sized Dragon (p. 57) templates as a base, according to gamers' power levels and equipment, with whatever elements of the Animalistic and Malevolent lenses seem appropriate.

The campaign/scenario can end with either the group reaching safety, or discovering the cause of the incident and a solution. With a fantasy background, it might segue into “Fear and Flame” (pp. 135-136). Of course, it could also end with the PCs all dying.

Serpent in the Mirror

Dragons Are: Powerful (in a subtle way), Rare (if increasing in numbers), Intelligent (probably – but largely incomprehensible), and Totally Weird.

Dragons Represent: The essence of strangeness – enigmas and symbols on the edge of normal vision.

PCs Are: Human, probably normal people, becoming entangled with growing webs of strangeness and fear.

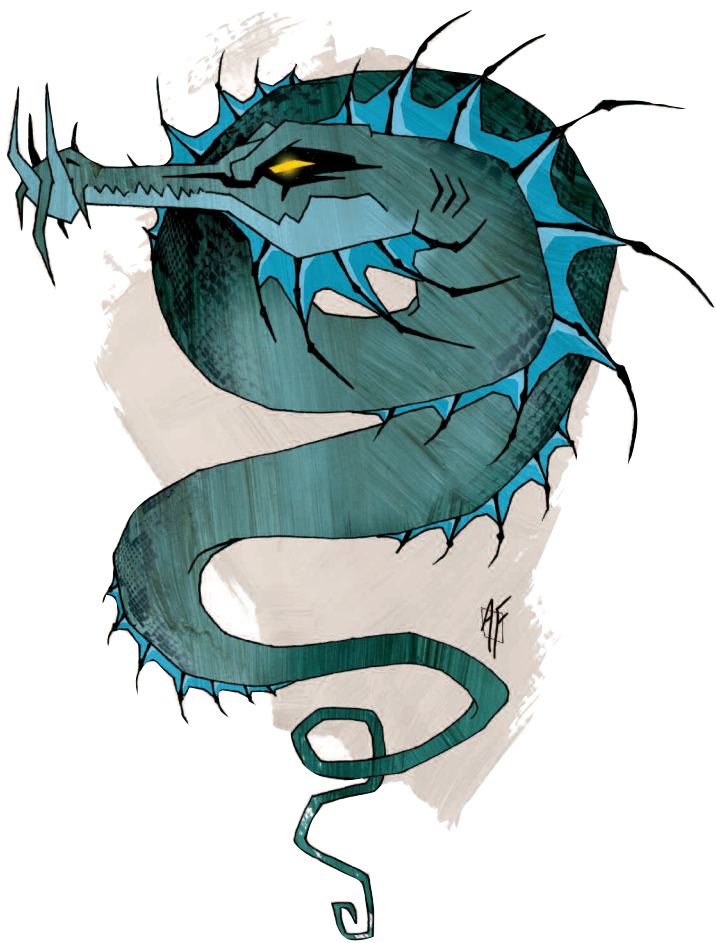
Most people believe that mirrors simply reflect, and that their inverted and distorted worlds are mere phantoms, geometrical illusions generated by the way in which they return light rays. A few people, however, know better. Lewis Carroll and Jorge Luis Borges dropped hints at the truth, although whether either of them was consciously aware of what lay beyond the glass is unclear. Most people who become conscious of the truth are locked away.

In fact, mirrors are windows into the realm of inversion and illusion. For millennia, its inhabitants have lived by mimicking us, prisoners of our vain solipsism. Recently, however (it is not clear just how recently), they have begun to seek an existence of their own. At much the same time that humans concluded that

dragons did not exist, they started making more and better mirrors. The nonexistent dragons find this convenient, or annoying, or both.

Most people who glimpse motion in mirrors that does not correspond to reality write it off as a trick of the light. The dragons, tricksters of light, appreciate this complacency, and continue to make their plans.

Dragons exist in this surreal campaign off the edges of the world, visible only out of the corner of the eye and in glimpses in dreams and mirrors. They are not born or hatched, but dreamed and feared. The setting should probably be the modern day, but the concept is flexible; it fits any period since the Bronze Age, and many fantasy worlds, too. In the latter case, dragons are not mere “magical beasts,” and divinations or mind magics will not work against them.



What they can do is influence reality, at least whatever a mirror reflects. They cause subtle changes, which are insidious, pervasive, and permanent. They can twist and invert patterns of thought and ethical ideals, or subtly distort physical forms. They can occasionally also create small, simple physical objects. Their influence appears to change the past, at least partially, so that anything they modify or create will always have been that way – although humans may become confused and uncertain, finding that they have two sets of memories. In the long term, the dragons seek to make the “real” world a reflection of their reality.

The campaign should begin in a very low key; ideally, the players might not have any idea what is to come. The PCs might be book or antique dealers, or engineers responsible for

*And the great dragon was cast out,
that old serpent, called the Devil, and
Satan, which deceiveth the whole
world: he was cast out into the earth,
and his angels were cast out with him.
– Revelation 12:9*

modernist office buildings or reflecting telescopes – or perhaps private detectives, policemen, or bodyguards, dealing with very peculiar problems. However, as NPCs start turning up dead or mad, or stop appearing at all (because their minds or bodies have slipped into an inverted frame of reference), the nature of the problem should slowly become, if not clear, then increasingly oppressive. The GM should work very hard to hint almost subliminally at twisting bodies and gaping jaws glimpsed in random shiny surfaces. Ultimately, the investigators may come to seem insane by “normal” standards, as their minds adapt to dealings with dragons and the truth about mirrors. The climax of the campaign might involve the destruction of some great mirror-walled building, or a reflecting telescope – the only way to prevent our culture becoming one with the Etruscans, the greatest mirror-makers in the ancient world.

ARMOR: Not Shining, But Big Enough

“This is Perseus Five to George Alpha: Dragon engaged, but appears resistant to particle beam weapons. Looks like another damn adaptive variant. Are your new systems functional?”

“One way to find out. Positron sword coming online. Now, you overgrown lizard – if you want Chicago, you’re going to have to come through me . . .”

Dragons Are: Very Powerful (would be nearly Godlike except for human technology), Rare (but impossible to ignore, and not rare enough), Nonsapient (sometimes verging on Intelligent), and Exotic.

Dragons Represent: Devastation on a city-wrecking scale. Formidable opponents for humanity’s mightiest defenders.

PCs Are: Tough, skilled human heroes, the “aces” of a high-tech fighting force.

Following their brutal interstellar war with a robotic culture, the alien Sinthebeons became obsessed with the need to suppress any other race that pursued that course of technological development, and to demonstrate to foolish primitives the superiority of biological science. On Earth, they decided to build conquest forces in the shape of humanity’s most powerful myths.

Humanity in turn found that, when fighting a mighty dragon which is trampling a city, bombs or big missiles are too indiscriminating, tanks are insufficiently fast or maneuverable – and camouflage is irrelevant. So the answer was power armor: *big* power armor, which rapidly acquired design and class names drawn from mythology. In a futuristic game, this armor technology is purely human invention. In a modern-day version, remnants of the Sinthebeons’ old enemies (who may have their own agenda) might help.

This campaign should feel like Japanese animation and monster movies; see *GURPS Mecha* for ideas. The powerful of the mechas should depend on the dragons' size and power; opposition "merely" comparable to the legendary creatures can probably be fought by light battlesuit troopers (and then the dragons will need higher DR), while Godzilla-style city-stompers will need giant robots as opponents. The campaign could include a continuing "arms race" between human engineers and Sinthebeon dragon breeders – the GM or players developing new designs and variants periodically.

Following *GURPS Mecha*, this is a variant alien invasion campaign (pp. ME17-18). The problem's scale and the speed of technological advance makes for over-the-top games, although both can have a feel for the realistic, gritty side of cinematic (pp. ME9-11). Combatants could be members of a military organization, and the monsters probably kill innocent people in large numbers (in the best traditions of dragonkind). The mecha are essentially experimental (p. ME11) – new models are continually being developed, sometimes in response to new threats. The Earth may be at TL8-9, depending on the chosen start date, although mecha technology may be racing ahead (especially if engineers are receiving alien assistance, or simply have first sight of captured Sinthebeon equipment). The aliens have wildly advanced biological technology, at least TL12, along with interstellar travel, but use their knowledge in arbitrary and inefficient ways.

The GM should develop the dragons as unique creatures, although templates such as the Giant Wyrms (p. 51), the Vast Sea Serpent (p. 56), or the Monstrous Western Dragon (p. 57) may be useful starting points. Given the power of mecha weapons and the strength of high-tech armor, the opposition will need to be powerful – certainly capable of wrecking a modern city.

While this campaign is primarily combat-oriented, it can also have plenty of anime-style soap opera, politics, and intrigue. The world's nations want to be defended, but military and intelligence agencies would like to acquire mecha and alien biotech for their own use, or at least for "insurance," and plenty of arguments about funding and strategic priorities will ensue.

Tiphon

A blast of baking hot air stirred the sands beneath as Xenaldoran flared his wings hard and landed next to his mate on the craggy shelf. The older dragon peeled back her lips in what passed for a smile, making room for him to lay his belly down on the warm rock by her side.

"Jussst in time," she hissed, flicking her eyes towards the sandy arena beneath them.

On a tournament day like this one, the walls of the arena were lined with the glittering hides of watching dragons. They clustered in caste groups, precise rank being indicated by the height of the watching ledge on which they were permitted a place. The Archon Arad was visibly in attendance, the sharp silhouette of his head throwing shadows against the sand. A roar went up from the crowd as two draconic combatants entered the arena floor.

"These are the rebels?" Xenaldoran murmured the question, tasting the scent of fear and sweat in the air with his tongue.

His mate smiled at him with lidded eyes. "Oh yes . . ."

Then, a roar greeted the first sight of blood. One of the jeweled creatures on the sands had raked the other. Out of sight, loud drums began to play as the fight started in earnest, with flashing teeth, and claws, and tails, and blood on the hot sands.

Dragons Are: Powerful to Very Powerful, Common, Intelligent, and Exotic.

Dragons Represent: Tyranny. More specifically, they embody the tendency of formerly oppressed groups to oppress others in turn, when they get the chance.

PCs Are: Rebels – either from among the oppressed, or within the crumbling hierarchy of the rulers.

The world of Tiphon is an exotic space opera or high fantasy setting. Dragons are the dominant beings, and "farm" lesser species as food and slaves. Although not overtly magical, they have an innate talent for persuasion, and can hypnotize weaker-willed creatures with the power of their voices. Some bloodlines have powers of telepathic mind control. Draconic society is highly stratified. Etiquette and tribal status are complicated and important, and dragon rulers show an inventively vicious streak.

Once, human civilization flourished on Tiphon, and human cities of glass adorned the Far Oases. Hunting parties using advanced technology (or magic) and superior tactics culled the giant winged lizards that made their lairs in the sands. Some young dragons were captured and trained as mounts or pets. Few ever fought their way free, or returned to the wilderness.

But time changes everything. After a war on Tiphon, civilization fell in explosions and flames. Craters replaced the cities. Protective domes shattered like dragon eggshells under armored tanks. Where greenery had been cultivated, the wastelands returned.

Then the dragons arose, having survived the catastrophe in ancestral lairs deep beneath the rocks. Their numbers grew, and they adapted to the new surroundings, displaying the native intelligence that humans had suspected but never proven. Scattered humans had survived, but lost most of their technology. The returning dragons, under the leadership of the old alpha male Arad, gathered these human tribes over generations and domesticated them, in cruel mockery of the fate that awaited captured dragons in previous eons. In addition, the dragons herded other desert creatures that had always been their natural prey. They established their own cities. No one can say whether this shows draconic intelligence, or a heightened ability to imitate the oppressors who they observed over the centuries of their great lifetimes. It is unwise to raise the question.

As predators and carnivores, dragons require large amounts of fresh meat, provided primarily by the massive herds of small reptilian crawlers that form a significant part of each bloodline's wealth. Rank and status are complicated, depending on a dragon's age, sire, coloration, job, religious affiliation, and caste. The system is intricate and seemingly stable.

But all is not well in the dragon Eden. Perhaps the trappings of civilization have softened the breed, but younger dragons are starting to question the wisdom of their elders. For the moment, truly draconian laws enforce order, but a tide of resentment rises, especially since the current leadership shows no signs of failing or retiring. Even the docile slave races, if secretly tutored, might find the courage to organize and rebel. Dragons who wish to exploit this possibility do so in great secrecy, because punishments meted out by the Archon for sedition are cruel and inventive.

Use the Western Dragon templates on pp. 56-57 for these creatures. Magery and spell-based magic are not available, but dragon characters may have Enthrallment skills (pp. CI139-140) or psionic Telepathy. Power 5-7 Telepathy is very common, forming part of the dragons' intricate linguistic systems; power 9 is the normal upper limit. (Higher levels would require a large

Unusual Background, or might simply be prohibited.) The skill Telesend is standard, and Telereceive is almost as common; all the other Telepathy skills may be associated with specific bloodlines. Using advanced telepathic powers against other dragons is considered crass at best, sinister at worst.

A few bloodlines have limited ESP, but are regarded with a certain amount of nervousness. A dragon with this skill either has a negative Reputation in draconic society (as a “weird seer”), or a Secret (with exposure leading to fear, distrust, and shunning; a dragon who previously kept such powers secret may be assumed to have misused them). Most dragons have the disadvantages Selfish or Self-Centered (should not count against disadvantage limits), and many have Bloodlust, Bully, or Jealousy (and many have all three).

Campaigns can involve players in twisted tales of dragon rivalries and new ideologies or PC human rebels, struggling to exploit the overlords’ political divisions and paranoia while relearning old skills such as literacy or seek lost technology. Humans might not develop psionic powers of their own, at the GM’s option; human psis should certainly be rare, and if they do exist, the dragons will probably hunt them down and kill them.

For an epic “Planet of the Drakes” plot, the campaign starts with the crash of a human spaceship in the desert. Arad, secretly terrified that the old masters are returning to punish the dragons (for he was once a captive in a human city, and has a deeply hidden sense of inferiority), unleashes his secret police to clamp down on every hint of human or dragon dissent. The one or two crash survivors move among the slave underworld, sowing confusion while staying one step ahead of the brutal purges. They could care about the deaths in their wake, or they could be descendents of the enemy who brought war to the old, peaceful, human-ruled Tiphon. Or they could be another alien threat among the stars. Dragons and humans could have to learn to collaborate, to save Tiphon from another global war.

Burning Space

Dragons Are: Very Powerful (Godlike from the individual human point of view, but controllable), Fairly Rare, Intelligent, and Very Exotic.

Dragons Represent: Extraordinary power under control. Vast abilities giving access to the universe.

PCs Are: Dragon riders seeking the stars. Traders, explorers, diplomats, smugglers, and spies – or any other type appropriate to a space opera campaign with a fantastical twist.

In this wild space opera setting, dragons are the secret of humanity’s travel to the stars – because they are effectively living starships.

The background has the structure of alternate history, although the laws of nature in this universe are probably very different from our own, and the divergence point was a long time ago. Sometime during the Bronze Age, a nameless mystical visionary who was exiled from the Mesopotamian city of Ur wandered east into the great Persian deserts. There, an array of gods and their servants confronted him, and sought his service. It seemed that he was peculiarly talented as an intermediary between men and gods, and possibly uniquely destined. However, the visionary was clever, with extraordinary nerve; he negotiated a bargain in which he would command the gods’ own servants – the dragons – to transport him and his heirs wherever they wished, in exchange for worship.

At the time when the campaign is set, this story has receded into legend, but dragons of vast power still serve humanity, and can be commanded by a caste of specialists. The family of the “First Dragon Rider” can adopt heirs if they wish, and often do. Hence, a substantial minority of the human race controls dragons.

As for the gods – they are worshiped politely in temples spread across the human spheres, but rarely make themselves known. So long as the gods receive such respect, a few talkative dragons have hinted that certain pacts and agreements, with the First Rider and with each other, keep them from acting too much among humanity.



The dragons have adapted to their role of providing transport. No longer terribly important on Earth itself or on most inhabited worlds, where mystical alchemists have mastered the art of rendering ships capable of flight and rapid motion through the middle air, the dragons specialize in destinations where only their powers can reach – the outer stars.

Dragons’ size ranges from the large to the downright titanic. All possess the ability to span space between the stars (Hyperflight, in game terms), and to survival in space to anyone touching them. They are varied creatures; some are austere and silent, while others love to speak in riddles and flaunt their powers. Most can breathe fire, even in space.

Technology in this setting is a bizarre mix of early Iron Age and futuristic, including elements of alchemical magic and “astrology” (actually astronomy combining Babylonian imagery and style with incredible precision). Personal combat may involve swords that can cut through any armor, force fields generated by amulets, or crystalline staves that project lightning. Plots follow the usual space opera pattern – exploration, warfare against would-be conquerors, contact with alien races, and so on – plus a fantastical twist or two. Renegade gods could manifest among the worlds of man and seek to acquire power by building personal cults, or Lovecraftian demons could emerge from the black depths of distant nebulae and seek to cast down the upstart children of Earth – human, draconic, and divine.

APPENDIX: FOURTH EDITION CONVERSIONS

These notes focus on the specific rules mechanics involved for using this book's material with *GURPS Fourth Edition*. They cannot adjust every rule reference or character suggestion, but the two editions are generally similar enough that this should not usually be a problem.

The most notable change is the revised treatment of lifting strength, permitting very large creatures to be defined with relatively moderate ST scores.

CHAPTER 1

Snake-Form Naga

81 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+4 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [24]; DX+3 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [36]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+2 [4]; Basic Speed-1.00 [-20].

Advantages: Alternate Form (Human) [15]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Toxic Attack 3d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Follow-Up, Sharp Teeth, +0%; Resistible, HT-3; -15%) [21].

Disadvantages: Cold-Blooded [-5]; Horizontal [-10]; Vermiform [-35].

Half-Human Naga

145 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+3 [30]; DX+3 [60]; HT+4 [40].

Advantages: Vermiform (drop No Manipulators) [15].

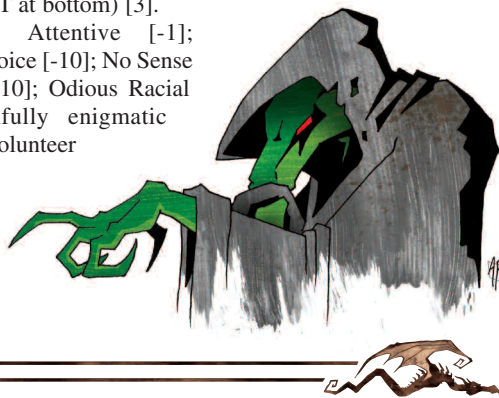
Draconic Lizardman

108 points

Attribute Modifiers: DX+1 [20]; IQ+2 [40]; HT+1 [10].

Advantages: DR 1 [5]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Magery 2 [25]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+2 HT at top of range, +1 HT at bottom) [3].

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Odious Racial Habit (Willfully enigmatic and rarely volunteer information) [-5].



CHAPTER 3

The notes throughout this chapter on rules treatments for dragons mostly also apply in *GURPS Fourth Edition* games, although some terms and values may have changed.

Templates

One of the largest changes is ST; quadratic ST allows the purchase of smaller levels of ST to produce the same amount of lift. ST is the base for Hit Points, not Fatigue Points, and the Size limitation applies to ST, replacing the enhanced ST rules. Size also applies to Hit Points.

Crawling Wurm

68 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+12 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -30%) [36]; DX+2 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [24]; IQ-5 [-100]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+3; HP+2 (Size, -30%) [3]; Will+5 [25]; Per+6 [30].

Advantages: Acute Hearing 1 [2]; Acute Taste and Smell 3 [6]; DR 6 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [18]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Striker (Tail; Crushing; Long +3, +300%) [20]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+HT at bottom of range, +2 HT at top) [3].

Disadvantages: Cannot Speak [-15]; Horizontal [-10]; Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Vermiform [-35].

Variations

Constrictors: Constriction Attack [15].

Swimmers: Amphibious [10], Breath-Holding [2/level], or Doesn't Breathe (Gills, -50%) [10].

Breath Weapons or Poison: These can all be modeled with Innate Attack. Choking breath is Toxic Attack 1d (Area Effect, 3 yards, +75%; Contact Agent, +150%; Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Drifting, +20%; Persistent, +40%; Resistible, HT-1, -25%) [18].

Venomous blood is Toxic Attack 1d (Only when bleeding, -50%; Melee, Reach C, -30%; Contact Agent, -30%; Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Resistible, HT-1, -25%) [3].

One approach for a poisonous bite is Toxic Attack 2d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Follow-Up, Teeth, +0%; Resistible, HT-2, -20%) [14].

One way to do fiery breath is Burning Attack 2d (Jet, +0%; Costs Fatigue, 4 FP, -20%) [8].

The wurm blight is Magery 1 (Plant College Only, -40%) [11] and Blight-20 [64].

Scavengers: Reduced Consumption (Cast Iron Stomach, -50%) 4 [4].

Creature of Venom: Immunity to Poison [15].

Lifespan: Extended Lifespan [2/level] or Unaging [15].

Small Wurm: Reduce ST to +8 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -10%) [40], SM to +1, the usual Striker to Striker (Tail; Crushing; Long +1, +100%) [10], and Increased Consumption to 1 [-10]. Remove extra HP. **69 points.**

Giant Wurm: Increase ST to +19 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -50%) [38], SM to +5, Sharp Teeth to Fangs [2], Striker to (Tail; Crushing; Long +4, +400%) [25]. Reduce HP to +1 (Size, -50%) [1]. *74 points.*

Lindorm: Drop No Manipulators from Vermiform; add No Fine Manipulators [-30] and Short Arms [-10]. This variation may also be given levels of Enhanced Move (Ground) [20/level]. *78 points.*

Gargouille: Use the Giant Wurm template. Add Doesn't Breathe (Gills, -50%) [10], Crushing Attack 2d (Water Blast, Cone, 5 yards, +100%; Double Knockback, +20%; Reduced Range, $\frac{1}{2}$, -10%; Underwater, +20%; No Wounding, -50%) [18], Magery 1 (Water College Only, -40%) [11], and Waves-25 [84]. *197 points.*

Lambton Worm: Reduce IQ to -7 [-140]. Increase Will to +7 [35] and Per to +8 [40]. Add Constriction Attack [15], Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Neck, No Vitals) [15], Magery 1 (Plant College Only, -40%) [11], Regeneration [100], Withers Plant-20 [72], Appearance (Hideous; Universal, +25%) [-20], Odious Personal Habit (Devastates the countryside and eats people if not given regular supplies of milk) [-15], Quirk (Likes drinking milk in large quantities) [-1], and the Animalistic Lens (Bestial at [-15]) [-66]. May also qualify for the Diabolic Lens [Varies]. *159 points.*

Winged Serpents: Add Flight (Winged, -25%) [30], possibly also with the limitation (Cannot Hover, -15%). Also consider Enhanced Move (Flying) [20/level].

Wyvern 209 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+8 (Size, -40%) [48]; DX+4 [80]; IQ-4 [-80]; HT+4 [40].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+4; Will+4 [20]; Per+7 [35]; Basic Speed+3.00 (Only when flying, -30%) [42]; Basic Move-4 [-20].

Advantages: Claws [3]; DR 3 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [9]; Flight (Winged, -25%) [30]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Toxic Attack 2d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Follow-Up, Spear, +0%; Resistible, HT-2, -20%) [14]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Striker (Tail/Spear; Impaling; Long +2, +200%) [24]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+HT at bottom of range, +2 $\frac{1}{2}$ HT at top) [3].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip 2 [-10]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Foot Manipulators (Both) [-6]; Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Short Arms (Both) [-10].

Variations

Smaller Wyverns: Reduce SM to +2, ST to +5 (Size, -20%) [40], DR to 2 [6], Striker to (Tail/Spear; Impaling; Long +1, +100%) [16], Toxic Attack to 1d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Follow-Up, Spear, +0%; Resistible, HT-2, -20%) [7], and Increased Consumption to 1 [-10]. *193 points.*

Larger Wyverns: Increase ST, Size Modifier, Long on Striker (Tail/Spear; Impaling), and Innate Attack venom. Remember to adjust ST for SM.

Shooting Quills: Add Quill Attack 1 point (Small Piercing; Increased Range, $\frac{1}{2}$, +10%; No Wounding, -50%) [1]; change Toxic Attack to 2d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Follow-Up, Quills, +10%; Resistible, HT-2, -20%) [15] for the regular Wyvern or 1d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Follow-Up, Quills, +10%; Resistible, HT-2, -20%) [8] for the Small Wyvern, for a 1- or 2-point increase respectively.

Professor Friedl's Mechanical Dragon 392 points

ST 68 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -10%) [290]; DX 9 [-20]; IQ 8 [-40]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM+1; Dmg 7d+1/9d+2; BL 925; HP 68 [0]; Will 8 [0]; Per 8 [0]; FP 0 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Absolute Timing [2]; Burning Attack 2d (Accurate +2, 10%; Cyclic, 1 second, 18 cycles, +1700%; Armor Divisor 5, +150%; Increased Range, $\frac{1}{2}$ Max, +5%; Increased Range, $\frac{1}{5}$ 1/2D, +10%; Jet, +0%; Not against sealed, -30%) [195]; DR 10 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [30]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Eidetic Memory 2 [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Intuitive Mathematician [5]; Machine [25]; Temperature Tolerance 5 (+2 $\frac{1}{2}$ HT at bottom of range, +3 $\frac{1}{2}$ HT at top) [5].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Farsighted) [-25]; Cannot Speak (Mute) [-25]; Colorblindness [-10]; Hard of Hearing [-10]; Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Quadruped [-25]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Petty Drake 122 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST-3 [-30]; DX+5 [100]; IQ-4 [-80]; HT+4 [40].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM-2; HP+6 [12]; Will+4 [20]; Per+6 [30]; Basic Speed+1.00 [20].

Advantages: Burning Attack 1 point (Jet, +0%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Reduced Range, $\frac{1}{10}$, -30%) [2]; DR 1 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [3]; Extended Lifespan 2 [4]; Flight (Winged, -25%) [30]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Reduced Consumption 2 [4]; Resistant to Disease [5]; Sharp Teeth [1].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip 2 [-10]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Semi-Upright [-5]; Short Arms (Both) [-10].

Variations

Wild Drakes: Add Bestial [-10], Innumerate [-5], reduce IQ to -5 [-100], increase Will to +5 [25] and Per to +7 [35]. *97 points.*

Smaller and Larger Drakes: Their sizes range from SM-4 to SM-1. Smaller Drakes will probably be no less strong, but larger ones may gain ST and Fire Breath damage and range, but probably no more than 1d-2 and 2/20 range.

Cute Shoulder Dragon: Add Quadruped [-35], remove Extended Lifespan, Short Arms, Bad Grip, and Semi-Upright. Reduce ST to -8 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [-48], change DX to +5 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [60], Reduce Basic Speed to +0.00 [0], add FP+3 [9], Pitiable [5], and Laziness [-10]. *34 points.*

Venomous Dragonet: Remove Burning Attack. Add Fatigue Attack 2d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Follow-Up, Teeth, +0%; Resistible, HT-2, -20%) [34]. *154 points.*

Sea Serpent 87 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+25 (No Fine Manipulators; -40%, Size, -80%) [50]; DX+3 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [36]; IQ-7 [-140]; HT+6 [60].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+8; Will+7 [35]; Per+5 [25].

Advantages: Acute Hearing 5 [10]; Acute Taste and Smell 3 [6]; Constriction Attack [15]; DR 3 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [9]; Doesn't Breathe (Gills, -50%) [10]; Fangs [2]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Nictitating Membrane 2 [2]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Pressure Support 2 [10]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+2 $\frac{1}{2}$ HT at the bottom of the range, +HT at the top) [3].

Disadvantages: Cannot Speak [-15]; Colorblindness [-10]; Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Vermiform [-35]; No Legs (Aquatic) [0].

Variations

Air or Water Breathers: Exclusive air breathers replace the Gills limitation on Doesn't Breathe with varying levels of the Oxygen Storage limitation, the Breath Holding advantage, and possibly reduced Pressure Support. Exclusive water breathers switch the Gills to [0], reducing the template cost to 77 points.

Very Small Sea Serpent: Reduce SM to +4, ST to +9 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -40%) [18]. *55 points.*

Small Sea Serpent: Reduce SM to +6, ST to +16 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -60%) [32]. *69 points.*

Giant Sea Serpent: Increase SM to +9, ST to +33 [66]. *103 points.*

Vast Sea Serpent: Increase SM to +10, ST to +40 [80]. *117 points.*

Bena: Reduce SM to +3, ST to +10 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -30%) [30], HT to +5 [50], Will to +5 [25], Per to +3 [15], and Fangs to Sharp Teeth [1]. Increase DX to +4 [48] and IQ to -5 [-100], add Enhanced Move 1/2 (Swimming) [10], Magery 1 (Water College Only, -40%) [11], Crushing Attack 1d+2 (Double Knockback 2, +40%; Jet, 0%; Underwater, +20%; Variable, +5%; Costs Fatigue, 3 FP, -15%) [12], Tide-30 [104], and optionally Vulnerability (Wood; wounding □2) [-30]. The Crushing Attack represents a water blast. *195 or 225 points.*

Western Dragons p. 56

Western Dragon: Per+2 [10]; Flight (Winged, -25%) [30]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictitating Membrane 2 [2]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Temperature Tolerance 6 (+2□HT at bottom of range, +4□HT at top) [6]; Unaging [15]; Bad Grip [-10]; and Horizontal [-10]. *72 points.*

Hatchling/Man-Sized

Western Dragon 108 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+3 [30]; DX-1 [-20]; HT+3 [30].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Burning Attack 1d (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, □1/10, -30%) [6]; DR 1 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [3]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Western Dragon [72].

Disadvantages: Reduced Air Move 2 [-4]; Short Arms [-10].

Notes: Size 2 hexes; weight 150-200 lbs.

Young/Very Small

Western Dragon 219 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+6 (Size, -20%) [48]; DX+1 [20]; IQ+1 [20]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+2; Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Burning Attack 1d (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, □1/10, -30%) [6]; DR 2 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [6]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Western Dragon [72].

Disadvantages: Reduced Air Move 2 [-4].

Notes: Size 3-5 hexes; weight 500-800 lbs.

Adolescent/Small

Western Dragon 298/288/278 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+10 (Size, -20%/-30%/-40%) [80/70/60]; DX+2 [40]; IQ+2 [40]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+2/3/4.

Advantages: Burning Attack 2d-1 (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, □1/10, -30%) [11]; DR 3 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [9]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Western Dragon [72].

Disadvantages: Increased Consumption 1 [-10].

Notes: Size 4-8 hexes; weight 800-1,500 lbs.

Young Adult/Medium-Sized

Western Dragon 327/313 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+13 (Size, -40%/-50%) [78/65]; DX+3 [60]; IQ+3 [60]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+4/5; HP+1 (Size, -40%/-50%) [2/1]; Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Burning Attack 2d (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, □1/10, -30%) [12]; DR 4 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [12]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Western Dragon [72].

Disadvantages: Increased Consumption 2 [-20].

Notes: Size 8-12 hexes; weight 1,000-2,000 lbs.

Adult/Large

Western Dragon 394 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+16 (Size, -50%) [80]; DX+4 [80]; IQ+4 [80]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+5; HP+2 (Size, -50%) [2]; Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Burning Attack 3d-1 (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, □1/10, -30%) [17]; DR 6 (Cannot Wear Armor -40%) [18]; Enhanced Move 1/2 (Flight) [10]; Fangs [2]; Talons [8]; Western Dragon [72].

Disadvantages: Increased Consumption 2 [-20].

Notes: Size 10-14 hexes; weight 1,500-2,500 lbs.

Old Adult/Very Large

Western Dragon 437/419 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+18 (Size, -50%/-60%) [90/72]; DX+4 [80]; IQ+5 [100]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+5/6; HP+4 (Size, -50%/-60%) [4]; Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Burning Attack 3d (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, □1/10, -30%) [18]; DR 6 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [18]; Enhanced Move 1 (Air) [20]; Fangs [2]; Talons [8]; Western Dragon [72].

Disadvantages: Increased Consumption 2 [-20].

Notes: Size 13-16 hexes; weight 2,500-3,000 lbs.

Monstrous Western Dragon 460 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+20 (Size, -60%) [80]; DX+4 [80]; IQ+6 [120]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+5; HP+2 (Size, -60%) [2]; Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Burning Attack 3d (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, □1/5, -20%) [20]; DR 7 (Cannot Wear Armor) [21]; Enhanced Move 1/2 (Air) [30]; Fangs [2]; Talons [8]; Western Dragon [72].

Disadvantages: Increased Consumption 2 [-20].

Notes: Size 15+hexes; weight 3,000+lbs.

Variations

Wilderness Skills: Survival is (Per/A), making it Per-1 [1]. Note that all Western Dragons have Per+2.

Spells: No change.

Constrictors: Constriction Attack [15] and Double-Jointed [15].

Multiple Attacks: Use Extra Attack [25/level].

Poor Flyers: These limitations remain the same.

Natural Trackers: Discriminatory Smell [15] remains the same.

The Dragonet of Mount Pilatus: Start with the Hatchling/Man-Sized Dragon template [108] and change DX to +5 [100], Burning Attack to 3d (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Reduced Range □1/10, -30%) [20], and add Toxic Attack 4d (Only when bleeding, -50%; Contact Agent, -30%, Cyclic, 1 hour, 10 cycles, resistible, +90%; Melee, C range, -30%; Resistible, HT-4, -10%) [12]. Other possible modifications include the Animalistic Lens [-136] and the Malevolent Lens [-30], either separately or together. *254 points.*

Fairy Tale Dragon: Add Attractive [4] to the Young/Very Small Western Dragon template [219], the Adolescent/Small Dragon template [298/288/278], or the Young Adult/Medium-Sized Dragon template [327/313]. This dragon may optionally have a Dependency on Mana and the Whimsical Lens [-22].

Legged Worm: Take any template, delete Flight, delete the Burning Attack, add Toxic Attack (Area Effect +50%/level; either Contact Agent, +150%; Blood Agent, +100%; or Respiratory Agent, +50%; Cyclic, 1 hour, variable cycles, resistible +10%/cycle; Resistible, based off HT, -5%/level starting at HT-5) with a number of dice equal to that of the Fire Breath. Also replace Bad Grip 2 with No Fine Manipulators [-30]; add the No Fine Manipulators -40% limitation to ST and DX. Add the Extra Legs (4 legs) [5] advantage. They are also likely to have the Animalistic Lens [Varies] or the Malevolent Lens [-30].

Ice Dragon: Freezing Breath is modeled as follows: Fatigue Attack (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Hazard, Freezing, +20%; Costs Fatigue 2, -10%; and whatever Reduced Range a normal dragon of that type has). Reconfigure Temperature Tolerance so that the larger tolerance zone is lower. Such dragons usually have Survival (Arctic).



Valor

314 points

ST 21 [6]; **DX** 13 [20]; **IQ** 12 [0]; **HT** 16 [10].

Secondary Attributes: SM+4; Dmg 2d/4d-1; BL 88; HP 21 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 16 [0]; Basic Speed 7.25 [0]; Basic Move 7 (Running)/14 (Flight) [0]; Dodge 11.

Advantages: Adolescent/Small Dragon with the Hoarding Dragon lens [253]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Languages (3 at Accented/Broken) [9]; Status 1 [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Personal) [-10]; Draconic (Native/Broken) [-2]; Odious Personal Habit (Solipsism) [-10]; Uncongenial [-1].

Quirks: Insists that a power and freedom are always more important than intelligence; Loves flying and high places. [-2]

Skills: Aerobatics-13 [4]; Area Knowledge (Mountains)-14 [4]; Flight-15 [1]; History (Draconic)-10 [1]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-12 [1].

Snarl

353 points

ST 20 [0]; **DX** 12 [0]; **IQ** 14 [40]; **HT** 15 [0].

Secondary Attributes: SM+4; Dmg 2d-1/3d+2; BL 80; HP 20 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 15 [0]; Basic Speed 6.75 [0]; Basic Move 6 (Running)/12 (Flight) [0]; Dodge 9.

Advantages: Adolescent/Small Dragon with the hoarding Dragon lens [253]; Charisma 2 [10]; Contact (Adventuring rogue, Streetwise, 12, Usually Reliable) [4]; Draconic (Native) [0]; Fearlessness 1 [2]; Languages (6 at Accented/Native) [30]; Status 1 [5]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Disadvantages: Broad-Minded [-1]; Congenial [-1]; Fanaticism (Own advantage) [-15]; Nosy [-1]; Selfish (12) [-5].

Quirks: Finishes combats quickly and brutally if he cannot avoid them; Proud of his way with words; Regards lesser beings with affection – as nice tools. [-3]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Foothills)-15 [2]; Connoisseur (Visual Arts)-13 [1]; Detect Lies-14 [1]; Diplomacy-12 [1]; Flight-14 [1]; Innate Attack-13 [2]; Naturalist-12 [1]; Navigation (Land)/TL0-13 [1]; Poetry-13 [1]; Public Speaking-16 [2]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-14 [1]; Tactics-12 [1].

Chinese Dragons p. 59

Allergic Susceptibility (Iron) has been replaced with Revulsion (Iron).

Chinese Water Snake

5 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST-1 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [-6]; DX-1 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [-12]; IQ-2 [-40]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+0; HP-1 [-2]; Will+2 [10]; Per+3 [15].

Advantages: DR 1 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [3]; Doesn't Breathe (Gills; Water Only) [0]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Temperature Tolerance 2 (+HT at top and bottom of range) [2]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Unattractive [-4]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Vermiform [-35]; No Legs (Aquatic) [0]; Revulsion (Iron) [-15].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Racially Learned Skills: Survival (River) (A) Per+1 [4]-12.

Variations

Younger and older specimens may vary in ST, SM, and resulting Size modifier on ST.

May have Bestial [-10/-15], Impulsiveness [-10*], Incurious [-5*], lower levels of IQ [-20/level], or Short Attention Span [-10*]; will almost certainly have Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25]. These may be added to the template. Yin-dominated Water Snakes will have Bloodlust [-10*], Bully [-10*], Laziness [-10], or Sadism [-15*], as well as possibly Cold-Blooded [-5/-10].

Kiao

72 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+3 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -20%) [12]; IQ-1 [-20]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+2; HP+3 (Size, -20%) [5]; Per+3 [15]; Will+1 [5].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Claws [3]; DR 2 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [6]; Doesn't Breathe (Gills, -50%; Can only survive out of water for 1 hour at a time, -20%) [6]; Double-Jointed [15]; Enhanced Move 1/2 (Swimming) [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Temperature Tolerance 2 (+HT at top and bottom of range) [2]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Cannot Speak [-15]; Horizontal [-10]; Increased Consumption 1 [-10]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Revulsion (Iron) [-15]; Short Arms (Both) [-10].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Racially Learned Skills: Survival (River) (A) Per+2 [8]-14.

Variations

Kiao may have Telecommunications (Telesend) [30] and Mind-Reading [30]. These may or may not be a part of the Telepathy power; if they are, they get the -10% limitation. This should be included in older dragon templates as well if the younger ones have it. Alternatively, it can be modeled by Telepathy as an innate spell, requiring Magery as well.

A Kiao, as an “adolescent” dragon, may have such disadvantages as Bestial [-10], Impulsiveness [-10*], Incurious [-5*], or Short Attention Span [-10*]. Shyness [Varies] may also be appropriate. If afflicted by Yin scales, the Kiao may have such disadvantages as Bloodlust [-10*], Bully [-10*], Laziness [-10], or Sadism [-15*].

A Kiao’s parents may qualify as a Patron [Varies].

Kiao-Lung/Kioh-Lung 356 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+6 (Size, -30%) [42]; DX+2 [40]; IQ+6 [120]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+3; HP+6 (Size, -30%) [9].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Attractive [4]; DR 4 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [12]; Doesn’t Breathe (Gills, -50%) [10]; Double-Jointed [15]; Enhanced Move 1 1/2 (Ground) [30]; Enhanced Move 1 (Swimming) [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Speak Underwater [5]; Temperature Tolerance 2 (+HT at top and bottom of range) [2]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip 2 [-10]; Horizontal [-10]; Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Revulsion (Iron) [-15]; Short Arms (Both) [-10].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Racially Learned Skills: Survival (River) (A) Per [2]-16.

Variations

Kioh-Lung: Kioh-Lung have Strikers (Horns, Crushing) [5] and may have slightly higher ST and IQ and more skills, as well as possibly a level or two of Magery and perhaps a few simple skills. They might even increase a level of Size Modifier, which would have a resulting effect on their ST.

Younger dragons: Excess Yin energy may cause unusual disadvantages. See above.

Li Lung 696 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+22 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -30%) [66]; DX+4 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [48]; IQ+6 [120]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+3.

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; DR 6 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [18]; DR 90 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%; Only vs. effects of earthquakes, cave-ins, and landslides, -60%) [90]; Dark Vision (Color Vision, +20%) [30]; Flight (Winged, -25%) [30]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity (To side effects of earthquakes, cave-ins, and landslides) [10]; Magery 3 (Earth College Only, -40%) [23]; Morph [100]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Sharp Claws [5]; Striker (Horns; Crushing) [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+2 HT at bottom of range, +HT at top) [3]; Tunnel Move 1 [35]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Quadruped [-35]; Revulsion (Iron) [-15].

Racially Learned Skills: Geology/TL2 (H) IQ-1 [2]-15; Prospecting/TL2 (A) IQ-2 [1]-15.

Innate Spells: Earthquake-40 [88].

Lung Wang

382 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+40 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -80%) [80]; DX+2 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [24]; IQ+8 [160]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+9; Basic Move-3 (Only on land, -30%) [-10].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Animal Empathy [5]; DR 10 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [30]; Doesn’t Breathe (Gills, -50%) [10]; Flight [40]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Nictitating Membrane 3 [3]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Speak Underwater [5]; Striker (Horns; Crushing) [5]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+2 HT at bottom of range, +HT at top) [3]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Quadruped [-35]; Revulsion (Iron) [-15]; Unattractive [-4].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Racially Learned Skills: Naturalist (H) IQ-2 [1]-16.

Variations

Size Variations: Although smaller templates are possible by reducing SM and ST, this template is actually very conservative. A much larger version would continue increasing in SM and ST.

Shapeshifting Lung Wang: Add Morph [100]. The basic version of Morph should be sufficient, although other modifications are possible. Point total: 497. Other possibilities involve adding Magery and Animal College spells.

P’an Lung

892 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+16 (Size, -60%) [64]; DX+10 [200]; IQ+8 [160]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+6; HP+2 (Size, -60%) [2].

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Amphibious [10]; Attractive [4]; Crushing Attack 3d (Aura, +80%; Melee, Reach C, -30%; Underwater, +20%; Extinguished for 2d turns by equal damage of fire, -30%; No Blunt Trauma, -20%; No Knockback, -10%) [17]; DR 4 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [12]; Doesn’t Breathe (Gills, -50%) [10]; Double-Jointed [15]; Enhanced Move 1/2 (Running) [10]; Flight [40]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Magery 3 [35]; Morph [100]; Nictitating Membrane 2 [2]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Secret Dragon Language (Native) [6]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Speak Underwater [5]; Striker (Horns; Crushing) [5]; Temperature Tolerance 3 (+2 HT at bottom of range, +HT at top) [3]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip 2 [-10]; Horizontal [-10]; Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Revulsion (Iron) [-15]; Short Arms (Both) [-10].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Racially Learned Skills: Meteorology/TL2 (A) IQ-1 [1]-17.

Innate Spells: Bless-25 [20]; Clouds-30 [44]; Curse-25 [20]; Predict Weather-21 [4]; Rain-35 [64].

Notes: The Crushing Attack emulates Water Fire p. 61.

Variations

Duty (Tending the Weather) and **Enemies** (rival dragons) are appropriate.

Shen Lung

687 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+17 (Size, -60%) [68]; DX+5 [100]; IQ+10 [200]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+6; HP+5 (Size, -60%) [4].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Appearance (Handsome/Beautiful; Universal, +25%) [15]; Crushing Attack 3d (Aura, +80%; Melee, Reach C, -30%; Underwater, +20%; Extinguished for 2d turns by equal damage of fire, -30%; No Blunt Trauma, -20%; No Knockback, -10%) [17]; DR 6 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [18];

Doesn't Breathe (Gills, -50%) [10]; Double-Jointed [15]; Enhanced Move 1 (Flight) [20]; Enhanced Move 1/2 (Running) [10]; Enhanced Move 1 (Swimming) [20]; Flight [40]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Magery 2 [25]; Nictitating Membrane 2 [2]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Pressure Support 1 [5]; Secret Dragon Language (Native) [6]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Speak Underwater [5]; Striker (Horns; Crushing) [5]; Temperature Tolerance 5 (+3 HT at the bottom of the range, +2 HT at the top) [5]; Terror (-5 to Fright Checks; Only Affects Poisonous Animals, -50%; Always On, -20%) [24]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip 2 [-10]; Horizontal [-10]; Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Revulsion (Iron) [-15].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Racially Learned Skills: Area Knowledge (Assigned river or lake) (E) IQ [1]-20; Naturalist (H) IQ-2 [1]-18; Survival (River) (A) Per [2]-20.

Notes: The Crushing Attack emulates Water Fire, p. 61.

Variations

Additional supernatural abilities such as Medium [10], Spirit Empathy [10], or Shapeshifting are likely.

Shen Lung should have a good selection of spells, especially from the Animal, Meta-Spell, Water, and other Elemental colleges as well as spirit-related spells.



Tien Lung

998 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+29 (Size, -60%) [116]; DX+7 [140]; IQ+15 [300]; HT+5 [50].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+6; HP+3 (Size, -60%) [3].

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Amphibious [10]; Animal Empathy [5]; Appearance (Handsome/Beautiful; Universal, +25%) [15]; Burning Attack 3d-1 (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, 1/5, -20%) [19]; Charisma 1 [5]; DR 6 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [18]; Doesn't Breathe (Gills, -50%) [10]; Double-Jointed [15]; Enhanced Move 1 (Flight) [20]; Enhanced Move 1 (Running) [20]; Enhanced Move 1 (Swimming) [20]; Flight [40]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Magery 3 [35]; Morph [100]; Nictitating Membrane 3 [3]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Pressure Support 2 [10]; Secret Dragon Language (Native) [6]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Speak Underwater [5]; Striker (Horns; Crushing) [5]; Temperature Tolerance 5 (+3 HT at bottom of range, +2 HT at top) [5]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip 1 [-5]; Horizontal [-10]; Increased Consumption 2 [-20]; Revulsion (Iron) [-15].

Quirks: Unnerved by the smell of wax. [-1]

Racially Learned Skills: Leadership (A) IQ [1]-25*; Naturalist (H) IQ-2 [1]-23.

Innate Spells: Bless-26 [1]; Curse-26 [1].

* Includes +1 from Charisma.

Variations

Most Tien Lung will have Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50]; Status 7 [30] or 8 [35] (both including the bonus from Filthy Rich) and powerful

supernatural Allies and Patrons. Unless Yin-overwhelmed, a Tien Lung will probably have a number of "good" disadvantages such as Code of Honor or Sense of Duty, and less desirable disadvantages are significantly less probable. They will also have plenty of additional spells, especially from the Animal, Elemental, and Meta-Spell colleges.

Variant Oriental Dragons

p. 62

Deafness: Deafness [-20] for water snake, kiao, and kiao-lung, as well as Cannot Speak [-15] for the kiao-lung.

Beast Lords: Speak With Animals [Varies].

Languages: Language advantages should probably be of either Accented or Native level for most adult dragons.

Literacy: Literacy is specified as a part of individual Language advantages.

Dragons as Spirits: Add Spirit, but remove the Usually On limitation from Insubstantiality and change it to Switchable on Invisibility for a total cost of 295 points. Telekinesis [5/level], Warp (often with Affects Others) [100], Jumper [100], Precognition [25], Shapeshifting, and many spells and other supernatural powers are very appropriate.

Yu Lung: Will begin life as a carp; use the Water Snake template, but remove Vermiform, No Legs (Aquatic), and Unaging; add Ichthyoid [-50], levels of Extended Lifespan [2/level], and additional levels of Will [5/level].

Japanese Dragons: For a typical tatsu, use the P'an Lung template but remove the water fire attack, reducing its cost to 875 points. For tatsu with no legs, delete Bad Grip, Sharp Claws, and Short Arms; add Vermiform [-50]; change ST to +16 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -60%) [32], and DX to +10 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [120]; the template cost becomes 745 points. They often have a Code of Honor [-5] and may also have Status -4 [-20] depending on the campaign; if used, add them to the template.

"Realistic" Dragon -171 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+6 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -30%) [18]; DX-1 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [-12]; IQ-5 [-100]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+3; Will+5 [25]; Per+5 [25]; Basic Move-3 [-15].

Advantages: DR 2 (Cannot Wear Armor, -40%) [6]; Flight (Small Wings, -10%; Clumsy, -25%; Lighter-than-air, -10%) [22]; Burning Attack 1d (Jet, +0%; Reduced Range, 1/2, -10%; Limited Use, 6/day, -10%) [4]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Sharp Claws [5]; Sharp Teeth [1].

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Bestial [-10]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Cold-Blooded [-5]; Colorblindness [-10]; Dead Broke [-25]; Hidebound [-5]; Increased Consumption 1 [-10]; Innumerate [-5]; Quadruped [-35]; Reduced Air Move -1 [-2]; Short Arms (Both) [-10]; Sleepy [-8]; Vulnerability (Fire/Heat, 2) [-30].

Variations

Unusual Biochemistry [-5], Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15], and Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10] may all be appropriate. The possible/variable explosion at death would be best treated as a 0-point feature.

Dinosaurs, Pterosaurs, and Megalania

p. 63

Apatosaurus

ST 61+; DX 9; IQ 3; HT 17.

Will 10; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5.

SM+7 (30 Hexes); 18-36 tons.

Traits: DR 4, Peripheral Vision, Quadruped, Striker (Tail, Long +8), Wild Animal.

Tyrannosaurus

ST 35-43; DX 14; IQ 3; HT 15.

Will 10; Per 14; Speed 7.25; Dodge 11; Move 7.

SM+5 (13+ hexes); 4-6 tons.

Traits: Bad Grip 3, Combat Reflexes, DR 4, Enhanced Move 1.5 (Ground Speed 17), Fangs, Sharp Claws, Short Arms, Weak Arms, Wild Animal.

Quetzalcoatlus

ST 9+; DX 14; IQ 3; HT 12.

Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.

SM+5 (15 hexes); 50-190 lbs.

Traits: Flight (Controlled Gliding, Air Move 13); No Fine Manipulators.

Megalanina

ST 21; DX 13; IQ 3; HT 16.

Will 12; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.

SM+3 (6 hexes); 1,000 lbs.

Traits: Toxic Attack 2d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 6 cycles; Follow-Up, Teeth; Resistible, HT-1); Wild Animal.

Lenses

pp. 64-68

Animalistic

Varies

Attributes: IQ should be reduced to 5 or below.

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Bestial [-10/-15]; Dead Broke [-25]; Hidebound [-5]; Innumerate [-5]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15].

Variations

Other disadvantages are possible, including Bad Smell [-10], Bad Temper [-10*], and Odious Personal or Racial Habits [-5 to -15]. Additional disadvantages can be an individual customization or can be added to the template. Tamed Animalistic Dragons will have Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10] instead of Social Stigma (Barbarian).

The Inner Beast: Stress Atavism [Variable].

Hoarding

-25 points

Disadvantages: Greed (12) [-15] and Miserliness (12) [-10].

Variations

Preference for a specific type of treasure qualifies as a Quirk, while Paranoia [-10] is a common addition. Long-term development of skills such as Connoisseur (Various specialties) (IQ/A) or Accounting (IQ/H), advantages such as Single-Minded [5], and disadvantages such as Clueless [-10], Jealousy [-10] or even Gullibility [-10*] or Addiction (Treasure) [Varies] are likely.

Whimsical

-22 points

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Compulsive Behavior (Playing with bright shiny objects, 12 or less) [-10]; Distractible [-1]; Vanity [-1].

Variations

Odious Personal Habit (Capricious) [-15].

Benevolent

-15 points

Take a total of -15 points from Charitable [-15*], Code of Honor [-5 to -15], Disciplines of Faith [Varies], Duty [Varies], Fanaticism [-15], Pacifism [-10 or 15], Sense of Duty [Varies], or Vow [Varies]. Individual cases may well have other appropriate disadvantages such as Honesty [-10*] or Truthfulness [-5*]. Possible advantages include raised levels of IQ, Blessed [Varies], Higher Purpose [5], Patron

(Divine) [Varies], Single-Minded [5], Spirit Empathy [10], and magical abilities.

Disinterested

-20 points

Disadvantages: Choose -20 from the following: one of Callous [-5], Oblivious [-5], or Odious Racial Habit (Solipsism) [-10]; either Loner [-5*] or Uncongenial [-1]; and Attentive [-1], Bad Temper [-10*], Chauvinistic [-1], Clueless [-10], Dreamer [-1], Dull [-1], Hidebound [-5], Incurious [-5*], No Sense of Humor [-10], and Odious Personal or Racial Habit (No small talk) [-5].

Variations

More extreme levels of disinterest can be demonstrated by adding Low Empathy [-20]. This lens works well with Hoarding [-25] or Solitary Wanderer [-20], depending on the dragon's focus.

Subtle

Varies

Subtle dragons often have high levels of IQ [20/level] and Fearlessness [2/level]. Other possibilities include Detect (Magic or Supernatural) [Varies], Danger sense [15], Intuition [15], Medium [10], Oracle [15], and even Illuminated [15]. They typically have Obsessions [-5* or -10*] but relatively few other disadvantages; those that they have are often Attentive [-1], Dreamer [-1], Overconfidence [-5*], Staid [-1], or Stubbornness [-5].

Malevolent

-30 points

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12) [-10], Bully (12) [-10], Intolerance (Total) [-10].

Variations

Malevolent dragons may be made more or less evil by changing the Frequency of Submission numbers; to be truly evil, they should probably not go below 9. Bad Temper may also be upgraded to Berserk [-10*]. Other possibilities include Bloodlust [-10*], Fanaticism (Self) [-15], Megalomania [-10], Pyromania [-5*], and Sadism [-15*] are other possibilities. Malevolent dragons are very likely to gain Enemies and/or negative Reputations.

Diabolical

Varies

Excommunicated is no longer an independent disadvantage; use Social Stigma (Excommunicated) instead. Diabolical dragons may also have supernatural disadvantages to represent possible curses or weaknesses.

Keepers of Secrets

-20 points

Disadvantages: Choose -20 points from the following: Broad-Minded [-1], Callous [-5], Careful [-1], Duty [Varies], Fanaticism (Ensuring the "correct" use of knowledge) [-15], Hidebound [-5], Incurious [-5*], Loner [-5*], No Sense of Humor [-10], Oblivious [-5], Obsession (Controlling knowledge, 9 or less) [-15], Odious Personal Habit (Cryptic) [-5], Sense of Duty (To correct use of knowledge) [-15], Stubbornness [-5], Uncongenial [-1], or Workaholic [-5].

Appointed Guardian

-15 points

Disadvantages: Duty (15) [-15], Obsession [-15], or a Vow [-15].

Variations

Optional advantages include Detect (Supernatural or Magic) [Varies], Doesn't Sleep [20], Fearlessness [2/level], Higher Purpose [5], Patron [Varies], Single-Minded [5], Unfazeable [15], and minor disadvantages such as Careful [-1].

Lord of the Beasts

Varies

The precise nature of this lens varies. Possible advantages include Allies (Varies), Animal Empathy [5], Animal Friend [5/level], Detect (Varies; animals, magic, supernatural phenomena, supernatural beings, and similar types are all appropriate) [Varies], Fearlessness [2/level],

Higher Purpose [5], Magery (Possibly Animal College Only) [Varies], Medium [10], Oracle [15], Patron (Divine or other powerful entity) [Varies], Power Investiture [10/level], Social Chameleon [5], Speak with Animals [25], or True Faith [15]. Likely disadvantages include Duty [Varies], Fanaticism (Self) [-15], Megalomania [-10], Senses of Duty (Subjects, Patron, Animals) [-10 to -15], or Vow (Vegetarianism) [-5]. If the dragon is a mage or has Power Investiture, a few spells from the Animal College may be appropriate.

Solitary Wanderer -20 points

Disadvantages: Choose -20 points from either Loner [-5*] or Uncongenial [-1], and Attentive [-1], Callous [-5], Careful [-1], Confused [-10], Curious [-5*], Dreamer [-1], Dull [-1],

Hidebound [-5], Impulsiveness [-10*], Intolerance [Varies], Low Empathy [-20], Oblivious [-5], Odious Personal Habit [-5/level], Shyness [Varies], Staid [-1], Stubbornness [-5], or Vow [Varies].

Variations

Confused Dragon: Berserk (9) [-15] and Paranoia [-10]. 367 points.

“Realistic” Dragon: Clueless [-10] and No Sense of Humor [-10]. 372 points.

Whimsical Dragon: Oblivious [-5] and Sense of Duty (Creator) [-5]. 382 points.

May have Cannot Speak (Mute) removed and senses upgraded via improvement work.

To use the nonsapient version of the Mechanical Dragon, simply use the above character with IQ reduced to 5 [-100]. 332 points.

CHAPTER 4



Dragon Blight p. 74

Lifebane and the spells mentioned have not changed names, but dragons have less fatigue than they used to. Venom and the Cloud of Mist enhancement have been replaced by a Toxic Attack with the Area Effect, Cyclic, Persistent, and Drifting enhancements.

Breathe Fire p. 74

The Breathe Fire advantage has been completely replaced by Innate Attack. Several of the converted templates include possible fire-breathing variations. Slavering Flame is best reproduced with the Cyclic enhancement, although its effects on armor are harder to represent.

For a one-hex wide stream of fire, use Burning Attack [5/level] with the enhancement (Cone, 1 yard, +60%). The standard Western Dragon fire breath is Burning Attack 1d (Cone, 1 yard, +60%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Reduced Range, □1/10, -30%) [6].



ST, Natural Weapons, and Damage p. 75

Natural Weapons directly reflect normal ST damage. For Claws, “Only used after a successful grapple or bite” is an Accessibility limitation. Spears are now Strikers with impaling damage.

Dragon Combat Maneuvers p.78

These are now known as techniques. No major changes are required.

Hypnotic Gaze p. 77

While the Entrhancement skills still exist, Hypnotic Hands is represented by the Hypnotism skill bought up to a cinematic level and no longer automatically requires Trained by a Master. Other ways of modeling Hypnotic Gaze include Affliction, Binding, Innate Attack for fatigue damage, and Mind Control. The Malediction enhancement is usually required.

New Character Features pp. 79-82

Most of these features are already covered by the *Basic Set*, *Fourth Edition*. Morph and Shapeshifting are different variations of the Shapeshifting advantage. Splash is an Innate Attack and can be found in the Bena variation of the Sea Serpent conversion on p. 146. Capricious should be replaced by Odious Personal or Racial Habit (Capricious) [-15]. Restricted Manipulators is represented by the “Foot Manipulators” special Limitation of Extra Arms. Attack Enhancements and Limitations are a part of the *Basic Set* now.

Metabolic Variations p. 82

Sleepy has changed point cost to [-8] for 1/2 of the time. Hibernation is now a -60% Limitation on Metabolism Control. Increased Life Support is now Increased Consumption when dealing with food intake.

Other Possible Variations p. 82

Poor Grip is now the first level of Bad Grip. Magic Resistance has the Improved Enhancement, which allows casting spells in spite of the advantage. Mana should be considered Very Common now for Dependency; the cost does not change.

Size Disadvantages p. 50

These disadvantages may be appropriate since they work in relation to the Size Modifier rules.

Many-Headed Dragons p. 80

This section has been mostly replaced by the Extra Head advantage [15/level]; however, the advantage Doesn't Sleep (Nuisance Effect: At least one head must sleep, -10%) [18] is important. Regrowth [40] replaces the Injury Tolerance/Regeneration combination, while Extra Attacks [25/level] replaces Full Coordination. Compartmentalized Mind [50/level] may be relevant.

CHAPTER 5

Magic works similarly under Third and Fourth Edition rules, but there are some detail differences. A new edition of *GURPS Magic* is planned for late 2004, and will be very useful in games involving spell-wielding dragons.

Innate Spells p. 85

Innate spells do not require much alteration. Draconic fatigue levels have dropped radically in many cases. In many cases, the cost of high-level magical skills has risen dramatically.

Knacks p. 86

Knacks no longer exist; substitute an equivalent advantage, skill, disadvantage, attribute bonus, or characteristic bonus and use the limitation (Mana Sensitive, -10%) as well as the Supernatural origin.

Magical Advantages p. 87

Awareness and Second Sight are replaced by the Detect advantage. Wild Talent replaces both Harmony With The Tao and Natural Spellcasting; Natural Spellcasting is Wild Talent (Magic Only). Knacks have been removed.

CHAPTER 6

Barbarian Dragon-Slayer p. 100 197 points

Attributes: ST 14 [40]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 14 [40].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d/2d; BL 39; HP 14 [0]; Will 12 [10]; Per 10 [0]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 6.75 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15] and a total of 30 points in any of IQ+1 [20]; additional HP [2/level]; additional Perception [5/level]; additional Will [5/level]; Allies (Warband) [Varies]; Claim to Hospitality [Varies]; Danger Sense [15]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Fit [5]; Hard to Kill [2/level]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Intuition [15]; Luck [Varies]; Night Vision [1/level]; Rapid Healing [5]; Reputation (As mighty warrior) [Varies]; Resistant (Disease and/or Poison) [Varies]; Status [5/level]; or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5] and a total of -20 in any of Attentive [-1]; Bloodlust [-10*]; Callous [-5]; Compulsive Carousing [-5*]; Distractible [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10*]; Overconfidence [-5*]; Personality Change When Drunk [-1]; Proud [-1]; Sense of Duty (To allies, family, clan, or similar) [Varies]; Social Stigma (Disowned) [-5 or -10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5*]; Vow (To slay monsters or defend people) [Varies]; or Wealth [Varies].

Primary Skills: Broadsword (A) DX +1 [4]-14; Shield (Shield) (E) DX+1 [2]-14.

Secondary Skills: Brawling (E) DX [1]-13; Naturalist (H) IQ-1 [2]-9; Riding (Horse) (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Survival (A) Per [2]-10.

Background Skills: A total of 15 points in any of Farming (IQ/A), Animal Handling (IQ/A), Area Knowledge (IQ/E), Axe/Mace (DX/A), Thrown Weapon (Axe/Mace) (DX/E), Public Speaking (IQ/A), Boating (DX/A), Camouflage (IQ/E), Carousing (HT/E), Climbing (DX/A), Detect Lies (Per/H), First Aid (IQ/E), Games (IQ/E), Hiking (HT/A), Intimidation (Will/A), Jumping (DX/E), Knife (DX/E), Leadership (IQ/A), Navigation (Land) (IQ/A), Running (HT/A), Crewman (Seamanship) (IQ/E), Spear (DX/A), Thrown Weapon (Spear) (DX/E), Stealth (DX/A), Swimming (HT/E), Tactics (IQ/H), Tracking (Per/A), Two-Handed Axe/Mace (DX/A) or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

* May be modified for self-control number.

Dragon-Blooded Human p. 100 70 points

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: A total of 40 points in any of increased attributes [10 or 20/level]; additional Will [5/level]; additional of Perception

[5/level]; Absolute Direction [5]; Animal Empathy [5]; Appearance [Varies]; Detect (Magic, the supernatural, or dragons) [Varies]; Deep Sleeper [1]; Eidetic Memory [5 or 10]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Hard to Kill [2/level]; Intuition [15]; Languages [Varies]; Longevity [2]; Magery [Varies]; Magic Resistance [2/level]; Night Vision [1/level]; Patron (Secret) [Varies]; Rapid Healing [5]; Resistant (Disease, HT+8 or Immunity) [5 or 10]; Single-Minded [5]; Status [5/level]; Unfazeable [15]; or Wild Talent [20/level].



Disadvantages: A total of -25 points in any of Appearance [Varies]; Attentive [-1]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Callous [-5]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Extra Sleep [-2/level]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Gigantism [0]; Greed [-15*]; Loner [-5*]; Low Empathy [-20]; Miserliness [-10*]; No Sense Of Humor [-10]; Oblivious [-5]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (Usually for weirdness) [Varies]; Secret (Strange family history) [Varies]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Uncongenial [-1]; Unnatural Features [-1/level]; or Xenophilia [-10*].

Skills: A total of 5 points in any of Fortune-Telling (Augury) (IQ/A), Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (IQ/A), History (Esoteric specialties) (IQ/H), Intimidation (Will/A), Dreaming (Will/H), Meditation (Will/H), Stealth (DX/A), or Thaumatology (IQ/VH).

* May be modified for self-control number.

Dragon-Friend

p. 101
50 points

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Move 5 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0].

Advantages: Ally or Patron (Dragon, variable point cost) [30]. Depending on the lens and type of Dragon, a Dragon may be built on more or less points than the starting character. An Animalistic Crawling Wyrm, for example, might make a good “tamed beast” friend, but would be worth very few points on its own. The character should also choose a total of 30 points from the following: increasing the Frequency of Appearance or Power of the Patron/Ally, additional Perception [5/level]; additional Will [5/level]; Above Suspicion [1]; Animal Empathy [5]; Charisma [5/level]; Common Sense [10]; Cultural Adaptability (Xeno-Adaptability) [20]; Daredevil [15]; Detect (Magic) [10]; Empathy (Sensitive or Empathy) [5 or 15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Intuition [15]; Language Talent [10]; Languages (Usually exotic or secret draconic tongues) [Varies]; Luck [Varies]; Magery 0 [5]; Pitiable [5]; Reputation (Among dragons as a friend, or among humans as someone not to cross) [Varies]; Serendipity [15/level]; Spirit Empathy [10]; Status [5/level]; True Faith [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Voice [10]; or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 in any of Broad-Minded [-1]; Bully [-10*]; Chummy [-5]; Congenial [-1]; Curious [-5*]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10*]; Nosy [-1]; Overconfidence [-5*]; Reputation (Monster-lover) [Varies]; Responsive [-1]; Sense of Duty (To the dragon or to all dragons) [Varies]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Status [-5/level]; or Wealth [Varies].

Skills: A total of 10 points in any of Animal Handling (IQ/A), Connoisseur (IQ/A), Artist (IQ/H), Public Speaking (IQ/A), Expert Skill (Bardic Knowledge or Dracontology) (IQ/A), Games (IQ/E), Diplomacy (IQ/H), Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (IQ/A), Jeweler (IQ/H), Musical Instrument (IQ/H), Poetry (IQ/A), Riding (Dragon) (DX/A), Savoir-Faire (High Society) (IQ/E); or Singing (HT/E).

* May be modified for self-control number.

Notes: Savoir-Faire (High Society) will probably have the familiarity of Draconic culture rather than or in addition to the characters' own.

Hoard Raider

p. 102
80 points

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: A total of 20 points in increased attributes [10 or 20/level], or any of additional Perception [5/level]; Acute Hearing [2/level]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contacts and Contact Groups (Street) [Varies]; Danger Sense [15]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; High Manual Dexterity [5/level]; Intuition [15]; Luck [15]; Night Vision [1/level]; Serendipity [15]; or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: Choose Overconfidence (6) [-10] and either Odious Personal Habit (Glory Hound) [-5] or Loner (12) [-5], or choose either Greed (12) [-15] or Trickster (12) [-15]. Select an additional -10 points in any of Curious [-5*]; Enemies (Past victims, human or dragon) [Varies]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10*]; Nosy

[-1]; Oblivious [-5]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (Reckless and/or criminal) [Varies]; Sense of Duty (Allies, family, clan, or similar) [Varies]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; Uncongenial [-1]; Vow (To acquire or recover some item) [Varies]; or Wealth [Varies].

Primary Skills: Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Camouflage (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Climbing (A) DX [2]-12; Traps (A) IQ-1 [1]-10.

Background Skills: A total of 16 points in any of Connoisseur (IQ/A), Archaeology (IQ/H), Area Knowledge (any) (IQ/E), Brawling (DX/E), Cartography (IQ/A), Fast-Tak (IQ/A), Filch (DX/A), Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (IQ/A), History (Various specialties) (IQ/H), Jeweler (IQ/H), Jumping (DX/E), Knife (DX/E), Lockpicking (IQ/A), Navigation (Land) (IQ/A), Prospecting (IQ/A), Shortsword (DX/A), Streetwise (IQ/A), Survival (any) (Per/A), Tracking (Per/A), or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

* May be modified for self-control number.

Knight in Shining Armor

p. 102
151 points

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Fearlessness 3 [6]; Status 2 [5]**; Wealth (Wealthy) [20]; and a total of 25 points in any of +1 to ST or HT [10]; +1 to IQ [20]; additional HP [2/level]; additional Will [5/level]; Above Suspicion [1]; Allies (Squire, retinue, etc.) [Varies]; Appearance [Varies]; Claim to Hospitality (Family or fellow nobles) [Varies]; Charisma [5/level]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contact Group (Military) [Varies]; Contacts (Military) [Varies]; Daredevil [15]; additional Fearlessness [2/level]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Legal Enforcement Powers (“Low justice” – broad jurisdiction) [10]; Magic Resistance [2/level]; Potential Advantages (Status, Wealth, etc.) [Varies]; Rapid Healing [5]; Reputation (As a heroic warrior) [Varies]; Resistant (Poison, +8 HT) [5]; Social Chameleon [5]; additional Status [5/level]; True Faith [15]; or additional Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Chivalric) [-15]; and a total of -15 points in any of Charitable [-15*]; Compulsive Behavior (Contemplation of Beloved) [-10*]; Compulsive Vowing [-5*]; Dependent (True love, young squire, etc.) [Varies]; Distractible [-1]; Dreamer [-1]; Fanaticism (Religious faith) [-15]; Honesty [-10*]; Impulsiveness [-10*]; Loner [-5*]; Overconfidence [-5*]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocent) [-10]; Proud [-1]; Sense of Duty (To family, kingdom, or religion) [Varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5*]; Uncongenial [-1]; or Vow (To defend the right, slay monsters, etc.) [Varies].

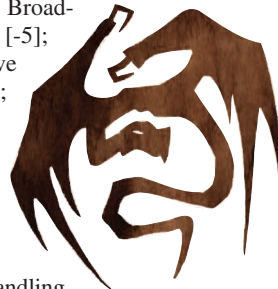
Primary Skills: Broadsword (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Lance (A) DX [2]-13; Riding (Horse) (A) DX [2]-13; Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-14.

Secondary Skills: Heraldry (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-10; and any two of Axe/Mace (A) DX [2]-13; Flail (H) DX-1 [2]-12; Two-Handed Flail (H) DX-1 [2]-12; Leadership (A) IQ [2]-10; or Tactics (H) IQ-1 [2]-9.

Background Skills: A total of 9 points in any of Animal Handling (IQ/A), Connoisseur (IQ/A), Area Knowledge (Homeland) (IQ/E), Public Speaking (IQ/A), Brawling (DX/E), Carousing (HT/E), Games (IQ/E), Combat Sport (any “knightly” weapon (DX/varies), Dancing (DX/A), Falconry (IQ/A), Leadership (IQ/A), Naturalist (IQ/H), Spear (DX/A), Tactics (IQ/H), Tracking (Per/A), Two-Handed Sword (DX/A) or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

* May be modified for self-control number.

** Includes +1 for Wealth.



Reckless Scholar

p. 103
75 points

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Status 1 [5]; and a total of 20 points in any of an additional level of DX or IQ [20]; additional Will [5/level]; Above Suspicion [1]; Acute Vision [2/level]; Claim to Hospitality (Fellow scholars) [Varies]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Fit [5]; Higher Purpose (To raise human knowledge of dragons) [5]; Intuition [15]; Languages [Varies]; Luck [15]; Patron (University or rulers) [Varies]; Reputation (As a sage, among scholars) [Varies]; Serendipity [15]; Single-Minded [5]; additional Status [5/level]; Tenure [5]; Unfazeable [15]; or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: One of Fanaticism (Scholarship) [-15], Obsession (Knowing all about dragons, 9 or less) [-15], Vow (To unlock all the secrets of dragonkind) [-15], or Code of Honor (Scholarly – credit sources, never lie about facts, etc.) [-5] and Overconfidence (6) [-10]; plus a total of -10 points in any of Attentive [-1], Broad-Minded [-1], Clueless [-10], Curious [-5*], Easy To Read [-10], Imaginative [-1], Impulsiveness [-10], Loner [-5*], Nosy [-1], Oblivious [-5], Proud [-1], Reputation (As suicidal lunatic) [Varies], Skinny [-5], Stubbornness [-5], Truthfulness [-5*], Uncongenial [-1], or Xenophilia [-10*].

Primary Skills: Any three of Expert Skill (Bardic Knowledge) (H) IQ [4]-12; Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; History (Esoteric specialties) (H) IQ [4]-12; Naturalist (H) IQ [4]-12; Occultism (Demonology) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; or Theology (H) IQ [4]-12.

Secondary Skills: Any four of Area Knowledge (Wilderness) (E) IQ [1]-12; Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-12; Climbing (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-10; History (Other specialties) (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Navigation (Land) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Research (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Stealth (A) DX-1 [9]; Survival (any) (A) Per-1 [1]-11; or Teaching (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

Background Skills: A total of 9 in any of Alchemy (IQ/VH), Connoisseur (IQ/A), Archaeology (IQ/H), Artist (IQ/H), Fortune-Telling (Augury) (IQ/A), Cartography (IQ/A), Games (IQ/E), First Aid (IQ/E), Geology (IQ/H), Literature (IQ/H), Meteorology (IQ/A), Jeweler (IQ/H), Philosophy (IQ/H), Riding (DX/A), Thaumatology (IQ/VH), Tracking (Per/A), Veterinary (IQ/H), or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

* May be modified for self-control number.

Sacrifice Survivor

p. 103
60 points

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Pick one of Charisma 3 [15]; Serendipity 1 [15]; or True Faith [15]; and then a total of 15 points in any of +1 to HT [10]; additional Will [5/level]; Above Suspicion [1]; Ally (Dragon) [Varies]; Animal Empathy [5]; Appearance [Varies]; Claim to Hospitality (From family or dragon) [Varies]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Intuition [15]; Luck 1 [15]; Patron (Dragon) [Varies]; Pitiable [5]; Reputation (Various) [Varies]; Social Chameleon [5]; Status [5/level]; Unfazeable [15]; or Voice [10].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 points in any of Broad-Minded [-1]; Charitable [-15*]; Duty (To dragon) [Varies]; Honesty [-10*]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10*]; Overconfidence [-5*]; Phobia (Sex) [-10*]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (“Collaborator/

dragon-lover”) [Varies]; Responsive [-1]; Selfless [-5*]; Sense of Duty (To dragon, family, or community) [Varies]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Truthfulness [-5*]; Unfit [-5]; or Xenophilia [-10*].

Primary Skills: Pick any two of Public Speaking (A) IQ [2]-12; Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; or Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-12.

Secondary Skills: Add another 2 points to any of the Primary Skills options.

Background Skills: A total of 4 points in any of Acting (IQ/A); Farming (IQ/A); Connoisseur (IQ/A); Area Knowledge (Vicinity of lair) (IQ/E); Cooking (IQ/A); Dancing (DX/A); Detect Lies (Per/H); First Aid (IQ/E); Fortune Telling (IQ/A); Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (IQ/A); Musical Instrument (IQ/H); Naturalist (IQ/H); Hobby Skill (Needlecraft) (DX/E); Psychology (IQ/H); Riding (Dragon) (DX/A); Savoir-Faire (Varies) (IQ/E); Sex Appeal (HT/A); Singing (HT/E); or Survival (Local terrain type) (Per/A).

* May be modified for self-control number.

Notes: Many characters with this Template will have Charisma, which will change many skills.



Servile Minion

p. 104
60 points

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: A total of 20 points in any of +1 to any attribute [10 or 20]; Acute Hearing [2/level]; Claim to Hospitality (From the dragon or its allies) [Varies]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Patron (Dragon) [Varies]; Pitiable [5]; Rapid Healing [5]; Resistant (Disease or Poison, HT+8 or Immunity) [Varies]; or Social Chameleon [5].

Disadvantages: Duty (To dragon; either 12 or less, 15 or less and non-hazardous, or 9 or less and involuntary) [-10], plus a total of -15 points in any of increased Duty [Varies]; Alcoholism [-15]; Appearance [Varies]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Bully [-10*]; Callous [-5]; Careful [-1]; Cowardice [-10*]; Dull [-1]; Fearfulness [-2/level]; Greed [-15*]; Hidebound [-5]; Humble [-1]; Hunchback [-10]; Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Low Pain Threshold [-10]; Low Self-

Image [-10]; Nightmares [-5*]; Oblivious [-5]; Odious Personal Habits [-5/level]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (Monster's pet) [Varies]; Sadism [-15*]; Selfish [-5*]; Selfless [-5*]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Staid [-1]; Status [-5/level]; Uncongenial [-1]; Unfit [-5]; Unluckiness [-10] Wealth [Varies]; or Xenophilia [-10*].

Primary Skills: Savoir-Faire (Servant) (E) IQ+2 [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Any two of Accounting (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Acting (A) IQ [2]-11; Area Knowledge (Vicinity of lair) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Cooking (A) IQ [2]-11; Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (A) IQ [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-11; or Stealth (A) DX [2]-11.

Background Skills: A total of 7 points in any of Brawling (DX/E), Detect Lies (Per/H), Diplomacy (IQ/H), Fast-Talk (IQ/A), Heraldry (IQ/A), Holdout (IQ/A), Knife (DX/E), Scrounging (Per/E), Survival (Local terrain type) (Per/A), Traps (IQ/A), or any Primary or Secondary skill.

* May be modified for self-control number.

Slayer's Advisor

p. 105
90 points

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: A total of 20 points in any of DX+1 [20]; IQ+1 [20]; additional Will [5/level]; Above Suspicion [1]; Claim to Hospitality (From fellow scholars) [Varies]; Common Sense [10]; Empathy (Empathy or Sensitive) [15 or 5]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Intuition [15]; Languages [Varies]; Legal Immunity (Bardic Immunity) [10]; Longevity [2]; Reputation (As wise) [Varies]; Single-Minded [5]; Status 1 [5]; or Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 points in any of Absent-Mindedness [-15]; Appearance [Varies]; Attentive [-1]; Bowlegged [-1]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Code of Honor (Scholarly – credit sources, never lie about facts, etc.) [-5]; Ham Fisted [-5 or -10]; Imaginative [-1]; Lame [Varies]; Loner [-5*]; Nosy [-1]; Paranoia (15) [-5]; Proud [-1]; Reputation (As creepy eccentric) [Varies]; Secret (Various) [Varies]; Sense of Duty (To scholarship or local community) [Varies]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5*]; Uncongenial [-1]; or Unfit [-5].

Primary Skills: Any two of Area Knowledge (Local) (E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Fortune-Telling (Augury) (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Expert Skill (Bardic Knowledge) (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; History (Various, usually unusual or secret) (H) IQ [4]-13; Occultism: Demonology (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Tactics (H) IQ [4]-13; or Theology (Varies) (H) IQ [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Any three of History (Other specialties) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Naturalist (H) IQ-1 [2]-13; Physician (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Research (A) IQ+1 [2]-12; Teaching (A) IQ+1 [2]-13; or Thaumatology (VH) IQ-2 [2]-11.

Background Skills: A total of 6 points in any of Alchemy (IQ/VH), Connoisseur (IQ/A), Archaeology (IQ/H), Public Speaking (IQ/A), Cartography (IQ/A), Detect Lies (Per/H), Diagnosis (IQ/H), Fast-Talk (IQ/A), First Aid (IQ/E), Geology (IQ/H), Heraldry (IQ/A), Literature (IQ/H), Meteorology (IQ/A), Prospecting (IQ/A), Philosophy (IQ/H), Riding (DX/A), Stealth (DX/A), Survival (any) (Per/A), Tracking (Per/A), Traps (IQ/A), or any Primary or Secondary Skill.

* May be modified for self-control number.

Notes: May have magical abilities.

Thoughtful Dragon Slayer p. 105 150 points

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: A total of 25 points in any of +1 to any ST or HT [10]; additional Will [5/level]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Common Sense [10]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Gadgeteer [25]; Intuition [15]; Luck [15]; High Manual Dexterity [5/level]; Night Vision [1/level]; Reputation (As monster-slayer) [Varies]; Status (Up to +2) [5/level]; Versatile [5]; or Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 points in any of Careful [-1]; Greed [-15*]; Imaginative [-1]; On the Edge [-15*]; Overconfidence [-5*]; Sense of Duty (To allies, family, or community) [Varies]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Trademark [-5/level]; Vow (To slay monsters or defend people) [Varies]; or Wealth [Varies].

Primary Skills: Any two of Armoury (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Camouflage (E) {IQ+2} [4]-15; Gunner (Catapult) (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Poisons (H) IQ [4]-13; or Traps (A) IQ+1 [4]-14.

Secondary Skills: Any three of Acting (A) IQ [2]-13; Animal Handling (A) IQ [2]-13; Smith (Iron) (A) IQ [2]-13; Crossbow (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-13; Thrown Weapon (Harpoon) (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Hidden Lore (Dragon Lore) (A) IQ [2]-13; Polearm (A) DX [2]-12; Stealth (A) DX [2]-12; Tracking (A) Per [2]-13; Two-Handed Axe/Mace (A) DX [2]-12.

Background skills: A total off 11 points in any of Axe/Mace (DX/A), Bolas (DX/A), Carpentry (IQ/E), Engineer (Various) (IQ/H), First Aid (IQ/E), Lasso (DX/A), Mechanic (Wagon) (IQ/A), Merchant (IQ/A), Naturalist (IQ/H), Net (DX/H), Professional Skill: Netmaking (DX/A), Occultism (Demonology) (IQ/A), Navigation (Land) (IQ/A), Riding (Horse) (DX/A), Research (IQ/A), Scrounging (Per/E), Survival (Local terrain type) (Per/A), Tactics (IQ/H), or any Primary or Secondary skill.

* May be modified for self-control number.

CHAPTER 7



Dracontology

p. 108

In *GURPS Fourth Edition* games, Dracontology becomes an Expert Skill and can substitute for Occultism, Anthropology, History, or Linguistics when dealing with dragons and their society.

Half-Dragons

p. 113

This is a 32-point meta-trait.

Attribute Modifiers: HT+2 [20].

Advantages: Ritual Aptitude 2 [2]; Unusual Background (Half-Dragon) [10].

Dragon Racial Templates

p. 114

The modifications are as follows; Raise IQ to 12 if it is less [20/level]; add the advantages Alternate Form (Quasi-human; No reversion when asleep or unconscious, +150%) [38], Eidetic Memory 2 [10], and Will+5 (Only vs. Ritual Magic, -50%) [13]. Add Unaging [15] if not already present, and delete any other advantages which this supercedes. Add one local human language at Native [6]. Thus, for example, the Wyvern Template increases to 411 points, the Medium-Sized Western Dragon becomes 394/380 points, and the Kiao-Lung becomes 424 points.

The shapeshifted human form has a template with IQ+2 [40]; Eidetic Memory 2 [10]; Unaging [15]; and one human language at Native [6]. This template costs 71 points.

Ossian

p. 114
493 points

ST 19 [-6]; **DX** 14 [40]; **IQ** 14 [40]; **HT** 17 [20].

Secondary Attributes: SM+4; Dmg 2d-1/3d+1; BL 72; HP 19 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 17 [0]; Basic Speed 7.75 [0]; Basic Move 7 (Ground)/14 (Flying) [0]; Dodge 7.

Advantages: Small Western Dragon [345]; Allies (Shady associates, 25% of total, 10 allies, 12 or less) [12]; Charisma 2 [10]; Comfortable [10]; Contact (Dublin fence: Streetwise-12, 12 or less, Usually Reliable) [4]; English (Native) [0]; French (Accented/Native) [5]; Irish Gaelic (Native) [6]; Northwestern European Draconic (Native) [0]; Reputation +2 (As an interesting fellow, among high-class mysticism enthusiasts dealing with his human form) [3]; Reputation +2 (As trustworthy, in the Dublin underworld, 10 or less) [2]; Status 1 [5].

Disadvantages: Enemies (Unknown) [-10]; Reputation -2 (For slightly uncertain background, among respectable society folk dealing with his human form) [-5]; Secret (Criminal connections) [-10]; Secret (Dragon operating in human society) [-20].

Quirks: Brutally straightforward in physical combat; Careful; Pursues wealth as a source of security; Uses criminal associates to take revenge on respectable types who annoy him. [-4]

Skills: Acting-15 [4]; Connoisseur (Literature)-14 [2]; Area Knowledge (Ireland)-15 [2]; Public Speaking-16 [2]; Brawling-15 [2]; Artist (Calligraphy)-12 [1]; Carousing-17 [2]; Dancing-12 [1]; Filch-13 [1]; Guns/TL5 (Shotgun)-15 [2]; Holdout-15 [4]; Literature-14 [4]; Occultism-14[4]; Mount-13 [1]; Riding (Horse)-13 [1]; Savoir-Faire-14 [1]; Streetwise-15 [4]; [Riding (Horse)-13 [1]; Savoir-Faire-14 [1]; Streetwise-15 [4]; Teaching-14 [2].

Sorcery Game Rules

p. 115

The only major change is to the final qualification for a research team; such characters should know Draconic at least at Accented and probably Native.

CHAPTER 8

Given the different cost of dragon templates under *GURPS Fourth Edition*, the suggested starting level for campaigns with dragon characters becomes 500 points.

Sorcerer Template

p. 122
112 points

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Draconic (Broken) [2], Ritual Aptitude 3 [3], and a total of 15 points from additional Will [5/level]; Autotrance [1]; Charisma [5/level]; Detect (Magic) [10]; Fearlessness [2/level]; High Pain Threshold [10]; additional Languages [Varies]; Longevity [2]; Night Vision [1/level]; Single-Minded [5]; Status [5/level]; or Voice [10]; or Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: A total of -25 points chosen from among Appearance [Varies]; Attentive [-1]; Bully [-10*]; Callous [-5]; Clueless [-10]; Enemies [Varies]; Fat [-3]; Fearfulness [-2/level]; Hard of Hearing [-10]; Jealousy [-10]; Lame [Varies]; Loner [-5*]; Manic-Depressive [-20]; Miserliness [-10*]; Nightmares [-5*]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Oblivious [-5]; Obsession (Related to sorcery) [Varies*]; Odious Personal Habits (Obsessive or arrogant behavior, Solipsism) [-5/level]; Overconfidence [-5*]; Overweight [-1]; Paranoia [-10]; Phantom Voices [-5/level]; Proud [-1]; Secret [Varies];



Shyness [Varies]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma (Excommunicated) [-5]; Stubbornness [-5]; Unfit [Varies]; or Very Fat [-5].

Primary Skills: Research (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Ritual Magic (VH) IQ [8]-13.

Secondary Skills: Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; and any two of Autohypnosis (H) Will-1 [2]-12; Public Speaking (A) IQ [2]-13; Literature (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Meditation (H) Will-1 [2]-12; Philosophy (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Poetry (A) IQ [2]-13; Symbol Drawing (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Teaching (A) IQ [2]-13; or Writing (A) IQ [2]-13.

Background Skills: A total of 3 points in any of: Anthropology (IQ/H); Connoisseur (IQ/A); Archaeology (IQ/H); Games (IQ/E); Expert Skill (Conspiracy Theory) (IQ/H); Detect Lies (Per/H); Erotic Art (DX/A); Fast-Talk (IQ/A); Hidden Lore (Dragon Society) (IQ/A); History (Varies) (IQ/H); Intimidation (Will/A); Leadership (IQ/A); Mathematics (Varies) (IQ/H); Naturalist (IQ/H); Pharmacy (Varies) (IQ/H); Poisons (IQ/H); Expert Skill (Psionics) (IQ/H); Psychology (IQ/H); Religious Ritual (IQ/H); Savoir-Faire (Varies) (IQ/E); Sex Appeal (HT/A); Stealth (DX/A); Thaumatology (IQ/VH); or Theology (IQ/H).

Paths: Any two out of Cunning, Knowledge, Luck, or Protection, each at 13 [16 each].

Rituals: Buy off a total of 4 levels of penalties with any rituals of choice [8].

* May be modified for self-control number.

CHAPTER 10

Recover Strength is now known as Recover Energy. Otherwise, all of the spells retain the same names.

Most of these disadvantages should have a self-control roll of 12 or

less. Sleepy should be listed as [-16] for 2/3 of the time. The results under the critical failure/full set list for 1-2 should also include a decrease in self-control roll.

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Briggs, Katharine. *A Dictionary of Faeries* (Allen Lane, 1976).

Cavendish, Richard (editor). *Mythology: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Little, Brown, 1992).

Ciruelo. *The Book of the Dragon* (Paper Tiger, 1992). A confusing mixture of discussions of dragons from folklore and literature, with descriptions of how Ciruelo thinks real dragons would live. Worth browsing for the gorgeous artwork alone.



Clute, John, and Grant, John (editors). *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (Orbit, 1997). An invaluable general reference.

Dickinson, Peter. *The Flight of Dragons* (Pierrot, 1979). Amply illustrated (and tongue in cheek) scholarly discussion of such issues as the mechanics of dragon flight, biochemical explanations for fiery breath, and reasons for the dragons' legendary hoards. A classic exercise in rationalization.

Ingersoll, Ernest. *Dragons and Dragon Lore* (Payson and Clarke Ltd., 1928). The writer's attitudes are gloriously non-politically correct. This all-inclusive discussion of ancient, Eastern, and Western dragons, claims that the dragon myth was born in the East, and spread from there.

Shuker, Dr. Karl. *Dragons: A Natural History* (Aurum Press, 1995). A handy, richly illustrated compendium of dragon legends, mostly – but not solely – dealing with Western creatures.

Simpson, Jacqueline. *British Dragons* (B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1980). Thorough and lively discussion of how dragons and their slayers appear in British folklore.

Time-Life Books. *The Enchanted World: Dragons* (Time-Life Books: New York, 1994). Solid, nicely illustrated discussion of the dragon through legend and folklore.

Titley, Norah M. *Dragons in Persian, Mughal and Turkish Art* (The British Library, 1981).

Myths and Legends

Beowulf. See p. 13; look for the translation by Seamus Heaney (published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000).

Ferdowsi. *The Book of Kings (Shah-Nameh or Shahnama)*. See p. 10; has been translated and republished several times.

Modern Fiction

There is certainly insufficient room here to list every modern fantasy story featuring dragons. Many novelists have their own ideas about dragons, their nature, and their life cycles. The following is a very limited selection of interesting or influential fictions.

Blanpied, Pamela Wharton. *Dragons: An Introduction to the Modern Infestation* (Boydell Press UK, 1979). Creates a new dragon legend, explaining why humans have never found evidence of dragons when they have been here all the time. With scientific drawings, footnotes, and a bibliography featuring the more prolific academics of the "New Zealand Institute of Verminology."

Brust, Steven. *Jhereg* (Ace, 1983). The narrator hero of this book and its sequels has a very useful shoulder dragon as a partner.

Gentle, Mary, and Kaveney, Roz (editors). *The Weerde*, Books 1 & 2 (Roc, 1992 & 1993). British "shared world" collections; most Weerde are more like werewolves, but their elders develop into interesting rationalized dragons.

Grahame, Kenneth. *The Reluctant Dragon* (Bodley Head, 1898). Fairytale about a boy who encounters a kindly dragon that is reluctant to fight, and must help save him from St. George. But the saint does not want to hurt the dragon either . . .

Heinlein, Robert A. *The Star Beast* (Ballantine Del Rey, 1977). A space-operatic treatment of SF dragons, and the delicate art of negotiating with them.

Hickman, Tracy, and Weis, Margaret. *Dragonlance Chronicles* (TSR, 1984). Popular trilogy set on the world of Krynn, where the forces of good and evil do battle on dragon-back. Genre-fest based on the authors' *D&D* campaign that also became a set of modules.

Le Guin, Ursula. *A Wizard of Earthsea* (Puffin, 1968). Classic children's fantasy, in which the language of dragons is the language of magic. See also the second sequel, *The Farthest Shore*.

McAvoy, R. A. *Tea with the Black Dragon* (Bantam, 1983). A bored 2,000-year-old Chinese dragon takes human form, goes to America, and waits for the person who can help him to find himself. Deftly written mayhem ensues. There are also sequels and other books in the same universe.

McCaffrey, Anne. *Dragonflight* (Ballantine Del Rey, 1984). A servant girl is plucked from obscurity to become a dragonrider, and the life-mate of a golden dragon queen. The first of the popular (and very extensive) “Dragonriders of Pern” series.

Nesbit, Edith *The Book of Dragons* (Harper, 1900). A collection of whimsical and surreal children’s stories (also known as *The Seven Dragons*), all featuring dragons or similar creatures. An electronic copy is included with the RPG *Forgotten Futures VIII* (see below).

Pratchett, Terry. *Guards! Guards!* (Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1989). Contrasts an unprepossessing breed of miniature dragons with a full-size beast of seemingly limitless power and the old school. (“Noble dragons don’t have friends. The nearest they can get to the idea is an enemy who is still alive.”) Some other parts of Pratchett’s Discworld series involve dragons more incidentally; *The Colour of Magic* (1983) features noble and elegant riding dragons whose only slight problem is that

they are imaginary, while *The Last Hero* (2001) finds a new breed of miniature dragons in an unexpected environment.

Shephard, Lucius. “The Man who Painted the Dragon Griaule” (Arkham House, 1984). Short story about a con artist whose swindles become real art, at a terrible price.

Swanwick, Michael. *The Iron Dragon’s Daughter* (Millennium, 1993). A revisionist fantasy featuring a dragon which is at once a war machine and an archetypal draconic personality, cunning, proud, and violent.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again* (George Allen & Unwin, 1937). Classic children’s story, describing how a posse of dwarves and one reluctant hobbit thief are involved in the death of the dragon Smaug.

Weis, Margaret (editor). *A Dragon-Lover’s Treasury of the Fantastic* (Warner, 1994). A handy collection of modern dragon stories.

FILMOGRAPHY



Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979). Watch it with fresh eyes. *This* is what it used to be like to meet a dragon.

Dragonheart (Rob Cohen, 1996). A dragon-slayer teams up with the last dragon to save a kingdom from a tyrannical king. A so-so movie, but the dragon is voiced by Sean Connery.

Dragonslayer (Matthew Robbins, 1981). A fairytale about a bumbling apprentice who sets out to prove himself a true wizard by slaying a terrible fire-breathing dragon.

Godzilla (Ishirō Honda, 1954). An unstoppable giant reptile with radioactive breath is created by American nuclear weapons tests. As became traditional, Tokyo is destroyed. The first of many *Godzilla*/Godzilla films.

Jabberwocky (Terry Gilliam, 1977). A nicely sordid medieval-fantasy tale of a monster, human responses to its rampages, and the practical problems of slaying. Gloriously messy.

Reign of Fire (Rob Bowman, 2003). An honorable if deeply flawed attempt to update the Western dragon, with properly sinister, serpentine monsters (though not enough of them).

Spirited Away (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001). An appealing Japanese fantasy animation with an impressive dragon river god or two.



LUDOGRAPHY



Many fantasy RPGs feature dragons in many different forms. The following is just a brief selection.

Cook, Monte, Tweet, Jonathan, and Williams, Skip. *Dungeons & Dragons Monster Manual* (Wizards of the Coast, 2000). Appropriately, the primary creatures book for the original fantasy RPG has plenty of dragons and draconic monsters. There are also several reasonable *D&D* or *d20* supplements dedicated to dragons.

CROC. *Scales* (Siroz, 1993). Wonderful French urban fantasy RPG, in which characters are either mythical beasts or

descendants of the celestial dragon who wander the world in human form trying to avoid drawing the ire of their powerful grandparents. Only available in French.

Rowland, Marcus L. *Forgotten Futures* (Marcus Rowland, 1993-2002). A roleplaying game drawing on Victorian and Edwardian scientific romances and fantasies, published on CD-ROM and on the Web. *Forgotten Futures VIII* (“Fables and Frolics”) is based on the children’s stories of Edith Nesbit, and includes a complete copy of *The Book of Dragons* (see above), plus other stories on similar themes.

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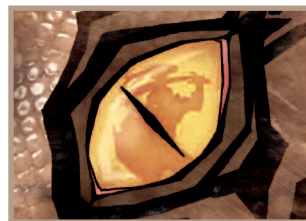
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