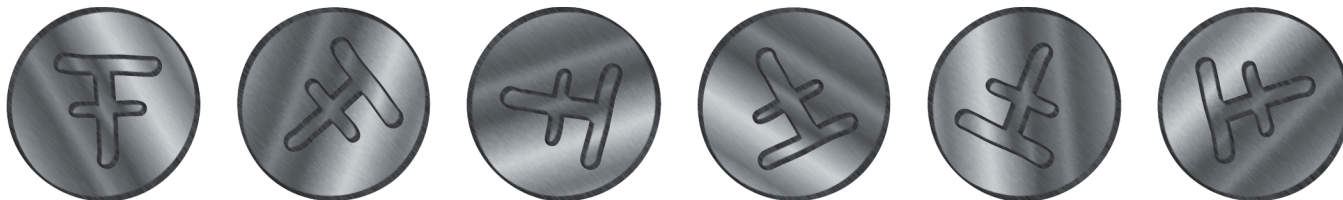


# GURPS®

Fourth Edition

# DUNGEON FANTASY ENCOUNTERS™

## THE CARNIVAL OF MADNESS™



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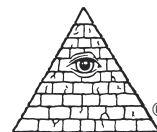
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# STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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*Everybody loves a clown,  
so why don't you?  
Everybody laughs at the things  
I say and do  
They all laugh when they see  
me comin'  
But you don't laugh, you just  
go home runnin'  
— Gary Lewis and  
the Playboys, "Everybody  
Loves A Clown"*

## ABOUT GURPS

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

# INTRODUCTION

An age-old problem in hack 'n' slash fantasy gaming is that of convincing delvers to visit the dungeon the GM spent hours designing. In a perfect world, they'd obtain a map from a mysterious stranger, or as treasure, and immediately follow it to adventure. More heavy-handedly, a guild, a temple, the King's Men, or even the King might offer a quest and not take "no" for an answer. Yet there's no guarantee that the players will cooperate – the adventurers could stray from the path or get distracted.

One solution is to say, "No matter where you go, there you are!": The dungeon lies in the heroes' path regardless of their choices. While that works with some players, others see it as railroading or even cheating; they want to map a "sandbox" world with points of interest in fixed locations. Then there's the fact that not every adventure suits all locales – try fitting in a jungle-themed quest while the party is exploring a polar icecap, or a crawl through a town's sewers when the heroes are pointedly avoiding settlements.

Perhaps the best solution is for the campaign world to feature adventures that, while preplanned, believably have no fixed address. Encounters that find the delvers rather than being found *by* them. Situations that adventurers who stray from *any* beaten path could plausibly stumble into.

The challenge is to make such a chance meeting more than a quick exchange of goods (as with a merchant caravan) or battle (like the hackneyed "bandit ambush"). So, what travels widely and offers something out of the ordinary? Why, a circus – a carnival! Of course, to be interesting to powerful heroes, such a thing must be *special* . . .

As in other supplements, important traits the PCs can use to solve problems are in **boldface**.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to hundreds of **GURPS** releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to *Pyramid* magazine. From 2008, he has served as lead creator of the **GURPS Action** and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** series; work on the latter led to his design of the **Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game**, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with *son amour*, Geneviève.



# SPINE-CHILLING ATTRACTIONS

“Carnival of Madness” is what those in the know call the Ringmaster’s (p. 9) bizarre traveling show. Especially in a world of magic and monsters, though, commonfolk would avoid any circus that used such a moniker openly! The name spoken in town, painted on signs, shouted by criers, etc. should be something generic and innocuous that appeals to the GM – say, “Show of Wonders” or “Amazing Traveling Carnival.”

And what *is* the Carnival of Madness? Nobody is entirely sure, but for ideas, see *One Truth Among Many* (p. 5). It’s easier, though rarely less worrisome, to experience than to explain . . .

## Carnival Capitalism

This encounter assumes that crafty munchkins will do the minimum to earn enough Tokens to eat (p. 7) and bribe the minstrels (p. 8), exploiting the Carnival indefinitely as a “free” inn without real risk – not even that of theft – and coming out ahead by trading excess Tokens for bonus loot and benefits. If they don’t, the GM may want to hint at the possibility or increase Token payouts to make prizes alone reason enough to tarry.

## Ready or Not, The Circus Is Coming to Town

Those who succeed at the skill roll in *One Truth Among Many* (p. 5) will know that *no mortal has ever seen the Carnival on the move*. It’s always encountered set up, tents pitched, ready to thrill and chill.

A party that scouts ahead, physically or magically, will spot the circus firmly in place. If they decide to visit it, they’ll find it waiting. If they make malicious plans (e.g., rounding up a horde to raid it, or bombarding it with long-range magic), it won’t be there when trouble arrives; see *It Was Right Here!* (pp. 10-11). If they elect to *avoid* it, that’s fine – except that if they take their eyes (fleshy or wizardly) off it for even an instant, then when they look for it again, they’ll discover it’s now set up *closer*. All this is regardless of how far in advance they scout out the Carnival and start thinking about it!

Not all gaming groups enjoy cosmic precognition or telepathy – and *real* adventurers will want to be the first to get the better of the Carnival. At the GM’s option, it’s difficult but possible to sneak up on the Carnival with nefarious intent, or to escape its approach. *Every* party member must *win* a

Quick Contest of the better of **Will** or **Mind Block** skill, plus any levels of **Mind Shield** advantage, against effective skill 20; spells offer no help against this cosmic effect. If even one party member ties or loses, the play fails.

## Come One, Come All

Which isn’t to say that there are no mundane signs of the Carnival! Those approaching it get a **Tracking** roll to spot evidence that wagons, horses, and more exotic beasts have “just” passed through the area, despite nobody having seen them. Questioning the locals using **Diplomacy**, **Interrogation**, **Intimidation**, **Streetwise**, or the like confirms this last oddity.

Closer, it’s clear that the circus is in town – or in the creepy forest clearing, around the desert oasis, inside the cavern mouth, etc. Colorful signs depicting tents, exotic animals, and clowns mark the way. Music is audible in the distance. A **Musical Composition** roll reveals that this is closer to “mad piping” than “circus music”; a successful Perception + **Bardic Talent** roll warns of a decidedly supernatural undertone.

If the circus is actually in *town* – that is, someplace where the Town Watch or King’s Men protect people, even carnies, from random violence – there may also be a charivari (known by a number of names: *sharevari*, *shivaree*, etc.). In this instance that means a “parade” through the community, accompanied by raucous music and tumbling clowns. Its purpose is let the locals know the circus is here. Adventurers contemplating attacking the procession should know that in addition to being legal, it attracts children (possibly using creepy mind control, granted), who join in and head to the Carnival.

## Welcome to the Circus!

Once in sight, the Carnival resembles, well, a *carnival* – complete with tents, and the wagons and animals required to transport it (even though nobody has ever seen it on the road). Tumblers tumble, barkers bark, players play. Grinning carnies beckon to one and all.

Depending on the GM’s decision in *One Truth Among Many* (p. 5), a **Perception** roll may let observers with special traits sense more. Add advantage levels to Per as follows: **Bardic Talent** or **Magery** if the Carnival is the creation of wizards or a lost civilization; **Holiness** or **Power Investiture** if a god created it; **Power Investiture (Druidic)** if it’s a faerie prank; or **Psi Talent** if Elder Things are behind it. Success reveals the Carnival’s general nature, not details.

## (Fair) Ground Rules

Indeed, the Carnival of Madness has many obviously supernatural qualities. On its grounds – inside the irregular-but-unmistakable border “casually” marked by unhitched wagons, the backs of tents, and temporary animal enclosures – several rules hold:

*The Carnival never sleeps.* The circus folk are always awake (this “benefit” doesn’t extend to visitors). Adventurers who stick around long enough realize this automatically: Noise and entertainment go on 24 hours a day. Those actively searching for where the carnies sleep should roll against **Observation**. Success reveals there’s no such place!

*The Carnival is a paranormal nexus.* Levels of mana, sanctity, and all other ambient supernatural energies are always at least “normal,” enabling spells and powers to function without penalty. Levels might be higher if that’s typical in the lands outside, but never lower – even if *that’s* normal. As usual, this can be sensed by rolling vs. Perception + **Magery, Power Investiture**, or similar advantage, at -3 unless actively searching.

*The Carnival is protected.* Some force – cosmic fear, the Ringmaster’s (p. 9) charms, the Carnival’s basic nature (*One Truth Among Many*, below), *something* – repels monsters. Even deep in troll country or a spider-infested wood, atop a haunted ancient battlefield, or next to a dungeon, *do not check for wandering monsters*. Realizing this usually involves spending some time there, but **Observation** can reveal the oddity sooner if wandering monsters would be so common that the target number on 3d to encounter them is 12+.

*The Carnival knows.* People plotting against it can prevent it from showing up; it’s aware of who’s traveling with whom; its challenges rise to the level of its visitors, both individually and as a group; and there are many similar oddities (e.g., the fortuneteller, p. 7, vanishes before she can be harassed, and the carnies at the freak show, p. 8, spot all failed Fright Checks). The GM who finds this too absolute can permit delvers to try to mask intentions, alliances, skill levels, etc. as explained earlier: *Every* participant in the deception must *win* a Quick Contest of **Will** or **Mind Block**, plus **Mind Shield**, against effective skill 20.

## GAMES

What’s a carnival without games? Adventurers seeking to win Fokens (p. 6) to trade for prizes (pp. 9-10) will want to try their hand at these – especially if they have their eye on something expensive. Though the games aren’t precisely *rigged*, they’re never as easy as they appear.

Below are some examples. These establish a theme that should let the GM add others to challenge their specific group (because the Carnival *knows*; see above). Time enough for a delver to wait their turn for and play *one* of these games (a round, if multiple rounds are possible) triggers a check for *Wandering Hands* (p. 7).

### Feats of Skill

Games might test any number of precision-based skills, against either clever gadgetry (for **Lockpicking**,

**Traps, Crossbow** vs. mechanized targets, etc.) or a capable carnie (for archery contests with **Bow**, axe-tossing matches with **Thrown Weapon**, and so on). All are Quick Contests against an effective skill equal to the *higher* of 14 or the skill of the contender – who *can* use **Luck**, but only if they declare it prior to rolling! Cheating is neither discouraged nor useful, as the Carnival’s cosmic magic imperceptibly adjusts the game to be “fair” again. Visitors are never pitted against one another.

## ONE TRUTH AMONG MANY

The Carnival of Madness is no ordinary circus, nor an extraordinary one that exploits “ordinary” magic. It’s a paranormal peculiarity fit for a Weirdness Magnet (p. B161), a festival of freaks that nobody recalls arriving or witnesses departing. Possible explanations appear below; to foil players with prying eyes, which one is *right* is left to the GM. Being “in the know” – or even aware of the name “Carnival of Madness” – requires a skill roll. Any of these origins might suggest ties between the Carnival and larger mysteries in the campaign world!

*A Wizard Did It!* The Carnival is a wizardly experiment, like countless artifacts and monsters. The Ringmaster (p. 9) is *not* the wizard responsible. Maybe it’s an illusion or golem that gained free will, perhaps it was summoned; whatever it is, it likely won its freedom in a carnie game played for keeps. The other circus folk are mortals, bound by magic or (especially if the Carnival grants them power) obsession. Use **Thaumatology** at -4 to know about this obscure magical phenomenon – or **Hidden Lore (Demons, Spirits, or Undead)**, if that matches the Ringmaster’s nature.

*Olde-Tyme Circus.* As above, except the magic is that of a long-lost civilization that created the Carnival for entertainment. The Ringmaster might be a relict, the collective embodiment of primeval will, or (again) a monster. The other circus folk could be equally ancient – or recent additions. The skill covering such forgotten history is **Hidden Lore (Lost Civilizations)**.

*The Mad God.* A *deity* created the Carnival to test mortals – or to amuse itself! This is likely a trickster god of rogues (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 7: Clerics*, pp. 22-23), or a god of night that deals in dreams and secrets (*Clerics*, pp. 23-25). Everyone in the Carnival is a divine servitor, but incarnate and functionally mortal. The relevant skill is **Theology** at -4, or – if the specialty exists and suits the chosen explanation – **Hidden Lore (Cult Secrets, Divine Secrets, Divine Servitors, or Secrets of the Night)**.

*Faerie Fair.* The Carnival is yet another prank played by faerie folk. Like them, it is everchanging and exists between worlds. The Ringmaster and all the circus folk are faeries. To be aware of this, roll against **Hidden Lore (Faeries)**.

*Festivities From Beyond Time And Space.* Elder Things created the Carnival to drive mortals mad enough to run away and join the circus – that is, to worship them. *Most* circus folk are cultists; the Ringmaster is either their high priest or a Thing given flesh. The skill to know about this is **Hidden Lore (Elder Things)**.

Winning the Contest earns F5 if the activity is harmless or F10 if it's dangerous (e.g., disarming harmful traps, or a visitor and a carnie throwing knives at each other), plus the right to advance to the next round. A tie or loss leaves the contestant with nothing but possible injuries; they may not try again. Later rounds add a cumulative +1 to effective opposing skill and, for dangerous games, each die of damage – but also cumulatively double that round's prize. For instance, in the fourth round of trap-disarming, someone with Traps-14 must defeat skill 17; they get F80 if they win, but are crushed, poisoned, speared, etc. at +3 damage per die otherwise.

Baseline damage for harmful activities is up to the GM, but should be "typical" for the campaign. *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons* offers many dangerous ideas.

### Tokens

Though carnies might steal money (*Wandering Hands*, p. 7), no transactions at the Carnival of Madness involve \$. Rewards are paid in Tokens (F): "coins" of some impossibly light (F500 weigh 1 lb.), nonmetallic material. (In *GURPS* terms, they're high-tech plastic, and delvers' **Counterfeiting** is at -25 to create fakes if they somehow find a source of plastic.) The Carnival also *accepts* only Tokens, so those who want to do business or claim prizes (pp. 9-10) have little choice but to play games. Groups are free to exchange or pool Tokens, but Tokens carried off Carnival grounds vanish when the Carnival does (*It Was Right Here!*, pp. 10-11) – spend them while you can!

### Feats of Strength

A hero can attempt to show off raw strength. Two games are common:

**Mighty Lifts:** The contestant "just" picks up progressively more oversized dumbbells, pulls ever-heavier wagons with their teeth, or similar. Use the entire party's highest Basic Lift (BL) – that of whoever has the mightiest ST + Lifting ST – to calculate two-handed lift (8×BL), press (15×BL), wagon pull (effectively 300×BL), etc. If anybody in the group knows Power Blow, use *double* their ST; e.g., a martial artist with ST 11 and Power Blow weighs in at ST 22, stronger than a barbarian with ST 17, Lifting ST 3. In all cases, tack on another 10%; thus, anybody can attempt to move the weight, but even the strongest will need **Lifting**, **Power Blow**, or extra effort (pp. B356-357). Success (never failure!) allows a repeated challenge. Each later challenge adds 10% to weight, and each success wins F5; for instance, the fifth challenge involves +50% weight, and success nets the contestant a cumulative F25.

**Ring the Bell:** The contestant swings a mallet at an apparatus that propels a weight up a rail to ring a bell at the top. Find the entire party's highest ST + Striking ST; if someone has Power Blow, *double* their ST. Work out swing damage for this ST, plus the better of +1 per die or a flat +2 for either Mighty Blows (p. B357) or All-Out Attack (Strong). The damage needed to win is the maximum roll, but somebody with damage-increasing tricks besides Power Blow – notably **Focused Fury** (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 11: Power-Ups*, p. 18), **Great Rage** (*Power-Ups*, p. 19), or **Weapon Master** covering Two-Handed

Axe/Mace weapons – can benefit without raising the damage target. For instance, if the strongest hero is a barbarian with ST 17, Striking ST 2 (ST 19, for swing 3d+1), the mallet does 3d+4, so 22 is needed to win . . . but if they have Great Rage 1, they can manage swing 4d+2 and damage 4d+6, for which 22 is a slightly above-average roll. Using **Power Blow** to triple ST is also valid, as is declaring **Luck in advance** to roll damage three times. Success on the first try rings the bell and wins F5; succeed or fail, later attempts count for nothing.

### Riddling

Sphinxlike mind games are another carnie tradition! These involve "trick" questions designed to trip up the unwary. There are several ways to play this out:

**The Simple Way:** The GM can game out riddles exactly like *Feats of Skill* (pp. 5-6), but ones involving straight IQ or "brainy" (typically IQ-based) skills. Each Quick Contest covers a round of puzzles, left abstract. The opposing level is *still* the higher of 14 or the contender's level, **Luck** must *still* be declared in advance, and victory is *still* required to advance to the next round. Most such things count as "harmless," so the base prize is F5. Risky riddles – like guessing which cup holds poison, and then drinking – start at F10.

**The Other Simple Way:** A typical *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign leaves out such skills as Geography, History, Literature, sciences, and Intelligence Analysis (to deduce things from clues). For these, the GM might use simple success rolls against the usual default of IQ-6. Success counts as winning; failure, as losing. Later rounds inflict a cumulative -1: IQ-7, IQ-8, IQ-9, and so on. Otherwise, this works as above.

**The Controversial Way:** The GM can pose a real-world riddle – from a favorite book, a historical source, a computer game, the Internet (try asking on [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com)), etc. – to the *players*. If they get it right, they win whatever prize the GM likes, from F5 for a simple conundrum the players are free to cooperate on, to F10, F20, F40, or more for something a player has 30 seconds to solve without help. Such riddles don't usually come in "rounds." They also don't suit all gaming groups, as many gamers want to play someone more cunning than them and don't appreciate being put on the spot – though a workaround here is to let those playing high-IQ heroes ask for help (perhaps from one player per level of IQ above 10).

### Unarmed Combat

Anybody can challenge the Carnival's boxers or strongmen to bare-knuckles striking or grappling. The Carnival ensures that this "person" (more likely an illusion, creation, or summoned or conjured *thing*) is an *exact match* for their opponent: Use the delver's character sheet for all abilities and levels. Match any cheats (concealed weapons, magical buffs, etc.), too. The only "edge" the challenger has is **Luck**, if any; their foe doesn't get that.

Play out the match as combat. If the delver wins (by knock-out or fatality), the prize is F10, and they have the right to fight another round against a tougher foe. If they lose or surrender, they gain nothing – but lost HP or FP, crippled limbs, etc. are definitely real! Later rounds give the challenger's foe a cumulative +1 to all dice rolls (similar to Higher Purpose), but double the prize for that round; e.g., in the third round, the enemy fights at +2 but the prize is F40.

## ENTERTAINMENT

What brings *ordinary* folk to carnivals is less the games (which attract the strong and fit, brave and wise), and more the spectacle.

### Clowns

The Carnival is awash in clowns. There's no fee to see them, probably because they're not amusing – while not precisely evil, they're definitely *creepy*. They aren't the carnies who try to steal from visitors (*Wandering Hands*, below); they *are* the ones who deal with those who engage in excessive violence (*Horrific Clown*, p. 11).

Clowns possess a form of Terror (p. B93) that's normally "off" but that affects anyone who tries to talk to, joke with, pickpocket, or otherwise interact with them. This causes a Fright Check (pp. B360-361) for anyone who lacks **Unfazeable**, at +1 per clown-induced Fright Check after the first within 24 hours, and subject to standard modifiers for traits (**Combat Reflexes**, **Fearlessness**, etc.).

The GM should tailor each Fright Check's details to the interaction: The clown whispers blasphemous words in the Elder Tongue, its thorax gapes open in a laughing mouth with ribs for teeth, a thief's hand comes away apparently rotting (an illusion) or clutching a dead baby (a doll), etc.

### Death-Defying Feats

All manner of acrobats, jugglers, sword-swallowers, etc. roam the Carnival grounds. Attending a show in a closed tent costs a mere £1 per person. This lasts an hour and poses the usual risk of theft (*Wandering Hands*, below) – the audience conceals circus folk, and may be made up entirely of carnies if the Carnival is far from civilization.

However, voluntarily "tipping" the performers by tossing another £5 or more into the ring *immediately* refreshes all **Luck**. Tippers who lack Luck – or whose Luck is already "charged" – gain a "free" use. Those without Luck decide when to invoke this; for those with Luck, their next use expends this, but their personal Luck remains untouched and can even be called upon immediately. Nobody can accumulate more than one use of Luck from tipping.

Acting unappreciatively (booing, tossing food, etc.) gives a dose of **Unluckiness** that lasts until the GM feels like invoking it.

### Food

Food and drink of all sorts can be had at the Carnival. There's a beer tent, whole pigs on a spit, a selection of tempting baked goods, and more. A traveler willing to spend £1 can eat *well* for one entire day, saving on rations. Careful choices can *replenish* rations, with £1 buying six meals that won't spoil – though these are extravagant, and weigh 1 lb. (not 0.5 lb.) apiece.

Visitors without Fokens are in luck! "Trick or treat" is a hallowed Carnival tradition: An entertainer can



perform – mostly for the carnies – in exchange for food. Take an hour and roll against an entertaining skill such as **Acrobatics**, **Dancing**, **Musical Instrument**, **Performance**, **Poetry**, **Singing**, **Sleight of Hand**, or **Ventriloquism**. Success garners food for the day; critical success, £1. Don't forget to check for *Wandering Hands* (below), though.

## WANDERING HANDS

As (*Fair*) *Ground Rules* (p. 5) explains, the Carnival grounds have mana and sanctity, and are "safe" from wandering monsters. Heroes who catch on are sure to exploit this to regroup and heal. Fine!

Even supernatural carnies aren't above stealing, though. Once per hour spent on Carnival grounds – enough time for each delver to rest for an hour, or to negotiate and try one of the activities in *Games* (pp. 5-6), *Entertainment* (above), *The Menagerie* (pp. 8-9), etc. – roll 3d. On 9 or less, one of them is the target of a theft attempt. If someone has **Klutz** or **Unluckiness** (or given the Carnival's nature, **Weirdness Magnet**), they'll bump into someone and become the target. Otherwise, choose at random.

The criminal carnie is at least as good as any 250-point thief, with Pickpocket-15; for a greater challenge, use skill 14+1d. If they *win* a Quick Contest against their mark's **Perception** or *Per*-based **Streetwise**, they make off with a random item: coin purse, potion, scroll, arrows, or at the largest a one-handed weapon. If they tie or lose, they're caught! The delvers can react as they wish – other circus folk won't interfere unless the adventurers go on a rampage (*So, You Want to Fight*, p. 11), but won't be discouraged from stealing, either.

### Fortuneteller's Tent

The fortuneteller admits only one client at a time. A consultation costs £1. Those who force either issue won't start a fight – but they also won't find the seer (she vanishes in a puff of smoke).

The fortuneteller can reveal anything that any single Information spell that requires at most 25 *energy* and *one hour* to cast could. Fitting examples are Analyze Magic to learn an artifact's powers, Ancient History to know its past, Pathfinder to discover the route to a quest destination, Predict Weather for the upcoming journey, Seek Gate to locate (say) a portal to Faerie, Seeker to find a lost object (including possessions stolen by carnies!), Summon Spirit to consult with the dead, and of course Divination – any of Astrology, Cartomancy, Crystal-Gazing, Physiognomy, Sortilege, or Symbol-Casting. The GM may allow others.

This isn't literal spellcasting – each "reading" takes an hour regardless of type. One reading answers one question; to keep using Analyze Magic on an item, Summon Spirit to interrogate a specter, etc. requires £1 and one hour per question. Roll dice only if the desired information is protected by something like Scryguard; in that case, the seer's effective skill is 20.

If *Wandering Hands* (above) indicates a theft, someone visiting the fortuneteller's tent is exempt.

## Freak Show

This tent contains truly uncanny people (?), creepier than the clowns (p. 7). They're specifically chosen to unnerve even delvers – most exemplify what happens to those who finish second-best to fabled monsters. Taking a look costs £1 per person.

Viewers of the entire show must roll a series of 10 progressively harder Fright Checks (pp. B360-361) – at +4, +3, +2, +1, no modifier, -1, -2, -3, -4, and finally -5 – as they look upon ever-more-distorted figures. The *only* other modifiers that apply are those from **Fearlessness/Fearfulness**, **Unfazeable** (grants +8 but *not* immunity), and **Xenophilia**; notably, Combat Reflexes and Combat Paralysis have no effect. Failures have their usual, possibly permanent effects. Attendees are free to leave at any time, however.

Anyone who stays for the whole thing and succeeds at all 10 Fright Checks (carnies notice even the briefest gasp!) will impress their hosts and gain £5. Multiple visits are allowed, but a given spectator can win the prize only once per appearance of the Carnival.

### Tippling Policy

At the Carnival, prices for food and entertainment are clearly posted; rewards for beating challenges, and how many tries are allowed, are stated up-front; and prizes (pp. 9-10) are labeled with the number of Fokens need to claim them. But tips and bribes – those mentioned in *Death-Defying Feats* (p. 7) and *Minstrels* (below), and any others the GM adds – are *not* advertised, but secrets to be figured out. If the GM feels that's unfair, then when such a situation would arise, roll secretly against the skill in *One Truth Among Many* (p. 5); success hints "Maybe you should tip."

## House of Horrors

This tent holds *true* supernatural horrors with the Terror (p. B93) ability. These jump out at visitors and try to scare them (and don't stick around for a fight). Use the rules for the freak show (above), except that leaving early is *not* an option. Anyone who ventures in must roll all the Fright Checks – leaving means facing them on the run for the exit! The payoff is no better: £5 for not flinching.

## Illusionist Show

In a fantasy world, nobody is *that* impressed by mere spellcasting. That goes double for delvers. While there are "magic shows" here and there on the Carnival grounds, they involve common spells or sleight of hand, and are mostly for atmosphere.

Then there's the Illusionist Show: "A Magical Mélange to Mystify the Mightiest of Mages." This is where the Carnival's cosmic weirdness shines most strongly. It involves supernatural feat after supernatural feat that, by rights, isn't possible for known magic. It costs £1 per person to see, lasts an hour, and poses the usual risk of *Wandering Hands* (p. 7).

For most viewers, this is just entertainment. For those who can cast spells (any kind), it's an eye-opener! They acquire one "free" use of **Wild Talent** modified with Focused pertaining to their spellcasting advantage: **Bardic Talent**, **Magery**, **Power**

**Investiture (any)**, etc. This enables them to cast *one spell they know of but don't know* at IQ + advantage level. Scholars enjoy the benefits of No Advantage Requirements (**GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 4: Sages**, p. 8), meaning this spell can be of *any* type.

Those without Wild Talent decide when to use this; they can sit on it indefinitely, if desired. For those with Wild Talent, their next use expends the benefit – but *their* Wild Talent remains unused and available at once, if desired. Nobody can accumulate multiple uses of Wild Talent by watching the show.

## Minstrels

Along with clowns (p. 7), acrobats (p. 7), and prestidigitators (above), the Carnival is full of musicians. These don't put on regular shows in tents. They can be (and expect to be!) tipped, though.

A mere £1 tip guarantees that *Wandering Hands* (p. 7) doesn't apply to the tipper that day – the minstrels sing their praises and the other carnies back off. Someone flush with Fokens *can* "buy protection" for several days, or for their group; e.g., a big winner with four friends could drop £35 so that all five are left in peace for a week.

On the other hand, anybody who attends the Carnival for at least an hour and exploits it as a place to rest, but without tipping (or having an associate tip for them) *even once*, is in for a hard time! Before leaving the grounds – whether after an hour or a week – check for an effect akin to Enthrallment (pp. B191-192) or Musical Influence (pp. B210-211) at effective skill 20.

*Secretly* roll resistance for each offender. They use **Will** or **Mental Strength**. **Mind Shield** adds, but as this is another cosmic aspect of the Carnival, Magic Resistance does not. *The Rule of 16* (p. B349) applies.

Those who resist realize that the Carnival in general tried to "mess with their head," though not how. Those who don't are implanted with an impish suggestion of the GM's choice. This shouldn't be deadly, but it should be *inconvenient*: forget an item (it belongs to the carnies, now!), take the wrong path upon leaving (perhaps to the wrong dungeon), return to play one last game (pp. 5-6) they have little chance of winning, etc. The suggestion ends after the deed is done, unless eliminated using **Remove Curse** (vs. skill 20) first.

## THE MENAGERIE

No circus would be complete without a collection of exotic beasts to gawk at! But in a land overrun by dragons, puddings, and manticores, nobody wants to see lions, tigers, and bears. Any monster with at most IQ 6 is *possible* – even the Carnival of Madness doesn't enslave smarter beings – but only ones that cages can contain (i.e., nothing that can ooze, phase, or teleport) and that don't burn, corrode, explode, etc. are *likely*.

Naturally, these monsters can be fought for Fokens. The conditions:

- Single combat only – one monster vs. one challenger.
- Challengers can bring whatever gear they like.
- Matches are fought in 20-yard-wide circular depression ("the pit").
- To the death! Two beings enter, one being leaves.

• No advance “buffing” (spellcasting, potion-drinking, etc.). The challenger can buff *in action*, but one who does so beforehand won’t be allowed to fight (the carnies *know*).

• External interference (casting spells or shooting missiles into the pit, tossing in gear, *jumping* in) won’t end the fight, but means the challenger forfeits the prize.

Trivial monsters that pose little threat (such as rats, even giant ones) aren’t available; minor monsters that are usually dangerous only in groups (dire wolves, flesh-eating apes, etc.) pay F5; monsters with attacks and defenses tough enough to equal a delver (e.g., a crushroom, giant ape, karkadann, obsidian jaguar, or triger) pay F10, or F15 if unusually scary; and anything that could take on a group (like an electric jelly or an ice wurm) pays *at least* F20, and up to F40 for the scariest examples. This corresponds to fodder, worthy, and boss monsters; see *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, pp. 27-28 and *It’s a Threat!* in *Pyramid* #3/77: *Combat*.

Remember, the Carnival *knows* (see p. 5). The GM should adjust which monsters qualify at each level (fodder, worthy,

and boss) *for these delvers*. The Carnival also knows who’s with whom, and allows each group of visitors to challenge a specific type of monster only once; thus, if there are 12 different beasts, party members can fight at most 12 times. On later visits to the Carnival (after it has vanished and reappeared), new monsters will be available to challenge, and these are likely to be tougher!

Oh, and after the heroes slay a monster, it (or one just like it) appears back in its cage to gawk at. Don’t ask how.

## CASHING OUT

What use are Tokens, aside from paying for freak shows and funnel cake? Like any good carnival, this one has prizes! But instead of giant stuffed animals, they’re things *heroes* are likely to want.

Near the Carnival’s center is a booth showing off the available prizes – each labeled with a price in Tokens – in glowing glass display cases. This is staffed by an eternally cheerful carnie who loudly declares how wonderful each prize is.

## THE RINGMASTER

The Ringmaster is the Carnival’s “boss,” though not its creator. Depending on the GM’s decision in *One Truth Among Many* (p. 5), it could be a demon, divine servitor, faerie, free-willed golem, magical creation, or Elder Thing. In all cases, it takes mortal form – but “death” merely dispels it until the Carnival’s next manifestation!

Delvers are likely to meet the Ringmaster only if they cause trouble – or if they insist, to make a deal. Encounters should be mainly verbal. If combat breaks out, the Ringmaster will dodge, exploit *Speed is Armor!* (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 12), and send in the horrific clowns (p. 11).

The Ringmaster draws on “The Carnie” (*Pyramid* #3/114: *Mind Over Magic*). It’s presented as a monster, not built on points, due to its unique strangeness. It resembles a classic jester – but that “makeup” is its real face.

<b>ST:</b> 12	<b>HP:</b> 12	<b>Speed:</b> 8.00
<b>DX:</b> 15	<b>Will:</b> 15	<b>Move:</b> 8
<b>IQ:</b> 15	<b>Per:</b> 15	
<b>HT:</b> 13	<b>FP:</b> 13	<b>SM:</b> 0
<b>Dodge:</b> 13	<b>Parry:</b> 11	<b>DR:</b> 2

**Dementation:** Requires Concentrate maneuver. Roll a Quick Contest: 20, -1 per yard, vs. subject’s Will + Mind Shield (Unfazeable grants immunity). Victory gives victim -5 to IQ (and Will and Per) for minutes equal to margin.

**Marotte (16):** 1d+3 crushing. On a hit (regardless of whether it penetrates DR), roll a Quick Contest: 16 vs. target’s Will + spellcasting Talent (Magery, Power Investiture, etc.). Victory warps the victim’s spells for minutes equal to margin of victory – although they still work, the GM rolls randomly for subject and, if variable, effect. Reach 1.

**Terrifying Gaze:** Requires Concentrate maneuver. Roll a Quick Contest: 25 vs. subject’s Will + Mind Shield +1 per previous use on them in the past 24 hours (Unfazeable grants immunity). On a victory, roll 3d, add margin, and consult the *Fright Check Table* (pp. B360-361). Range 10.

**Visions of Madness:** As Dementation, but victory inflicts Hallucinating (p. B429), not IQ loss, for minutes equal to margin.

**Traits:** Callous; Charisma 4; Code of Honor (Carnival Rules); Doesn’t Sleep; Enhanced Dodge 2; Extraordinary Luck; Indomitable; Madness 5; Mind Shield 4; Odious Personal Habit (Mocking Laughter); Penetrating Voice; Sinister Clown 4; Trickster (12); Unfazeable; Unnatural Features 5; Wild Talent 1.

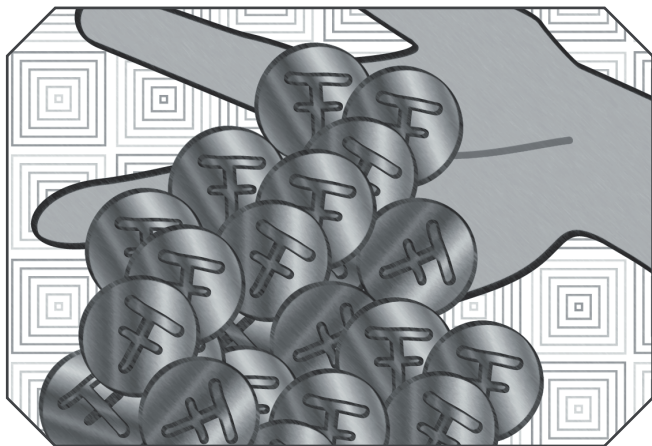
**Skills:** Acrobatics-19; Acting-19; Axe/Mace-16; Brawling-15; Dancing-19; Escape-15; Fast-Talk-16; Gambling-15; Intimidation-20 (21 when surprising with laughter); Jumping-16; Leadership-18; Mental Strength-16; Merchant-15; Performance-19; Pickpocket-15; Propaganda-15; Psychology-18; Public Speaking-19; Sleight of Hand-18; Stealth-18; Streetwise-15; Wrestling-16.

**Class:** Varies.

**Notes:** A *marotte* is a scepter carved with a harlequin’s head, decorated with bells and ribbons (a “jester’s wand”); treat as a knobbed club. Its supernatural effect works only for wielders with the Madness trait. Madness is a power Talent that raises effective Will with the supernatural attacks. These attacks are independent of mana, sanctity, etc.! Sinister Clown is a Talent that aids Acrobatics, Acting, Dancing, Intimidation, Mimicry, Performance, Psychology, Sleight of Hand, Stealth, and Ventriloquism. Skills reflect the effects of traits.

In game terms, this skill supplies all the information necessary for the *players* to determine weapon quality, enchantments, and other special properties; there's some lighthearted embellishment, but the description is essentially trustworthy.

The *only* way to obtain a prize is to insert the indicated number of Fokens into the slot beneath it. The price cannot be paid in any other way (e.g., in ordinary coins), and is non-negotiable, no matter how silver-tongued the would-be negotiator. That's mostly because the goods *aren't really there*, but appear in the claimant's hand only after suitable Fokens are deposited – no exceptions, no refunds! Smashing a case to loot it reveals its contents to be an elaborate illusion (“for promotional purposes”); items are in limbo until paid for, and that's where deposited Fokens go as inserted.



Once a prize is claimed, it cannot be returned. The display case is immediately filled with a new item, labeled with a new price. A group with enough Fokens *can* choose the same case over and over until something they really like appears.

What are the prizes? Most often things like special orders (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*, pp. 25-26), above-average weapons (balanced, elven, fine, orichalcum, etc.; *Adventurers*, pp. 26-27), concoctions (*Adventurers*, pp. 28-29), magical items (any kind), or valuable jewelry. Occasionally, they're small pieces of good armor (gauntlets, a helmet, or whatever; *Adventurers*, pp. 27-28). There's almost always at least one unique artifact that commands a high price; for some ideas, see *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 6: 40 Artifacts*, and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Treasures 2* and *3*. And there may be a few things that, though inexpensive, are rare in the campaign world or even exclusive to the Carnival.

The GM can either choose prizes by hand or roll on the tables in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables*. It's more fun to choose; the Carnival *knows* things about its visitors, and wants to tempt them. One goody that each delver should find hard to pass up – plus four or five “generic” items, like healing potions – works well.

And what do they cost? The *nominal* price is F1 per full \$25 of value; e.g., a major healing potion (\$350) costs F14, while a fine thrusting broadsword (\$2,400) is F96. For unique artifacts, see *The Problem of Price (40 Artifacts)*, p. 20); mundane nonmagical, exceptional nonmagical, typical magical, and remarkable magical properties would cost, respectively, F100, F300, F600, and F1,000.

Given an adventuring party's likely winnings, the best goodies might be out of reach even if they pool their resources.

If the GM wants to give them something *cool* – that kicks off another adventure (“A gen-u-ine treasure map!”), or that's *creepy* (e.g., the beloved doll a hero lost as a child) – *it costs what it costs*. After all, the GM could just put it in the hands of some monster! But such “specials of the day” traditionally have hidden downsides in keeping with the Carnival's mischievous nature.

## Not Quite Enough

Punters who badly want a prize but fall a little short can mosey over to the gambling arcade – conveniently near the prize booth. There, they can play cards, dice, shell games, etc. No similar games are available for regular coin or other stakes.

This works much like *Gambling (GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons)*, p. 4), with \$ converted to F on a 25:1 basis. Thus, it's a Quick Contest of **Gambling** against skill 12 for F1, +1 to opposing skill per doubling (13 for F2, 14 for F4, 15 for F8, and so on). But in this case, ties go to the house; winning doubles the wagered Fokens, while a loss or a *tie* loses them all. As well, Sleight of Hand can't be used to cheat – or more accurately, it can be, but then the carnie gamesman cheats just as aptly, nullifying the bonus.

## IT WAS RIGHT HERE!

As long as somebody “interesting” – meaning adventurers – is either on the way to the Carnival or present on its grounds, it sticks around. The Carnival *knows* (see p. 5). In theory, boring delvers could spend their lives there. But as soon as these preferred visitors no longer have eyes on the Carnival, it disappears.

Vanishing can be as rapid as the GM likes. Perhaps the heroes venture into the bush, realize they forgot something, and turn around to find nothing but wagon tracks, animal droppings, the smell of carnival food, and a bouncing clown nose. Or maybe the Carnival remains at the edge of town, music and laughter audible, even if the delvers ignore it . . . but once they leave town, so does it.

This can matter if the carnies stole from the PCs; see *Wandering Hands* (p. 7). Once the Carnival vanishes, so does anything left there – circus folk might leave behind candy apples and horse apples, but they never forget anything *cool*. That doesn't mean “gone forever,” just “gone wherever the Carnival went.”

So, where's that?

Between locations, the Carnival *doesn't exist*. It isn't on the road – at least, no road in the delvers' reality. It's in a pocket dimension, Faerie, or the Lodge of the Trickster God, or perhaps in the past, future, or Beyond Time And Space. It can't be found using magic that doesn't *explicitly* reach into such realms (which few spells do). Someone who makes the roll in *One Truth Among Many* (p. 5) can learn which **Plane Shift** spell is needed to go where it is, but they'll still need to find a teacher for that spell (and the one to return home!), plus whatever unusual **Area Knowledge** or **Navigation** specialties are needed to locate the Carnival upon arriving.

The GM decides when and where the Carnival reappears in the real world. Once the Carnival pops into reality, it and items left there can be tracked down with spells – notably **Pathfinder** and **Seeker** – subject to all standard modifiers, which usually include *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241).

Of course, casting while the Carnival is in a different time or dimension invites critical failure! More mundanely, the Carnival may show up nearby, in which case simple scouting or the mundane skills under *Finding a Quest* (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 4) will suffice.

## ALTERNATIVE ADVENTURES

The main adventure involving the Carnival of Madness sees the delvers encountering a strange circus on their travels, spending anywhere from a few hours to a few days playing games, perhaps trying to solve its mysteries, and then cashing in Tokens for prizes. Then they leave and it disappears, though if the GM gets the sense that it amused the players – or if carnies stole from their characters! – the Carnival can have return engagements.

There might be ties to larger plots. Perhaps a local child went missing at the Carnival (which needn't still be nearby), and villagers beg the heroes to investigate. Or maybe the key to another quest can be obtained only by earning some Tokens and claiming it as a prize.

But the Carnival is nothing if not unpredictable, so here are some less-standard options, especially useful once the players tire of the “mysterious carnival” shtick:

*Come, Join the Circus!* It's possible that the party might want to run away and join the circus. The GM needn't permit this – if they refuse to leave the grounds or even fight off the clowns, the Carnival can evaporate in a puff of glitter and candy-colored light. But if the players are hellbent on becoming circus folk, they might find such a vanishing act heavy-handed and unsatisfying. Rather than turning into unsleeping freaks (possibly ones that worship Elder Things), they can be accepted. In that case, the Carnival works exactly as described here, except that the PCs are apprised of its comings and goings; whatever their abilities, they won't actually *work for* it. It amounts to a way to jump between locations, times, and dimensions, having wild adventures . . . but if they fail to return before the Carnival leaves, they're stranded!

*Working for the Ringmaster.* If the heroes figure out enough of the Carnival's secrets, the Ringmaster (p. 9) may decide they've demonstrated the ability to carry out missions for it. Perhaps the Carnival needs novel freaks for the freak show (p. 8), spooks for the house of horrors (p. 8), monsters for the menagerie (pp. 8-9), or prizes (pp. 9-10). Maybe the Carnival stole from someone it underestimated, or offended local spirits or gods with its disorderly conduct, and the Ringmaster needs envoys to smooth things over. Whatever the task, it *won't* be a simple fetch quest or bounty hunt – it will involve handling beings, artifacts, or deeds beyond the resources of a dimension-hopping circus full of prescient clowns. Naturally, all payment is in Tokens.

## So, You WANT TO FIGHT?

This encounter assumes that players will roleplay their alter-egos as curious, if not civilized. Yet some might overreact to a challenge's unfairness, being stolen from, or not getting a coveted prize.

If they vent their frustrations on a single carnie, *let them!* After all, the Carnival actively promotes blood sports like bare-knuckles brawls and beast-baiting. Such foes are at least the equal of delvers, built on suitable 250-point templates: bare-knuckles fighters are martial artists, “conjurers” in the illusionist show (p. 8) are wizards, minstrels are bards, pick-pockets are thieves, strongmen are barbarians, etc. Spread a hex map and run the combat.

If they go on a rampage, the Carnival *can* simply vanish (*It Was Right Here!*, pp. 10-11). This encounter is meant to be sinister but *amusing* – and as mass murder isn't amusing, the GM has no obligation to game it out. This definitely applies to attempts to burn down the whole thing (whether with torches or spells), destroy it with a magical earthquake, and similar; although the Carnival isn't indestructible (scenery should burn, break, and fall apart whenever that would be funny!), it *is* a supernatural entity capable of disappearing to save itself. If theft triggered the violence, remind the players that those goods are now *gone*. “Heroes” hellbent on destroying the Carnival can undertake a quest to find a way to lock it in place.

For in-between cases – or to drum into the players' skulls that the Carnival is both powerful and a bit scary – send in the horrific clowns.

### Horrific Clown

A humanoid clown with rubbery flesh, bony fingernails, and a gaping maw *in its chest*. Attacks savagely because it knows it'll be back before long. Often found in hordes, spilling from impossibly small places. Likes children.

<b>ST:</b> 12	<b>HP:</b> 12	<b>Speed:</b> 6.00
<b>DX:</b> 12	<b>Will:</b> 13	<b>Move:</b> 6
<b>IQ:</b> 11	<b>Per:</b> 11	
<b>HT:</b> 12	<b>FP:</b> 12	<b>SM:</b> 0
<b>Dodge:</b> 9	<b>Parry:</b> 10	<b>DR:</b> 2

**Bony Claws (14):** 1d crushing. Reach C, 1.

**Maw (14):** 1d+3 cutting. Reach C.

**Terror:** Affects a single subject. Roll Fright Check at +1, after the first (from *any* clown) within 24 hours. Not “always on” – the victim must initiate a noncombat interaction, or the clown must take a Concentrate maneuver in combat. Range 1.

**Traits:** Berserk (12); Callous; Dark Vision; Doesn't Sleep; Double-Jointed; Elastic Skin; High Pain Threshold; Indomitable; Penetrating Voice; Sadism (12); Sinister Clown 4; Striking ST 5 (Maw); Unfazeable; Unnatural Features 5.

**Skills:** Acrobatics-14; Brawling-14; Climbing-16; Escape-15; Intimidation-17 (18 when surprising with laughter); Psychology-13; Stealth-15; Wrestling-12.

**Class:** Varies.

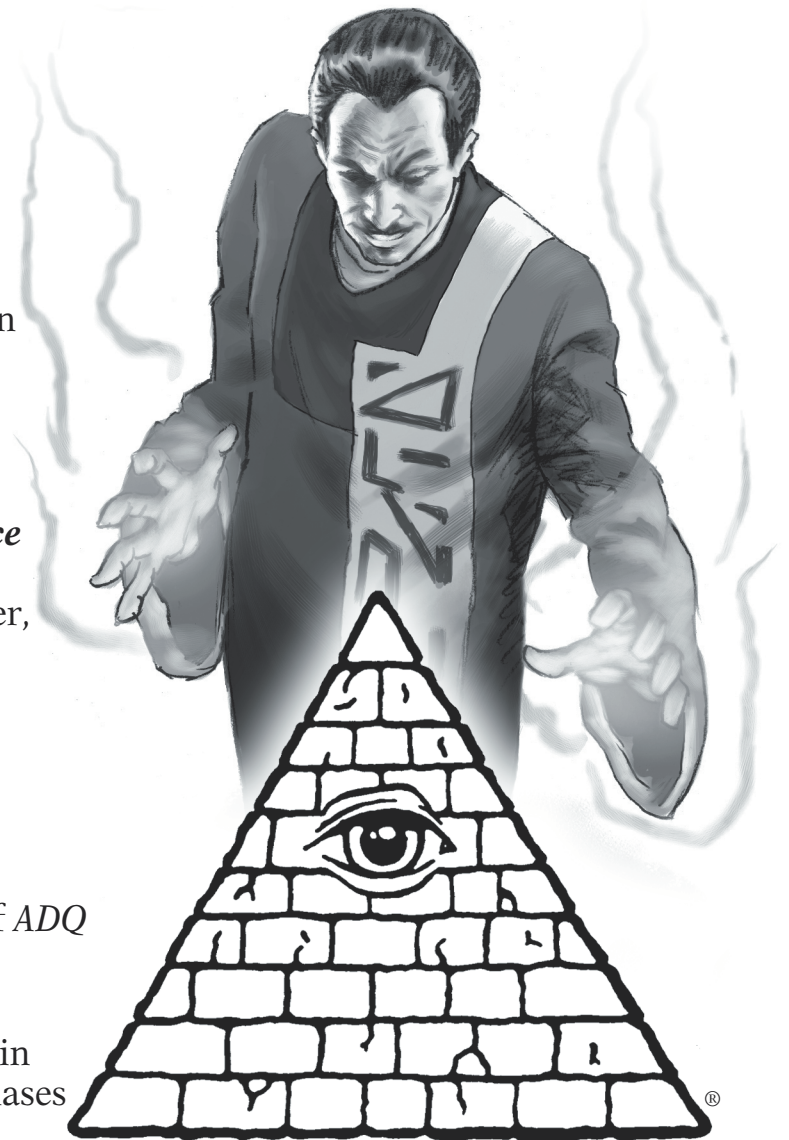
**Notes:** Sinister Clown is as defined for the Ringmaster (p. 9). Skills reflect the effects of traits.

# STUCK FOR AN ADVENTURE? NO PROBLEM.

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