

The Thought Police

Using psionics to keep characters in line

I tell you this up front – it weren’t my fault, what happened in Gundershall. I would have sprung the others if I could, but they got this militia there, the likes of which I ain’t ever seen before. They know what crime you’re gonna commit before you even thunk out a proper plan. That’s why the others wound up nicked. ‘Cuz of them militia. I tell you, Gundershall is one city the Lightfinger Guild ought to avoid.

Start from the beginning? Well, okay. If you figure it’s gonna help the guild. Just so long as it warns my brother and sister thieves about what they’re in for.

We’d heard Gundershall was a rich city. Lots of flash homes and wealthy merchants with jewellery dripping off ‘em, just begging to be lifted. But that only figures, don’t it? Gundershall’s in the heart of the diamond mining district.

So me, Arias, Lucky the Legbreaker, and Big Efful make our way over the mountains and down into Gundershall. It’s just as rich as they say – nobs wearing cloth of gold, and big houses with marble pillars. Everyone looks so soft we figure we’ll rule this town. Tumble whoever we want, catpaw our way into the best homes, and stiff anyone who gets in our way.

But first, we want to make sure we ain’t stepping into marked territory. Our first stop’s a pub on the other side of the stables, so to speak, a cheap little hovel with sour ale. If there’s already a guild in Gundershall, we figure this is the place to find it. We hang around a whole week, eyeballing the locals and dropping a word or two in the cant whenever we see a likely lookin’ scraw. And what do we find? Nuthin’. Not a single thief in the whole city, near as we could make out.

Arias is gettin’ restless by now, and figures it’s time to do a little pocket sifting. I give it the nod, ‘cuz we need a little spending money. She edges out into the street and picks a likely mark. Flash lookin’ fellow, probably a noble. It’s going smooth and easy; her hand’s in and out like a hummer. And then somethin’ happens. This militia guy – and I swear his back’s to her the whole time – turns around and grabs Arias’ wrist like he saw the whole thing. He gives a whistle and – pop! pop! pop! – three more of the militia appear beside him.

They don’t look so tough – they’re only wearing leather armor and carrying dinky little swords – but Arias takes one look at ‘em and falls to her knees, begging ‘em not to hurt her. From the expression on her face, you’d think she was about to be crisped by a dragon. Next thing we know, Arias is marchin’ off down the street, all jerky like, between those four fellows. Me, Lucky, and Efful are so surprised we don’t move quick enough. By the time we get to the corner, they’re gone.

We don’t see Arias for a day or two. When we do, she’s gone peculiar in the head. Says she can’t remember how to thief no more. And it’s true, sure as sin. We test her out on a simple shell game with the bartender and she muffs it straight off. Bad enough that Lucky had to cover for her, but then she goes and says she’s gonna report herself to the militia, for committing a crime. Big Efful had to take a swing at her, to knock that silly idea out of her head.

An that’s when our next problem starts. Big Efful’s been getting testy, these last few days, and so when one of the patrons says to lay off Arias, Efful figures on startin’ a little bar room brawl. Tables and teeth start to fly, and Lucky and I sit back to watch the fun. But before Efful gets a chance to bloody her other fist, there’s this pop! pop! noise again, and two of them militia fellows appear.

Now Efful’s pretty big, and we’re figuring these two aren’t gonna last a minute. But were we ever wrong! Those two was tougher and stronger than guys their size had a right to be, and one had a arm that ended in an axe. Not one of yer screw-off hook hands, but a honest to blazes metal axe where his hand should be. Well, Efful takes one look at that and draws a sword. Next thing ya know, that sword’s glowing red-hot and Efful drops it on the floor.

Efful’s a real scrapper, so the sword trick don’t slow her down none. She slams a fist into mister axe-hand – and swears a blue streak when his stomach turns out to be as hard as metal, too. Before she’s got a chance to try somethin’ else, the guy behind her blinks. Just blinks, mind you, and Efful disappears with a pop! Beats me where she went. She don’t know no spells and sure as sacrilege didn’t tely-port herself nowhere.

The militia guys turn and look at us. Like I say, they don’t look so tough, but what they said sent us

back a step.

"We've been watching you," they says, "through the eyes of your friend, here. Everything Arias sees, we see. Everything she hears, we hear. Try to steal anything – or try that shell game on another bartender – and you'll be under arrest before your hand reaches your pocket."

Then pop! pop! and they're gone too.

The folks in the bar is lookin' sideways and surly at us, so we lit out fast. In all the confusion, seems we lost Arias. Probably went to turn herself in to the militia, after all. And good riddance, since she's become a ratter for them. If I were you, I'd toss her out of the guild.

How did I lose Lucky? Well I'm comin' to it.

You know how Lucky is. He'd as soon kill a man as steal from him. I only meant for him to do a simple smash-and-grab job, but he got carried away again. 'Stead of just knocking the shopkeeper out, Lucky stiffered him. Left his knife behind, too. We went back for it, but the shop was crawling with militia by the time we got there. Still, I figured we was safe, since nobody in this town would recognize Lucky's knife.

We watched from the alley out back, to make sure things was smooth. But it weren't. Don't it figure, but them militia guys cast some sort of magic over the knife. One of the fellows picked it up, closed his eyes, and without even makin' a gesture or babbling them funny words that wizards like to use he starts talkin' to the knife like it's alive. I dunno how it did it, but that knife told him Lucky's name and age, just like that. It even knew that Lucky was one-eighth ogre – something even I didn't know about him before.

We legged it away down the alley, but there was one of them militia guys blocking the way. I drew my knife, thinkin' to sidle around behind him and pat his back while Lucky kept his attention. But next thing I know, Lucky's down on the ground crying – actual tears, for sanity's sake – and sayin' over and over that he's a worthless criminal scum.

I'm so busy gaping at Lucky I don't see the punches coming. But they hit, hard, and my arm goes numb. I look up, and there's three more militia fellows standing beside the first. And none of 'em close enough to have punched me.

They questioned us on the spot about the murder – I guess the folks in Gundershall don't believe in trials. Trooper he is, Lucky lied beautifully, once he got his composure back. But them militia guys could tell, every time Lucky flipped them a fable. And then one of 'em looks Lucky dead in the eye and says a single word: "Guilty."

The others give this grim nod, and I'm wonderin' what'll come next. I kinda get a hunch when they tell me to take a step to the side. I expected maybe they'd give Lucky a bruisin' and tell him to heave on away from Gundershall, but that wasn't their style, oh no. They just stand there and look at him. After a second or two, Lucky goes all white and funny looking, and then he disappears. Well, most of him, anyway. All that's left is a pair of feet, leakin' a little red.

I'm thinkin' it's an illusion, and still feeling pretty cocky. But then one of the militia guys looks into my eyes and, in a creepy kinda way says, "It's no illusion. Your friend has been executed, for the crime of murder. I suggest you leave Gundershall, before you wind up committing a capital offence, as well."

I'm ashamed to say it, but I turned and ran. Them fellows was just too weird for me. I was gonna leave town right there and then. But when I slowed down to catch my breath, my eye lit on one of them fancy homes. Whoever lived there had left the door open a crack. And that's an even better invitation than an unfastened lock. 'Specially when I could see the glint of silverware on a table just inside the door.

I looked over my shoulder for the militia, but didn't see any. I was gonna leave town that night, but figured Gundershall owed me a little something, just to pay my way back home again. 'Specially after the way it treated my crew. So I slipped on over to the door and eased it open.

The silverware's just inside, and as my hand closes on it, I smile. I'm as good as wealthy. Then a voice whispers softly in my ear. "Aren't you worried that theft might be a capital offence?" it asks.

I hate to say it, but I screamed. And I dropped that silverware on the ground. It made a clatter that must have been heard for blocks. But when I look around, there's no one there. No one at all.

I gotta tell you, I was spooked. Not only were those militia guys able to disintegrate a man where he stood, but they were invisible too. If they went for me, I'd never even see it coming.

So that's how it happened that I left Gundershall without a copper in my pocket. It was a tough go, on the road back. I wasn't sure how far them militia patrolled, and I was afraid even to steal an apple from a tree. Along the way, I thought of going back for Efful or Arias, but figured it weren't worth it.

So that's my report. And if the Lightfinger Guild knows what's good for it, they won't try no thievin' in Gundershall ever again.

In the typical AD&D campaign, the militia that serve as the police force of a town or city are simple fighters, perhaps armed with magical weapons and armor. They're usually little more than cannon fodder for high-level player characters with a variety of spells and magical items at their disposal. There is little to make the life of a thief difficult – or to dissuade characters of chaotic alignment from running amok in town, injuring or killing whomever they please. The DM can always throw ever-increasing numbers of militia members in their way, but the PCs are likely to only kill them and take the magical goodies they were carrying.

Spellcasters are an option, but the lower hit points of wizards make them poor candidates for the militia. And both they and clerics face a common problem – spells that take several rounds to cast.

In contrast, the psionicist offers several advantages as a militia member. Most psionic abilities require no preparation time – they take effect instantaneously. In addition, the use of psionics does not require gestures, spell books, special vocalizations, or material components, making psionics an “invisible” art.

Psionic abilities can be used by a militia member while patrolling the streets, as an aid in arresting criminals, to question suspects, to investigate crime scenes, to spy upon known criminals – even to rehabilitate convicted felons.

Psionics on the beat

A psionicist militia member on patrol has a number of abilities that will make the job of policing a town easier. For simple observation of suspicious characters, there's the *all-round vision* ability, which allows the member to watch with his or her back turned. A member trying to locate a suspect who is hiding might use *life detection*, while *spirit sense* and *psionic sense* can help a member who is on the trail of a ghostly spirit or a fellow psionicist.

Danger sense protects the militia member while he or she is on patrol, while *teleport trigger* can instantly return the member to headquarters if he or she is wounded (reduced to a certain number of hit points) or knocked unconscious.

Militia members can use their psionic abilities to stay in touch with one another, much as real-world police officers use a radio system. *Mindlink* is the most reliable ability, since it provides two-way communication over an unlimited distance. But *send thoughts* or *psychic messenger* can also be used by a militia member wanting to make a report.

When a crime is spotted and additional militia members are required, either to make an arrest or help control a violent situation, members can arrive on the scene instantly by using the *teleport* ability. *Dimensional door* is somewhat less useful, since it causes temporary disorientation and since it has a maximum range of 50 yards, but *dimension walk* is a good alternative for shorter distances; travelling one mile or less takes just under 30 seconds. For longer journeys (to apprehend a suspect who has fled to another city, for example) the psionicist militia member can use *probability travel* to make the arrest.

Keeping the peace

Typical psionicist militia members are armed with short swords, spears, hand axes, short bows, war hammers, or light crossbows. Some carry a small shield. Should additional muscle be required, the psionicist might also be a fighter – either a dual-class human, or a multi-class halfling or dwarf.

The psionicist militia member has a number of abilities that can help when he or she is facing a violent criminal. While a psionicist is limited to leather armor (other types reduce the psionic power score), the ability *flesh armor* can be used to drop the militia member's armor class until it is the equivalent of plate mail. An *inertial barrier* can protect against everything from missiles to acid, while *displacement* creates a false image that provides an armor class bonus.

The psionicist can use *enhanced strength* or *adrenalin control* to boost his or her abilities, and can use *combat mind* to anticipate an opponent's fighting tactics and thus gain an advantage.

The *graft weapon* ability also provides an advantage, and if the militia member is disarmed, *body weaponry* can convert a limb into a replacement weapon, or *ballistic attack* can turn a small, hurled object into a deadly missile.

The psionicist militia member need not resort to weapons at all. He or she can use the *detonate* ability to explode weapons from a distance of 60 yards, and can *disintegrate* an item or creature at 50 yards. *Project force* can deliver a body punch up to 200 yards distant.

The psionicist can use *molecular agitation* to make a metal weapon too hot to hold, or to cause the clothing of an opponent to burst into flame. *Molecular manipulation* and *soften* can be used to create flaws in the weapons of opponents or to weaken metal armor to the point of uselessness.

Making an arrest

The psionic militia member does not need to rely upon the authority of his or her office to instil obedience. Thieves and other lawbreakers who normally thumb their noses at authority can be brought into line using a variety of psionic abilities. *Awe* can be used to mentally intimidate a suspect, while *invincible foes* can convince a lawbreaker that the militia member is unbeatable. *Ego whip* can leave a suspect feeling worthless and inferior, prompting the lawbreaker to surrender.

Once a suspect is taken into custody, the psionicist can seize the lawbreaker and *teleport* him or her to prison, or can *teleport other* if the suspect is willing to surrender (or is unconscious). Those who refuse to surrender may be dealt with by means of the *control body* ability, which allows the psionicist to move them about like puppets. *Domination* and *mass domination* can also be used to make lawbreakers do as the militia member wishes.

Especially tough lawbreakers can be dealt with using the *banishment* ability, which allows the psionicist to teleport the character to a pocket dimension and hold him or her there for as long as the psionicist is able to maintain this ability. The only lawbreakers who will be able to escape this form of “solitary confinement” are those who have access to the astral or ethereal planes, or who can teleport between planes.

Questioning suspects

When trying to determine the guilt or innocence of a suspect, the psionic militia member has several advantages over real-world police officers. A number of psionic abilities can be used to establish guilt – or innocence.

By using *aura sight*, a militia member can determine a suspect’s alignment. While this is not necessarily proof of evil doing, it can demonstrate a tendency toward lawbreaking or violence. During the questioning period, the militia member can use *truthear* as a psionic lie detector, or can use *ESP* to directly read the thoughts of a suspect. Even *empathy* has its uses in determining a suspect’s emotional reaction to a crime.

Some of these abilities can also be used to prevent crime. By using *ESP* to read the thoughts of a suspicious character, a militia member can learn that a crime is about to be committed and step in to prevent it.

When questioning suspects, *probe* can be used to dig a deep into a character’s subconscious to unearth memories that the suspect is not consciously thinking about. If the militia members are of an evil alignment, *inflict pain* can be used to torture the truth out of a suspect.

If a lawbreaker is in dis guise or trying to hide his or her identity with illusion or polymorphing spells, *identity penetration* can be used to reveal the truth.

Finally, if the militia includes at least three psionicists of 7th level or higher, *retrospection* can be used to glean free-floating memories from the past – even memories originally created by witnesses who have long since died.

In areas patrolled by a psionic militia, certain magical items are banned outright, since they prevent militia members from doing their jobs. Banned items include the *ring of mind shielding*, which makes its wearer immune to *ESP*, lie detection, and psionic abilities that can determine alignment, and the *amulet of proof against detection and location*, which can protect against *clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *ESP*, and other scrying attempts. Sometimes, these items will be used by militia who are doing “undercover” work, in an effort to shield their true identities.

Surveillance

If a psionic militia member suspects that a citizen is planning a crime or is about to break the law, he or she can monitor that suspect using a number of different psionic abilities. By using either *clairaudience* or *sound link*, the member can listen in on incriminating conversations. *Clairvoyance* and *sight link* can be used to observe criminal activities as they are taking place, allowing the militia member to serve as a witness.

For undercover surveillance work, the militia member can use *metamorphosis* to change into an object or animal, or can observe unnoticed using *invisibility* or *superior invisibility*. Observation can also be conducted unobtrusively using *shadow-form* or *chameleon power*.

At the scene of a crime

In the real world, much of the work done by police involves trying to piece together clues after a crime has been committed. The crime scene can yield several clues that a psionic militia member can analyze using his or her unique talents.

By means of the *object reading* ability, a militia member can determine the race, sex, age, and alignment of the person who last “owned” the object. This loose term also includes thieves – even though their lawful ownership of an object might be subject to dispute. This ability can also provide the psionicist with information on how the last owner gained the object (perhaps through illegal means) and lost it. *Object reading* can be especially useful if applied to a murder weapon.

The militia member can survey the crime scene itself by means of the ability *sensitivity to psychic impressions*.

This will reveal residues of powerful emotions to the psionicist – emotions that may help to determine if a death was accidental (little emotional residue) or was a murder, which can leave a strong residue of hatred or fear.

Finally, *poison sense* can be used to determine whether a person who was found dead was poisoned. Unfortunately, only good investigative work can reveal the type of poison used; the ability only reveals the presence of poison.

Criminal rehabilitation

In cities with a psionic militia, not just crime investigation but also criminal rehabilitation can employ psionic abilities. In passing sentence on an offender, a judge might use *empathy* to determine how a suspect feels about his or her crime. Those who display no remorse receive stiffer sentences.

Other psionic abilities can be used to rehabilitate the lawbreaker. A *post-hypnotic suggestion* might compel a criminal to, in future, turn himself or herself in to the militia if subsequent crimes are committed. The *mindwipe* ability offers more drastic measure of dealing with lawbreakers, particularly with repeat offenders. By using this ability, the psionicist can seal off portions of the criminal's mind, limiting access to learned skills – particularly those skills associated with thieving. (In terms of game mechanics, the character's experience level is lowered, reducing his or her thieving skill scores.) In the process, the criminal's Intelligence and Wisdom are lowered, but this is considered a small price to pay for the rehabilitation of a criminal. Best of all, these changes are permanent and can only be reversed via *psychic surgery*.

Magical items useful to the militia

In campaigns where psionics are severely restricted or are absent altogether, a number of magical items can be used to duplicate the psionic abilities described above. The unfortunate drawback is that these portable items can fall into the hands of lawbreakers and be used against the force of law that they were designed to serve.

These magical items include: *crystal ball*, *helm of telepathy*, *medallion of ESP*, *potion of human control*, *potion of invisibility*, *ring of chameleon power*, *ring of human influence*, *ring of invisibility*, *ring of truth*, *ring of X-ray vision*, *robe of blending*.

Adventure ideas

While psionicists are prohibited from being of chaotic alignment, they may be either good or evil. Thus a city patrolled by a psionic militia may be a safe, secure place where citizens don't bother to lock their doors and where violent crime is almost unheard of. Or it may be a fantasy version of 1984, in which "thought police" intimidate the citizenry, who are terrified of being arrested for thinking "illegal thoughts." The PCs may thus find themselves either supporting the local militia or working actively to defeat or overthrow it. In either case, PC thieves will certainly be getting more than they bargained for.

Here are two ideas for adventures that hinge upon a psionic militia:

A thieves' guild (possibly one that was ejected previously from the town) is planning to gain new territory. But first, they must eliminate the psionicists who serve as the town's militia. They plan to use cerebral parasites or brain moles to do the job. The PCs get involved either because the thieves test the creatures on a psionic member of the party, or because they are hired by the thieves to capture and distribute these creatures. The PCs may or may not realize the true purpose of this capture-and-release program until it is too late.

A psionic militia is being set up in the PCs' city. Word goes out that the militia is hiring, and the PCs apply. Part of the application process involves testing each candidate for psionic wild talents. These latent abilities can only be awakened by a psionicist skilled in *psychic surgery*. In the process, one of the PCs is accidentally *fate linked* with another applicant. The applicant later commits a horrendous murder and is pursued by the militia. If caught, he or she will be executed. The *fate link* can be reversed, but unfortunately there aren't any psionicists currently available to do the job. The PCs are forced to (temporarily) find and protect this violent criminal, for if the criminal dies, so will their companion.