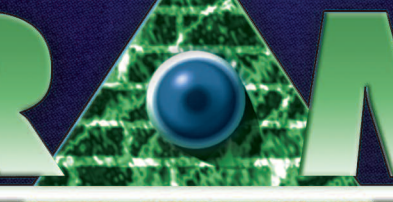


PYRAMID



Issue 3/69 July '14

PSIONICS II



A LITTLE BIT PSYCHIC

by Sean Punch

MIND AND BODY
by Christopher R. Rice

THE PYRAMID FARM
by J. Edward Tremlett

THE OVERMIND INSTITUTE
by David L. Pulver

EXPANDED PSI FOR SANDMEN
by Jason "PK" Levine

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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We're reading your brain waves, there's no use in not thinking about white elephants, and not even the tinfoil hat will keep you from loving this month's *Pyramid*! We're turning our all-seeing eye toward psionic powers, with special emphasis on how it intersects with the world of **GURPS**.

Sometimes you don't want psionic powers to be the dominant force of a campaign, but you still want a light addition of psi for flavor. When you want to be *A Little Bit Psychic*, Sean Punch – mastermind of **GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks** – has just the mini-supplement for you. It includes over a dozen new psionic perks, a new Talent, 30+ new minor abilities (and guidelines for creating your own), plus a table of existing mental-minded perks and where to find them.

When your *Mind and Body* are one, you can do truly extraordinary things. Learn about three new fighting styles that fuse **GURPS Martial Arts** with **GURPS Psionic Powers** from the dojo of Christopher R. Rice. You'll also get new techniques, new perks, two new psionic abilities, and expanded suggestions for psi-amplifiers.

Hints of their existence have flitted out from the shadows for years, across several supplements. Now, David L. Pulver – author of **GURPS Psi-Tech** – expands on the history, organization, and key people of *The Overmind Institute* (first introduced in **GURPS Psionics** for Third Edition). This month's Eidetic Memory also includes a **GURPS** template for a typical Overmind scientist, plus insight for adding this sinister group to a **GURPS Monster Hunters** campaign.

If you're psychic, the latest New Age movement – Next Nubia Now – is tailor made for you. Visit *The Pyramid Farm* for a refreshing haven from the fast-paced modern world! But once you're there, you might discover something far more sinister . . . and you might never return. Learn the systemless secrets herein, if you dare.

GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier offered some brief suggestions for including psi in Project SANDMAN campaigns. Jason "PK" Levine – editor of that supplement and author of **GURPS Psionic Campaigns** – offers his suggestions for *Expanded Psi for Sandmen*. This guide provides seven new abilities (including psi techniques), tips for adjusting the taisher template, and ideas for "imperfect psi" that augment the setting's horrific aspects.

This issue's Random Thought Table goes right for the liver with some challenges to psionic presuppositions, while Odds and Ends out the issue with suggestions for low-psionic campaigns plus thoughts on species-specific abilities. This issue of *Pyramid* is an "all that and a kitchen think" of awesome!

Article Colors

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue (humor, editorial, etc.)

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features

Purple: Systemless Features

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FROM THE EDITOR

EDITOR'S LOG, "SUPPLEMENTAL"

One of the earliest issues of *Dragon* magazine I purchased as it was coming out monthly was #91. That issue contained something that I considered one of the mind-blowing things about that era of the magazine: a pullout supplement. In issue #91's case, it was "Treasure Trove," a collection of magic items. If it had been a standard article listing a new collection of ensorcelled equipment, that would've been cool enough. But it was designed as the center of the issue, in exactly 12 pages, with a secondary "cover" – so if it could be pulled out and treated as a mini-supplement.

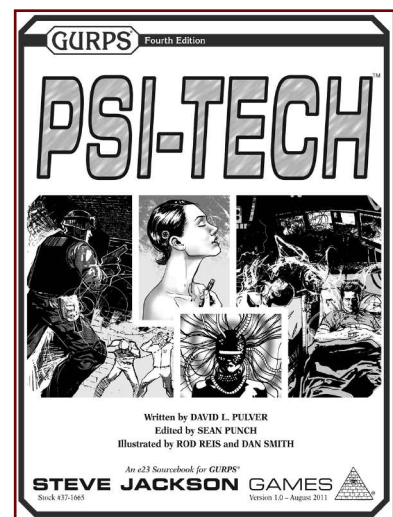
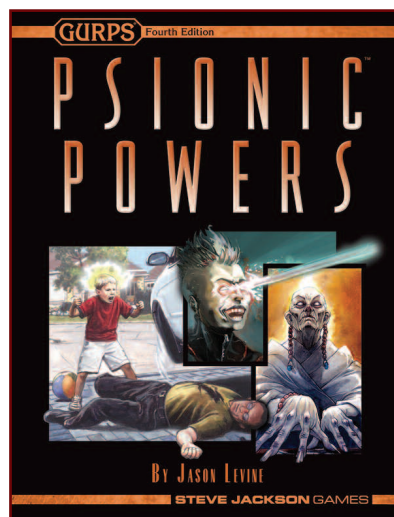
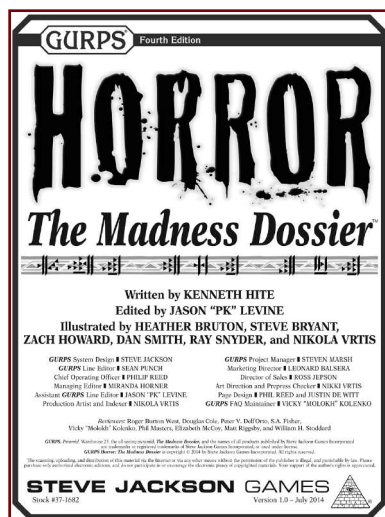
That blew my 11-year-old mind, and gave those types of articles an increased weight and utility. I felt like I was getting a free supplement (or adventure, or whatever they included in the center). In hindsight, I realize it was part of the periodical I'd paid my 11-year-old lunch money for, but it still felt like a bonus.

While this third volume of *Pyramid* doesn't really need to worry about page signatures – and our experiments at including staples with the digital downloads has been a big flop – I do

still feel a special thrill when we offer an article that could serve as a mini-supplement all by itself (such as Sean Punch's excellent "A Little Bit Psychic," pp. 4-11). I also know many readers print out articles that appeal to them when they download a new issue, so we strive to make sure that articles run on sequential pages; we even make sure articles end on a full page (even if we need to squeeze in an ad or a quote to make it look pretty, or shuffle a standalone bit to Odds and Ends), unlike magazines of old who would strew their content across multiple quadrants of the issue. Hopefully, we'll never need to do the "(Turn to page 30)" thing that even my beloved *Dragon* often did in the middle of many features.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

How well did our mental efforts work this month? Did we blow your mind, or overthink it? Send us your private thoughts to pyramid@sjgames.com, or gather at the hive mind of forums.sjgames.com. We're always reading your comments and working to make the magazine better, and we promise to always
(Turn to page 87.)



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A LITTLE BIT PSYCHIC

BY SEAN PUNCH

Mental super-powers, psionic training institutes and government remote-viewing projects, the astral plane and the creatures that lurk there . . . such stuff can be fun but has far-reaching implications for the campaign landscape. It also requires a lot of rules – enough to fill *GURPS Psionic Powers* and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi*, and then spill over into *more* supplements (and *Pyramid* articles!). Then there are the point costs of all those psionic abilities, Talents, perks, skills, and techniques, which are capable of consuming even the biggest budget and pushing power levels ever-upward. While psi is cool, it has the potential to dominate not only minds but also the game world, players' attention, and character sheets.

That isn't how "psychic powers" should look in tales where the paranormal is meant to provide spice rather than serve as a major ingredient. Instead, such gifts ought to be liminal or flaky, and consequently dismissed as coincidence at best or as superstition at worst. If that describes *your* campaign, read on!

PSYCHIC PERKS

The smallest psychic gifts are what *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks* calls "power perks." According to *Psionic Powers*, p. 19, each such perk is considered part of a psionic power – foiled by Anti-Psi, affected by psi-tech, and so on – despite lacking a power modifier. Such traits don't need psi skills, and rolls required to use them receive a bonus from the relevant power Talent. All of those rulings remain true in the framework presented here, meaning that Psychic Perks come with an upside and a downside that are roughly equal in impact, and thus have no effect on point cost:

Psionic Talents and beneficial psi-tech aid the use of Psychic Perks, while Anti-Psi abilities and baneful psi-tech curb their use.

Psionic Powers also states that these perks are available only to people who possess the abilities or Talent for a psi power. That *isn't* necessarily true in this picture. Psychic Perks may be the *only* psionic traits available in the campaign (which eliminates perks that require full-blown abilities to function). Alternatively, the GM might make Psychic (p. 6) and/or Unusual Background (Psychic) (p. 9) a prerequisite for such perks – a flavorful and highly recommended approach!

Talent and Psychic Perks

The GM decides which Talent benefits rolls for Psychic Perks. If such perks coexist with full-fledged psi abilities, then

the Talent is likely to be suited to the particular perk; e.g., Telepathy Talent for any perk that influences others' minds. If "psionics" describes a unified power, then Psi Talent (*Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi*, p. 4) aids *all* Psychic Perks. And if such perks are the only psionic gifts in the campaign, Psychic (p. 6) may apply.

Talent adds to rolls to *use* Psychic Perks; e.g., if a perk calls for an IQ roll to activate, the roll becomes IQ + Talent. However, Talent *doesn't* "stack" with the skill or attribute bonuses that many perks grant, such as the +1 to Acting for Honest Face. In these and other cases where there's no obvious roll for Talent to aid, the GM might do one of the following:

- Add the bonus to a minor roll incidental to the situation. *Examples:* Air Jet requires no roll, but the GM might ask for an IQ roll to blow out one *specific* candle – and in that case, Talent would add. When Convincing Nod is a Psychic Perk, Talent doesn't benefit Fast-Talk but *does* give the subject a Vision bonus to notice the psychic . . . which could be good or bad! And Deep Sleeper as a psychic gift may grant Talent as a bonus on the IQ roll to awaken.
- Secretly roll against the user's Perception + Talent when the perk comes into play, with success revealing a vague clue regarding the situation. *Examples:* In the case of Honest Face, the GM might inform the psychic that he gets the feeling that someone is scanning the crowd for suspects – but not who, why, where, or how. When Pet is a Psychic Perk, the owner may become aware that the creature is frightened or in danger, even from afar.

And if *none* of the above possibilities apply, so be it!

How Many Psychic Perks?

Psychic Perks will feel more distinctive if each PC's allotment is *separate* from the maximum number of generic perks, Style Perks, Magic Perks, etc. A recommendation is one Psychic Perk per 25 starting character points. Thus, 25- to 50-point "ordinary folks" may buy one or two, while 100- to 150-point heroes can possess about as many as they have quirks. (Beyond that power level, full-fledged psi powers start to make more sense.)

Psychic vs. Non-Psychic

The same perk can and often does exist in psychic and non-psychic forms. The *player* chooses what bin to put it in, which in turn determines the allotment it comes out of and whether it's affected by psionic Talents and psi-tech. This decision is permanent – a perk cannot start in one category and move to another.

Several perks obey different rules when they're not mundane abilities. For instance, Forgettable Face is incompatible with the extremes of Appearance unless it's exotic. It should go without saying that Psychic Perks *always* qualify as exotic or supernatural!

All of this makes it important to note which perks are which on the character sheet. A simple footnote mark should do.

Existing Perks

Many perks described in *GURPS* supplements could be Psychic Perks, influenced by psionic Talents, supernatural phenomena, etc. The *Perk Table* (below) is an annotated list of good, *subtle* suggestions. (Table columns are explained on p. 6.) It isn't exhaustive – the GM might allow a psychic version of any perk that isn't undeniably, visibly physical.

Perk Table

<i>Perk</i>	<i>Power</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Air Jet	Telekinesis	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 10	
Autotrance	Astral Projection, Dream Control, Telepathy	p. B101	
Brotherhood	Animal Telepathy, Telepathy	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 17	
Call of the Wild	Animal Telepathy	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 12	
Card Sharp	ESP	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 42	
Coin Trick	Teleportation	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 69	
Controllable Disadvantage (Mental)	Varies	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 12	[1]
Deep Sleeper	Dream Control	p. B101	
Dowsing	ESP	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 42	
Ecstatic Psi	Any	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 19	
Forecast	ESP, Probability Alteration	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 42	
Forgettable Face	Psychic Vampirism, Telepathy	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 4	
Gaze Into the Abyss	Anti-Psi, Psychic Vampirism, Telepathy	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 24	
Good with (Animal)	Animal Telepathy	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 13	
Good with (Social Group)	Telepathy	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 13	
Hands-Free	Telekinesis	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 16	
Hilfe!	Telepathy	<i>Dungeon Fantasy 14</i> , p. 14	
Honest Face	Psychic Vampirism, Telepathy	p. B101	
I Know What You Mean	Telepathy	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 63	
Influence Shticks	Telepathy	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 15	[2]
Know-It-All	ESP	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 42	
Loaded Dice	Probability Alteration, Psychokinesis	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 44	
Moneyclip Magnet	Probability Alteration	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 44	
Near-Death Projection	Astral Projection	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 29	
Passing Appearance	Telepathy	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 4	
Pet	Animal Telepathy	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 18	[3]
Postmortem	Psychic Healing	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 48	
Psychic Surgery	Psychic Healing	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 48	
Schadenfreude	Psychic Vampirism	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 51	
Shopper's Blessing	Probability Alteration	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 44	
Simple Defense	Anti-Psi, Telepathy	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 24	
Small-Scale TK	Psychokinesis	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 56	
Social Vampire	Psychic Vampirism	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 51	
Soothing Touch	Psychic Healing	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 48	
Static Control	Ergokinesis	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 35	
Tolerance	Anti-Psi	<i>Psionic Powers</i> , p. 24	[4]
Trivial Destiny	Probability Alteration	<i>Power-Ups 2</i> , p. 20	
Weird Dreams	Astral Projection, Dream Control, ESP	<i>Dungeon Fantasy 14</i> , p. 14	

Notes

[1] Good examples – which *can* be exotic or supernatural, remember! – are Amnesia or Delusions as defenses against interrogation or mind reading (Anti-Psi), Dread as a sense of sorts (ESP), Easy to Read to boost your “mental signal” (Telepathy), Frightens Animals to discourage beasts (Animal Telepathy), Lifebane to kill off vermin (Psychic Vampirism), Nightmares to inconvenience dream intruders (Anti-Psi *or* Dream Control), Supersensitive to detect minds (Telepathy), and Weirdness Magnet to attract ghosts and the like (Astral Projection).

[2] Talent doesn't aid skill rolls, but *does* aid the subject's Vision rolls to notice you.

[3] The animal is a *very minor* “bonded creature” (psionic familiar), and may be ever-so-slightly weird if the GM allows.

[4] The GM may associate Tolerance with Psychokinesis, Telepathy, or other powers, if it resists those powers' abilities. This perk exists only if psionic attacks exist, although the PCs needn't be the ones wielding them; e.g., in a *GURPS Horror* campaign, sinister NPCs may command major powers while the heroes have only trivial psychic abilities.

Perk: The perk's name.

Power: Which canonical psi power(s) the perk fits best. If Psychic Perks are part of a picture wherein there are no major psionic abilities and thus there's little justification for multiple Talents – which is earnestly recommended – simply treat “psychic power” as a single, unified entity and *ignore* this column.

Reference: Where to find the perk.

Notes: Footnotes on how the perk works in this application.

New Talent: Psychic

5 points/level

You have a Talent (pp. B89-91) for psychic matters. Unlike Parapsychologist (*GURPS Psis*, p. 5) and Psionist (*Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi*, p. 21), this knack *doesn't* facilitate the deliberate, disciplined study of psionics using Expert Skill (Psionics), Hidden Lore (Psi), Occultism, Physics (Paraphysics), or Psychology, or aid such psi-tech knowhow as Electronics Operation (Psychotronics). Indeed, the more specialized of these skills might not exist in the game world! It doesn't add to Hypnotism, either – you don't consciously project mental influence.

Instead, Psychic provides insight into the mystical and weird facets of *your own mind*. It benefits **Autohypnosis**, **Dreaming**, **Meditation**, **Mental Strength**, and **Mind Block**, plus any **Philosophy** specialty concerned more with *self* than with aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, logic, etc. The five core skills are all Will-based, so this trait might seem less attractive for the price than Will, except . . .

- Instead of providing a reaction bonus, Psychic adds its level to all rolls to use Psychic Perks (pp. 4-7) and minor psychic abilities (pp. 8-11). In the terminology of *GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents*, this bonus is an “alternative benefit.” Non-psychic versions of these traits never benefit from this Talent.

- Psychic may be a *prerequisite* for Psychic Perks and/or minor psychic abilities. In that case, there are Psychics and non-Psychics, and only the former possess these little gifts. People without this Talent can still have non-psychic versions of such traits, but these count against any mundane allotments the GM sets; notably, such unfortunates don't get additional slots for Psychic Perks.

In effect, Psychic isn't merely a skill Talent but also the Talent for a broad, vague psionic power defined not by a focused subject matter (such as animals, healing, minds, or probability) but by all of its abilities being *inexpensive* and *subtle*.

New Perks

In a campaign where most psionic gifts are perks, it's important to offer psychic PCs enough choices that each can carve out a niche. For this purpose, more is always better! Here are several examples to help out – and to illustrate the general feel and power level recommended for homebrew creations.

These examples suggest suitable powers. If the game uses full-fledged psionics, then append the new perks to the relevant lists in *Psionic Powers*. If it stops at Psychic Perks – or at minor psychic abilities (pp. 8-11), at most – then everything below is tied to the campaign's unified “psychic” or “psionic” power.

As in *Power-Ups 2: Perks*, † marks a perk that requires specialization of some kind, while ‡ indicates one that comes in several levels that count as a perk apiece.

20/20 Hindsight

Suggested Powers: ESP or Probability Alteration.

You have Intuition (p. B63) that works *only after the fact*. Whenever you commit to an important course of action, the GM will secretly roll against your IQ, using the rules for Intuition. Success means that when the truth of the situation unfolds and you're too far along to back out, you'll realize for certain whether your decision was good or bad. This is valuable for distinguishing wise or unwise choices from lucky or unlucky dice – after all, random rolls could derail even the perfect strategy, or conceal how close you came to disaster! A GM admission like “You looked in all the wrong places and caught the murderer only because he got 18 on his self-control roll and returned to gloat” is a handy learning experience for the *next* situation of that kind.

Auric Squint†

Suggested Powers: Psychic Healing, Psychic Vampirism, or Telepathy.

By squinting at someone, you perceive a colored aura that reveals *vague* information about their psyche, as defined by the mental traits on their character sheet. This requires a Concentrate maneuver and a Per roll at -1 per yard. Success means the GM provides a one-word revelation; e.g., “creative,” “conservative,” “passionate,” or “peaceful.” The GM must be *truthful*, but should only cough up genuine secrets on a critical success . . . a serial killer might appear “consistent” or “driven,” but only critical success would zoom in on “murderous.”

Optionally, a more healing-oriented variant might give hazy *physical* details (“agile,” “fit,” “sick,” etc.). If so, Auric Squint requires specialization: Mental or Physical.

Dream Ally

Suggested Powers: Astral Projection or Dream Control.

There's one specific person in the world who – when you're *both* asleep – can interact with you in dreams. While this individual is well-disposed toward you, neither of you chose the other; this is a psychic accident. In a genuine emergency (GM's decision), you can attempt a Dreaming skill roll to convey information equivalent to a text message. On a success, make a reaction roll at +3; a “Good” or better result means your friend will do you a small favor, like call your local allies long-distance and relay your communication. This can be handy when you're abducted, drugged, etc. and cannot otherwise get help.

This is a two-way street, similar to Claim to Hospitality (pp. B41-42). Your Dream Ally, played by the GM, may ask small favors of *you*. If you refuse, the link dissolves and you lose your perk.

Haunting Death

Suggested Power: Astral Projection.

This variant of Dramatic Death (*Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 19) guarantees that you will put in at least a brief appearance as a ghost or a psychic echo after you die.

The GM will give you, *the player*, one real-world minute to speak clearly to the person or small group of your choice – a sibling, the local police chief, your fellow PCs, your killer, whoever. Savvy spooks might share the name and ravings of an assassin who gloated Bond-villain style, or just practical stuff like combinations to safes and passwords to accounts.

This doesn't guarantee returning as a *playable* spirit or astral entity – but if the GM allows that, you qualify, and enjoy +5 on any roll required to attain that state.

I Feel Them Watching Me

Suggested Powers: ESP or Telepathy.

You don't have Danger Sense, exactly, but whenever a sapient (IQ 6+), living being takes an Aim or Evaluate maneuver against you – or uses Observation or a social tactic such as Cutting Out (*GURPS Social Engineering*, p. 81) with hostile intent – the GM will make a secret Per-3 roll for you. Success means he warns, "Somebody is watching you." While you won't be *surprised* and freeze up in response to ensuing trouble, you must spot the enemy using your ordinary senses in order to identify the threat or receive an active defense.

Ignorable

Suggested Powers: Ergokinesis, Probability Alteration, or Telepathy.

Perhaps your mind photokinetically dims the light or broadcasts "Don't look at me!", or maybe you're simply a serendipitous sneak, but some psychic influence renders you slightly harder to spot when you want to go unnoticed. If the penalty to detect you with Vision or a skill (Observation, Shadowing, etc.) is at least -1 because of a dense crowd, poor lighting, or other mundane obscuration, there's an *extra* -1 to notice you. This *does* affect rivals rolling Quick Contests against your Camouflage, Stealth, and similar skills. On the other hand, you're at -1 to be noticed even when you want to be!

Lucky Token†

Suggested Power: Probability Alteration.

This unusual variant of Equipment Bond (*Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 9) means you have an item that's uniquely suited to you and that gives you +1 to a skill . . . but the item is a lucky charm of some sort (coin, medicine bundle, St. Christopher medal, etc.), while the skill is one culturally accepted as being especially sensitive to fickle fortunes. Specialize by skill: Driving, Explosives (EOD), Gambling, Market Analysis, Performance ("Break a leg!"), Sex Appeal, and most Games and Sports qualify, and the GM may permit others, such as Survival or Tracking in a low-tech society. Handle loss and replacement as for Equipment Bond.

Over There!

Suggested Power: Telepathy.

Your verbal ruses are just a *little* telepathic. When you feint in combat or use a social skill such as Fast-Talk for a distraction, you may opt to speak loudly: "Look, an eagle!", "Your shoe's untied!", etc. If you do this – and your victim can hear you – you may roll a Quick Contest of Will with that person. Victory gives you +1 on the ensuing ploy; loss, -1. Mute psychics, mimes, and stealthy ninja are out of luck; this gift relies on the power of the *voice*.

Presence

Suggested Powers: Ergokinesis, Probability Alteration, or Telepathy.

Almost the opposite of Ignorable (above); you cannot have both. When you *want* to be seen, you are a little more brightly lit, in just the right place, or ooze telepathic attraction, giving others +3 on Vision and skill rolls to spot you. When you would prefer to remain unobvious (e.g., when using Stealth), make a Will roll to rein in this effect or observers gain your margin of failure as a bonus, to a maximum of +3. This is effectively a visual version of Penetrating Voice (p. B101).

Psychic Commentator

Suggested Power: Ergokinesis.

You generate electronic voice phenomena (EVP) *unconsciously* when under stress. Radios within 10 miles and tuned away from strong signals pick up vague snippets of your thoughts. This is a marginal advantage because savvy allies could eventually use it to learn that you're in trouble. Or that you're starving and could really go for a pizza.

Though this could be built as Telecommunication (Radio; PM, -10%; Send Only, -50%; Unconscious Only, -20%; Uncontrollable, -10%; Vague, -50%), it's considered a perk for the reasons given in *Modifiers and Minimum Costs (Psionic Powers*, p. 19).

Psychic Medic‡

Prerequisite: Psychic (p. 6).

Suggested Power: Psychic Healing.

This perk comes in levels. You may have only as many levels as you have of Psychic. Add the level to your First Aid rolls.

The GM might generalize this idea to other skills plausibly aided by psychic powers. Each skill is its own perk. In effect, such perks extend Psychic to aid additional skills in accordance with *Smooth Talent Cost (Power-Ups 3: Talents*, p. 25).

The Buzz

Suggested Powers: Psychic Vampirism or Telepathy.

You have an uncanny sense for the moods of crowds (10+ people). Whenever this is important, the GM will make a secret Per roll. Success returns a one-word description of the overall atmosphere – "angry," "bored," "excited," etc. – along with any modifiers to social skills that would apply as a consequence, allowing you to judge what approaches are likely to work. This isn't enough to give a true bonus to mass-influence rolls such as Public Speaking, but it *does* mean that in a Quick Contest against the Will of the mob or a rival speaker, all ties go to you . . . unless your rival *also* has this perk!

Weirdness Wormhole

Suggested Powers: Probability Alteration or Teleportation.

This is a mix of perk-level Snatcher (p. B86), an uncontrollable deviation of Doodad (*Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 9), and a specialized variety of Weirdness Magnet (p. B161). Minor-but-bizarre physical artifacts seek you out. These vary from innocent (like other people's missing socks) to creepy (how *did* that live spider get inside the light bulb?). The effect is that once per game session, the GM will roll 3d. On a 6 or less, you'll find a material object that serves as a minor clue or a hint about a side-quest, or that's trivially useful in its own right.

MINOR PSYCHIC ABILITIES

If perks aren't enough – and particularly if the GM wants to venture beyond the one-point world of flickering candles, weird hunches, and friendly pets, yet stop short of the 25-, 50-, and 100-point packages of *Psis* – an interesting alternative is advantage-based psi abilities that don't exceed a modest cost limit. The GM picks the cutoff, but 5, 10, or at most 15 points per capability is recommended. Given that the objective is subtle gifts that can be explained away as coincidence, fit backgrounds where broader powers don't exist, and are simple rather than character-sheet-bloating mindbenders, these additional restrictions are recommended:

0. *No flashy stuff!* The GM decides what qualifies, but it's generally best to forbid or seriously circumscribe attacks, force fields, movement abilities, capabilities that overtly manipulate the world (objects, lighting levels, temperature, etc.), and anything else with obvious, visible effects.

1. *No complex, GURPS Powers-style builds.* Abilities may have a power modifier and one or at most two other modifiers – probably limitations, though this leaves room for an enhancement and a limitation.

2. *No psi skills or techniques, like those in Psionic Powers.*

Abilities that rely on interactions with psi itself – especially Anti-Psi countermeasures based on Mind Shield, Neutralize, Static, etc. – are a bad deal and therefore best avoided in settings without full-blown psis slinging around high-end abilities. If monstrous NPCs wield such paranormal firepower, though, then dig in! Many classic campaigns, *Horror* games foremost among them, pit borderline-psychoic heroes against superhuman rivals. In that case, it's reasonable to permit Detect and psionic defenses, as long as they still obey the guidelines above.

Modifiers for Minor Abilities

As noted already, minor abilities should avoid complex modifiers. However, there are a few exceptions.

Power Modifier

All psionic abilities qualify for a power modifier – most often the -10% recommended on p. B254 and *Powers*, p. 28. Canonically, this limitation represents susceptibility to countermeasures: -5% for anti-powers and another -5% for psi-tech. These complications are rare in campaigns without full-fledged psionics and psychotronics, but there are other ways to justify the discount:

- *Dangerous.* If aliens, ghosts, deranged serial killers, possessed evil dolls, or similar bogeys are drawn to psychics and their gifts, that's a solid limitation. *Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psis* implicitly pegs it at -5%. (If the horrors are invisible to or otherwise unaffected by the abilities that attract them, then an extra -5% for countermeasures is justified, for -10% total.)

- *Disturbing.* If psi abilities *subconsciously* unnerve anyone present when they come into play – a common fictional flaw – that's a Nuisance Effect: -5% for -1 to reactions, -10% for -2. Temporary Disadvantage, Frightens Animals, -10% is another option.

- *Tiring.* If active uses of psi abilities cost 1 FP, and even unconscious or completely passive ones wear out the psychic at a rate of 1 FP per minute, that's Costs Fatigue, -5%. *Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psis* does this, too.

The examples on pp. 8-11 use the customary -10% and leave the internal details to the GM, who's free to vary the makeup or assess a more modest limitation.

In campaigns with only perks and minor abilities, what works best is a single, generic limitation called "Psionic," "Psionics," "Psychic," or similar. All minor abilities share it; there's no separate Psychokinetic, Telepathic, etc. Still, the GM is welcome to associate such gifts with individual powers. The examples don't judge; they use a nonspecific "PM" for "Power Modifier."

Classic Flaws

One or two of Backlash, Stunning, -10% (*Powers*, p. 104), Immediate Preparation Required, -30% to -90% (*Psionic Powers*, p. 20), Requires Concentrate, -15% (*Powers*, p. 112), Requires IQ Roll, -10% (*Powers*, p. 112), Requires Will Roll, -5% (*Powers*, p. 112), Unconscious Only, -20% (p. B115), or Uncontrollable, -10% or -30% (p. B116) can bring the right feel to a minor psychic ability that misbehaves or demands an extreme effort. Strange forms of Accessibility (p. B110) are widespread. Remember, Unconscious Only *requires* Uncontrollable, and this pairing means the user doesn't invoke the gift – it comes up when the GM feels it makes sense. Any of these limitations *could* be part of a power modifier, but as not all suit every likely advantage, they're better assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Classic Strengths

Low-end psychic abilities rarely rate enhancements beyond the special ones that very generic advantages need to feel like psi. An exception is Low or No Signature, +10% or +20% (p. B106), which can keep things from becoming too flashy, and Reflexive, +40% (*Powers*, p. 109), which amounts to a beneficial form of Uncontrollable.

Talent and Minor Abilities

Minor abilities are subject to the rules outlined under *Psionic Talents* (p. B255). The main wrinkle is the question of how many psionic Talents exist. The advice expressed many times so far remains true: In a campaign where psi is supposed to be simple and low-key, make it a single, generic power with a single, generic Talent that benefits every ability from perks on up. Such a Talent's fair cost is 5 points/level – and if all the affected gifts are minor, it's fairest to have this double as a skill Talent. Psychic (p. 6) illustrates these concepts. Psi Talent (*Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi*, p. 4) could work, but it omits mundane skills on the grounds that it aids numerous potent abilities, so the GM may want to tack on skill bonuses.

How Many Minor Abilities?

To keep traits intended as minor from dominating the campaign – and to ensure that psychics are mostly normal individuals spiced up with some modest, quirky gifts – it's recommended that the GM set limits on more than just the point cost of the individual abilities. A few ideas:

- *Limited budget.* A PC can invest only a certain fraction of the campaign power level in minor abilities. Somewhere between 1/10 and 1/5 of point total is recommended; e.g., from 15 to 30 points in a 150-point campaign.

- *Limited number.* A PC can have only a small number of such abilities, perhaps just one and probably no more than two or three.

● *Both!* If there are lots of low-cost options, some players will use a limited budget to buy so many that their characters end up unfocused. If there are many high-cost choices, even a limited number can consume such a huge chunk of starting points that some PCs will be defined by psi abilities and little else – unsubtle “budget superheroes” rather than “a little bit psychic.” Combining the two limits solves both problems, allowing abilities to come in at a wide range of point values without ill effect.

Whatever scheme the GM prefers, Psychic Perks are over and above this allocation; see *How Many Psychic Perks?* (p. 4).

Examples of Minor Abilities

Here are many minor abilities built from advantages and modifiers in such a way that they meet the goals of being cheap (2 to 15 points), subtle, and hard to abuse. As *Power Modifier* (p. 8) notes, all have the generic “PM, -10%,” which the GM must customize. Like Psychic Perks, these recommend standard powers – but generally, this complication is best ignored in favor of a single, generic power.

Ancestral Recall: Racial Memory (Active; Immediate Preparation Required, 1 hour, -75%; PM, -10%) [8]. *Notes:* After a one-hour ritual in the tradition of your people, word your question and roll against IQ. Success means that if your ancestors knew the answer, you learn it. *Suggested Powers:* Astral Projection (if you truly contact the dead), ESP (if that’s merely a visualization aid), or Telepathy (if you tap the collective consciousness). 8 points.

Animal Influence: Animal Empathy (PM, -10%; Requires IQ vs. Will Roll, -10%) [4]. *Notes:* As unmodified Animal Empathy, except that this is direct telepathic contact that obstinate beasts can resist; the IQ roll becomes a Quick Contest of IQ vs. Will. Losing means you can neither read motivations nor attempt Influence skills. *Suggested Powers:* Telepathy (if that power encompasses animals) or Animal Telepathy (if not). 4 points.

Channeling Séance: Channeling (Immediate Preparation Required, 1 hour, -75%; PM, -10%) [2]. *Notes:* You can conduct a séance wherein “spirits” possess and speak through you, per Channeling. These entities take an hour to arrive, during which time you’re engaged in ritual; in many cultures, this involves chanting, dancing, and food offerings. *Suggested Powers:* Astral Projection (if spirits are extradimensional), ESP (if psychic echoes), or Telepathy (if disembodied minds). 2 points.

Clairaudient Enhancement: Parabolic Hearing 1-5 (PM, -10%; Requires Concentrate, -15%) [3/level]. *Notes:* You enjoy marginal clairaudience. You can’t hear distant sounds as if you were right there, nor can you eavesdrop on what’s being said inside soundproof compartments. However, when you concentrate constantly on a location from which an ungifted person could conceivably receive sound, you effectively bring your ears closer, halving distance for each level of this ability. *Suggested Power:* ESP. 3, 6, 9, 12, or 15 points.

Clairvoyant Enhancement: Telescopic Vision 1-5 (No Targeting, -60%; PM, -10%; Requires Concentrate, -15%) [1/level]. *Notes:* You possess borderline clairvoyance. You can’t peer inside things or look around as if you were at a distant location, but when

you concentrate constantly on something you can see, your effective viewpoint moves closer, eliminating -2 per level in range penalties to Vision (but *not* ranged combat). As with all “leveled” abilities, the GM decides how much to permit; five levels (like Clairaudient Enhancement, above) is a fair limit. *Suggested Power:* ESP (if genuinely clairvoyant) or Ergokinesis (if using low-level photokinesis). 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 points.

Emotion Sense: Either Sensitive (PM, -10%; Requires IQ vs. Will Roll, -10%) [4] or Empathy (PM, -10%; Requires IQ vs. Will Roll, -10%) [12]. *Notes:* As basic Sensitive or Empathy, except that this is direct mental contact. The IQ roll becomes a Quick Contest of IQ against the subject’s Will, and losing means you neither get a “feeling” about that person nor receive skill bonuses where that individual is concerned. *Suggested Powers:* Psychic Healing or Telepathy. 4 or 12 points.

Empathic Adaptability: Cultural Adaptability (PM, -10%; Requires IQ Roll, -10%) [8]. *Notes:* At the beginning of any social encounter – negotiation, party, classroom lecture, etc. – roll vs. IQ to read the passive mental emissions of those present. Success lets you ignore any -3 for cultural unfamiliarity for the event. Failure means the ability malfunctions; you must leave and return to retry, accepting any consequences that has under the circumstances. *Suggested Powers:* Psychic Vampirism or Telepathy. 8 points.

Empathic Chameleon: Social Chameleon (PM, -10%; Requires IQ Roll, -10%) [4]. *Notes:* As Empathic Adaptability (above), but instead of removing penalties for cultural unfamiliarity, it eliminates those for Rank and Status differences.

Unusual Background?

The GM may opt to associate an Unusual Background with Psychic Perks or minor psychic abilities. This isn’t necessary for game balance – the capabilities aren’t especially potent, and non-psionic versions of the underlying perks and advantages are often available to anyone. However, a few traits *are* cinematic, exotic, or supernatural, and the GM might prefer that all low-level psis have the following trait to keep them honest.

Unusual Background (Psychic)

5 points

You’re a psychic! You might get strange hunches, find yourself surrounded by odd effects when under stress, or even generate subtle paranormal outcomes by concentrating hard enough. You may purchase any Psychic Perks (pp. 4-7) or minor psychic abilities (pp. 8-11) the GM permits, subject to campaign limits on number. As well, you may buy Talent for those, which typically means Psychic (p. 6). This advantage *doesn’t* give access to full-fledged psi powers or training, however; in games that use it, those capabilities either don’t exist or demand a *much* larger Unusual Background.

The only edge this trait grants in itself is a sixth sense about psi phenomena affecting *you*. The GM will roll vs. Perception + Talent immediately before you touch an object or enter an area charged with an inimical psychic effect, or when such an effect is used on you. Success means you get either a warning (“That doorway gives you the creeps.”) or a feeling that something bad has happened, as appropriate.

And as with that gift, failure on the IQ roll to tune in means the ability fails – and while leaving and returning allows a repeated attempt, such behavior is often *highly* inappropriate when dealing with social superiors! (Make an immediate reaction roll *with* any penalties for differences in Rank or Status.) *Suggested Powers*: Psychic Vampirism or Telepathy. 4 points.

Extrasensory Periphery: Peripheral Vision (PM, -10%; Uncontrollable, -10%) [12]. *Notes*: Behaves like standard Peripheral Vision, except that the ability's weird, psychic source occasionally has you jumping at shadows. When you're stressed (*Uncontrollable*, p. B116), the GM will secretly roll against your Will. Failure means you see something "behind your back" that isn't really there. Once you turn and check, the GM will repeat the process, continuing until a Will roll succeeds or the stress passes. *Suggested Power*: ESP (if a form of clairvoyance) or Ergokinesis (if a kind of photokinesis). 12 points.

The brain is as strong as its weakest think.

– Eleanor Doan

Flashes in the Dark: Extra-Sensory Awareness (PM, -10%; Reduced Duration, 1/60, -35%; Takes Recharge, 5 seconds, -10%) [9]. *Notes*: Whenever your vision is limited – by smoke, darkness, etc., or when blindfolded or blinded – your "third eye" affords you a crystal-clear view of the world out to 20 yards in a 120° arc in front of you (see *Scanning Sense*, *Psionic Powers*, p. 17). The catch is that you glimpse this in *one-second flashes* separated by five-second periods of psychic blindness. Hope you have a good memory! *Suggested Power*: ESP. 9 points.

I See Dead People: See Invisible (Ghosts; Backlash, Stunning, -10%; PM, -10%) [12]. *Notes*: You can see invisible, otherworldly entities. It's disorienting to have your perceptions unexpectedly shifted into another plane; the result is mental stun. Make an IQ roll to recover each second, after which you can continue to watch. This can be a fatal flaw if it stuns you when you need to dodge whatever killed the person whose ghost you see – or an object hurled by a poltergeist! *Suggested Powers*: Astral Projection (if spirits are extradimensional), ESP (if psychic echoes), or Telepathy (if disembodied minds). 12 points.

Mediumistic Séance: Medium (Immediate Preparation Required, 1 hour, -75%; PM, -10%) [2]. *Notes*: You can lead a séance in which you call and speak with "spirits," as for Medium. Calling up these entities requires an hour of invocations, meditation, prayer, or whatever is standard for your culture and beliefs. *Suggested Powers*: Astral Projection (if spirits are extradimensional), ESP (if psychic echoes), or Telepathy (if disembodied minds). 2 points.

Metabolic Yoga: Metabolism Control 1-4 (PM, -10%; Requires Concentrate, -15%) [3.75/level]. *Notes*: Works like standard Metabolism Control, except that you must concentrate *constantly* over the interval covered by any HT roll you want to receive the bonus; e.g., an entire minute, for a bleeding trance, and need to make a Will-3 roll to avoid having it broken if you're disturbed in any way. *Suggested Powers*: Psychic Healing or Psychometabolism. 4, 8, 12, or 15 points.

Minor Adjustment: Visualization (Immediate Preparation Required, 10 minutes, -45%; Probability Alteration, -10%) [5]. *Notes*: This works like Adjustment (*Psionic Powers*, p. 44), except that it uses IQ (not a skill) and can't affect friends' actions (only yours), and you can never reduce the time to use it below 10 minutes. *Suggested Powers*: Dream Control (if control over dreamscapes works when meditating while awake), ESP (if you witness future events you can exploit), or Probability Alteration (if you actually alter outcomes). 5 points.

Minor Coincidence: Serendipity 1 (PM, -10%; Requires Will Roll, -5%) [13]. *Notes*: You enjoy occasional, fortuitous twists of fate. This differs from the Coincidence ability on p. 44 of *Psionic Powers* in two ways. First, you don't wish for things. Like standard Serendipity, outcomes are at the GM's discretion – though you, *the player*, are welcome to tender suggestions. Second, your subconscious' power to stack events in your favor depends on a Will roll. *Suggested Power*: Probability Alteration. 13 points.

Nervous Portents: Danger Sense (PM, -10%; Uncontrollable, -10%) [12]. *Notes*: As for unmodified Danger Sense, the GM will make a Per roll for you whenever danger lurks, and warn you on a success. However, your gift is hair-trigger! While you're under stress (*Uncontrollable*, p. B116) – particularly if you're *already* in danger – the GM will make a secret Will roll for you, with failure meaning you sense "danger" that isn't there. Once you're certain this was a false alarm, the GM will roll again, the cycle continuing until a roll succeeds or the stressful situation ends. *Suggested Power*: ESP. 12 points.

Omen Magnet: Oracle (Passive Only, -20%; PM, -10%) [11]. *Notes*: Strange portents have a way of finding you. You cannot use this ability actively to "check the omens," but sometimes the universe (GM) sends you cryptic signs. When this happens, make a Sense roll to notice the hidden message and an IQ roll to interpret it, exactly as for unmodified Oracle. *Suggested Powers*: Dream Control (for bizarre dreams) or ESP (otherwise). 11 points.

Psi Sense: Detect (Psionic Activity; PM, -10%; Reflexive, +40%; Vague, -50%) [8]. *Notes*: Identical to the ability on p. 41 of *Psionic Powers*, but in a campaign without psi skills, make a simple Per roll to pick up on psionic activity. *Suggested Power*: ESP – or possibly Astral Projection (if psi activity is usually linked to ghosts) or Telepathy (if it's always a function of minds). 8 points.

Psychic Barricade: Mind Shield 1-12 (Always On, -10%; Limited, Psi, -50%; PM, -10%) [1.2/level]. *Notes*: You have a psionic defense that gives you the benefits of Mind Shield (IQ and Will bonuses to resist mental intrusion), but only against *rival* psi – it has no effect on the setting's other paranormal powers. This is a bulwark, not a shutter; you don't control it and can't open it to signals you *want* to receive, which it resists at the lower of level+5 or your usual resistance roll. *Suggested Powers*: Anti-Psi or Telepathy. 1.2 points/level, rounded up.

Psychic Counselor: Common Sense (PM, -10%; Uncontrollable, -10%) [8]. *Notes*: As usual for Common Sense, when you – *the player* – are about to do something ill-advised, the GM will roll against your IQ and warn you on a success. This manifests as visions or voices in your head. However, while your *character* is under stress (*Uncontrollable*, p. B116), anxiety clouds the signal; the GM will make a secret Will roll for you and use failure as an excuse to mislead you with the next statement about the current situation. This continues, with a new Will roll after each deception, until either a roll succeeds or the stress abates.

Suggested Powers: ESP (if you glimpse the consequences of your actions) or Telepathy (if you tap the collective consciousness). 8 points.

Psychic Detective: Psychometry (Immediate Preparation Required, 10 minutes, -45%; PM, -10%) [9]. *Notes:* After taking at least 10 minutes to skim reports on a place or item of interest (despite the name, these needn't be *police* records), you can enter the location or touch the object and use Psychometry on it. You may do so actively, rolling against IQ with a time penalty, and the GM may roll vs. IQ-4 for the passive aspect. If you switch to a new subject, you must start over, reviewing new information. *Suggested Power:* ESP. 9 points.

Psychic Hunches: Intuition (PM, -10%) [14]. *Notes:* Works like the ability on p. 42 of **Psionic Powers**, except that in a campaign that doesn't use psi skills, it depends entirely on innate smarts and calls for an IQ roll. *Suggested Power:* ESP (if you glimpse possible future outcomes) or Probability Alteration (if your sixth sense of the odds enables you to guess well). 14 points.

Psychoelectric Scream: Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Only on Electrical, -20%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%; Malediction 1, +100%; PM, -10%; Unconscious Only, -20%; Uncontrollable, -30%) [15]. This is a rare case where a very complex build is justifiable! *Notes:* When you're under stress (*Uncontrollable*, p. B116) – especially due to cattle prods, medical probes, etc. – a failed Will roll “jams” electrical devices within two yards of you. Roll a Quick Contest of Will vs. the HT of *any* such equipment, including yours and your allies'. Victory means controls become unresponsive, lights dim, cameras freeze on the current image, etc. Reroll each second while the stress endures. *Suggested Power:* Ergokinesis. 15 points.

Retrocognitive Flashbacks: Psychometry (Passive Only, -60%; PM, -10%; Reliable 4, +20%) [10]. *Notes:* Works like the ability on p. 38 of **Psionic Powers**, except that since psi skills don't exist, the roll to receive “vibes” is against raw IQ. *Suggested Power:* ESP. 10 points.

Second Chance: Luck (PM, -10%; Requires Will Roll, -5%) [13]. *Notes:* Works like the ability on p. 45 of **Psionic Powers**, but with a twist. In a campaign that doesn't use psi skills, the roll is against basic Will, reflecting your subconscious ability to *force* the universe to do what you want! *Suggested Power:* Probability Alteration. 13 points.

Spoon-Bender: Telekinesis 1 (Based on IQ, +20%; PM, -10%; Reduced Range, 1/10, -30%) [4]. *Notes:* By concentrating, you can perform minor feats of action at a distance. The action isn't very impressive (ST 1, for Basic Lift 0.2 lb., and Move 1), and neither is the distance (a yard) – and though it can affect your body and attack enemies who stand close by, it isn't strong enough to be useful there. Still, it beats the Small-Scale TK perk, depends entirely on the mind (IQ rolls, not DX rolls), and enables the skill bonuses of standard Telekinesis within its weight and distance class. The GM is advised to cap low-end psychics at this level; anything more and the game may not start out with research institutes, but it will certainly end in one. *Suggested Power:* Psychokinesis. 4 points.

Uncanny Dodge: Enhanced Dodge 1 (PM, -10%, Requires IQ Roll, -10%) [12]. *Notes:* Your psychic senses trigger your natural flinch response an instant sooner than your mundane ones, helping you dodge blows (but not make trained blocks

or parries). Roll vs. IQ whenever you're attacked. Success means you get +1 to Dodge if you can defend at all; failure means no bonus. Talent doesn't aid the IQ roll (Talent can't short-circuit limitations) or the Dodge roll – but if this ability works, Talent *does* boost the Acrobatics roll for an Acrobatic Dodge (p. B375). *Suggested Power:* ESP (if you can predict attacks), Probability Alteration (if you're boosting your odds), or Psychokinesis (if this is low-end levitation). 12 points.

Vibes: Sensitive Touch (Accessibility, Not vs. mindless, -10%; PM, -10%) [8]. *Notes:* You can sense the psychic reverberations left in material objects by IQ 1+ beings who've interacted with them in the past hour. Touching something, you know whether somebody else has touched it; standing on a floor, you can tell whether someone else is walking on it; and you can distinguish between people (but not *identify* them) by touch alone. This gives the same +4 to touch-based tasks that mundane Sensitive Touch grants *if* a creature with a mind is involved. This knack is worthless when it comes to vibrations caused by mindless machines, differences between the textures of inanimate artifacts, and so on. *Suggested Power:* ESP. 8 points.

Visions (Aspected): Precognition (One Event, -40%; Passive Only, -20%; PM, -10%) [8]. *Notes:* As **Psionic Powers**, p. 39 – but in campaigns without the Visions skill, all rolls are against IQ. *Suggested Power:* ESP. 8 points.

Visions (Dream): Precognition (Dreaming, -70%; Passive Only, -20%; PM, -10%) [5]. *Notes:* As **Psionic Powers**, p. 39 – but in campaigns without the Visions skill, all rolls are against IQ. *Suggested Powers:* Dream Control or ESP. 5 points.

Visions (Overwhelming): Precognition (Backlash, Stunning, -10%; Passive Only, -20%; PM, -10%) [15]. *Notes:* As **Psionic Powers**, p. 39 – but in campaigns without the Visions skill, all rolls are against IQ. *Suggested Power:* ESP. 15 points.

Visions (Second Sight): Precognition (Can't See Own Death, -60%; Passive Only, -20%; PM, -10%) [5]. *Notes:* As **Psionic Powers**, p. 39 – but in campaigns without the Visions skill, all rolls are against IQ. *Suggested Power:* ESP. 5 points.

These ideas are optimized for campaigns at or below the 150-point power level. For suggestions regarding campaigns of that level, see p. 38.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean “Dr. Kromm” Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every **GURPS** product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of **GURPS Third Edition** projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition** with David Pulver. Since then, he has created **GURPS Powers** (with Phil Masters), **GURPS Martial Arts** (with Peter Dell'Orto), **GURPS Zombies**, and the **GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy, and GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . among other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie.

MARTIAL ARTS



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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

MIND AND BODY

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

In many campaigns that feature psychic powers, a recurring theme is that of the psionic warrior – a being who has, through training, achieved harmony with both his psychic abilities and his martial prowess. These new optional rules

explore this concept. They require familiarity with *GURPS Martial Arts*, *GURPS Psionic Powers*, and *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*. Either *GURPS Psi-Tech* or *GURPS Ultra-Tech* is recommended, but not required.

PSIONIC MARTIAL ARTS

These three new styles are intended for games that have psychic abilities and martial-arts powers. The GM may even decide that chi skills and psi are the same thing! See *GURPS Psionic Campaigns* (p. 12) for more information on such a melding. All psi techniques for a specific psionic skill within a style, whether listed or not, count toward points for learning that style's perks.

ISHIN-DENSHIN

6 points

Style Prerequisites: Telepathy Talent 1+, Telereceive or Telereceive (Shallow) 3+, and Mental Blow 2+.

Ishin-Denshin is what you get when you weaponize telepaths. Ishin-Denshin is a Japanese saying that means, "What the mind thinks, the heart transmits," which is the style's mantra and description in one. The main goal of stylists is to read an opponent's mind and use that information against him. Some stylists even eschew weapons and armor, feeling their gifts and training are sufficient.

Stylists with Extra Attack like to Feint with their first attack, and go for either high-value (neck, skull, etc.) targets or Rapid Strike with the second. Those without that advantage perform this in two turns, or more rarely via All Out Attack (Double). This can also be bought as a Combination (*Martial Arts*, p. 80): Feint + Karate Strike/Neck or Skull. Optionally for those with high skill, this can be performed as Rapid Strike, with Feint taking -6, just as if it were an attack.

Another favorite is to use Mental Blow's Lasting Blow technique to stun an opponent for a full 10 seconds and then perform a combination of Telegraphic Attacks, All-Out (Strong) maneuvers, or both to put the enemy down as fast as possible. When facing multiple opponents, they use the Multiplicity technique for Telereceive; this gives the bonus from Tactical Reading against all of their foes. Then they use Defensive Attacks or Defensive Feints until the odds are more in their favor. Stylists often purchase high levels of the Independent (p. 14), Instant Read (p. 14), and Multiplicity psi techniques for Telereceive.

Because reading the minds of opponents is fundamental to the style, practitioners may learn the Tactical Reading (*Psionic*

Powers, p. 63) perk as soon as they learn this style (instead of requiring the usual 10 points in skills and techniques).

Cinematic Ishin-Denshin stylists invest heavily in skills that increase their already formidable abilities or make them even deadlier.

Skills: Body Language; Karate; Meditation; Mental Blow; Telereceive.

Techniques: Aggressive Parry (Karate); Counterattack (Karate); Exotic Hand Strike; Feint (Karate or Telesend).

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Mental Strength; Power Blow; Pressure Points; Pressure Secrets; Sensitivity.

Cinematic Techniques: Hand Catch (Karate); Hand-Clap Parry (Karate); Pressure Point Strike (Karate); Timed Defense; Whirlwind Attack (Karate).

Additional Psionic Abilities/Skills: Mental Stab; Telesend; Sensory Control (Overload).

Perks: Gestalt Familiarity; Psi Strike (Telepathy; Karate; see p. 16); Psi Technique Mastery (any power in style; see p. 16); Rule of 17 (any power in style); Skill Adaptation (Hand Catch defaults to Karate); Special Exercises 1-2 (Will above 20); Synchronize; Tactical Reading*; Telepathic Feints (see p. 16); Teamwork (other Stylists); Tolerance (any ability in style; see p. 17); Warrior Psi (any power in style; see p. 17).

Optional Traits

Attributes: Increased DX and IQ.

Secondary Characteristics: Increased Will and FP.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Parry (Karate); Extra Attack; Fit; High Pain Threshold; Striking ST; additional Telepathy Talent or abilities, *especially* offensive ones.

Disadvantages: Intolerance (Non-psi or Non-telepaths); Overconfidence.

Skills: Acrobatics; Autohypnosis; Hidden Lore (Psis or Secret Styles); Judo; Mind Block; Physiology; Staff; Tactics.

* The GM may allow up to three levels of this perk to Ishin-Denshin stylists; levels are cumulative. Additionally, the bonuses from Tactical Reading and Sensitivity *stack* for all purposes.

New Psi Techniques

These three new psi techniques are designed for Combat Sense (*Psionic Powers*, p. 37) and Telereceive (*Psionic Powers*, pp. 58-59).

Battle Precog

Hard

Prerequisite: Combat Sense 2+.

Default: Combat Sense-4; cannot exceed Combat Sense.

Instead of gaining your normal bonuses against attacks, you gain Enhanced Time Sense (p. B52) for the next minute. This can *only* be used in combat situations, unless you accept an additional -2 to the technique roll (which can be bought off).

You may attempt to activate this technique *instantly* as a reaction to any attack, at an additional -4 (which can be bought off).

This technique cannot be used with Combat Sense 1 and is at an extra -2 for Combat Sense 2; higher levels take no penalty.

Independent

Hard

Default: Telereceive-7; cannot exceed Telereceive.

As for the Suggestion technique (*Psionic Powers*, p. 64), except that you continually read your subject(s) minds.

Instant Read

Hard

Default: Telereceive-4; cannot exceed Telereceive.

The psi can use his ability to read a subject's mind as a free action.

also rely on the Transparent Blade technique (p. 19) to turn their weapon invisible and perform a Committed Attack.

Particularly skilled stylists increase the Double-Blade (p. 19) and Dual Weapon Attack techniques, fighting with *two* Psi-Swords and no Psi-Shield. Stylists on the defensive use All-Out Defense (Increased Block) to enhance their Psi-Shield's protection further or use All-Out Defense (Increased Parry) with Destructive Parry to remove their opponent's weaponry.

When unarmed (a rarity), they apply Karate strikes to high-value targets to disable their targets as quickly as possible. If trying to subdue a foe, they use Wrestling to perform a Choke Hold.

Cinematic stylists rely on any of the above, but also use the Long-Blade technique (p. 19) to temporarily increase the reach of their Psi-Sword and follow up with a Whirlwind Attack to deadly effect. They can learn a number of cinematic skills, making them even more dangerous. They also have access to variants of both Immovable Stance and Push, which are used with their Psi-Shields.

Each knight is equipped with four different psi-amplifiers. The first is a dedicated psi-amplifier armband that increases the knight's Psi-Shield by one level. It costs \$4,500, weighs 0.88 lbs., and uses XS/1 week (or 2xB/1 month).

The second is a dedicated psi-amplifier in the shape of a gauntlet that increases the knight's TK Grab by five levels. It costs \$11,750, weighs 1.75 lbs., and uses XS/150 minutes (or 2xB/10 hours).

The third is a dedicated psi-amplifier amulet that increases the knight's TK Shield by two levels. It costs \$6,000, weighs 1 lbs., and uses XS/1 week (or 2xB/1 month).

The fourth is a dedicated psi-amplifier that resembles the hilt of a sword and increases the knight's Psi-Sword by one level. It costs \$2,500, weighs 1.5 lbs., and uses XS/300 minutes (or 2xB/20 hours).

Because the use of their psi-amplifier weapons are ingrained in their training, stylists may buy Psi-Amplifier Adaptation (p. 16) as soon as they acquire the style. Many knights know more than one psionic power and those with ESP, Psychic Healing, or Telepathy abilities are common.

Skills: Autohypnosis; Breath Control; Karate; Meditation; Mind Block; Psi-Sword; Psi-Shield; TK Grab; TK Shield; Wrestling.

Techniques: Aggressive Parry (Karate); Armed Grapple (Psi-Shield or Psi-Sword); Choke Hold (Wrestling); Close Combat (Psi-Sword); Counterattack (Karate or Psi-Sword); Feint (Karate, Psi-Shield, or Psi-Sword); Kicking (Karate); Reverse Grip (Psi-Sword); Targeted Attack (Psi-Sword Swing/Neck or Weapon); Targeted Attack (Psi-Sword Thrust/Eye or Vitals).

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Body Control; Breaking Blow; Flying Leap; Immovable Stance (Psi-Shield); Invisibility Art; Kiai; Light Walk; Lizard Climb; Mental Strength; Power Blow; Precognitive Parry; Push (Psi-Shield).

Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack (Psi-Shield or Psi-Sword); Dual-Weapon Defense (Psi-Shield); Flying Lunge (Psi-Sword); Springing Attack (Psi-Sword); Whirlwind Attack (Psi-Sword).

THE WAY OF THE CERULEAN BLADE

11 points

Prerequisites: Psychokinesis Talent 2+, Psi-Shield 1+, Psi-Sword 1+, Signature Gear (Psi-Amplifiers)*, TK Grab or TK Grab (Short-Ranged) 3+, and TK Shield 3+.

The rare tekes who can manifest both a Psi-Sword (pp. 17-18) and a Psi-Shield (pp. 18-19) are taken by the Order of the Cerulean Blade to one of their chapterhouses as soon as their existence is known. There, they learn how to control their abilities and are ingrained with the Order's Code. Their training is long and arduous, but when they are finished, they set out into the land, a knight-errant, righting wrongs and helping others.

Stylists use a combination of martial prowess and psychokinetic ability, and are aggressive or defensive as the situation requires. While most stylists do not relish killing, they take it seriously and dispatch their foes as quickly as possible. They will either Evaluate and Wait for an opening, or use their Psi-Shield to Beat (*Martial Arts*, pp. 100-101) and create one. Another favorite tactic is using TK Grab to tug at their opponent, creating a distraction – this is a form of Feint, but can be performed as a Beat as well. Against armed opponents, they use the Destructive Parry psi technique (p. 19) and destroy weapons with their Psi-Sword before engaging further. If they can, they

Additional Psionic Abilities/Skills: any other Psychokinesis ability.

Perks: Chi Resistance (any); Equipment Bond (Psi-Sword or Psi-Shield Psi-Amplifier); Focused Fury; Grip Mastery (Psi-Sword); Off-Hand Weapon Training (Psi-Sword or Psi-Shield); Psi Strike (Psychokinesis; Karate; p. 16); Psi-Amplifier Adaptation (p. 16); Psionic Adaptation (Astral Sword, EK Shield, or Mind Shield; p. 16); Psionic Bond (pp. 16-17); Psychic Fortitude (Psychokinesis; p. 16); Sacrificial Block (Psi-Shield)†; Sacrificial Parry (Psi-Sword); Special Exercises (FP can exceed HT by 100%); Skill Adaption (Precognitive Parry requires neither Danger Sense or Precognition); Special Setup (Power Blow works with TK Grab); Telekinetic Feints (see p. 16); TK Knuckles (p. 17); TK Projection (p. 17); Tolerance (p. 17); Warrior Psi (any Psychokinesis ability; p. 17); Weapon Adaptation (Broadsword to Psi-Sword or Shield to Psi-Shield).

Optional Traits

Attributes: Increased DX, IQ, and HT.

Secondary Characteristics: Increased Per, Will, and FP.

Advantages: Charisma; Combat Reflexes; Energy Reserve (Psionic); Enhanced Defenses; Enhanced Power Defense; Fearlessness or Unfazeable; Fit; Forceful Chi; High Pain Threshold; Indomitable; Inner Balance; Social Regard (Venerated); Reputation; Rapid Healing; Weapon Master (Psi-Sword or Psi-Shield); additional Psionic powers or Talents.

Disadvantages: Charitable; Code of Honor; Duty; Selfless; Sense of Duty (Close friends and companions); Vow; Wealth.

Skills: Acrobatics; Detect Lies; Diplomacy; Electronics Operation/TL (Psychotronics); Electronics Repair/TL (Psychotronics); Esoteric Medicine; Hidden Lore; Parry Missile Weapons; Spear; Strategy; Tactics.

Techniques: Acrobatic Stand; Bullet Parry‡; Camouflaged Mind Block‡; Disarming; No-Mind‡.

Cinematic Techniques: Grand Disarm (Karate or Psi-Sword).

Perks: Acrobatic Feints; Armor Familiarity; Better Psychokinetic Amplifiers; Gestalt Familiarity; Psi-Amplifier Adaptation; Rule of 17; Shield-Wall Training; Special Exercises (IQ or Will); Teamwork (fellow stylists); Weapon Bond (Psi-Sword or Psi-Shield Psi-Amplifier).

* This depends on the TL of the campaign, thus levels were omitted. The GM may optionally allow knights who've fallen on hard times, been disgraced, etc. to *not* have to purchase this trait.

† This functions identically to Sacrificial Parry, except that you get to use your Block instead of a Parry.

‡ These techniques can be found in *GURPS Supers* (p. 38).

THIRD-EYE FIGHTING

5 points

Prerequisites: ESP Talent 1+, Awareness 3+, and Combat Sense 1+.

Third-Eye Fighting blends martial prowess and extrasensory perception, allowing the stylist to be profoundly aware of his environment. This style is similar to *Ishin-Denshin* (p. 13), in that it uses (and takes account of) an opponent's actions, but relies more on building up an image of the nearby area, rather than knowing what foes are going to do.

It's a passive style, making Evaluate and Wait maneuvers popular amongst stylists. A favorite Combination (*Martial Arts*, p. 80) is a Judo Grapple/Hand + Judo Throw + Judo Arm Lock to force the subject onto the ground and into a submission hold. Some stylists use Finger Lock instead of Arm Lock. Advanced students of this style learn the Battle Precog technique (p. 14).

Cinematic stylists often buy Blind-Fighting and Precognitive Parry, increasing their awareness of the environment.

New Psi-Amplifier

Psi-amplifiers appear in both *Ultra-Tech* (p. 94) and (*Psi-Tech*, pp. 12-13); these rules assume you are using the *Psi-Tech* version. When using *Psionic Powers*, psi-amplifiers can optionally increase a specific ability's level *instead* of its Talent (this costs the same as if you were buying a bonus to Talent). There is no effect if an ability is non-leveled or at maximum strength already.

The GM may allow psi-amplifiers that give a higher bonus than normal. *Double* the base cost and weight and halve the duration of operation for each additional multiple of its bonus; this cannot exceed twice the original bonus. For example, a psi-amplifier helmet that gives +8 to EK Shield's skill would cost \$50,000, weigh 8 lbs., and its power requirements would become 3xS/3 days or 2xC/2 weeks.

For psi-amplifiers that use a lower than listed bonus, each decrease in Talent or power level reduces the cost and weight by an amount equal to *half* of what it would take to add another Talent or power; this cannot reduce the cost or weight below one-fifth of the original value. It does not

reduce power consumption. For instance, a psi-amplifier headband that gave only +1 to a Talent for a single psi power would cost \$4,500 and weigh 0.88 lbs.

Additionally, the GM may permit psi-amplifiers to take other forms that are similar in shape and size to already existing ones. For instance, a headband might instead be designed as an armband or ear wraps.

Psi-Amplifier Weapon (TL[^])

This new psi-amplifier is typically only useful for damaging abilities. It is a compact hand-held device that looks like a weapon or piece of one (gauntlet, hilt, etc.). It gives +1 to Talent for a single psi power. Additionally, it *channels* the power through the device itself; while this may seem like a cosmetic effect it does allow the psi to treat his power as if it were gear. This permits the use of certain traits that would otherwise be incompatible (e.g., Weapon Bond). \$7,000, 2 lbs., XS/300 minutes or 2xB/20 hours. Per additional power it can boost: +\$4,500, +0.50 lbs. LC3.

Skills: Awareness; Combat Sense; Judo; Sumo Wrestling.
Techniques: Arm Lock (Judo); Breakfall (Judo); Disarming (Judo); Evade (Judo); Finger Lock; Judo Throw; Sacrifice Throw; Wrist Lock (Judo)

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Breaking Blow; Mental Strength; Precognitive Parry.

Cinematic Techniques: Fighting While Seated (Judo or Sumo Wrestling); Grand Disarm (Judo or Sumo Wrestling); Timed Defense.

Additional Psionic Abilities/Skills: Clairaudience; Clairvoyance; Danger Sense (ESP, -10%).

Perks: Psi Strike (ESP; Judo or Sumo Wrestling; p. 16); Psi Technique Mastery (any ability in style; p. 16); Sacrificial Parry

(Judo or Sumo Wrestling); Sure-Footed (any); Technique Mastery (Arm Lock, Finger Lock, or Judo Throw).

Optional Traits

Secondary Characteristics: Increased Per.

Advantages: Enhanced Time Sense (ESP, -10%); Enhanced Tracking (ESP, -10%); Terrain Adaption (ESP, -10%).

Disadvantages: Duty; Pacifism; Sense of Duty (Humanity, fellow Stylists, or Psis).

Skills: Autohypnosis; Hidden Lore (Psis); Mind Block; Meditation.

NEW PERKS

Perks marked with a * are cinematic and restricted to those with Trained by a Master (p. B93) or Weapon Master (p. B99). Those marked with † require *specialization* by advantage, piece of equipment, rule, skill, task, technique, etc., depending on exactly how it works. Read the description and pick a suitable specialty; the perk has *no effect* outside that one narrow area. Those marked with ‡ *come in levels*, exactly like an advantage that comes in levels. Many of these perks require psionic abilities and are thus psionic perks.

Extra Option†

GURPS Power-Ups 2 introduced Extra Option perks that extend optional rules to individuals in campaigns that don't apply those rules globally. **GURPS Psionic Powers** and **GURPS Powers** offer several that would be appropriate for a psi campaign. If the psi can invoke an additional option at will, then each psionic power that can benefit requires a separate Extra Option perk.

Piece of Cake†: You can use the *Just Like Riding a Bike* rules (**Psionic Powers**, p. 8) for a particular psionic ability in a settings that do not use those rules, allowing you to perform trivial or unresisted tasks without a roll.

Psychic Fortitude†: You can use *Godlike Extra Effort* (**Powers**, p. 160), but only for a particular psionic power.

Power Begets Power†: If the GM is using the alternate rules for Extra Effort in *Pyramid #3/9: Space Opera* (p. 14), you may instead use the regular rules for one particular psionic power.

Psi Strike†

Once per game session, you can add one of your psionic power Talents (chosen when you take this perk) to a single attack or damage roll as a bonus, by spending 2 FP. This rarely suits psionic powers that don't feature some sort of sensing or attack ability. You must specialize by melee or unarmed skill and psionic power.

Psi Technique Mastery†

Pick a specific psi technique for an psionic ability. When you use that technique, you pay *one* FP to use it, not two. A second level of this perk, eliminating the FP cost completely, *may* be available if the GM permits. If allowed, it requires that the

psi have at least two levels of his power's Talent *and* at least half the maximum level of his ability. The second level of this perk is cinematic and might not suit all campaigns.

Psi-Amplifier Adaptation†

You are innately attuned to psi amplifiers (**Ultra-Tech**, p. 94, or **Psi-Tech**, p. 12) and don't suffer any ill-effect ("psychotronic feedback") from critical failures while using them. This means you can use psi-amplifiers that are not properly attuned or are attuned to someone else! Note that this perk protects *you*, but not the device – on a critical failure, it's disabled and needs a minor repair, as usual. You must specialize by power.

Psionic Adaptation†

Normally, a psionic ability can only be learned as a part of its power. Sometimes, a psi discovers a less orthodox means of acquiring an ability. Pick *one* psionic ability that you could conceivably learn as a part of one of your own powers (subject to GM approval). For example, a teke who already had TK Shield could purchase Psionic Adaptation (EK Shield to Psychokinesis) if the GM agreed that the two abilities are sufficiently similar.

Psionic Feints

You use your psionic ability to distract, sense, or read your target. You may use an appropriate psionic skill to feint and may improve the Feint (Psi skill) technique. Examples of this ability include sending distracting thoughts into your targets with Feint (Telesend); using a minute amount of psychokinetic force to tap your target's shoulder or tug his ear with Feint (TK Grab); or sensing your target's actions before he does them with Feint (Prognostication or Visions).

Psionic Bond†

The Weapon Bond and Equipment Bond perks in **Power-Ups 2** and other **GURPS** supplements assumes a balanced, familiar weapon/item that grants the owner +1 to effective combat or operation skill; it isn't a supernatural attunement. The GM may allow psis to take a variant that *is* supernatural – it's a psionic perk, requires at least one psionic power or power Talent, and is subject to Anti-Psi.

The psi must specialize in a specific item or weapon, and can have only one Psionic Bond at a time. However, he may freely shift the bond to another suitable item with a day of meditation, which makes replacing lost items easier to manage.

Rules Exemption†

This works much like Extra Option (p. 16), except that instead of granting access to a specific, *beneficial* optional rule that *isn't* used campaign-wide, it allows an exemption from a particular, *detrimental* optional rule that *does* apply to everybody else. For example . . .

Certainty of Power†: If the GM uses *Strange, Uncertain Powers (Psionic Powers, p. 8)* to give psis penalties for doing a particular action, or making them roll for every use, the ability to ignore these penalties for one specific power is a perk.

*There was a blur of movement.
Dion heard a wild cry and saw flame
burst from the sword's hilt, swinging in
a deadly arc.*

– Margaret Weis, *The Lost King*

TK Knuckles

Prerequisite: TK Shield 3+.

You can temporarily shield your arm, leg, or other body part in a portion of your TK Shield, allowing you to increase your barehanded damage. This gives +1 damage and you are considered armed, but you suffer from Bad Grip 2 while using

it. Turning this perk on or off takes a Ready maneuver, but may be attempted quickly by rolling against your TK Shield skill at -4; success means you did it instantly!

TK Projection†

Prerequisites: TK Grab or Telekinetic Control; see below.

By spending 2 FP, you can use your TK to project an attack, with your power's normal range. If using a weapon, your ability does not *physically* move your weapon; you are simply projecting the force of the blow. Figure damage based on your power's ST, not yours. With a weapon, your power must meet its minimum ST requirement in order to use it with this perk.

Tolerance†

This perk is normally an Anti-Psi perk (*Psionic Powers, p. 24*), but it makes sense to allow those with a martial-arts style that uses psionic abilities to take it as well, as stylists have been “practicing” on one another. In this case, it becomes a psionic perk for the ability it is selected for.

Warrior Psi†

You can use extra effort with a psionic power! You must specialize by power, which must be one that inflicts injury or causes an affliction. At the instant you attack, you may opt to use Mighty Blows (p. B357). This costs 1 FP to use, which can come from any source. For abilities that cause damage, this gives either +2 damage *or* +1 damage per die, whichever is better. For abilities that cause afflictions and require a Quick Contest, it instead adds *two* to your skill roll or your final margin of success (chosen before you roll). For abilities that do damage based on the margin of success, you must choose whether this adds to base damage, skill roll, or final margin before you roll.

NEW PSIONIC POWERS

Two new abilities for the Psychokinesis power are especially useful for martial artists.

PSI-SHIELD

22/43/64/85 points for levels 1-4

Skill: Psi-Shield (DX/Hard).

You can manifest a shield of pure psychokinetic force. This takes a skill roll and a Ready maneuver to activate and lasts for one minute, after which you must make another skill roll. It works exactly like a normal shield, giving you +1 to all your active defenses. Use your Psi-Shield skill to block attacks. You may optionally “bash” with your shield; it has a Reach of 1, uses your Psi-Shield skill to hit, and deals your thrust plus Psychokinesis Talent in crushing damage. It provides (25 × its level) cover DR, but if penetrated, it fizzles out and must be activated again.

Each level gives +1 to all your active defenses while active, but you cannot use the hand that it is created onto (you're holding it).

Statistics: Defense Bonus 1 (Can block attacks like a normal shield, +15%; Nuisance Effect, Occupies one hand, -5%; Psychokinesis, -10%; Requires DX Roll, -10%; Requires Ready, -10%; Visible, -10%) [21] + Striking Surface (*Power-Ups 2, p. 12*) [1]. Further levels increase Defense Bonus by one level at a time [21/level].

Barrier Shield

Hard

Default: Psi-Shield-10; cannot exceed Psi-Shield.

Instead of creating a shield you can use to attack, you instead create a large plane of force that acts as moveable cover, like a mantlet or pavise. You can have up only one such barrier at a time, but you can move the barrier at a rate of one yard/second.

The shield protects a one-yard area; for every 5 points by which your (modified) skill roll succeeds, double the width, cumulatively. It provides cover DR (18 × Psi-Shield level).

Treat the barrier as a wall (see p. B408). It lasts for one minute, after which successful use of this technique will extend the duration another minute each time.

If enough damage penetrates the barrier, it is destroyed. Every time a barrier is destroyed within a 24-hour period, you have a cumulative -2 to create a new one.

Hands-Free

Default: Psi-Shield-1; cannot exceed Psi-Shield.

When you first create your Psi-Shield, you can roll against this technique. If successful, your shield doesn't occupy a hand.

Hard

TK-nical Grappling

Any style that takes advantage of Telekinesis can use that power (or similar ones) to grapple and strike. If enhanced detail in fighting is desired, use the concepts found in *GURPS Martial Arts: Technical Grappling* to good effect.

The section on *Funky Powers and CP* (see *Technical Grappling*, p. 28) details Telekinesis specifically, using your TK level as a proxy for ST, and any appropriate Relative Skill Level to figure out a Training Bonus (see *Technical Grappling*, p. 4).

A telekinetic grapple is a two-handed grapple for all purposes, but the fact that it is often a ranged attack may prove a slight complication. One cannot brace against the grappler's own body to provide leverage, or easily transition from a two-handed grapple to a sweep, takedown, or throw, lacking anything but a pair of disembodied hands. As such, grapplers who want to use more complicated moves – moves that impart leverage – in close combat should first grapple. They then rely on Pass Limb (see *Technical Grappling*, p. 24) to maintain CP while freeing up a single TK hand to perform most mass-based moves, such as takedowns and sweeps.

Alternately, invoke the armed grappling rules, but only allow these ranged grapples to perform techniques that default to ST or DX – possibly in addition to the limitations above!

Very strong tekes may use the Pickup rules (*Technical Grappling*, p. 24) to simply hoist their foes into the air, where they suffer -5 to attacks, -3 to all active defenses, and cannot move!

Instant Use

Default: Psi-Shield-4; cannot exceed Psi-Shield.

You can summon your Psi-Shield instantly, even if you're being attacked! Combine this technique with Barrier Shield (above) to create a barrier in front of you, providing cover against attacks that cannot normally be blocked.

Hard

Transparent Shield

Default: Psi-Shield-2; cannot exceed Psi-Shield.

As for Psi-Sword technique (p. 19). This technique can be combined with Barrier Shield and produces an *invisible* barrier.

Hard

PSI-SWORD

Variable for level 1,
11 points per additional level*

Skill: Psi-Sword (DX/Hard); defaults to DX-6 or Force Sword-2.

You can manifest a sword (or any sort of Reach C, 1 melee weapon you like) of pure psychokinetic force. Psi-Swords receive all the benefits of a fencing weapon (p. B208), but can parry flails normally (*Martial Arts*, p. 122). Psis cannot be harmed by their own Psi-Swords.

You may swing or thrust with it. If your Will is higher than your ST, treat your Will as ST for the purpose of determine basic damage (pp. B15-16) with the Psi-Sword.

The sword does swing+(level) cutting damage or thrust+(level/2) impaling damage. Round the latter *down* after halving; e.g., you do thr at level 1, thr+1 at level 2 or 3, thr+2 at level 4 or 5, and so on.

The sword ignores all DR, whether natural or from armor! However, if the target has an active Mind Shield, treat it as providing DR equal to its level.

If you injure the target, he must roll against HT, at -1 for every 2 full points of injury taken, or be mentally stunned from the psionic energy of your attack. He may roll HT (at no penalty) to recover each turn. In addition, a failed HT roll leaves the target not only stunned, but at -3 to HT for (20-HT) minutes. This is a flat HT penalty – multiple Psi-Sword attacks will not double it, triple it, etc. – but it *does* affect the foe's rolls to recover from being stunned, and to resist being stunned by subsequent Psi-Sword attacks!

Statistics: Cutting Attack 1 point (Based on Will or ST, Variant, +20%; Melee Attack, Range C, 1, -20%; Mental Defense Only, +250%; Psychokinesis, -10%; Side Effect, Stunning and -3 to HT, +65%; ST-Based, +100%; Thrusting Blade, +15%) [11/level].

* Level 1 costs 11 points plus a surcharge based on your basic damage. Calculate basic *thrust* damage (using the higher of your ST or Will, as described above), taking any applicable advantages (e.g., Striking ST) into account. If your thrust is not in whole dice, treat each ±1 as ±0.3 dice; e.g., treat thrust 1d+2 as 1.6d. Multiply the dice by 22 to find your surcharge.

Example: You have ST 12, Will 13, and Striking ST 3. Your effective ST 15 is better than your Will. Your thrust damage is 1d+1, which is treated as 1.3d. 1.3×22=28.6, which rounds up to 29 points. Psi-Sword 1 thus costs you 11+29=40 points.

Blunted-Blade

Default: Psi-Sword-1; cannot exceed Psi-Sword.

Instead of doing damage, you may opt to roll against this technique when you activate your ability. Your weapon no longer causes damage, but instead only stuns. Roll damage normally to see if the target is stunned. Optionally, for an additional -7 (which can be bought off), you may have it inflict crushing damage instead of cutting or impaling.

Hard

Burning Blade

Hard

Default: Psi-Sword-1; cannot exceed Psi-Sword.

You may opt to roll against this technique when you activate your ability. If you succeed, you add the incendiary modifier to your attack, allowing you to start fires!

Destructive Parry

Hard

Default: Psi-Sword-1; cannot exceed Psi-Sword.

Your Psi-Sword damages any weapon it parries or that parries it. Roll damage normally and apply it to your foe's weapon on a successful parry by either of you.

Double-Blade

Default: Psi-Sword-1; cannot exceed Psi-Sword.

You can generate *two* weapons when you create your Psi-Sword – usually one in each hand – permitting a Dual-Weapon Attack (see p. B417).

Electric Blade

Hard

Default: Psi-Sword-2; cannot exceed Psi-Sword.

You may opt to roll against this technique when you activate your ability. If you succeed, you add the surge modifier to your attack, allowing you to short out electronics and those with the Electrical disadvantage (p. B134). For an additional -6 to your roll your Psi-Sword treats the DR from a Mind Shield provided by psi-tech as DR 1.

Lasting Blow

Hard

Default: Psi-Sword-4; cannot exceed Psi-Sword.

As per the technique for Mental Blow (*Psionic Powers*, p. 65).

Long-Blade

Hard

Default: Psi-Sword-1; cannot exceed Psi-Sword.

You can increase the length of your blade for a single attack. Your Psi-Sword becomes a Reach 1, 2 or Reach 2, 3 weapon. For an additional -1, you can give your blade a Reach 1-4, like a whip.

Penetrating Blow

Hard

Default: Psi-Sword-1; cannot exceed Psi-Sword.

As for the Astral Sword technique (*Psionic Powers*, p. 28), but this halves the target's Mind Shield instead of their armor since Psi-Swords already ignore armor.

Transparent Blade

Hard

Default: Psi-Shield-2; cannot exceed Psi-Shield.

Your sword becomes invisible to others. Those nearby must make a Per-6 roll, minus range penalties, to notice the weapon in your hand. Failure to detect the weapon means the first time you attack, the target gets *no* defense, but thereafter defends at -4.

Wield a sword of psychokinetic force!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice has telepathetic powers. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he dreams of being able to write full-time, or at least eke out a living doing it. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group, Antoni Ten Monrós, Beth “Archangel” McCoy (the “Sith Editrix”), Douglas Cole, and Peter Dell’Orto, for being most excellent sounding boards; and Jason “PK” Levine for inspiring the Psi-Sword power.



EIDETIC MEMORY

THE OVERMIND INSTITUTE

BY DAVID L. PULVER

The Overmind Institute is a ruthless corporate research group engaged in wide-ranging experiments to exploit psi and psi-tech within a contemporary secret-psi setting. Specifically, the default setting uses the Phoenix Project detailed in *GURPS Psionics* for Third Edition and implied by the vignettes in *GURPS Psi-Tech*. This setting, which also reflects some conspiracy theories, posits that people with reliable psi powers exist, and that psi-technology has been developed to augment and counter their abilities. However, knowledge of this has been kept from the public since the Cold War era through independent government campaigns of secrecy and disinformation fostered by the intelligence agencies and militaries of major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China.

In the United States, covert elements of the U.S. government attempt to maintain a monopoly over psionics. However, this faction – nicknamed the psiberocracy – is challenged by nongovernmental organizations. One of these is the Overmind Institute.

HISTORY

The Overmind Institute is a secretive organization of independent psionic researchers. It was founded in the United States in 1976 by a coalition of maverick parapsychologists fighting efforts of the “psiberocracy” to control civilian research and silence or discredit those parapsychologists seeking independence from federal control and censorship. The pressures of this ongoing struggle led to radicalization, with moderates giving way to those egoistical or desperate enough to use any means to advance their goals of free psionic research, including illegal human DNA and biocybernetic experiments. A series of FBI raids shut down the Institute’s open facilities in the late 1970s. However, some Overmind Institute scientists were able to escape with their own research. The organization secretly reconstituted itself and continued its operations.

This new underground incarnation of the Institute was far more ruthless. In order to stay ahead of government investigators, its fellowship forged alliances with criminal groups and revolutionaries in developing nations. Although its leadership was still ideologically devoted to pure science, the Overmind

Institute supported itself through the black-market sale of psionic training and psionic technology.

In the 1990s, as the U.S., Russian, and other wealthy “connected” governments (mainly the NATO powers, along with Israel, Japan, China, Korea, and India) began to make increased use of psi powers and technologies, rumors of their existence and efficiency began to leak out. This accelerated when the collapse of the Soviet Union saw many former ex-members of Soviet black psi-ops units go freelance or become involved with Russian Mafiya groups. These rogue operators told stories not just of psi-powered individuals (for many criminals, rebels, and dictators had long employed a few real psychics of their own) but also of the classified psi-technology devices they wielded.

As drug cartel barons, rebel leaders, and Third World dictators became aware of the fearsome capabilities of American and Russian psi-tech, a new frontier opened up in the global arms trade – one that the Overmind Institute was a pioneer in exploiting. Most valued was the psi-shielding technology the Institute offered, as it allowed illicit groups to hide their most secret activities from psionic remote viewing programs like the CIA’s Project Stargate (and other deep black programs whose names never leaked to the public). If you were a dictator who wanted to hide a WMD program or a billionaire drug lord who wanted to elude the DEA, you went to the Institute.

Thanks to black-market psi-tech sales in the 1990s (most notably to Iraq and North Korean regimes and to the wealthy Columbian drug cartels), the Institute gained significant wealth, which it used to establish hidden labs across the world and build up a network of “legitimate” front companies to pursue its own transhumanist goals. Its clientele of dictatorships, human-trafficking rings, and drug cartels could also be relied on as a source of individuals to serve as unwitting experimental subjects. It was from these human trials that the Institute developed its first bio-psi products (psi-enhancing and psi-blocking drugs). Their early experiments in surgical psi-enhancement were often performed on people who had “disappeared” in South America’s brutal conflicts.

Following the Cold War, corruption in the post-Soviet military-industrial and defense complex led to an influx of Russian and Czech psi-tech onto the black market, notably first-generation psychotronic devices such as early mind shield helmets.

The Russian Mafiya also began manufacture of certain first generation psi-drugs, challenging the Overmind Institute's domination of that market. However, much of this technology was outdated and of dubious reliability (neither the Russians nor the Americans ever distributed their latest technology to clients). The Overmind Institute remained a primary source of psi-technology that could not be directly tied to either Western or Eastern bloc governments and came without ideological baggage attached. The increasingly multi-polar world of the first decades of the 21st century combined with ongoing and worsening turmoil in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and other regions have continued to ensure growing markets for its products.

ORGANIZATION

For a sinister criminal organization with global aspirations, the Overmind Institute is decentralized and nonhierarchical. Despite its primary source of funding being the global black market in psi-tech, the leaders of the Overmind Institute do not consider it a criminal cartel. These sales are simply means that justify the ends. The ultimate aim of the Institute is psionic research to understand the nature of psionic powers, foster their growth, and develop humanity as a psionic species.

The Institute uses its ill-gotten gains and diversified network of daughter organizations both to facilitate its psychic arms dealing by creating new products, and to work toward its ultimate goal of transcendent human evolution. Its leadership are idealists and fanatics who are utterly ruthless in their attempt to achieve their mental utopia.

Fellows: These are full members of the organization privy to its secrets. There are presently about 400 fellows (male and female) in the organization. All have advanced degrees (at least a masters and often a doctorate), usually in psychology, biology, medicine, or electronics engineering. The most senior fellows are the directors and assistant directors of various programs run by the Institute. Overmind scientists are fanatically devoted to their work, with few scruples about experiments on unwilling subjects – or even themselves. Indeed, many Institute researchers are psis themselves, the result of bio-psi treatments or natural abilities.

Associates: These are people who work directly for the Institute and understand its mission and purpose, but who don't make policy or perform research. This includes some 1,200 secretaries, interns, IT specialists, lab techs, engineers, lawyers, security personnel, arms dealers, covert operatives, and businessmen. An associate may be promoted to a fellow, usually by a combination of loyalty, development of psi talent, and attaining an advanced scientific degree.

Fellows and associates usually hold positions within one of the Institute's major front organizations. Some are undercover in "legitimate" positions within university faculties, think tanks, or government agencies that are not part of the Institute. About 10% of the Institute's members are under criminal indictment or on terrorist watch lists. These are protected by the Institute and work in its secret labs and black programs, often living in its covert facilities such as the Mine (see below).

A few dozen Institute members have been arrested and are presently incarcerated – usually without trial in secret government prisons – or have abandoned its precepts and either gone into hiding or turned against it.

In addition, the various front companies and groups that the Institute controls include various employees, contractors, and volunteers ("mundanes") who are completely unaware of the Institute's actual nature. Those with useful talents may be recruited as associates or fellows, usually following a lengthy indoctrination and vetting process. Those who accidentally discover the Institute's secrets may be allowed to join as members if they are both useful and pass a telepathic loyalty exam. Although a few of those who fail suffer "accidents," others are just as likely to have their memories altered or erased or to "disappear" and end up as experimental lab rats, depending on the current needs of the organization.

The Institute believes humanity, or at least an elite caste of humans, will become an openly psionic species. However, the time is not yet ripe for that revelation – normal humanity is still too powerful, and might enslave or destroy *Homo superior*. As a result, the organization attempts to keep psi powers in the shadows, which means reserving it for clandestine activities. The Institute supplies psi-tech, training, and support to various terrorist groups, criminal cartels, and rogue or pariah states. This earns hard currency for the organization while permitting field-testing of its theories and products. Many of the Institute's leaders also see global conflict as the midwife for mental evolution, and believe that the concentration of psi power in the hands of major governments is fundamentally hostile to the rise of "the Overmind."

GURPS Monster Hunters

The setting assumptions fit with a *GURPS Monster Hunters* campaign in which the government has black-ops units who cover up the truth about rogue psis, cryptids, and the like. In such a setting, the Overmind Institute can serve as an antagonist, with its fellows taking the role of mad scientists responsible for creating super-powered rogue psis and bioengineered abominations. Alternatively, the party might be employed by the Institute to capture rogue psis and psi-using supernaturals for study, or to recover dangerous psi-technology that was stolen from its laboratory complexes.

Secret Bases

In addition to its front organizations the Institute maintains a half dozen or so secret lab facilities scattered about the world. It is here that the most hard-core experiments occur and where prisoners and out-of-control experimental subjects are held captive.

The Mine: A major lab facility in the Rocky Mountains in an abandoned mine.

The Lake: A hidden facility located in the Pyrenees mountains, possibly in Andora.

The Castle: Supposedly an exclusive corporate retreat, built on the restored ruins of an old castle in the Schwartzvold region of Germany (Black Forest).

The Silo: A new facility located in an old missile silo (or a grain silo?) in the Midwest.

All facilities are well defended by mundane and psionic security systems, including psiborgs. Many contain cells holding heavily modified experimental animals and human subjects, some of whom are completely insane and highly dangerous. The Institute's security guards – armed with both automatic weapons and various psi-tech devices like psi bombs – wear distinctive uniforms with oversized elongated helmets containing psionic shielding and psycho-optic filters that have earned them the nickname “Gigers.”

Psi-Tech and the Overmind Institute

The Overmind Institute is a psionics institute (see *GURPS Psionic Campaigns*) offering training to its members. It is also a provider of psi-tech – the technologies that enhance or block psionics powers – both bio-psi tech (drugs, genetic engineering, and surgery) and psychotronics (electronic devices).

All technologies covered in this article are detailed in *GURPS Psi-Tech*. The Institute's prime areas of expertise include all aspects of bio-psi and those psychotronics that involve anti-psi technology, psi-interface systems, psi-amplifiers, and telepathic mind shielding. Most of its psychotronics should be considered emerging technologies (at least 3× weight and cost); some are experimental (at least 10× cost with bugs from the *Gadget Bugs Table*, p. B476).

FRONT ORGANIZATIONS

The original “Overmind Institute” was long ago shut down by the U.S. government. As the name is now currently used, it refers to the overriding philosophy guiding a decentralized secret society of linked front organizations that share information and research data and funding, but that remain semi-autonomous. The primary work of the Institute is performed by its fellows and associates through these front organizations that are run on a compartmentalized “need to know” basis. Over the years, many of these fronts have been shut down or cut loose as the Institute attempts to stay one step ahead of government investigators. Several are currently operating in 2014.

Center for Posthuman Evolution (“The Center”)

This organization maintains the outward façade of being a trendy “transhumanist” think tank funded by various wealthy donors (many in technology industries). It focuses on the scientific, technological, and social issues related to development of neuroscience, brain imaging, mind-machine interface, genetic engineering, neural enhancement, cybernetics, biotechnology, and mental performance-enhancing drugs.

The Center hosts or sponsors legitimate conferences and research papers on all of these subjects, maintains a small publishing house and releases a quarterly journal. It also awards annual prizes for particular developments in its field of interest. It is respected in the academic and futurist community, and attracts many bright young interns.

The Center has no public interest in psi phenomena – but that is just the face it presents to the outside world. Its shadowy

board of directors – mostly meeting through virtual reality teleconferencing – is the present body that guides the entire Overmind Institute.

The real purpose of the center's work is to provide an environment for identifying and recruiting academics whose skills and philosophies make suitable candidates for Institute fellowship. The Institute's reasoning is that someone who is comfortable with, say, the idea of human genetic engineering or cybernetic enhancement will be philosophically well-equipped to support the true *mental* transformation of humanity as well. Moreover, since the Institute's primary methods of achieving mental evolution are through the medium of biotechnology and cybernetics, they will have the skills needed to help.

Only after indoctrination into the institute's ideals (and a thorough telepathic vetting) will candidates be exposed to the reality of psi powers and the science behind them.

Stapleton Capital

The Institute directors know they aren't the only ones inventing psychotronic or bio-psi technology. Through its people in the Center for Posthuman Evolution, the Institute continuously monitors scientific papers and fringe forums, looking for any hints of legitimate breakthroughs in psionic technology. When they find any signs of a key breakthrough by someone else, they pounce. Their chosen instrument is Stapleton.

Stapleton Capital (established in 1991 in Cambridge, Massachusetts) is a venture capitalist firm that specializes in the funding and acquisition of new biotech and cybernetic patents and startup businesses. They *do* engage in this role, and prefer to acquire psi-tech legally, via corporate buyouts, angel investment, headhunting of key employees, or buying patent rights. (This is often helped by a little intimidation, bribery, or telepathic suggestion.)

However, sometimes a target is too big, too well-protected, or just too stubborn to be swayed by these means. (Eccentric gadgeteering psi-tech inventors who refuse to sell out to big business are a classic example of this.) Stapleton's “Priority Acquisitions Office” maintains contacts with various operatives who specialize in industrial espionage, computer hacking, and burglary. It has a half dozen or so teams and agents it regularly employs as middlemen for industrial espionage. It also has its own small black ops team, the Magpies, staffed with psionic adepts, for situations too sensitive or important for outside contractors, or where these have already failed.

Wyndham Hill Academy

This exclusive New England boarding school (1902) was taken over by the Overmind Institute. The academy's present headmaster is one of their of their fellows. It has 200 students, ages 13 to 17, many from international backgrounds. It also includes some poorer children on a scholarship program. Its “Black Class” is secretly involved in training individuals identified as possessing psi powers. The mundane students often serve as unwitting puppets and subjects for the psis' maturing mental powers.

Claustrum Sentinel

Claustrum Sentinel (founded in 1990, with offices in London, Hong Kong, and Dallas) is one of the Institute's longest-lived front companies. Its public face is the development, sale, and installation of a range of quality physical security systems, such as encrypted communication systems and faraday cage shielding. This is a cover for its primary business, which is the production and sale of psychotronic shielding technology to well-heeled corporations, cartels, and foreign governments aware of the psitech. Its major products are psionic shield helmets and anti-psionic negafields; it also is developing psi scanner devices to detect psionic activity.

Braustein-Schwartz

This biotech firm (founded in 2002 with help from Stapleton Capital) specializes in rapid next-generation gene sequencing. Its area of expertise is diagnosing children with unidentified neuropathic conditions who may be suffering from orphan diseases (rare afflictions that affect vulnerable patient groups), in particular degenerative neurogenetic conditions. If a child has mysterious headaches, dizziness, seizures, or behavioral issues, and mainstream doctors or psychologists can't find a solution, it might be genetic – and Braustein-Schwartz can help find it, bringing hope for an eventual cure.

Their funding comes from various international foundations, government programs, and corporate donations, including an endowment from the Tessa Bell Foundation. Braustein-Schwartz also has a spinoff company, Braustein-Schwartz Labs, which specializes in rapid-response court-ordered genetic tests (for paternity suits and criminal cases).

While Braustein-Schwartz is indeed doing good work, its real interest is not in finding rare diseases but in conducting research into the basis of latent psionic powers. Early onset psionic latency often has similar symptoms to certain neurogenetic conditions (mysterious headaches, seizures, fatigue, apparent autism, misdiagnosed schizophrenia from telepathically hearing voices, etc.). Thanks to its ostensible mission, Braustein-Schwartz Center has been able to test tens of thousands of children and has gained access to large databases of genetic information, both improving the Institute's understanding of the genetic basis of psi powers and allowing it to identify likely psi-latents as children for later recruitment. Similarly, its court-ordered genetic tests allow it to gain access to the records of numerous individuals who entered the criminal justice system, and provide useful contacts among judges, federal investigators, and police departments.

Tessa Bell Foundation

Named for a teenage girl (the runaway daughter of one of Stapleton Capital's executives) who committed suicide after a long struggle with mental illness (actually out-of-control pyrokinetic powers), the Tessa Bell foundation runs a network of homeless shelters and group homes for troubled teens and young adults in several major urban centers in the United States and Europe. It provides therapy, health care, and counselling for troubled teens. It also supports pharmaceutical research into new anti-psychotic and mood-stabilizing drugs and neuropsychology. It offers a scholarship program for poor but talented teens in affiliation with Wyndham Academy.

The foundation is a covert arm of the Overmind Institute. Many psis come into their powers as teenagers, are

misdiagnosed as mentally ill, or run away from home. The Foundation's primary purpose is to identify and recruit these individuals. While most are perfectly legitimate group homes, a select few are covert psionic institutes devoted to the carefully controlled training and indoctrination of young psis for the Institute.

Willendorf Genetics

A mid-sized biotech corporation (founded in 1985), Willendorf has specialized in the development of psychiatric medications (mood stabilizers and antipsychotics). It presently has three compounds in late stage development in its pipeline and one on the market. Some of its funding includes a grant from the Tessa Bell Foundation.

In fact, Willendorf is the present front company for the Institute's psi-drug manufacturing business. It currently is engaged in low-rate production of the drugs Blue Fire, Monobloc, and Mind Hype, and is testing the new Brainstorm drug.

Nathan Biocybernetics

This U.S. corporation (founded in 1989 in Silicon Valley) is ostensibly engaged in the development of novel man-machine interfaces, cybernetic prosthetics, and bio-chip implants for medical purposes, in particular the treatment of people with spinal injuries. In recent years, the company has expanded significantly due to technology breakthroughs in its neural interface systems. These in part were prompted by funding from government agencies such as DARPA with the goal of providing novel treatments for soldiers who have suffered traumatic injuries or paralysis in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Among Nathan's successful prototype projects are a popular hearing aid implant, a next-generation bionic arm controlled by nerve impulses, a neural-interface helmet system that allows individuals afflicted with some forms of blindness to generate synthetic vision, and an implant that allows paralyzed individuals to learn to control wheelchairs and various household appliances via mental commands. It has also done pioneering work in the use of neural implants to treat mental illness among children, with some of its prototype projects performed in partnership with the Tessa Bell foundation.

The company engages in extensive animal testing of its biochip implants, which has apparently drawn threats from animal-rights extremists. As a result, it maintains high security around its labs. In fact, the threats actually came from a break-in by agents of the rival Phoenix Project (psionic do-gooder vigilantes). Nathan's overt medical programs cloak its real purpose, the development of the Overmind Institute's cybernetics and neural technology. Its Advanced Brain Interface Laboratory is devoted to the Institute's psi amplifier program. The best of its neural scientists have also contributed surgical expertise toward the psiborg program, and some of its teams spend time working in the Mine and other covert Institute facilities (see pp. 21-22). It also developed the brain-interface tech used by Goetic Hamster.

Goetic Hamster

This multinational technology company (founded in 2011 by a team of Korean, Russian, and American grad students) specializes in the development and distribution of computer games and virtual reality gaming hardware using first generation neural brain-machine interface technology.

It has commercialized the Cephalogear, a low-cost mass-produced neural-interface helmet based on medical technology that was originally intended to help paralyzed individuals. Using a highly successful crowdfunding campaign, Goetic Hamster has recently manufactured and distributed some 1,000 early prototypes of its Cephalogear plus software for a massive multiplayer and highly addictive online virtual-reality game (*Star Dragon Chevalier*) that uses it.

Unknown to the users of the game, the Cephalogear hardware is actually a test of a World-Web psionic interface (see **Psi-Tech**) intended to tap mental power from mundane users to vastly amplify a central user's psionic abilities. Goetic Hamster's central servers are presently being used by the Overmind Institute to power up a small team of astral projectors charged with astral monitoring and interdiction of threats to the organization's operations. However, the Institute plans a further large scale expansion of the World-Web to several tens of thousands of users, and for upgrades that will allow it to identify any system users who may have psionic abilities.

Mountain & Byrd

This heavyweight international law firm (650 staff with 72 partners) was founded in New York in 1902. The firm is strong in intellectual property, international, and corporate law, with a reputation as legal attack dogs. Its head office is in New York with branch offices in London, Brussels, Miami, and Hong Kong.

They provide legal services for the Institute's front companies. Some partners in the firm are fellows or associates of the institute and use psionic training and/or psi-tech – primarily anti-psi and telepathy – in their legal practice to protect the firm and win important cases. The firm's excellent anti-psi capability is also deployed to ensure no one else is psionically *tampering* with vital cases – a capability several big clients outside the Institute are also willing to pay to utilize.

The firm can make life hell for anyone who is investigating the Institute but lacks similar legal firepower. Usually it does this indirectly by digging up other people with a legal grudge against its targets – or possibly against their assets, friends, or employers. Did the investigators injure a bystander or a hired security guard when targeting the Overmind Institute? Guess who will provide the victim with a high-priced personal injury lawyer!

PROGRAMS

The Overmind Institute uses semi-randomly generated code words to refer the various covert programs its component organizations are engaged in. (This is useful even in a world of telepaths: An esper who reads an Institute member's surface thoughts may pick up references to, say, "Gemini Green" but still have no idea what it refers to.)

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Institute used project names that were symbolic or descriptive, e.g., "Project Mind-child" and euphemistic nicknames for facilities that referenced a facet of their geography, e.g., "the Chapel" or "the Estate."

In 1996 a breach of security (by members of the Phoenix Project vigilante group) led to all programs receiving new randomized two-word code names. The bio-psi and psi training programs (code name "Gemstone") were assigned a code with a gemstone and NATO phonetic alphabet letter, e.g., Jade

Hotel. Covert ops and black-market sales programs (code name "Zodiac") were named with a sign of the zodiac and color, e.g., Taurus Blue. Psychotronic projects (code name "Elemental") were named with an element and phonetic alphabetic letter, e.g., Strontium Mike.

A Sampling of Programs

Jade Zulu: Psi-drug program run by drug cartel laboratories and later at Wildendorf Genetics. Among its successes were the Blue Fire, Brainstorm, and Monobloc psi drugs.

Lithium Echo: The Institute's highly successful psiberface and psi-amplifier program. However, early projects did damage the brains of several human test subjects, although some were successfully repurposed as Sapphire Bravo or Topaz Juliet subjects (see below).

Coral Victor (Project Mindchild): Development of artificial psi powers. Several dozen preadolescent street children (identified by the Tessa Bell Foundation's youth shelter program) were fitted with experimental brain-tissue grafts, neural implants, and catalyst drugs to "awaken" their psionic ability. Most died or went insane. A few Coral Victor children developed powerful psi abilities and are now operatives in the Institute.

Sapphire Whiskey: Early program to develop psiborgs – disembodied animal brains (later, humans' were used) that are encased in life-supports systems and psi-amplifiers and induced to produce psionic effects. Most psiborg work took place not at front companies but in the Institute's off-the-grid laboratories.

Onyx Delta: Use of human genetic engineering to create psi-gifted children. Produced numerous failures but its greatest success was a powerful (if somewhat sociopathic) telepathic boy (initially code-named "Matrix Delta"); now an adult, his potent mind-control abilities serve him well in his position as one of the senior partners at Mountain & Byrd.

Moonstone Mike: Failed program to develop a catalyst drug for children who had latent teleportation powers. Some subjects did teleport but proved prone to uncontrolled nightmare-induced "sleep jumping." All either suffered messy accidents or *vanished*.

Topaz Juliet: This was the development of soma-traumatic latency therapy: the removal of body parts from psi-talent subjects in the hope that the trauma would lead to their brains developing psi powers to compensate for their induced disability. Initial efforts at the program led to messy failures until the mutilation was combined with massive doses of psi drugs, which resulted in a few successes. One of them, a mute and armless telekinetic/telepath, is the Institute's most feared enforcer.

Gemini Green: A plan to kidnap and brainwash a popular televangelist who possessed significant telepathic and empathic powers in order to gain control of his congregation and their funding. Halted by intervention of the pro-psi Phoenix Project.

Sapphire Bravo: Extraction of brains from moderately psi-talented human subjects (chiefly children) for advanced psiborg development. Unfortunately, one supposed "homeless runaway" used in the initial program was the daughter of wealthy magnate Robert Pendrake; his private investigators later uncovered some of the truths behind the Institute. This led to Pendrake's funding of the Millennium Council, a powerful anti-psionic vigilante organization that has targeted the Overmind Institute.

Pisces Black and Malachite Hotel: Operatives from a CIA black psi-ops team (Special Operations Group Bioenergetics Operations Division) captured by Taliban group in Afghanistan were traded to Overmind Institute dealers in exchange for additional shipments of negafields and psionic-shield helmets. The agents were found to have psibernetic brain implants granting them artificial psi abilities. As part of the Malachite Hotel program they are being slowly dissected in an Overmind Institute laboratory to reverse engineer the advanced neuro-psi implant technology.

Silver Charlie: Development of man-portable psionic overload devices. The contractor was raided by government agents, resulting in the loss of the program.

Hydrogen Whiskey: Ongoing project to build a giant "citadel-size" psi-amplifier system in the institute's secret Rocky Mountains lab.

Aries Red: Gathering genetic and psi-latency data from school children and testing catalyst drugs under the cover of a vaccination program.

Ivory Romeo: Attempt to hunt down and capture cryptid animals believed to be psi catalysts. The program is currently focused on retrieving a rare species of tapeworm.

Capricorn Yellow: The takeover of an isolated small town and its transformation into a regulated community intended as an optimum environment for raising psi-gifted children.

Cobalt Bravo: Psi-bomb development program based on reverse engineering of black-market Russian military technology acquired in the Middle East.

Obsidian Alfa: Ongoing effort to develop "third generation" psiborgs, the Traveller and the Witch, for astral projection and probability-field manipulation, respectively.

OVERMIND INSTITUTE SCIENTIST

95 points

This template is for a typical fellow of the institute. The Institute believe in the concept of *Homo superior* – that humanity will evolve or can be evolved into a superior species that harnesses latent psionic abilities. Many members tend toward an arrogant detachment from the mass of humanity, which they see as a condition they have transcended.

In a **Monster Hunters** setting, major Overmind Institute scientists would be equivalent to techies. More powerful members will augment these base abilities with extensive psionic powers.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: 40 points chosen from among IQ +1 or +2 [20 or 40], Will +1 to +4 [5/level], Administrative Rank [5/level], Contacts (Professional) [Varies], Eidetic Memory [5], Intuition [15], High TL [5/level], Less Sleep [2/level], Patron (Overmind Institute or front organization [Varies]; Reputation [Varies], Single-Minded [5], Status [5/level], Wealth [Varies], Unfazeable [15], Versatile [5], or any psi powers or Talents.

Disadvantages: -30 points chosen from among Absent-Mindedness [-15], Bad Sight (Mitigator, Glasses, -60%) [-10], Callous

[-5], Curious [-5*], Delusion ("I'm no longer human") [Varies]; Enemy (Anti-biotech or anti-psionic activists, Animal-rights activists, Intelligence agencies, Law enforcement, Monster hunters, or Psionic vigilantes) [Varies], Fanaticism [-15], Jealousy [-10], Oblivious [-5], Obsession [-1, -5*, or -10*], Odious Personal Habit (Arrogant) [-5 or -10], or Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Expert Skill (Psionics) (H) IQ+1 [8]-14. • One of Biology/TL (Biochemistry), Bioengineering/TL (Cloning or Genetic Engineering), Engineer/TL (Psychotronics), Pharmacy/TL (Synthetic), or Psychology/TL (H), all (H) IQ [4]-13; or Surgery/TL (VH) IQ-1 [4]-12.

Secondary Skills: Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ [1]-13; Diagnosis/TL (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; First Aid/TL (E) IQ [1]-13; Research/TL (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; and Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-12. • One of Electronics Operation/TL (Medical, Psychotronic, or Scientific) (A) IQ [2]-13.

Background Skills: 5 points chosen from among NBC Suit/TL (DX/A); Current Affairs/TL (Science & Technology) (IQ/E); Administration, Animal Handling (any), Hazardous Materials/TL (any), or Public Speaking (all IQ/A); Mathematics/TL (any) or Physician/TL (both IQ/H); Weird Science (IQ/VH); or any unchosen primary or secondary skill.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Lenses

Academic (+3 points): Add Tenure [5] to the list of advantages. Increase Research to IQ+1 [4]-14. Add Teaching (IQ/A) to the list of background skills.

Black Ops (+5 points): Add Alternate Identity [15] to the list of advantage options, and remove Status. Add Merchant (A) IQ+1 [4]-14 to primary skills (for arms dealing). In secondary skills, replace Writing with Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-13. Add Fast-Talk (IQ/A), Forgery/TL (IQ/H), Guns/TL (Pistol) (DX/E), and Shadowing (IQ/A) to background skill options.

To this end, members [of the Phoenix Project] attempt to help new psis realize their potential, while at the same time protecting them from organizations like . . . the Overmind Institute.

– GURPS Psionics

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid SF fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released **Basic Dungeons & Dragons**. Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating **Transhuman Space**, co-authoring the **Big Eyes, Small Mouth** anime RPG, and writing countless **GURPS** books, including the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition, GURPS Ultra-Tech**, and the **GURPS Spaceships** series.

THE PYRAMID FARM

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Palo Alto, California, March 2013.

"They're still after us!" Tom gasped, looking back down the street as two tall, dark-suited men stepped out of the night – their gold face masks glinting under a flickering streetlight.

"I know," Sheila said, holding her head as they resumed running. "I can feel them. They're so empty. So hungry."

Tom and Sheila should have known they were in trouble when their search for a missing, recently erupted psi led them to that creepy, New Age "colony" in Portola Valley. They'd heard stories about lost and confused telepaths going in and not coming out, but this time they'd decided to hop the fence and look for themselves.

That had not been a good idea, and now they were running for their lives.

Hear me, she broadcast. Stories about the Pyramid Farm are true. They're collecting us, using us for something terrible. Only got briefest contact from one of their captives, but we're in danger. All of us –

A sudden wave of brainfuzz engulfed her, and she stumbled, tripped, and fell. A second later, she heard Tom shout as he fired ahead of them, not behind.

He shouted once more – louder, this time – before falling eerily silent.

Quickly, she was yanked up by her hair – pulled to her knees as someone forced her to look at what three dark-suited men were doing to Tom.

*Then her captor forced her to look up at his gold face mask, and then **behind** it.*

Sheila started screaming. She wouldn't stop until they got her back to the Pyramid Farm.

Then it was too late to scream.

Since the mid-1970s, the quasi-afrocentric spiritual movement known as Next Nubia Now has been prophesying a new future for humanity. They created a colony to put those ideas into practice. Within the walls of Meroe Base 1 – jokingly called "the Pyramid Farm" by its neighbors and detractors – its members are encouraged to work hard, love freely, and try to develop the power of their minds.

While the happy, smiling colonists go about their daily, mostly self-governed toil in their beautiful "Life Chamber," terrible things happen under the ground.

The leader of their movement, Tanwetamani, hasn't been quite himself for decades, and his interest in psychic power isn't a healthy one. Psis who go into the colony don't always come out, and dangerous creatures in human shape are sometimes

sent out to hunt them down and bring them back for something truly unspeakable. Something that could enslave or end the world if it succeeds . . .

Intended for campaigns where psychic powers play a medium-to-major role, the Next Nubia Now movement could be a major adversary, ongoing concern, or a deadly but seemingly minor distraction. This generic campaign outline provides information on this purportedly pro-psionic New Age group, the Pyramid Farm they live in, and what's really going on at night. It also discusses its powerful leader, his sinister plans, and the dangerous astral creatures at his beck and call.

YOUR DREAMS WILL TAKE YOU VERY FAR

In the early 1970s, Charles G. Bevell was a well-regarded computer engineer, the founder of a successful Palo Alto electronics research, and a kindly husband and father. His company, Beveltronics was leading the pack in developing new means of human-computer electronic interfacing, but he remained humble about their achievements. In fact, when a leading technology magazine listed him as one of America's top Afro-American electronics innovators in early 1974, he was genuinely embarrassed – preferring to avoid the limelight.

By the end of the following year, Charles – now calling himself Tanwetamani – was all but basking in it.

By then, he'd ended his marriage, sold his business to his fiercest competitors, and authored *Next Nubia Now*; a swiftly written, best-selling book about his a dream-conversation with a long-dead Kushite pharaoh, and the knowledge that spirit had imparted. In its feverish pages, Tanwetamani boldly proclaimed the arrival of a new age of life on Earth, where psychically aware men and women would lead humanity into the future. He also claimed its genesis to be in Meroe Base 1 – the newly built "Colony of the Future-Past Now" that he'd founded in nearby Portola Valley with the buyout money.

What had happened? Charles' estranged wife and children insisted they hadn't noticed anything wrong until he'd decided to just drop everything and travel to North Africa. Maybe he'd been a little stressed, but surely that didn't justify him just leaving for weeks, only to come home a stone-eyed stranger who spoke with an unnerving certainty, but had no love left to give them anymore?

As Tanwetamani revealed in *Next Nubia Now*, for all their love they hadn't understood the horrific nightmares plaguing his sleep. They had not shared his terrifying visions of a world in moral and social decay. They hadn't witnessed the violent and bloody end time of poverty, lawlessness, sickness, and war.

They had not seen the mushroom clouds that brought a stark, Earth-killing end to it all.

Charles would have done *anything* to rid himself of such troubling visions. So when he realized that their last act took place somewhere he'd seen before – ruins of what were once tall, skinny pyramids, crumbling by a river in a mountainous desert – he knew he had to go to ancient Meroe, on the banks of the Nile. That's why he left his company in capable hands, got on a plane for Khartoum, and went down the Nile, hopefully to find an answer.

In that hoary burial ground of Nubian kings, Charles found a forgotten tomb in the shadow of other, greater ruins. It had been ransacked long before, with nothing left inside, yet he knew this was the place that had called to him. So he spent the night there, his mind open to revelation and hope.

That night, no less than the Kushite pharaoh Taharqa himself collected Charles' soul and took him spirit-walking. He learned that the nightmares had been visions of the World That Is and the destruction that lay ahead in the World to Come. But he also learned that, by following the Tenets of Taharqa, the world would instead enter the World That Could Be and become a paradise. Then, after renaming Charles after his own son – Tanwetamani – the pharaoh walked into the rising dawn, promising to return once the World That Could Be was well on its way.

Part gentle polemic, part hopeful prophecy, and part psychic manual, *Next Nubia Now* provided a blueprint for a saner, more philosophically just society – its laws and customs informed by both ancient wisdom and modern science. It wasn't much different from other, similar "New Age" spiritual organizations, but such was Tanwetamani's presence that he soon garnered a massive following. When he spoke, promising equality of the people, prosperity of the soul, and love for one and all, those who heard his words often *wanted* to share in his ideas, or were at least willing to hear more.

As a result, when Meroe Base 1 opened its doors to applicants for its "Life Chamber," there were far more spiritual pilgrims than its 20 square acres would allow. Tanwetamani wisely winnowed the applicants down: finding those with skills necessary to the colony and kindly rejecting those whose "psychic spark" was presently insufficient. Once they had 300 persons – with one woman for every man – Tanwetamani announced the optimum population level was set.

So the media and the disappointed were sent home, the doors of the Life Chamber were shut, and the exciting experiment in work, love, and psychic development got underway.

TO SEE WHAT YOU CAN TRULY BE

Almost 40 years later, the Life Chamber is *working*. A combination of hydroponics and careful resource management provides more than enough food for its 500-or-so inhabitants, solar panels meet their carefully

rationed energy needs, and their mode of around-the-clock communal living and working gives them enough space to house everyone in some degree of comfort.

From outside, the fences are high enough that all one can see are tall, thin pyramids covered in Meroitic hieroglyphics. Inside, the other buildings resemble Kushite temples and palaces, laid out according to odd "cosmic principles." Smiling, striding statues of Sebiuemker – Nubian god of procreation and security – are everywhere, along with lush decorative gardens, and fountains that smell of violets.

Once inside the front gates, it's like stepping back into 1970s science fiction TV show. Long-haired, well-tanned men and women walk around in loose, white tunics, wearing wide, plain gold bracelets and anklets; sturdy shoes; and big smiles. They walk hand in hand while talking, greet each other by touching foreheads, and give off a palpable feeling of peace and tranquility.

That peace crosses over into the psychic realm. Inside the fence, psis find an oasis of calm and quiet, with all outside background noise gently blocked. Of course, that means it's extremely difficult to use telepathy to get a message out, or in, but Tanwetamani assures it's to aid fledgling psis, as well as maintain their privacy.

When they aren't working, the colonists lounge in pleasure and comfort. They go into special pyramids to develop their mental rapport, and each evening they gather in the palace to eat a generous, communal evening meal and be entertained with uplifting, North African music. Afterward, they enjoy wine made in their vineyard, and engage in gentle debate, pose philosophical questions, and make constructive suggestions.

The Pyramid Farm is self-sustaining, but it still has regular commerce and contact with the outside world. This mostly comes in the form of daily guided tours (free), weekly seminars on the Tenets of Taharqa (\$10 for adults; free for children), and "private inquiries" with Tanwetamani himself (\$1,000 an hour). All tours begin and end by the gift shop and café, where visitors can buy Tanwetamani's many books or sample the simple but hearty vegetarian fare the colonists eat.

Bury Me Standing

The colonists' bodies are personally mummified by Tanwetamani, according to a modern take on the "Nubian Tradition." It closely follows the ancient Egyptian rites of ritualistically eviscerating, drying-out, and wrapping up the body, except that he then encases the body in plaster, rather than linen wrappings.

Once dry, the plaster is decorated with sacred, Merotic script, and a gold death mask of the deceased is placed on its face. He then encloses the body within a tight-fitting glass tube, and places it upright into a small, personal pyramid created for burial purposes.

These 10'-tall, 4'-wide pyramids lie along the eastern side of the colony's enclosure, their sealed doors facing the rising sun. When the colony greets the sun in the morning, they do it standing behind the pyramids of the "Departed." On special days they read the names of the Departed and honor their works for the Colony.

At night, none care to be close to the area. They say the funerary structures feel lonely and haunted – sometimes even hungry.

The numbers have increased quite a bit, allowing for Arrivals (births) and Departures (deaths). There have also been quite a few “immigrations,” as outsiders have been allowed to enter the Life Chamber, provided they meet Tanwetamani’s exacting standards. Chief among them are those with skills and expertise the colony requires – currently masons, botanists, educators, and computer programmers – and the all-important “psychic spark” that will be so crucial in the world to come.

As the spiritual lodestone of Meroe Base 1, Tanwetamani spends his days on the move. He greets the rising sun with the entire colony in the morning, just as the night shift is giving way to the day. After that he’s in his office, working on his latest book or meeting with well-paying spiritual seekers or those who wish to be put on the lengthy waiting list for immigration. In the afternoon he speaks to the children – some of them strangely listless and stony-eyed – telling them stories from the World that Was, and showing how the World That Could Be is coming true, here and now.

After that he sits in the main garden and answers his followers’ spiritual questions, right up until it’s time for supper. At dusk, he and the colony bid the sun goodbye, and then he retires to a special “retreat” pyramid of his own to “meditate.” Sometimes he is alone, sometimes not; he often takes new and promising members of the colony into his special pyramid, hoping to awaken their psychic spark.

LIFE AIN’T ALWAYS WHAT IT SEEMS

In *Next Nubia Now*, when Tanwetamani says that he entered the burial chamber as Charles G. Bevell and exited as someone else, he *isn’t* speaking metaphorically. Since his trip to Meroe, he’s been the earthly servant of a powerful but trapped psionic entity – tirelessly working to find those whose psychic powers can free his master.

The astral creature had been a prisoner in Meroe since long before the Nubians conquered Egypt. In those truly ancient days, their civilization had mastery of advanced, mental arts,

The energy detected within small replicas of gigantic pyramids have little engineering value today, but it is logical that many other uses will be invented when methods of increasing the energy are discovered.

– *The Psionic Generator Pattern Book*, paranormalpyramids.com

which they used to protect their small kingdom from threats both mundane and otherworldly. When the foul being came to Earth seeking to psionically enslave humanity for its own, malign purposes, the Nubian psychic sorcerers shackled it like the monster it was.

The creature was bound to a block of polished, red basalt to keep it from fully re-entering either the astral plane or the real world. That block was then placed within an unused tomb, its walls infused with enough power to keep the entity from physically affecting the outside world outside. The tomb was sealed shut – and eventually forgotten as the civilization declined and fell.

The entity raged for aeons, seeking revenge, but could move its gaze no further than its prison walls. Some 500 years ago, a small earthquake cracked its tomb, loosening the wards enough to let it look around the world, so to seek a vessel for its will. It took the intervening five centuries for human science to provide what it needed, which is when it found the kindly and unassuming Charles G. Bevell, his wealth, and his intriguing ideas on man-machine interfacing.

Satisfied, the entity used all the power it could to summon the hapless mortal to its prison, under the sands of Meroe. It showed poor Charles a vision of the future it desired: a world driven to its knees by skull-headed people, their exposed brains wrapped in gouts of unholy, black flame, with horrifying things looking through the ebon fire – their eyes like dying stars.

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Servants of the World That Could Be

Tanwetamani's slaves are a race of semi-intelligent, astral parasites that harmlessly absorb the natural energies given off by telepaths. As such, they tend to lurk around psis, who can usually sense their presence as an unnerving hunger.

Most of the parasites he controls are set to constantly cycle through the Pyramid Farm's fences, thus generating the colony's telepathic barrier. But some he implants into the corpses of his Colonists – replacing their dried-out husks with plaster effigies prior to official burial. The implantation process turns the corpses' faces into hideous mockeries, necessitating the gold death masks. They have no biological processes, cannot heal naturally, and must avoid direct sunlight or else burst into flames.

Once linked with a body, the parasites can step into and out of the astral plane. Also, their normally harmless feeding now inconveniences psis; any psychics in the creatures' immediate *physical* presence suffer bad headaches, nausea, and dizziness if they try to use their powers.

During the day the embodied parasites lurk in the astral plane, along with their disembodied brethren. At night, a number of them are on active guard duty – entering the physical world to capture intruders and desirable psis.

They also venture out into the world to grab those that Tanwetamani desires to put in the pyramid of power, though they cannot take them into the astral plane for ease of travel. They also cannot venture further than 50 miles from the man who controls them. That still gives them the entire city of San Francisco and most of Santa Cruz as their hunting grounds.

The parasites have a measure of their borrowed body's memories, allowing them to deal with everyday objects and situations, but they aren't great with independent thinking. For example, if they're on guard duty, and they see people sneaking in, they'll try to capture them, but if the interlopers should escape, they'll go back to guarding the Pyramid Farm unless given a direct order to chase them down and bring them back.

The alien made him watch the trees wither, the oceans boil, and the skies turn red as blood as the entity slid through the massive hole in space its people had made with their burning minds.

It made him watch as the world Charles knew was burned away – remade to suit the entity's alien needs.

The visions almost broke Charles, driving him to find an answer in Meroe. No sooner did he see the block of red basalt than his mind and soul were devoured in one grotesque psychic slurp. Then the entity excreted a heavily altered copy into the shell left behind, and sent his grotesque satrap back into the world – there to use the tools of the age to do its bidding.

A somewhat self-willed tendril of the entity, Tanwetamani has formidable powers of psychic persuasion. He can remove and implant memories into people, read and control their minds, and cause those who displease him to suffer headaches, blackouts, and strokes. He can also awaken the “psychic spark” in those who are just a chromosome or two shy of being psionic, though he only does this for the most promising (read “easily vanished”) of candidates.

He also acts as a shepherd for the entity's “children”: nasty astral parasites that cling to the body of his master. (See *Servants of the World That Could Be*, above). He can place them into dead human bodies, so as to have reliable servants. Many of the colonists supposedly laid to rest have been used to house these creatures, and the results can be seen at night – wearing gold face masks, disrupting telepathy, and flitting into and out of the astral plane to catch their prey.

The parasites often are sent after psis that have attracted Tanwetamani's attention, usually by visiting the Pyramid Farm to see what the organization has to offer. If Tanwetamani takes an interest in such a person, he will try to convince them to join the Colony. If they refuse, he'll simply dispatch his creatures to stalk, capture, and drag them back to a secret lair beneath Tanwetamani's “retreat.”

Below his private pyramid is an underground chamber where dozens of unfortunate psis are mummified alive. They are

wrapped in circuit-laced plaster, encased in a glass tube, fed by IV drips, and wired up in series like living ornaments on an ever-growing power pyramid. Night-shift computer-tech colonists – psionically forced into secrecy – sit and monitor the power pyramid each night, running test after test on their energy levels.

At the appropriate hour, under Tanwetamani's supervision, they use his techniques of man-machine interfacing to link the victims together. Then they bring their combined powers up to a certain point, and aim a concentrated burst at the location of the entity's prison tomb.

They do this hoping to send enough raw psychic power there to flood its wards, and break the entity free. Maybe if the psis didn't keep shorting out on them, they could finally reach that line. Maybe if they didn't keep dying, requiring new ones to be added and broken in, they could *really* have something.

But Tanwetamani knows that one day it *will* happen. His master will finally be free, and the visions he once thought to be nightmares will finally come true. His skull will erupt with black flame, as will those of his many, dead-eyed children, and they will scream the name of their lord as it strides through the hole their burning minds shall make in the sky.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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EXPANDED PSI FOR SANDMEN

BY JASON "PK" LEVINE

As explained in *GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier*, Project SANDMAN has a handful of psychic agents known as "taishers" (from Scots Gaelic *taibhsear*, "one with the Sight"). The taisher template represents this with psionic abilities that take a *GURPS Basic Set* approach: ESP Talent plus a selection of advantages with the Psionic limitation. This simple approach makes sense for "psi-light" games, particularly those in which these History-B-based abilities represent the alpha and omega of what's available.

However, some groups may prefer the framework of *GURPS Psionic Powers* – whether they plan to bring in other powers like Ergokinesis, Telepathy, etc., or just want to introduce leveled abilities and psi techniques to the basic *Madness Dossier* abilities. This expansion makes psi a modicum more expensive (due to the need for a skill), but provides taishers with *quite* a bit of versatility . . . yet another weapon against the irruptors!

TAISHER ESP

These new abilities are presented in the format explained in *Psionic Powers* (p. 22).

Anunnakku Sense

8/18/36/56 points for levels 1-4

Skill: Anunnakku Sense (Per/Hard).

You can detect the remnants of History B, including irruptors, reality subduction zones, and reality shards. This will not help you locate cultists, glyphs, memes, or other signs of irruptor *influence* on our world, however. Anunnakku Sense is an active ability; you must concentrate for one second, after which the GM will secretly roll against your skill minus range penalties (p. B550) to the nearest instance. On a success, you learn the information below. Anunnakku Sense is not a "targeting" sense – you cannot use it to follow up with other psionic abilities against the detected subject.

Successful use of Anunnakku Sense 1 reveals that there is something from History B nearby; nothing more. Anunnakku Sense 2 reveals the direction to the incursion; you may also follow up with an unmodified skill roll to get a general idea of what you're sensing (e.g., "a few irruptors" or "a strong reality shard"). Anunnakku Sense 3 gives you the exact location of the subject; for a subduction zone, you also get a rough idea of its boundaries. Anunnakku Sense 4 provides exact location *and*

follow-up details with a single roll; you may then make a second, unmodified skill roll to learn precise information (e.g., "three girtablullû raiders" or "a magnifying glass that can see through certain things").

Statistics: Detect (History B; ESP, -10%; Vague, -50%) [8]. Further levels remove Vague [18], then add Precise, Nontargeting [36], and then Analyzing [56].

Exclusion

Hard

Default: Anunnakku Sense-2; cannot exceed Anunnakku Sense.

You may omit any *known* instances of History B from your search and/or limit your search to a certain class of incursions (e.g., "reality shards only").

Extended Range

Hard

Default: Anunnakku Sense-5; cannot exceed Anunnakku Sense.

Your sweep uses long-distance modifiers (p. B241) instead of standard range penalties.

Unusual Background and Powers

A psi with access to the ESP abilities in this article *or* to the ESP abilities in *Psionic Powers* – but not both – must take a 10-point Unusual Background. One with unrestricted access to ESP pays 15 points. Access to other psionic powers (whether he has ESP or not) costs 20 points. Of course, the GM is free to charge higher Unusual Backgrounds for "problematic" psi (e.g., Teleportation) or simply disallow it altogether.

Clairvoyance (History B)

see Psionic Powers, pp. 40-41

Taisher ESP offers this variant on standard Clairvoyance. It can only be used to see into reality subduction zones. However, it trades this drawback for having 10× the range of normal Clairvoyance (e.g., 10 yards at level 1, 20 yards at level 2, 50 yards at level 3). It costs the same as standard Clairvoyance.

Espers who already have standard Clairvoyance and want it to work *better* when used in subduction zones can buy additional levels of Clairvoyance with the limitation *Accessibility, Only into reality subduction zones* (-30%). Because this counts as both “normal ESP” and “taisher ESP,” it requires at least a 15-point Unusual Background.

Statistics: Replace Reduced Range with Accessibility, Only into reality subduction zones. Cost is unchanged.

Illumination

Taishers may also take Illuminated (ESP, -10%) [14]. This is not a typical psionic ability; it requires no roll to use, works passively, and (most important) permanently highlights the character to anyone *else* with Illuminated. It has no associated skill or psi techniques. The power modifier means that its *benefits* are lost if targeted by anti-psi or psychotronics, but nothing removes the ability for *others* to identify the esper as one of the Illuminated.

Irruptor Sight

13/21 points for levels 1-2

Skill: Irruptor Sight (Will/Hard).

You can see things that have been hidden from sight via Anunnaki methods. This includes naturally invisible irruptors (such as an êkimmu encountered outside of a host body), anyone using Invisibility Art (a trick that relies on Anunnakku programming), any sort of “cloaking field” technology used by the irruptors, and anyone or anything obscured by the GU.SHUB (Neglect) glyph. You *may* also be able to roll (often at a penalty) to see strange, invisible energies from History B; this is at the GM’s sole discretion and usually applies only when irruptors have brought over Anunnaki tech for use in some bizarre scheme.

Make an Irruptor Sight roll when encountering such a thing; if it would normally require a Quick Contest to resist, your roll is at -1 for every three *full* points of your foe’s success. Success means you see right through the obfuscation and don’t even have to make a resistance roll; critical success also renders you immune to that effect from that one subject for 24 hours. (For example, if you critically succeed against a GU.SHUB glyph, you would ignore any *other* GU.SHUB glyphs drawn by *that* scribe.) If you fail, you may still resist normally – though critical failure gives you -5 on the subsequent resistance roll.

With Irruptor Sight 2, you not only spot hidden things, you can roll to penetrate *any* visual attempt to cloud your senses. This protects you against the glyphs IGI.NU.GAL (Blind), NAM.HILI (Fascinate), and SANGUSH (I belong here); the expanded concepts of NAMZAKU.MULAN (see *Madness Dossier*, p. 39); any vision-based hypnotism that incorporates Anunnaki techniques (including Hypnotic Hands and a Hypnotic Freeze attack); and any memes conveyed via writing or silent video.

Statistics: See Invisible (Anunnakku; ESP, -10%; Requires Will Roll, -5%) [13]. Level 2 adds True Sight [21].

Host Scan

Hard

Default: Irruptor Sight-5; cannot exceed Irruptor Sight.

If you suspect an êkimmu (or similar irruptor) is within a host, you may use this technique to scan the host. The GM will secretly roll a Quick Contest of your Host Scan vs. the irruptor’s Will. If you *win*, you uncover the possession! If you tie or lose, you learn nothing – unless you also critically failed *or* the êkimmu critically succeeded, in which case the GM lies! (If there’s no êkimmu, the GM will simply tell you as much if you succeed, tell you nothing if you fail, and lie if you critically fail.)

Shared Sight

Hard

Default: Irruptor Sight-5; cannot exceed Irruptor Sight.

You can attempt to share your vision with another person. You must touch him and then roll at a penalty for the psi technique (unless bought off) *and* for the worst margin of loss or failure between the two of you. Success means you both ignore the effect (or see the irruptor, etc.).

Ontomancy

14/17/20/26/32 points for levels 1-5

Skill: Ontomancy (Per/Hard).

You can subconsciously perceive the ebb and flow of the clash between History A and History B, and use that knowledge to anticipate future events. Unlike Sandman Foresight (p. 33), you are *not* limited to events directly related to History B; it’s entirely possible for your insight to help you realize that a company’s stock is going to crash, even if the devaluation was not directly caused by irruptors, cultists, etc.

Ontomancy requires you to meditate quietly, focusing your mind on the universe. You may only attempt this once per day! The amount of meditation required depends on your Ontomancy level:

Level	Time	Level	Time
1	60 minutes	4	4 minutes
2	30 minutes	5	1 minute
3	15 minutes		

Once you’ve fulfilled this requirement, roll against skill to see if you perceive something useful. Success means you’ve identified a ripple between the two histories and may attempt to interpret it; critical success gives +5 on the interpretation roll. Interpretation requires a second, IQ-based skill roll; critical success provides clear and useful information while normal success offers vague omens. In all cases, the GM determines the topic.

Statistics: Oracle (ESP, -10%) [14]. Further levels add Reduced Time 1 [17], then improve Reduced Time to 2 [20], to 4 [26], and then to 6 [32].

Direct Study

Hard

Default: Ontomancy-6; cannot exceed Ontomancy.

Instead of meditating to tune into the universe as a whole, you can study an incursion from History B directly.

This is *much* faster – though often dangerous! You must be within a reality subduction zone, within a few yards of an irraptor, or within reach of a reality shard that has not yet been moved from its place of discovery. Use the normal rules, reading “minutes” as “seconds.”

Specific Search

Hard

Default: Ontomancy-10; cannot exceed Ontomancy.

You may look for omens about a specific event, person, group, etc. If successful, the GM still provides the details, but they must relate to the topic you’ve chosen.

Sandman Foresight

5/8/13/17/27 points for levels 1-5

Skill: Sandman Foresight (IQ/Hard).

You get flashes of warning about History B. The specifics depend on your level, but in all cases you only receive information relevant to *your* future – or, at level 2+, to the future of someone you touch. (These visions are often triggered by shaking the hand of a person who’s about to encounter an irraptor, reality shard, etc.)

With Sandman Foresight 1, the GM will roll against your skill if something from History B is about to put you or your compatriots directly in danger; in effect, it acts as a very limited, skill-based Danger Sense. You receive no information past “Incoming danger!” and are limited to learning about immediate threats.

At Sandman Foresight 2, the GM will roll when he believes that you’ll be coming into contact with something from History B in the near future. He’ll *also* roll if you touch someone for whom this is true. Success means you receive a vague vision of what may happen; your margin of success determines its clarity.

Sandman Foresight 3 allows you to *actively* look for History B in your own future or the future of someone you’re touching. Success gives you a vision *if* the GM thinks the subject is at all likely to interact with irruptors, reality shards, a reality subduction zone, etc. This is not easy! It takes 10 minutes of concentration, is done at -8 to skill, and costs 2 FP. Sandman Foresight 4 removes the skill penalty and Sandman Foresight 5 removes the FP cost, but only Fast Fortune (below) can reduce the 10-minute requirement.

Statistics: Precognition (Accessibility, Anunnaki phenomena only, -40%; Aspected, Danger, -20%; ESP, -10%; Passive Only, -20%) [5]. Further levels remove Aspected [8], then Passive Only [13], then add Reliable 8 limited by Active Only [17], and then Reduced Fatigue Cost 2 [27].

Fast Fortune

Hard

Default: Sandman Foresight-10; cannot exceed Sandman Foresight.

Your active reading takes only 20 seconds (instead of 10 minutes). This psi technique is only useful in combination

with Sandman Foresight 3+, but you may learn it at lower levels in case you use extra effort.

Visions of Clarity

Hard

Default: Sandman Foresight-10; cannot exceed Sandman Foresight.

You may attempt this psi technique immediately after the GM succeeds at a passive Sandman Foresight roll; this requires one second of concentration and a completely separate roll. If successful, you receive a brief vision. If you have Sandman Foresight 1, this is the *only* way to get some clue of what danger is coming – at the cost of a full combat turn you could have spent reacting! Otherwise, it supplements the vision you’ve already received with a second perspective, a related event, etc. As always, your degree of success determines how useful the vision is.

You may also use this technique when actively reading someone’s future, to the same effect. However, if the GM doesn’t have a vision for you in the first place, using Visions of Clarity doesn’t change that!

Template Changes

When using these expanded psi rules, make the following changes to the taisher template (*Madness Dossier*, p. 27).

- In *Advantages*, replace Detect (History B) [38] with Anunnakku Sense 3 [36].
- If the GM allows other psi in the game, the taisher may reduce his Unusual Background by 5 or 10 points if he can’t access all of it. See *Unusual Background and Powers* (p. 31) for details. These points may be spent on further advantages.
- In *Primary Skills*, add Anunnakku Sense (H) Per+3 [2]-18. This includes +4 from ESP Talent.

Rookie Taishers

When using *Budget Cuts and Rookie Sandmen* (*Madness Dossier*, p. 28), the change to Detect should be interpreted as a downgrade to Anunnakku Sense 2 [18] and Anunnakku Sense (H) Per+2 [1]-15 (including +4 from ESP Talent). The taisher should take *five* secondary skills from the last list (instead of six), spending 1 point on each (instead of 2). Otherwise, use the lens as written.

Shard Study

10 points for level 1, plus 2 points for each additional level

Skill: Shard Study (IQ/Hard).

You can identify a reality shard and get a sense of its general purpose and history. Roll against your skill when a shard is within range (see below); alternatively, if one comes within range without you realizing it, and the GM feels that it’s giving off strong enough “vibes,” he may roll secretly at -4 for you. Your margin of success determines how clear and complete the information is; on a critical success, you receive visions of the shard in use. On a failure, you cannot study that shard again for 24 hours.

You must touch the reality shard to use Shard Study 1. At level 2 and up, consult the *Psionic Range Table* (**Psionic Powers**, p. 22), but using your level+2. In other words, your range is 10 yards at level 2, 20 yards at level 3, 50 yards at level 4, 100 yards at level 5, and so on.

Statistics: Psychometry (Accessibility, Reality shards only, -40%; ESP, -10%) [10]. Further levels add Ranged and Reduced Range, 1/10 [12], then remove Reduced Range and add Increased Range, one level at a time [+2/level]. *Feature:* Margin of success determines clarity, rather than range of time, as “time” can be a meaningless concept with many reality shards.

Shallow Scan

Hard

Default: Shard Study-3; cannot exceed Shard Study.

If successful, you learn about the history of the shard from a mundane, “real-world” perspective. In other words, you can learn details about the standard object that it’s *pretending* to be.

Specific Study

Hard

Default: Shard Study-5; cannot exceed Shard Study.

You can search for details about how this shard relates to a specific event, person, or place. For example, if you found a pen knife, you could determine whether it was used for ritual sacrifices in a given cave and, if so, the details behind how it aided the ritual.

Subduction Sight

3 points/level

Skill: Subduction Sight (Per/Hard).

As a free action, you can visually “zoom into” a reality subduction zone, subtracting your power level from the range penalties (p. B550) to look at something within. For example, if you have Subduction Sight 6, you could see an irruptor 70 yards away (original range penalty -9) as if it were only seven yards away (adjusted range penalty -3). If you Aim beforehand, *double* your effective power level! While using this ability, your Subduction Sight skill replaces your Per for *all* distant-vision purposes, from Vision rolls to rolls against Body Language, Lip Reading, Observation, etc.

When firing a ranged weapon into a zone, Subduction Sight can also give you up to +1 Acc per level (not cumulative with scopes or similar aides) if you first take a number of Aim maneuvers equal to the bonus. You may aim for less time to claim a smaller bonus.

Statistics: Telescopic Vision (Accessibility, Only into reality subduction zones, -30%; ESP, -10%) [3/level].

Quick Shot

Hard

Default: Subduction Sight-4; cannot exceed Subduction Sight.

When using your ability as a scope, you only have to take one Aim maneuver for every +4 (or fraction thereof) to Acc. For example, with Subduction Sight 7, you could use Quick Shot to claim your full +7 Acc after only two seconds of aiming.

Shared Sight

Hard

Default: Subduction Sight-5; cannot exceed Subduction Sight.

By touching another person (who must be willing), you can let him “zoom in” his sight as well. For every *full* five points by which you make this roll, you may share with yet another person.

Every day the Red King stays asleep is a day that history remains familiar, that humans remain free, that the madness dossier remains closed. And all it costs is the life, the morals, and the sanity of everyone who works for Project SANDMAN.

– **GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier**

IMPERFECT PSI

As discussed in the taisher template, many ESP powers only work subconsciously or have annoying “pside effects.” Players may add up to -30% in the following limitations to any or all of their taisher’s ESP.

Backlash (varies): Choose an Attribute Penalty, Incapacitation, or Irritant from Affliction (p. B35). Every time you use your ability, you must roll against HT. On a failure, you suffer that effect for minutes equal to your margin of failure. The limitation value is equal to -(half of the enhancement value); for example, Nauseated is a +30% enhancement, so Backlash, Nauseated is worth -15%.

Backlash, Stunning (-5%): As for Backlash, but failure leaves you stunned for *seconds* equal to your margin of failure.

Costs Fatigue (-5%/level): Up to four levels (4 FP per use) can be appropriate.

Nuisance Effect (-5% or -10%): Most nuisance effects are -5%, including the need to intone loudly, a slight warping of reality around you that bothers others for a while (-1 to reactions), and similar problems. Save -10% for serious issues.

Unconscious Only (-20%): The GM decides when your ability turns itself on, not you; it becomes passive. You must *also* add Uncontrollable.

Uncontrollable (-10%): This limitation is only appropriate for abilities that would inconvenience the user by activating on their own or that have Unconscious Only. Examples of the former include Clairvoyance (you become blind locally), Ontomancy (you’re drawn into meditation), Sandman Foresight (you get lost in visions), Shard Study (ditto), and Subduction Sight (you zoom in *instead* of seeing what’s right in front of you).

Unreliable (-10% or -20%): You have to roll before even *attempting* to use your ability, which can be frustrating! For -10% it works on a 14 or less; at -20% it needs an 11 or less.

Adding these limitations reduces the cost of the taisher's ESP abilities, of course. For convenience, these new costs are summarized on the *Limited ESP Table* (below).

Example: The taisher template gives Melissa Anunnakku Sense 3 [36]. She wants it to be a traumatic sense, however, and gives it Backlash, Stunning (-5%) and Costs Fatigue, 1 FP (-5%). Looking up Anunnakku Sense 3 in the "-10%" column gives an adjusted cost of 34 points. Melissa has saved 2 points, which she can spend to improve her other traits.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In History A, Jason Levine is the Assistant *GURPS* Line Editor, telecommuting from his home in Chattanooga, where he was privileged to be the editor of *GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier* (among other supplements). In History B, however, evidence indicates that he is destined to be an overseer working directly for the wicked šedu, helping them oppress humanity with an iron fist. It is thus in everyone's best interest to keep reality just the way it is.

Limited ESP Table

Ability Name and Level	-5%	-10%	-15%	-20%	-25%	-30%
Anunnakku Sense 1	7	6	5	4	4	4
Anunnakku Sense 2	17	16	15	14	13	12
Anunnakku Sense 3	35	34	33	32	31	30
Anunnakku Sense 4	55	54	53	52	51	50
Clairvoyance 1	10	10	10	10	10	10
Clairvoyance 2	15	13	10	10	10	10
Clairvoyance 3	20	18	15	13	10	10
Clairvoyance 4	25	23	20	18	15	13
Clairvoyance +1	+5	+5	+5	+5	+5	+5
Irruptor Sight 1	12	12	11	10	9	9
Irruptor Sight 2	20	19	18	18	17	16
Ontomancy 1	13	12	12	11	10	9
Ontomancy 2	16	15	15	14	13	12
Ontomancy 3	19	18	18	17	16	15
Ontomancy 4	25	24	24	23	22	21
Ontomancy 5	31	30	30	29	28	27
Sandman Foresight 1	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sandman Foresight 2	7	5	5	5	5	5
Sandman Foresight 3	12	10	9	8	7	5
Sandman Foresight 4	16	14	13	12	11	9
Sandman Foresight 5	26	24	23	22	21	19
Shard Study 1	9	8	7	6	5	4
Shard Study +1	+2	+2	+2	+2	+2	+2
Subduction Sight*	2.75	2.5	2.25	2	1.75	1.5

* Subduction Sight's values are *per level*. In all cases, multiply this value by the level of the ability and *then* round up to the nearest whole number. For example, with -15% (2.25 points/level), Subduction Sight 6 would cost (2.25×6)=13.5, rounded up to 14 points.



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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

TWEAK THE HIDDEN TRUTHS

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Psionic powers have always been a staple of low-budget supers and science-fiction cinematic efforts. This is because done right (poorly?), they can be really *really* cheap. Point to the forehead and squint, and suddenly trained actors are flinging themselves across the room or repeating what you say in a robotic cadence. It almost became a running joke how often the original *Star Trek* went to the “invisible psionic powers” well (“This godlike child . . . is . . . making me . . . punch . . . myself . . .”). Even George Lucas – with millions of dollars and cutting-edge special effects – relied on cheap psionic effects for his initial outing. (“Yes, this guy is definitely choking me with his mystical powers; I’m not just making throat-clearing sounds and clutching my neck, bug-eyed.”)

However, the oft-conjoined fusion of cinematics and psionics has resulted in some assumptions that can be useful to challenge. Fortunately, challenging established paradigms is what we do here at Random Thought Table (exploiting our core competencies is on our buzzword to-do list as well). So let’s look at some of the underlying assumptions of many psionic effects, and see what we can do to come up with something cool and new.

JEDI LIVER TRICKS

I used to think that the brain was the most wonderful organ in my body. Then I realized – well, look what’s telling me this!
– Emo Philips

The brain is almost universally assumed to be the core of psionic abilities, since it is generally treated as the ultimate manifestation of mental ability (which, as head trauma proved ages ago, is the providence of the brain). However, from a gaming standpoint, there’s no reason for that to be the case; no amount of clinical research has pointed to psionic abilities as originating from the brain or *anywhere else*, so for our purposes, it’s entirely logical (and “realistic”) to have the ability originate wherever we want.

The ancient Egyptians believed the heart to be location of intelligence and thought, and Aristotle reached similar conclusions. The Prometheus legend had its foundational basis in the notion that the *liver* was the home of the soul. We have as much scientific evidence of the existence of the soul in the liver

as we do the brain, so we can have psionic abilities originate from whatever we want.

What effect does this have on game play? Well, first off it makes for great alternate visuals: Rather than an endless procession of psionics raising their hands to their foreheads, “mentalist” might instead put their hand over their abdomens or chests. In a setting with alternate worlds or realities, this is an easy way to ramp up the “alien” factor of other realms: “The psychics from Pharaoh-3 all unleash their abilities by clutching their *chests!*”

Moreover, having different organ origins for such powers allows for interesting possibilities for ramping up or suppressing them. Headshots are no longer effective at disrupting psis, but a good chest-kick is. If the heart is the source, maybe cardiovascular effort is a way to augment power. If powers stem from the liver, maybe alcohol suppresses – or *increases!* – abilities. (For Freudian-minded groups, the possibilities for phallic or yonic origins for psionic abilities should be evident . . .)

Psi-Source Mysteries

If “psionics” from different worlds have different organs as their abilities’ origins, it might be a good long-term mystery for heroes to unravel to realize that an underlying source exists for these abilities. Perhaps each group’s abilities originate from different organs because its practitioners *believe* that’s where those abilities stem from. Maybe there’s an “ur-soul” that serves as the invisible basis for these powers. Alternatively, all psychics have hyperdimensional insectoids latched onto them, channeling power through wherever the hosts believe those abilities should stem.

LET IT GLOW, LET IT GLOW . . .

Although it was one of the first assumptions that fell to the wayside in the CGI era, the notion that psionics are generally invisible is still a stalwart of the genre. But there’s no reason to presume it needs to remain such.

The Star Wars films become very different if Jedi powers always produce a visible effect; good luck using your mind-influencing powers when the shopkeeper's assistant can witness the telltale crimson aura in the air when you wave your hand!

When dispensing with the notion of (near-)universal psionic invisibility, a few different possibilities could be used.

Psionic Usage Is Constant

Perhaps all psionic usage causes an on-off universal common effect. Any psychic's eyes turn blood-red with the same intensity whenever using any kind of ability, or all targets of a psionic effect look crystalline in the same way.

More Power, More Visible

Perhaps visible effects increase as the psionic power increases. This option is pretty straightforward: Minor effects might cause the eyes to glow very faintly, while more intense powers would increase eye-glow intensity. (The character-point value of the ability is a good basis for determining how noticeable the side effect is.) This might allow for witnesses to determine the relative strength of the action by analyzing the visible effect.

More Power, Less Visible

It's possible that visible effect decreases as psionic power increases. Perhaps there's a universal "effect aura"; whatever isn't dissipated in the psionic power's effect itself is rendered as a visible effect. In other words, extremely subtle effects have blindly obvious auras, while more explosive or dangerous psionic effects might be otherwise invisible (except . . . y'know . . . the prom being destroyed telekinetically). This would result in a world where *all* psionic effects are really hard to keep quiet.

Red Is For . . .

Perhaps different categories of effects have different visual effects. For example, maybe all telekinetic effects cause a blue path to extend backward from the target to the psi, while pyrotechnic abilities might cause the mentalist to sweat blood.

Of course, players can already modify their psis' personal effects, but this would be a setting-wide tweak; having pyrotechnics universally known as the sweatblooders is definitely a different world.

YOU STRONG-MINDED FOOL!

The double-edged sword of a blessing sometimes being a curse is relatively common in the real world: It's easy to be overqualified for many jobs. Having too large a library can be disadvantageous to a smaller one, if it's unorganized and difficult to cull out information. Having literacy is usually advantageous, but it exposes the reader to text-based curses and spells.

This same idea can be applied to psychic powers. One of the basic assumptions of psi is that lower-willed folks are easier to affect than higher-willed ones. (And by "basic," we're talking "first 20 pages of *GURPS Basic Set*" basic.) However, that needn't be presumed. What if psionic effects require an "anchor" to latch onto? Perhaps the stronger the underlying mental foundation of the target (Will), the *easier* it is to affect that person with psionic powers.

This wouldn't make Will useless; it might still be helpful in defending against mundane psychological and interpersonal interactions, and warding off magical effects in a world that features both. However, it would no longer be an easy assumption to boost Will.

It's up to the GM to determine the cost of increased or decreased Will in such a world. Instead of the usual ± 5 points per ± 1 Will, it might be ± 4 points per ± 1 Will in a setting where psionic abilities are rare. Conversely, if psionic powers are ubiquitous (*everyone* is an active psi!), then increased or decreased Will might be a 0-point feature up to double IQ and down to 1. (Having a Will of 24 is handy in lots of situations, but it'd also mean you're getting brain-zapped daily.) Or it could be anything in between.

Too many corner cases exist to offer full rules here. (Fer-mat's Last House Rule: "I have discovered a truly marvelous tweak that this margin is too narrow to contain.") However, a very quick-and-easy system is to assume that the resistance to psionic effects is 20-Will in all situations where it would have previously been Will. (Thus, someone with a Will of 10 resists the same as before, someone with a Will of 11 resists as someone with a Will of 9 would have in the old rules, and so on.)

In such a situation, it's probably wise not to allow players to purchase increased/decreased resistance to psionic effects . . . or at least require an Unusual Background of some sort. After all, with a worldwide tweak such as this one, "I'm very strong-willed but I can still resist mental effects" is about as logical as "I'm very short, but I can still reach things on tall shelves."

Regardless, by challenging the underlying foundations of what psionic powers are, how they originated, and what they do, new realms of gaming goodness can be unleashed upon an unsuspecting world . . . *if* you put your mind to it.

Professor Charles Xavier:
Would you like to see another magic trick?

Man in Black Suit: Yes!

Professor Charles Xavier:
Get in the car.

Man in Black Suit:
Good idea.

– *X-Men: First Class*

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

ODDS AND ENDS

SLIGHTLY PSYCHIC CAMPAIGNS

by Sean Punch

The picture painted by *Psychic Perks* (pp. 4-7), minor psychic abilities (pp. 8-11), *Psychic* (p. 6), and *Unusual Background (Psychic)* (p. 9) is a subtle one, optimized for campaigns at or below the 150-point power level – especially those where the paranormal is met with skepticism and there’s no proof that self-professed magicians, psychics, and shamans use anything but applied psychology. What do those look like? Here are a few ideas.

GURPS Horror

As *Horror* (p. 31) remarks, powers in horror are something for monsters to use against heroes. Still, there’s a respectable tradition of protagonists kept awake at night and led ever-deeper into terror by poorly understood gifts that attract unhealthy supernatural attention. For this, low-end abilities

are ideal, and suit 75- to 100-point “accidental heroes” and 25- to 50-point “average Joes” (*Horror*; p. 10).

GURPS Mysteries

The “psychic detective” subgenre is fascinating, and the topic of *Psionic Mysteries (Mysteries)*, pp. 97-99 – but as noted there, powerful psi abilities make it hard for a mystery to remain a mystery. Making the heroes only a little bit psychic is a recommended solution. These rules offer a way to do so.

GURPS Social Engineering

Flashy psi abilities – levitation, mind blasts, etc. – are meant for physical action and conflict. In polite social affairs, they’re unnecessary . . . but full-fledged telepathy is godlike. Subtle, unreliable psychic powers solve all the problems and mix well with the cerebral nature of campaigns where *Social Engineering* enjoys extensive use.

ALIEN? HUMAN? WHATEVER . . .

by Steven Marsh

Tweak the Hidden Truths (pp. 36-37) challenges a few of the preconceived notions in psionic gaming. Other assumptions that can be adjusted are more binary toggles: “strong emotion always make psionic powers work better or worse,” for example.

Similarly, a somewhat common assumption in some games is that psionic powers are only the providence of aliens or nonhumans . . . or only the providence of *humans!* As a fun *X-Files*-like revelation, start with one of those two assumptions as the core understanding of the game, then “reveal” at some point that the opposite is actually true. Thus, if the universe believes only humans can have psionic powers, it might be revealed that all those psi-using “humans” are actually a different alien race, infiltrating humanity. Or if the understood “truth” all along has been that only aliens have psi powers, then perhaps it’s revealed that all those “aliens” were actually uplifted humans removed from Earth ages ago; any human can gain psionic powers if exposed to a certain ultrascience method . . . but *only humans*.

Reality Checksum

Provided the quote below can be found in *Julius Caesar*, then the continued vigilance of Project SANDMAN (pp. 31-35) has ensured that we remain in History A. If it’s from any other source or has been altered, presume that reality has changed and you are in terrible danger.

*Anunnakku bestride the narrow world
Like great Colossi; and we petty men
Walk where the šedu fly, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.
Men cannot be the masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves; we all are underlings.*

– William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

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