# GURPS® Fourth Edition

# STEAMPUNK 1
## Settings and Style™

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# STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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

# INTRODUCTION

Steampunk is a literary genre – a subgenre of science fiction and fantasy – which appeared in the tail end of the 20th century, with a lot of references to earlier material. It quickly became a commonly recognized form for novels, short stories, and roleplaying games. The original **GURPS** *Third Edition* treatment of the subject was William H. Stoddard's award-winning **GURPS Steampunk** (2000), which was followed by supporting material such as Jo Ramsay's **GURPS Screampunk** and Stoddard's **GURPS Steam-Tech** (both 2001), as well as by the related **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** (2000).

These books are still available, in electronic PDF format, from Steve Jackson Games' Warehouse 23 online store. However, since those supplements appeared, not only has **GURPS** moved on to a new edition, but "steampunk" also has evolved. Steampunk novels and movies are still being created, but alongside them, steampunk has become a *style* – a street fashion movement and focus for costume creators, with a number of steampunk artists, sculptors, and rock bands.

This series reflects all these developments. It does not replace the **GURPS** *Third Edition* books, which are still highly recommended. Neither does it simply update their numbers and game mechanics to Fourth Edition, though there is some of that. Rather, this new **Steampunk** series updates and extends the **GURPS** treatment of the topic to fit the new century.

## WHAT IS PRESENT

This first volume in the new series takes a new look at steampunk settings and games through a 21st-century lens. The first chapter is a brief overview and history of steampunk, suggesting sources that anyone interested could seek out for further reading along the way. The second chapter is a brief history of the "Steam Age" – the era which inspires both stories and the aesthetic, and which provides the settings for many steampunk campaigns. This chapter provides details to ensure that protagonists and adventures stay true to the genre.

The third chapter concentrates on general game concerns, first defining some game-relevant terms and concepts and then looking at steampunk gameplay and how to use **GURPS** for this purpose. This chapter gives the players and GM a mutual starting point for understanding the parameters of a new campaign. The fourth and last chapter shifts the focus to the heroes, discussing the mindset, behavior, and costumes that make a steampunk protagonist. The supplement then wraps up with a brief glossary and bibliography/filmography.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY

This volume draws on and references earlier **GURPS** treatments of steampunk, repeating some of their contents where this is convenient, but reordering and revising that material. Specifically, it adapts material from **GURPS Steampunk** and **GURPS Screampunk,** and non-setting-related material from **GURPS Castle Falkenstein.** Other than those couple of thousand words, this is a new supplement.

*The real 19th century was an age of amazing inventions and discoveries – but these accomplishments inspired visions of even greater achievements. Jules Verne's fictional odysseys and H.G. Wells' scientific romances took contemporary readers on a journey into the realms of possibility. At the same time, inventors such as Charles Babbage and Nikola Tesla proposed new technologies as radical as those in fiction, from steam-powered mechanical computers to wireless electric power.*

*– GURPS Steampunk*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Masters is a **GURPS** author of long standing, who claims partial responsibility for the adaptation of **Castle Falkenstein** to its **GURPS** manifestation, and for writing the steampunk-related **GURPS Castle Falkenstein: The Ottoman Empire** and **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6.** He was the author of both editions of the **Discworld Roleplaying Game, GURPS Thaumatology,** and many other **GURPS** books. He collaborated on yet more, including the **Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game** and **GURPS Banestorm.** He is the **Transhuman Space** line editor.

Phil has worked on several other companies' game lines, including **Ars Magica, Eclipse Phase,** and **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade.** He also wrote and self-published **The Small Folk,** an urban fantasy roleplaying game (available in digital form from Warehouse 23). He still lives in Britain with a wife and a small array of computers, none of them powered by steam.

# DREAMS OF STEAM

*Scurrying and ducking through the streets of Limehouse, Sammy the Reckoner looked about him with nervous eyes. This was not a comfortable place for him to be – he owed debts to at least three of the kings of the East End rookeries, and none of 'em was exactly what he'd call the **forgiving** kind. But business was business, and more to the point, judging by the coded telegram that had come to his garret room that afternoon, someone down here knew altogether too much of **his** business.*

*"That Man! Stop! State Your Name And Card Number!"*

*Sammy turned, his heart sinking as he sought to feign incomprehension. One of the Clockwork Peelers was standing just three yards away, its steel-sheathed arm pointing directly at him, its eyes glowing red, its great domed head . . .*

*. . . Suddenly shaking madly back and forth. Sammy recognized the effects of a magnetic gear-seizer, and he had the presence of mind to step back sharply a moment before the mechanical man locked solid and fell forward into the gutter, the impact spattering him with mud.*

*"Good day to yer, Sammy. I'll be taking yer thanks when yer ready to a-give 'em."*

*Sammy turned again, his heart sinking further as he recognized the voice. It was Black Bonnet Betsy who was grinning at him as she pocketed a child's catapult, and that meant it was the Anarchists as were calling in a debt this day. Which like as not meant he'd suffer worse than arrest by the end of it.*

## WHAT IS STEAMPUNK?

When he invented the word "steampunk," K.W. Jeter (p. 9) simply defined it as "Victorian fantasies," and he and his friends gave it little more thought than that; it was basically a joke about what could come after the "cyberpunk" movement. **GURPS Steampunk** says that it all centers around the question "what if?" as applied to the "Age of Steam," and a lot of it does involve alternate histories, often wild and very divergent. But more than any of this, 21st-century steampunk is about *style* – specifically the style of the Victorian age (plus or minus a few decades), filtered through a modern sensibility and rarely taken *too* seriously. While the 19th-century inspirations justify the "steam" part of the label, the "punk" part implies an unconventional attitude, a strong "do-it-yourself" ethos, and a dose of rebellion (see *The Steam Age and Punk*, p. 5).

That said, "steampunk" is a word which has meant slightly different things to different people. Any variety of the subgenre could be used in roleplaying games, one way or another, but understanding what the word *might* mean involves a review of the history of the subgenre.

## SOURCES

Nothing comes from nothing. Steampunk may have been named in the 1980s, but it took ideas and images from earlier sources – both from the Steam Age itself and from subsequent works which, if published today, would instantly be labeled as steampunk.

### PERIOD FICTION

The story begins in the late 18th century with the Gothic movement in the arts. This was a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment period, looking back to the medieval era for inspiration. Gothic architecture emulated medieval cathedrals, and Gothic fiction was similarly obsessed with architectural imagery. A typical early Gothic hero would be a member of an ancient family living in a looming castle, who discovers that he has inherited an ancient curse which he can't escape. Gothic stories tend to be wildly melodramatic and gloomy.

Readers of the time adored these tales of passion, danger, and tradition, which remained popular into the high Victorian era (and to modern times, mostly in the form of horror stories). The classic Victorian sensibility saw the Queen in her palace, the Archbishop in his cathedral, London at the center of the universe, and all was right with the world. Gothic stories expose the fears of the era: What if all was not right? What if all was *horribly, terribly wrong?*

However, the backward-looking early Gothic eventually came into collision with the era's equally powerful fascination with new sciences and technological progress. After all, it was possible that those too could go *terribly wrong.* A new sort of Gothic fiction was created by someone who features in some modern steampunk stories, for very good reasons.

## *The First Science Fiction?*

In 1818, a previously unpublished 21-year-old writer, the wife of a noted poet, produced a novel which had allegedly been inspired by a lurid dream after a night spent discussing ghost stories. The writer was Mary Shelley (1797-1851), and although her novel, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (which is discussed in more detail on p. 97 of **GURPS Horror**) is in many ways classic Gothic, it looks forward, to an age of science, more than it looks back to the Middle Ages. The hero suffers, not from an ancient curse, but from the consequences of his own mistakes, in the form of a brilliant but misguided scientific experiment. It has therefore been called the first true work of what would nowadays be identified as science fiction, although that term wouldn't be invented for another century. *Frankenstein*'s influence on later science fiction, including steampunk, is certainly huge.

"Proto-science fiction" had existed even earlier, mostly in the form of utopias and fantastic voyages. In this new "Age of Romantic Science" (see pp. 12-16), it became clear that science offered new ways of viewing the world and technological change might reshape society, giving writers countless new plots and themes – and Mary Shelley was keenly aware of this. Furthermore, disrupted societies and the new industrial cities suffered from new social pressures, of which crime was one symptom; science and reason might provide answers to these problems. It is significant that the most important proto-science-fiction writer of the early 19th century after Mary Shelley was Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), who often is also credited with inventing the detective story.

### Roleplaying Options

A roleplaying campaign in early Gothic mode would be a horror game in a period setting. It would most often evoke fears of taint (**GURPS Horror,** pp. 57-60) and madness (**GURPS Horror,** pp. 67-69), and would make good use of the *Fright and Madness Checks* rules and the *Madness Table (Gothic)* on p. 143 of **GURPS Horror.** Because modern psychiatry doesn't exist in-period and madness is very much the point of such stories, cures for these effects are largely unknown. Protagonists might well have enough on their plates just surviving with some shreds of sanity intact, though more sternly determined investigators might seek to suppress ancient terrors so as to ensure the dawn of a new and *hopefully* better age.

A post-*Frankenstein* Gothic game would still tend to be horror, but with more modern aspects as new fears come into play. There are fears of technology (**GURPS Horror,** pp. 88-89) and no hell (**GURPS Horror,** p. 97), of course, but increasingly over time, also fear of the universe (**GURPS Horror,** pp. 73-76), as science increasingly depicts it as inhumanly vast and utterly godless, and fear of the state (**GURPS Horror,** pp. 89-90), as global empires with steamships and telegraphs grow in scope and power. The development of Victorian morality was echoed by a growing fear of sex (**GURPS Horror,** p. 65), which might explain a taste for vampire stories; games that allow the supernatural instead of or as well as period weird science can certainly feature romantic vampires as antagonists. Unfortunately, cures for madness become rarer as the comforts of religion seem even less convincing, although at least lunatic asylums become *slightly* less horrible places.

Alternatively, Poe's creation of the detective story offers a different model for campaigns. The date puts this genre on the boundary between "low-tech mysteries," as discussed in Chapter 4 of **GURPS Mysteries,** and the "modern detective" mode discussed in Chapter 5 of that book. Late TL5 science and the creation of modern police forces move the flavor of things closer to the latter, but the age of super-rational detectives only comes later. Steampunk weird-science and Gothic horror elements can make things somewhat paranormal, so see also Chapter 6 of **GURPS Mysteries** – Poe-esque detective stories should certainly have a weird tinge.

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# THE STEAM AGE AND PUNK

"Punk" is a word with a range of meanings. Originally, it was invariably negative; while its meanings shifted over time, it wasn't a compliment to call anyone a "punk." The punk rock movement of the 1970s, however, adopted the negative term as a symbol of rebellion; it was a reaction to rock music that was seen as increasingly corporatized and overly complex, as well as a symbol of political radicalism. It was also cynical and sometimes bitter.

So where's the "punk" in steampunk?

Cyberpunk, its literary predecessor, embodied that punk-cynical sensibility – not just cynicism about whether people live up to ideals, but cynicism about whether those ideals were worth living up to in the first place. When it expresses a similar sense of alienation, steampunk is anachronistic, a modern vision of the 19th century. But the idea of the 19th century as a time of unquestioned moral standards is just as much an anachronism. Such standards were preached to Victorian schoolchildren, but characters in serious literature, and most real people, faced more complex problems. In fact, all the elements of "punk cynicism" already existed in 19th-century society, though not necessarily together. This was, after all, an age of revolutions and radical new thought, of Darwin and Marx – and of aesthetic decadence, of Baudelaire and Wilde.

The other half of punk rock was an attachment to "doing it yourself." Punks held that anyone could make music; technical competence was strictly optional. The steampunk fashion and art of the 21st century may not be as politically radical as 1970s punk rock, but they gleefully adopt a similar do-it-yourself attitude, encouraging fans to create their own costumes (which can be as garish or deliberately shocking as anything from the punk '70s), and to handcraft or modify devices to suit themselves.

So the "punk" in steampunk may be about cynicism, rebellion, individuality, or personal engagement – or a bit of all those. The main thing is to avoid conventionality (especially modern-day conventionality) as well as slavish conformity to the Victorian model.

# MAYHEW'S *LONDON LABOUR AND THE LONDON POOR*

*That one half of the world does not know how the other half lives is an axiom of antiquity, but the truthful revelations and descriptions of the London street folk, workers and non-workers, and the means by which they exist, will go a great way to enlighten the educated classes respecting matters which have hitherto been involved in mystery and uncertainty.*

*– From the "Advertisement" to volume 4*
*of London Labour and the London Poor*

The most influential text for the first writers to use the word "steampunk," in the 1980s and early 1990s, was a work of Victorian nonfiction. Its author, Henry Mayhew (1812-1887), was a crusading Victorian journalist who led a colorful life, running away to sea, training as a lawyer, working as a theater manager and playwright, repeatedly falling into debt, and helping to found *Punch* magazine. In 1849-1850, he wrote a series of articles for *The Morning Chronicle* about the life of poor workers in London, which were collected in three volumes in 1851 as *London Labour and the London Poor*. When it was republished in 1861, a fourth volume was added, dealing with the criminal classes and largely written by other authors, who sometimes discussed other cities and historical eras.

This huge work of sociology features extensive efforts to analyze its subject numerically, with estimates of the numbers in each profession based on multiple sources and including calculations based on secondary data. It also includes vivid descriptions of street scenes and interviews with a selection of its subjects, detailing their sometimes appallingly harsh lives and dirty jobs, from hauling dead bodies from the Thames to "toshing" (scavenging lost valuables from sewers and drains) and "pure-finding" (collecting dog feces for use in leather-tanning). Mayhew writes from a very Victorian point of view, but with a keen eye for detail. The book can be found online, and anthologies of selections from the four volumes also have been published.

Mayhew's work was an influence on radical politicians, Charles Dickens, the founding trio of modern steampunk (see p. 9), and countless other works, including ***GURPS Goblins.*** His description of life at the bottom of the heap in what was then the world's greatest city, with details of street-level jobs and language, is a primary source for muddy, gritty steampunk.

## Dickens to Doyle

All this was just a part of a larger development – the whole idea of popular mass-market literature. New urban populations, created by the Industrial Revolution, demanded entertainment, and mass-market publishers appeared to sell them magazines and books, with some of the stories depicting the society in which those readers lived, and reflecting the changing, technology-dominated world around them.

Some of this popular fiction has been a huge influence on steampunk. Those 19th-century writers described an industrial age that we now see as laying the foundations for our own era. Notably, Charles Dickens (1812-1870), the most popular writer in English of his age, depicted the new industrial cities, including London, as filled with strange and varied characters, from the gutters to the mansions; a lot of modern steampunk is very Dickensian.

Elsewhere in Europe, French writer Jules Verne (1828-1905) gave a new energy to proto-science fiction, creating crucial new images. Many of his novels were labeled "extraordinary voyages," and involved journeys to distant and wonderful places, sometimes requiring amazing imaginary machines such as heavier-than-air flying craft or submarines. Verne's *Albatross* and *Nautilus* sail on through modern steampunk.

Other writers of the time also contributed to the evolution of science fiction and, ultimately, to steampunk. Notably, Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) crafted *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* combining mad science with a study of the psychology of good and evil. At much the same time, Poe's invention of the detective story was refined by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), who created a near-perfect image of Steam Age rational heroism in consulting detective Sherlock Holmes. The Holmes stories influenced steampunk, both in their verbal descriptions of late Victorian and Edwardian London as a hotbed of mystery from the gutters to the Palace and in the visual style of the original illustrations and countless film and TV adaptations. Doyle's later *Professor Challenger* stories explored wilder aspects of science and technology.

## Scientific Romances and Dime Novels

By the end of the 19th century, partly thanks to Verne, popular fiction writers had become accustomed to the idea that stories might feature scientific ideas and futuristic speculation. One word used for this category of fiction, especially the British versions, was "scientific romances" (using "romance" in an old-fashioned sense). Today, this label serves as a standard term for period proto-science fiction.

Typical period scientific romances combine speculation about the future with assumptions and attitudes from the time of writing. They lack the obsession with the frontier often found in early American science fiction, as well as its two-fisted heroes; the typical heroes of a scientific romance are gentleman-scientists and their personal friends, along with the occasional hardworking proletarian engineer. Furthermore, around the beginning of the 20th century, growing concern in Britain about the threat of war with Germany led to a whole minor genre of "invasion novels," intended as dreadful warnings of the need for Britain to prepare to fight. Some later, wilder invasion novels featured futuristic war machines.

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was one noted author responsible for a few scientific romances – plus a whole range of other stories and poems which have shaped modern views of Victorian technology and the Victorian-era British Empire.

Although Kipling is mostly associated with tales of the Empire in general and India in particular, he also wrote a fair amount of supernatural fiction and a couple of science-fiction stories ("With the Night Mail" and "As Easy as A.B.C.") about a future created by easy airship travel. Kipling's fascination with how things are *done* is very science-fictional, and he helped create the image of the competent Scottish engineer.

The scientific romance form was polished and treated most seriously by H.G. Wells (1866-1946), who gave whole new subcategories and ideas to 20th-century science fiction. He was a political idealist with a keen interest in evolution, and his first novel, *The Time Machine*, is a story about the far future of humanity and of all life on Earth. For this purpose, Wells invented a whole new science-fiction concept – time-travel technology. The hero, a typical scientific romance gentleman-scientist, plunges into the far future on a machine of gears and crystal – one of the great images of early science fiction. Wells followed this up with other novels such as *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (a scientist grants animals sapience surgically), *The War of the Worlds* (hostile beings from Mars do to Victorian Britain what the British did to too many colonial peoples, and like many colonial adventurers, end up dying of disease), *The First Men in the Moon* (featuring an anti-gravity material and an unnerving alien civilization), and *The War in the Air* (the future war story turned into a tale of apocalyptic devastation). Steampunk owes Wells a *lot*.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, mass-market American fiction took the form of "dime novels" – slim, *very* cheap publications of various sizes, each including a story of modest length. These covered a range of genres, but one typical dime-novel story has since been labeled the "Edisonade" – a story in which a genius inventor comes up with an amazing machine, which he usually employs for personal profit. The first of these was Edward S. Ellis' *The Steam Man of the Prairies* (1868), which doesn't seem to have been much noticed until a rival publisher saw a reprint in 1876 and commissioned a blatant imitation, *Frank Reade and His Steam Man of the Plains*. This initiated a long series of stories about the Frank Reade family, setting a pattern for other writers.

In the archetypical dime-novel Edisonade, a boy inventor creates a vehicle (often owing something to Jules Verne) which can double as a weapon, and heads off to the frontier, or maybe some other unexplored land, where he uses it to kill a lot of natives, get hold of something valuable (such as gold ore or a gem from a lost city), and returns home rich.

Occasionally, these inventions are turned against enemies of the United States or other threats. This was a crude genre, frequently arrogant and racist, but it was an influence on the magazine science fiction of the 20th century, when that label was invented, and the visual style of dime-novel illustrations is an influence on modern steampunk.

### Roleplaying Options

A scientific romance campaign might feature competent but not superhuman heroes dealing with the consequences of some specific scientific development or technological invention, such as powered flight or working submarines. Exploration stories are possible, especially if the invention is space travel or some way to reach remote parts of the globe (the age of exploration wasn't *quite* finished even in 1900), but social or political stories are at least as likely. The heroes might have a full set of standard Victorian ideals, but radical or plain weird politics could also feature.

Alternatively, for military-history buffs, an "invasion" game, using the **GURPS Mass Combat** rules, might make an interesting short-duration campaign. Forces should mostly be early TL6, although before WWI, some elements even in advanced nations' armies might still be late TL5. A "future war" scientific romance game could add some exotic elements, to be determined by the GM – some might be roughly equivalent to late TL6 or TL7 units, while others could be outright strange.

A true-to-the-source campaign implies adapting to period ways of thinking, but gamers can soften this with PCs who have radical notions which happen to correspond to more or less 21st-century ideals. For example, they could display a not-very-Victorian approval of racial and sexual equality. (To be fair, some period scientific romances certainly feature plucky women who are quite prepared to handle guns – even if they do use them to slaughter assorted "primitives.") Modern-day gamers might be rather less comfortable trying to roleplay in strict dime-novel mode, with all the arrogance and casual racism – but those "Edisonade" heroes do correspond rather well to the heroes of the **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** series in their willingness to venture into dangerous unexplored places, kill the inhabitants, and take their stuff. A merger between the two forms would take some work, but could repay the effort: Delvers in steam-powered battle armor and wielding etheric shock weapons venture into the catacombs under lost cities, battle the pre-human monsters infesting those places, and come out with sacks full of bejeweled idols.

*No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own . . .*
*– H.G. Wells,* **The War of the Worlds**

# Proto-Steampunk

The Steam Age, as defined in this series, came to an end with the start of World War I in 1914. In the wake of that catastrophe, science fiction gained a new set of images – and the name by which it is now known. Although modern steampunk raids WWI and the post-WWI period for a number of stylish-looking technologies (some of them actually rather horrible in their origins), such as zeppelins and gas masks, and borrows images such as ornate ray guns from interwar science fiction, most steampunk looks further back.

However, that doesn't mean that a great steampunk-free gap exists between the invention of the term "science fiction" in 1929 and the coining of the word "steampunk" in 1987. The proto-science fiction of the Victorian era was never entirely forgotten, and plenty of writers and movie makers could see the appeal of 19th-century technology and 19th-century dreams.



## Movies and Television

Much of the most influential proto-steampunk can be found on cinema and TV screens. Steam Age-style machinery, with its polished brass and visible rivets, has a visual appeal which production designers periodically exploit, while famous 19th proto-science-fiction classics were ripe for adaptation, especially as they slipped out of copyright.

Hence, one of the most important works of this intermediate period was Walt Disney's 1954 film of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, starring James Mason as Captain Nemo. This film is recalled with great fondness by many modern steampunks, largely for the Victorian-style technology and design. *20,000 Leagues* was enough of a success that several other adaptations of period works by Verne and H.G. Wells

followed, some better than others. *Master of the World* (1961) was an obvious cheaper attempt to emulate the earlier film, with Vincent Price and a flying machine instead of Mason and a submarine, while *From the Earth to the Moon* (1958) was just weak. *The Time Machine* (1960) loses most of Wells' big ideas, but it at least gets the Victorian style right.

The other major work of screen proto-steampunk appeared on television in the 1960s. *The Wild Wild West,* which ran from 1965 to 1969, was a lighthearted and generally successful attempt to merge the then-popular superspy genre, with its ingenious gadgets and evil masterminds, with the Western. It is regarded with great fondness by many steampunk fans, and was an admitted influence on some writers.

## Written Science Fiction

Although "retro-science fiction" was initially less popular on the printed page than on screen, that situation gradually changed, even before the birth of steampunk as such. By the beginning of the 1970s, written science fiction had reached the stage where it could look back to its Victorian roots with curiosity or irony, or just for fun. Writers who had been brought up on Verne and Wells went to them for exercises in style, while alternate and secret histories spinning off from the 19th century also had their potential interest.

The first novel in this category was probably Ronald W. Clark's *Queen Victoria's Bomb* (1967), which tells of the invention of the atomic bomb in the 19th century, and the decision not to use it. However, *The Warlord of the Air* (1971), the first volume of Michael Moorcock's *Nomad of the Time Streams* trilogy, was probably more influential. Moorcock combines extensive knowledge of old popular fiction and a willingness to turn out flamboyant adventure stories for a wide readership with anarchistic political sympathies. His trilogy depicts a set of three alternate histories in which struggles against imperialism and racism are fought using technologies such as airships and giant mobile fortresses. The series also features famous historical figures in new roles, another common feature of steampunk alternate history.

Similarly, Harry Harrison's *Tunnel Through the Deeps* (1972) is set in a world in which a much stronger British Empire continues to dominate the planet in the late 20th century, with coal-fueled aircraft and atomic-powered trains. Its hero, an American engineer, struggles to build a tunnel across the Atlantic and to attain the hand of his beloved, in best Victorian style.

A slightly different angle on proto-steampunk was provided by Christopher Priest in *The Space Machine* (1976), a tribute to H.G. Wells. This tale merges key features of *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* and guest-stars Wells himself.

By the 1980s, all the components of steampunk were in place. All it really needed was the name – and someone to promote it.

### Roleplaying Options

Roleplaying campaigns based on 20th-century proto-steampunk should be heavy on the weird and wonderful technology – vehicles in the style of Verne or Wells are almost mandatory. The setting may well be an alternate history largely defined by this alternate technology, although a cinematic, semi-secret version of our history is another possibility.

The sensibility can be more openly modern than in a "scientific romance" game; the heroes may display modern attitudes to subjects such as sexual and racial equality from the start, or rapidly adopt them as their adventures broaden their horizons. They are usually competent, dashing adventurers, skilled with technology.

# THE FIRST YEARS OF STEAMPUNK

Steampunk was a lively subgenre even before anyone knew it existed. The impetus to name it came from a writer who was trying to rebel a little against a completely different fashion.

## The 1980s – A Word Is Born

In the 1980s, three young writers, James Blaylock, K.W. Jeter, and Tim Powers, were hanging out together in a Californian bar, critiquing each other's work and swapping ideas – not least, the idea of using Henry Mayhew (p. 6) as a source for the sort of Victorian-period stories that they were all creating. All three were selling novels such as Powers' *The Anubis Gates* (a fantasy about time travel to Georgian London) and Blaylock's *Homunculus* (about eccentric squabbling Victorian scientists). Eventually, critics began to notice that a fair number of such Victorian-period stories were being published, in contrast to the then-popular "cyberpunk" movement (which focused on hard-edged visions of a computer-dominated future – see **GURPS Cyberpunk**). A discussion of the subject subsequently appeared in the magazine *Locus*.

In 1987, Jeter wrote a letter to *Locus*, politely claiming to have been the first of the trio to have had such stories published, and enclosing a copy of his 1979 novel *Morlock Night* as evidence. (*Morlock Night*, a weird horror-fantasy sequel to Wells' *The Time Machine*, is indeed recognizable steampunk, if a little heavy on the fantasy, being set in a Victorian era invaded by Wells' monstrous Morlocks, who get into the London sewers and are opposed by a reborn King Arthur.) He went on to declare that the minor trend might become a movement:

*Personally, I think Victorian fantasies are going to be the next big thing, as long as we can come up with a fitting collective term for Powers, Blaylock and myself. Something based on the appropriate technology of the era; like "steampunks," perhaps.*

However, it seemed for a while that the movement was going to be limited to those three writers. Then, a slightly different story appeared from an unexpected source.

William Gibson and Bruce Sterling were the two biggest names in cyberpunk, but their 1990 joint effort, *The Difference Engine*, is now regarded as a key steampunk work – although they claim that, at the time, they didn't really regard themselves as joining a movement. (They admit to reading Mayhew, though.) It is less whimsical than the Californian trio's usual style, taking place in an alternate history created and dominated by a specific technological development. In this story, Charles Babbage's invention of the mechanical computer sets off the information technology revolution a hundred years early, with effects recognizable from cyberpunk, as those who control the information can control the world.

For a moment, then, it seemed that steampunk was blossoming. However, rather less followed than some people hoped.

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# HISTORICAL FICTION

If steampunk is largely about a (rather cinematic) image of 19th-century *style* as it is widely imagined, then it is inevitable that historical fiction, which provides many people with their ideas about the past and how it looked, would be an influence. Aside from modern novels set in the Victorian period, there are countless movies and TV series; things that appear on screen naturally give many people their visual references. Furthermore, modern screen adaptations of Victorian novelists such as Dickens or Kipling end up being, in a sense, "historical fiction," even if the original story took place in the year in which it was written.

A lot of historical fiction set in the 19th century is explicitly romantic, borrowing images from the works of Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters, which had little relationship to early works of steampunk, although some modern-day steampunk writers veer closer to the romance genre. The Western is a category of historical story that obviously has an influence on steampunk stories located in one particular part of the world – much more influence than the reality of the Old West, really. Probably more relevant, though, are those historical novels which focus on military history, with their natural tendency to harsh realism, struggling heroes, and technical detail. The Napoleonic Wars in particular have inspired some popular historical writing, including such series as Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe war stories and Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin naval novels.

The series with perhaps the greatest influence of all over modern steampunk is a distinctly nonstandard set of military stories. George McDonald Fraser took the minor figure of Harry Flashman from a noted Victorian school story, *Tom Brown's Schooldays,* and made him the anti-hero of a multi-volume fake autobiography. Flashman is a fraud – a "heroic" soldier who is really a lecherous, lazy coward, but who gets around much of the world during the Victorian era. He continually blunders into the middle of dangerous historical events, escaping by the skin of his teeth and preserving his reputation by luck, charm, and careful lies. In other words, the Flashman series combines cynicism, colorful fact-based details, and appearances by a long list of historical figures – all features of much steampunk. However, Fraser's chosen style – the bluff, slightly rambling mode of speech of a retired Victorian soldier – is less common.

### Roleplaying Options

A roleplaying campaign in the style of the Blaylock/Jeter/Powers trio would tend to be whimsical but gritty in tone. It should be set, or at least based, in a cinematic version of Victorian London and feature Mayhew-style street life (see p. 6) along with some very weird science (perhaps just as a thin justification for paranormal powers). The heroes should mostly be dedicated scientist-adventurers or their servants and sidekicks, frequently opposing the wild schemes of deranged masterminds. Sometimes, this may lead to fights, but few or none of the heroes should be purely combat-oriented. Rather, they should be clever and versatile, and employ experimental technology or connections in high society or low as ways to accomplish their goals. Despite some moments of flippant whimsy, players should accept that death, mutilation, or serious psychological or emotional damage are real dangers for their characters.

Games inspired more by second-generation steampunk can involve more plausible-looking technology rather than downright weird science, and may be set in alternate histories. They should feature images such as steam power, mechanical computers, or maybe more radical technologies such as space flight. Plots might be political/espionage stories or personal quests, whether limited to one city (London remains popular) or expanding across the solar system. Heroes can come from a range of backgrounds and may well be capable but not superhuman. Death or defeat should feel like real possibilities.

## The Fallow '90s

Steampunk didn't really become a mass-movement or as widespread an influence as cyberpunk had been despite some early novels and stories being quite successful, new works such as the one-shot comic *Gotham by Gaslight* (1989) and Kim Newman's alternate history/horror novel *Anno Dracula* (1992) playing with Victorian-Gothic imagery, and readers and critics throwing the word around. Few authors were described as "steampunk writers," as opposed to being writers who occasionally produced some steampunk, and the definition of the term never entirely hardened up.

Writers such as Colin Greenland (with *Harm's Way*) and Paul J. McAuley (with *Pasquale's Angel*) did play with variations on steampunk themes, but only in one-off novels. In 1995, Paul Di Filippo put the keyword in the title of *The Steampunk Trilogy,* a compendium of three stories, only connected in that they are set in versions of the 19th century and feature a lot of period-style weird science. The tales are as eccentric and bizarre as anything by the original steampunk trio, full of sex and strangeness, with little Steam Age technology. But again, this was a one-off. Likewise, the early volumes of Alan Moore's comics series *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999-2000) reintroduced readers to a whole range of fictional 19th-century characters and notions, helping keep steampunk alive but without inspiring many direct imitators.

In fact, the idea of steampunk was perhaps most enthusiastically preserved in roleplaying games, whose creators spotted its potential for old-fashioned adventuring, cool and weird gear, fancy titles, and eye-catching artwork. ***Space: 1889,*** by Frank Chadwick, appeared as early as 1988, before there was really a recognized movement to join. The game featured an alternate history in which late Victorian imperialism spread across the solar system thanks to the invention of functional space drives; the quality of the world building and period feel made this a cult favorite despite awkward game mechanics.

In 1993, British writer Marcus Rowland began publication of ***Forgotten Futures*** in digital shareware format. Each release of this game includes a collection of source material (generally period scientific romances or other early science fiction) for use as a basis for adventures. These collections make that material, which is often out of print as well as out of copyright, publicly available.

In 1994, R. Talsorian released Mike Pondsmith's ***Castle Falkenstein,*** which is set in an alternate Victorian era and which, essentially, mashes together every fantastic and steampunk element that the period setting can permit. Other games followed, including ***GURPS Steampunk*** in 2000.

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## "MAKER" CULTURE

Modern popular steampunk is somewhat linked to another movement of the day: "maker culture." This is a reaction to the sense that most things that people own or consume today are made elsewhere, and few people know how to modify or repair what they use, let alone how to manufacture things from scratch. "Makers" set out to master craft skills and create for themselves, using both traditional methods and modern technologies such as 3D printing. They share knowledge and ideas online and in communal "hackerspaces" where they can also share tools. Modern steampunks often share such idealism; they enjoy creating unique costumes and accoutrements, sometimes using authentic Steam Age tools and techniques, sometimes adding modern touches or using anachronistic materials so long as the look is right.

One way that maker culture can influence roleplaying games (and not just in the steampunk genre) is with the idea that adventurers should be able to maintain and repair their own equipment, and if necessary build some of it for themselves. After all, when a party is out in the wilderness, repair shops aren't close to hand. **GURPS** has a full set of technological skills (see *Skills for Design, Repair, and Use,* p. B190), and the GM can encourage players to take some of these by applying rules for wear and tear whenever reasonable; the **Basic Set** has some notes on pp. B484-485. Perhaps more interestingly, the maker philosophy can be reflected by encouraging heroes who acquire and use distinctive, personalized equipment. Signature Gear (p. B85) is important here, and **GURPS High-Tech** has some useful rules for equipment maintenance and modification, including styling, on pp. 9-10. The similar rules in **GURPS Low-Tech** are more versatile, even at higher TLs, as they cover not only custom-made equipment and maintenance (**Low-Tech,** pp. 14-15), but also the intricacies of decorated equipment (**Low-Tech,** pp. 37-38).

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*Just glue some gears on it and call it "steampunk,"*
*That's the trendy fashion nowadays –*
*A copper-painted chunk of some 1980s junk*
*Will fetch a pretty penny on eBay!*
*– Sir Reginald Pikedevant, Esquire,*
*"Just Glue Some Gears On It (And Call It Steampunk)"*

The other place where steampunk persisted, on and off, was in Japanese anime. Here, some creators demonstrated their own taste for Victorian-style technological imagery, influenced by the country's own early science-fiction tradition (which in turn was influenced by Jules Verne) and by Hollywood proto-steampunk movies. Highly regarded director Hayao Miyazaki had a clear fondness for archaic technology in general and airships in particular, and his *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986) was definitely steampunk before the word was invented. Quasi-steampunk works from other directors include *Robot Carnival* (1987), an anthology containing a couple of relevant episodes; and *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (1990), with an appearance by Captain Nemo. Japanese video games in turn were influenced by anime, and some came to feature steampunk stylings.

### Roleplaying Options

Apart from the early steampunk roleplaying games, the most interesting source of inspiration from this period is anime. To be true to this era, the setting should be quite cinematic; steam-powered robots, power armor, and aircraft are virtually obligatory, and airships are common and *huge*. The heroes might be brilliant adventurer-engineers or even super-powered beings – or they might simply be brave kids who fall into the middle of events and save the day by making friends and showing inspiration in the right place at the right time. However, a strong Japanese cultural flavor is *not* mandatory; Japanese steampunk creators often reference European models, although they don't show much interest in Mayhew's London lowlife.

# THE 21ST CENTURY: GOTHS DISCOVER BROWN

The fact is, though, that as the 21st century got underway, "steampunk" had mostly become a handy adjective to describe anything Victorian-inspired but not too meticulously accurate, with a science fiction or fantastical aspect. Steampunk novels, games, and movies appeared from time to time, and were sometimes successful, but the movement had become just an element in the science-fiction and fantasy spectrum.

Then, the term found a slightly different use.

Around 2006, steampunk suddenly took off, not as a literary or cinematic genre, but as a fashion movement. People started wearing steampunk costumes – basically Victorian-style, but rather more flamboyant than was normal in the 19th century – and listening to steampunk bands and attending steampunk conventions. Although the fashion movement led this development, it was followed in turn by a resurgence of steampunk fiction, as writers found a market for fiction that they wanted to write, or cashed in on the trend. (Some of these books overlap with the "paranormal romance" genre, with added corsets.) Authors responsible for this new-century steampunk include Scott Westerfeld, Gail Carriger, and most prominently, Cherie Priest, with her *Clockwork Century* series.

This reborn steampunk movement could be accused of placing style above substance, and – what with the corsets, flouncy skirts, and top hats – being not entirely new; American writer Jess Nevins commented that "steampunk is what happens when goths discover brown." However, it involves a concern with individuality and a high regard for handcrafting which do give it a rebellious, "punky" edge, notably reflected in its association with "maker" culture (p. 10). It can also send readers and viewers back to the classics of steampunk and early science fiction – and offer new opportunities for games.

### Roleplaying Options

If 21st-century steampunk is a fashion, concerned primarily with appearance, then games intended to reflect the form should make every effort to evoke the style. If the protagonists have any reason at all to wear goggles or gas masks, they should do so, along with carefully detailed Victorian costumes. Airships might be the default mode of transport, with unrealistic levels of reliability and safety (even when flown into combat by impoverished rogues), and everything should be intricately decorated.

Heroes need not be excessively competent, but plots should be quite cinematic, with plenty of opportunities for heroism. Moral ambiguity isn't out of the question. Conflicts can be social as well as physical (with plenty of use of **GURPS Social Engineering**); modern steampunks enjoy playing with Victorian formality, although the consequences of social errors or outrageous behavior may not be as severe or enduring as it could be in the original period. Certainly, adventurers can come from a wide range of social classes and work together without too much friction. Likewise, society may tolerate individuals wearing costumes associated with their occupations (explorers, engineers, etc.) even in circumstances where formality is expected.

# CHAPTER TWO
# THE INSPIRATIONAL ERA

*The bourgeoisie has disclosed how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigour in the Middle Ages which reactionaries so much admire found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence. It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former migrations of nations and crusades.*

*The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts in air, all that is holy is profaned, and man*
*is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.*

*– Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels,*
***The Communist Manifesto***

Steampunk references history; this chapter takes a look at the historical period it uses the most. For reasons explained in *The Long 19th Century* (p. 13), it covers the period 1789 to 1914; for further convenience, it breaks that period up into three parts. The focus is primarily on British society, because much steampunk is set there, but other areas get some attention, too. See also the timeline for the years 1815-1914 on pp. 15-24 of **GURPS Steampunk.**

This is the period in which, in many ways, the modern world was created. At the start, the Georgians were inventing steam-powered travel and mass-market journalism. At the end, the Edwardians were inventing the airplane and radio. In the middle of the period, there were years in which Londoners could travel on the first urban underground railway to go and watch public executions. In other words, the Steam Age is the crazy, energetic, smoke-stained progenitor to our own era.

# THE AGE OF ROMANTIC SCIENCE

The early part of Steam Age, from 1789 to around 1837, is known by many names. Its early phases can be called the French Revolutionary or Napoleonic Period, while the Industrial Revolution, which had started a few decades earlier, hit its first high point in this period. In Britain, this is the Georgian Period, as the country was ruled by the last of a line of kings named George. In the arts, it is the Romantic Period. This reaction to the Industrial Revolution placed a high value on emotion and spontaneity, leading to the ascendancy of the Gothic (pp. 4-5). But Romanticism extended *beyond* the arts, and for steampunks, this may equally be classed as the Age of Romantic Science.

Science was certainly on the rise, with new technologies permitting better observations, new industries valuing its practical products, and newly open-minded ways of thinking allowing it to follow conclusions wherever they might lead.

But this was a period of *romantic* science, calling on scientists (or rather "natural philosophers," as they were known for most of the period) to respect nature, and hence placing a high value on observational data. It was more holistic and less reductionist than the science of the preceding period, as well as more populist. The idea of a scientific elite, talking to each other in Latin, was replaced by a fashion for public lectures on the latest scientific topics – although the image also encompassed the notion that science proceeded through moments of great, almost mystical insight. In fact, Romantics sometimes argued that science should be a pure, idealistic pursuit, and should *avoid* being useful to industry. "Romantic scientists" make good PCs in games where knowledge is power; they can have their plot-significant moments of high drama as they discover new things, and between time, they should be willing (and hopefully able) to communicate their knowledge to others.

The political and military aspects of this period are covered from a roleplaying point of view in **GURPS Age of Napoleon,** which is recommended as a reference for anyone looking to run early Age of Steam games. In addition, **GURPS Goblins** provides a surprisingly useful guide to the general state of things in London in the later Georgian period – apart from the goblins, of course.

# REVOLUTIONS, POLITICAL AND OTHERWISE

The Steam Age started as it would go on, with a wave of huge changes in Europe. Britain had just lost a number of American colonies, and now France, which less than a century before had seemed like the continent's greatest power under the firm control of an absolute monarch, fell into revolution. The revolutionaries shocked the rest of Europe by executing their king and queen (along with a lot of other people), leading to wars with their neighbors, who didn't like this challenge to the status quo. Yet France managed to hold off these attacks, even as the revolution descended into murderous infighting. Then, in 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte seized control. See **GURPS Scarlet Pimpernel** for more on Revolutionary France.

## Industry

Across the English Channel, though, a different sort of revolution with even greater consequences had been building for decades. The Industrial Revolution had several elements. Transport networks were much improved, starting with better maintenance for roads and the creation of a canal system, followed by the development of steam railways in the 19th century. These used improved steam engines, which also replaced older power sources such as water mills in large-volume production of goods such as cloth. Indeed, every part of the economy seemed to be employing a whole range of ingenious new machines.
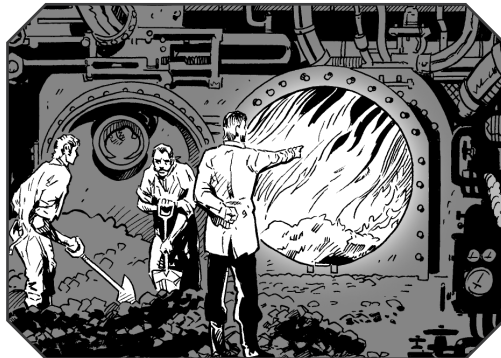
Although the Industrial Revolution wasn't *just* about steam power, steam became very important to it. In **GURPS** terms, although low-power stationary steam engines appear right at the start of TL5, high-power engines – designs suitable for use in vehicles – only become available after about 1800, and then only in Western Europe to begin with. As huge improvements in iron-making likewise made large-scale projects much more affordable by the end of the 18th century, the second half of TL5 is when technology turns really steampunk.

Britain was also undergoing an *agricultural* revolution, as new farming methods and larger farms produced a huge increase in yields. Combined with new sources of food imports, farms generated food supplies for the new industrial workforce. Hence, the Industrial Revolution triggered something of a population boom, and for the first time in history, a larger population could *also* hope for a higher per capita income.

However, not everyone was better off. The new factories needed large workforces, so much of the growing population moved to new industrial cities. Unfortunately, building and public-health standards didn't keep up, and vast areas of these cities consisted of crowded slums. Nor did the factories obey anything like modern health and safety rules or employment laws; many of them relied on child workers close to the machines, and injuries and deaths became quite common. This is the dark side of the new Steam Age, explaining why steampunk has always had a dystopian aspect.

## THE LONG 19TH CENTURY

What is the "steampunk period"? Many people say the "Victorian era," but Queen Victoria was born in 1819, and ruled from 1837 to 1901, whereas much steampunk looks to rather earlier or slightly later dates than that. This supplement often uses the term "Steam Age," but steam technology evolved through the 18th century and was slow to disappear; some remains in use today. If we want a rigid set of dates, we need a different definition. Fortunately, one is available.

"The Long 19th Century" is a label originated by British historian Eric Hobsbawm for the period 1789 to 1914. It is an idea about *European* history. It starts with the French Revolution, which brought down the greatest absolute monarchy of the preceding era and plunged Europe into a continent-wide war which in turn led to a new system for international relations. It ends with the start of World War I, another continental war which destroyed the vestiges of that system. It also starts just as the Industrial Revolution is getting fully underway in Britain, and it ends with an industrialized war that shakes up the related economic system. To put it a third way, it starts just as European colonialism is getting into high gear, and it ends at the point where its decline becomes inevitable. It is followed, according to Hobsbawm, by the "Short 20th Century," which in turn ends with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Not everyone agrees that the idea of the Long 19th Century is a useful way of looking at history, and it certainly has limitations. However, it has one big advantage here – it's a near-perfect fit for the "Age of Steampunk," starting with romantic poets running around Europe talking revolution, and steam power beginning to find serious uses outside of mines, and ending with the unglamorous brutality of WWI. So references to the "Age of Steam" in this supplement can be taken as meaning that period.

Likewise, some workers became angry at the way their old jobs could be wiped out by mechanization, and sometimes donned masks and smashed the hated machines. Such "Luddites" could be considered models for angry, very punky sorts of steampunk.

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## THE WORLD IN 1789

Earth in 1789 was a world of declining empires – and one or two that were decidedly on the up. Europe had just recovered from the mid-century Seven Years War. This had left Britain dominant and its opponents with grudges which were worked out when they helped the American Revolution – but it also brought Britain a global empire which financed its accelerating Industrial Revolution. Scotland was finally settling down after decades of threatened revolts, although Ireland was still treated more as a fractious colony than as part of the United Kingdom. France, meanwhile, had fallen into disorganization since its glory days under Louis XIV, while Spain was stagnating despite its own global empire.

Central Europe was dominated by the Holy Roman Empire, which was ruled from Austria. Germany consisted mostly of hundreds of miniature states within that empire. Italy was similarly a mosaic of small states. Much of southeastern Europe, including Greece, was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, which also extended into Africa and Asia. However, the Ottomans, who had once threatened all Europe, were now far into decline; they increasingly survived only because the major European powers were all worried about what would happen when they collapsed. (See **GURPS Castle Falkenstein: The Ottoman Empire** for a fantasy-enhanced picture of this.)

In North America, the newly founded United States was still consolidating its political arrangements, but elsewhere, most of the Americas was still under European control. Britain ruled Canada, although it was still assimilating the French-speaking parts; France had also ceded the sizable but thinly populated Louisiana Territory to Spain, which added this to its vast but inefficient Central and South American holdings. Portugal ruled Brazil.

Africa was still largely a mystery to Europeans. Sailors had mapped the coasts, but travel into the interior meant dealing with disease as much as with suspicious local rulers. Slavers – Europeans on the western coasts, Arabs on the eastern – complicated matters further. European settlement was largely limited to fortified trading posts, apart from a Dutch colony blossoming at the Cape of Good Hope. In India, the Mughal Empire was fragmenting under pressure from rivals and invaders, and the British East India Company was expanding to create a private enterprise empire of its own, thanks to advanced technology, vast wealth, and better organization. And in China, the Manchu emperors were reasonably strong, but underestimated the problems that would be caused by European trading ports on the coast.

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### Science

Meanwhile, science was undergoing rapid developments. French chemist Antoine Lavoisier wiped out the last remnants of medieval alchemy and its four elements. He identified and in some cases named a new set of elements (including hydrogen, oxygen, and sulfur) before he became a tragic victim of the Revolution. In 1799, the Italian Alessandro Volta created the first electrical battery, and researchers who had previously been limited to working with static electricity or dangerous experiments during thunderstorms used this for further developments. Englishman Humphry Davy employed electricity to discover sodium and potassium. He in turn trained Michael Faraday, who would lay the foundations of electrical science and engineering.

But science was doing even more to change humanity's view of the universe. The Scottish geologist James Hutton realized that new discoveries showed that Earth was far more ancient than had previously been understood, and coined the expression "deep time" for this reality. Meanwhile, German-born British astronomer William Herschel, discoverer of Uranus, the first new planet to be identified since ancient times, was coming to comparable conclusions about the sheer extent of deep space. Not surprisingly, such science appealed to the romantic radicals of the age.

## THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

All this got underway in a continent at war. During the Revolutionary Wars, a brilliant artillery officer named Napoleon Bonaparte worked his way up the French army. The weak government, fearing that he might spearhead a coup against them, sent him to Egypt in 1798, seeking a route to strike against British-dominated India. Napoleon defeated local forces with ease, but then Britain's Admiral Nelson destroyed his fleet, cutting his army off from home.

In 1799, Napoleon slipped home (leaving his army to be mopped up by the British) and became the figurehead for the feared coup after all. Then he parlayed his military successes into overall control. Napoleon was determined to assert his will and defend his position against the rest of Europe. However, his hope of invading England was destroyed in 1805 when the British drew his fleet and their Spanish allies into the Battle of Trafalgar and destroyed them, at the cost of Nelson's life.

On land, Napoleon defeated the Austrians and then the Prussians and their Russian allies. This meant leaving another campaign, in Spain and Portugal, in the hands of subordinates, and a British army under Arthur Wellesley – later Lord Wellington (later still, the Duke of Wellington) – methodically outfought them. Then, in 1812, Napoleon broke the First Rule of European Warfare: *Don't March on Moscow.*

He invaded Russia with an army of 600,000 men, and the Russians fell back and harassed his troops, all the way to Moscow. In the end, Napoleon had to retreat, with his army reduced to a few thousand by the time they reached home. This encouraged his defeated continental opponents to turn against him again, building a strategy based on the principle of not engaging him directly until they could muster an overwhelming force. He was driven back to France, where Wellington invaded from the south and allied armies took Paris.

Napoleon accepted defeat and exile to the Mediterranean island of Elba in 1814, while the allies carved Europe up between them, and Britain dealt with a sideshow war in America. However, in 1815, Napoleon rolled the dice one more time, returning to the mainland, where the French army declared for him. He then struck north into Belgium, seeking to destroy the British and Prussian armies before they could link up.

The two greatest generals of the era finally came face to face at Waterloo. Neither was at the top of their game, but Wellington was at least paying attention, whereas Napoleon's health may have been declining. After what Wellington called "the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life," the Prussians arrived to destroy Napoleon's chance of victory, and he was forced to accept defeat and exile to the remote Atlantic island of St. Helena.

## Consequences and Implications

The Napoleonic Wars had any number of unexpected side effects. For example, when Napoleon invaded Egypt, he took along a number of scholars. After the British defeated his armies, they picked up a number of French discoveries. Hence, European knowledge of ancient Egypt expanded vastly. (In a world where ancient magics have power, this could have *interesting* implications.) Later, political maneuverings in North America culminated in a cash-strapped Napoleon giving up his dreams of empire on that continent and selling Louisiana to the United States, opening the way to U.S. expansion westward. Yet, many people, who didn't happen to find themselves in the path of any armies, could almost ignore the wars; Jane Austen's novels barely mention them.

Hence, early period steampunk games set within this historical framework could feature military conflict as a key part of the plot, or merely involve dashing soldiers or globetrotting sailors as heroes – or they could leave such matters safely in the background, with just the occasional news story of victories or military disasters as a period touch. Nonetheless, for the sake of plausibility, it would be better not to play a Frenchman in London (or an Englishman in France) during periods of open conflict, and *anyone* with an exotic accent might be accused of being a spy by patriotic folk with a poor sense of geography.

It is also important to note that these were not "mechanized wars" in a modern sense, although they were quite industrial in scale, and some inventors were dabbling with unsteerable balloons and ineffective submarines. They were fought with mass-produced muskets and cannon, but did not involve self-propelled vehicles, and the state-of-the-art ships of the period were all sailing vessels. Still, an alternate history with early development of efficient steam engines could see steamships at Trafalgar and steam-powered artillery tractors (if not lumbering steam tanks) at Waterloo, bringing some of the horrors of mechanical warfare on a hundred years early.

# LATE GEORGIAN DAYS

The period between the downfall of Napoleon and the coronation of Queen Victoria was marked by social unrest across Europe, as the new systems created in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars settled into place. In Britain, the consequences of the Industrial Revolution became ever more pressing, as a network of railways spread across the land (the world's first passenger service was established in 1825), and the population continued migrating to the new industrial cities. At the same time, economic conditions grew increasingly tough for the poor, largely thanks to high tariffs on food imports.

Pressure began building for political reform, and was often brutally repressed. For example, in Manchester in 1819, at a mass demonstration in favor of better parliamentary representation, a force of cavalry charged the crowd with drawn sabers; 15 people died and hundreds were injured in an event known as the "Peterloo Massacre." The disaster actually made the panicky government turn *more* repressive. Pressure for change continued, however, and eventually, the Great Reform Act of 1832 made the British parliamentary system rather more democratic – although it would be decades before the system was fully reformed.

## AN AGE OF EXPLORATION

Europe had been engaged in an unorganized program of global exploration since the 15th century. The end of the 18th century marked the culmination of that process, with the outlines of the continents completely mapped, settlers pushing westward into the heart of North America, and the colonization of Australia. Global exploration formed part of the Age of Romantic Science, too, with expeditions on land and sea routinely accompanied by professional naturalists and astronomers.

For example, the British naturalist Joseph Banks traveled with Captain James Cook's first great expedition to Brazil, Tahiti, New Zealand, and Australia in 1768-1771. Banks then went on to become president of the Royal Society for over 40 years, and the British government's leading scientific advisor. (The older Banks would make a fine Patron for heroes in a game of Romantic Science, with his practical experience of adventuring and huge network of social and scientific contacts, some of them on the other side during the Napoleonic Wars.) The Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, after failing in his hope of joining Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, spent the 1799-1804 period exploring the Americas (and making a friend of Thomas Jefferson). As a result of his journeys, he founded the sciences of physical geography and meteorology.

Perhaps the crowning achievement of this fusion of science and exploration came in 1831-1836, when a young naturalist named Charles Darwin sailed around the world on the survey ship HMS *Beagle.* Darwin collected a vast mass of observations and specimens, and then worried even himself with the conclusions he drew. He delayed publication of his theory of evolution until 1859; as he anticipated, the emotional effects on society were shattering. Darwin would make a good Patron or an interesting model for a game scientist, or a fascinating NPC encounter in person; see **GURPS Who's Who 1** for a Third Edition character sheet.

Meanwhile, there were problems even at the top of the British system, as the royal family struggled to establish a safe line of succession – a process that ended with birth of the future Queen Victoria. See **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6** for an alternate history arising out of a change point early in this period.

## CRIME AND POLICE

Reshaped societies needed new institutions. For example, prior to this period, day-to-day law enforcement in Britain had mostly been in the hands of a disorganized assortment of amateur watchmen, aged constables, and bounty-hunting thief-takers. A proper police force, it was thought, would be prohibitively expensive and potentially tyrannical. The usual answer to lawlessness was to extend the death penalty to yet more crimes, such as impersonating a Chelsea Pensioner or damaging Westminster Bridge.

In the 1820s, Robert Peel, the Home Secretary, realized that this system wasn't working and *had* to be fixed. He tidied up the criminal law, reducing the number of capital offenses. In 1829, he established the Metropolitan Police in London, setting a pattern for other forces around the country and the world. The idea took some time to spread, with some counties in England not having a force until 1856.

The Metropolitan Police, in their early uniform of top hats and blue tail coats, had some serious teething problems. They were poorly paid, and many were dismissed or resigned within a few years. They were also unpopular; inquest juries sometimes returned verdicts of "justifiable homicide" when policemen were murdered. However, the system ultimately worked, and by the end of the century, it was the standard. See **GURPS Cops** for more on this.

### Around the World

Elsewhere in the world, old empires were crumbling. For example, Venezuela gained independence between 1811 and 1830, setting a pattern for Latin America, and Greece achieved independence from the Ottomans in 1822-1829. But the British hold on India grew stronger, and British colonies in Australia also expanded, as the United States extended west.

European countries, too, were obliged to change, despite resistance. The restored royal family in France was forced to rule as a somewhat-constitutional monarchy, with one king deposed when he resisted this. Thirty-nine of the German states attempted to form a loose and ineffective confederation, and the conservative Foreign Minister of the Austrian Empire, Metternich, worked ceaselessly to prevent change anywhere on the continent, producing a mixture of stagnation and economic growth.

# THE EARLY VICTORIAN ERA

After Queen Victoria ascended the throne of the United Kingdom in 1837, she ushered in a new age of formality and respectability – a reaction to the romantic, tumultuous Georgian period. However, unrest and demands for reform continued in Britain for a few years, and globally, the age of revolutions was far from over.

## A NEW KIND OF WORLD

This was the period in which railway building hit its peak in Britain and was taken up elsewhere. But this wasn't the only ongoing development of the time. Indeed, it is sometimes said that a "Second Industrial Revolution" kicked in around 1850, compounding the results of the first. It was also a time when governments tried to ameliorate the worst consequences of industrialization and to improve public health. In the 1850s, Britain passed laws to limit child labor, require employers to pay wages in cash rather than in goods, reduce smoke from coal fires, and make vaccination of children compulsory. After the "Great Stink" of 1858 almost made central London uninhabitable, the city acquired a superbly engineered sewer system (although it took until 1875 to complete), which effectively wiped out cholera in the city. Its creator was Joseph Bazalgette, a workaholic master engineer who must have acquired a uniquely complete knowledge of the city as seen from below. Bazalgette would make an unusual model for an engineer-hero in a game, and he certainly could serve a useful Patron for adventurers who have to deal with dark secrets in London's literal underworld.

But problems extended beyond Britain.

### 1848

Social change was leading to unrest across much of Europe. In 1848, this came to a head with multiple revolutions and lesser uprisings, affecting Italy, France, Germany, Denmark, Poland, and the Austrian Empire, but not Britain, Russia, or most of southern Europe. The forces involved were loosely allied at best, and these revolutions were poorly organized even at the national level; most of them were put down within a year. Still, serfdom was abolished in Austria and Hungary, Denmark lost its absolute monarchy, and the French government was extensively reformed.

And a radical intellectual named Karl Marx, expelled from Germany and France, ended up in London in 1849, where he settled down to writing books.

### The Irish Famine

Despite some continuing social friction, Britain had avoided this sort of revolution, largely though a gradual process of reform. As the greatest imperial and industrial power of the age, it experienced a surge of self-confidence – or arrogance. The idea that any part of the British Isles could suffer social catastrophe seemed unthinkable.

But that didn't make it impossible. Between 1845 and 1852, Ireland was swept by a plant disease called potato blight. This hit all of Europe, but unfortunately, the Irish peasantry had become almost entirely dependent on the potato as their source of nutrition. The result was a massive famine, and the London-based government, never as respectful of Ireland as of nearer parts of the British Isles, and unused to the idea of providing large-scale state aid, responded erratically. The resulting disaster probably killed well over a million people through starvation and disease, and forced another million into emigration.

## The Great Exhibition

Outside Ireland, though, Britain remained confident. One of the greatest symbols of the era was the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations" in 1851 in London. This was intended to showcase British leadership of the world in industry and design, and was held in a specially constructed building named the Crystal Palace, itself an engineering marvel – a kind of gigantic glasshouse, 1,851' long by 454' wide. Six million people (equal to a third of the population of Britain at the time) visited, including any number of famous names.

In some alternate histories, the Great Exhibition might appear as the chosen venue for all manner of eccentric inventors to show their wares. If commercial rivalry or unwise engineering then led to violence, well, it would start inside a giant glass house, with participants throwing much more than stones.

## The Crimean War

British confidence could still lead to trouble. In 1853, Britain and France allied to assist the declining Ottomans against an expanding Russia, in order to limit Russian power in the eastern Mediterranean. To negate Russian control of the Black Sea, they invaded the Russian-held Crimea.

Although the Allies won the war, in 1856, it was a messy, uncertain sort of victory. It was marred by bungles such as the disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade and the discovery of just how brutal modern warfare could be, and how poorly the army had prepared for casualties. A combination of dedicated press reporting – using the modern telegraph, so that reports reached home within days or even hours – and photography made it impossible to conceal the truth. The war led to the fall of a British government and eventually to a radical shake-up of army organization. Warfare was changing in the Steam Age.

# Go West!

Across the Atlantic, the United States was accomplishing a different kind of growth – geographical, into the West. This expansion began at the turn of the century, with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and Lewis and Clark's transcontinental expedition in 1804-1806. It really got underway in the 1840s, when pioneering wagon trains started heading west from Missouri. Texas joined the Union in 1845, offering new opportunities, notably in cattle-ranching. Then, in 1848, gold was discovered in California, creating a vast magnet for fortune-seekers.

The West is traditionally seen as a venue for adventure stories, and it's entirely possible to combine elements of the Western and of steampunk. However, historically, steam technology in the West in this era was limited to the great wood-fueled steamboats which made the Mississippi into a highway. Steampunk games may be more accurately set later in the century; see pp. 19-20.

# Imperial Expansion

Several European powers had been building global empires for centuries, but now the process entered a new stage, with Britain well in front. Britain added around 10 million square miles of territory and about 400 million people to its possessions between 1815 and 1914. After 1841, the British Empire literally extended to the far side of the globe, as New Zealand became a British colony.

Science and technology played a part here, too. As one example, the medicine quinine was isolated from a South American plant in 1820, providing effective protection against malaria, the disease which bedeviled European activities in the tropics. By 1850, the British government in India alone was using *nine tons* of quinine every year.

## Drug Dealing

Where European powers couldn't conquer, they could still enforce their will. Europe had an insatiable demand for Chinese goods such as silk, porcelain, and tea, but the Chinese government restricted trade, refusing to accept anything except silver in payment. So the British East India Company began selling opium from India into China via middlemen. The Chinese government tried to clamp down on this, leading to friction with the British, and in 1839, the Royal Navy stepped in.

The (first) Opium War was widely presented in the West as being fought to defend free trade, but even many British people felt that fighting to enforce the right to sell addictive drugs was morally dubious. Despite the protests, the war ended in 1842 with a crushing British victory and a treaty which gave the British the port of Hong Kong. The Chinese were naturally unhappy at their defeat, but in the Second Opium War (1856-1860), Britain allied with France and the United States to defeat the Eastern country again, capturing Beijing and burning down the emperor's summer palaces. China was left in chaos for a century.

## Rebellion!

The East India Company had other problems. Its policies in India had caused a build-up of resentment among the native troops it employed. In 1857, this exploded into a revolt known variously as the Indian Rebellion, the Indian Mutiny, the Sepoy Rebellion – or in India, as the First War of Independence.

The revolt lacked central organization, and not every part of India joined it, but it took a year to suppress, and shook the British badly. After it was over, the East India Company was officially dissolved, and control of India was handed over to the British government. Subsequently, in 1877, Queen Victoria took the title of Empress of India.

*The war led to the fall of a British government . . .*

# MITTELEUROPAN COOL, PRUSSIAN VILLAINY?

Historically based steampunk has generally tended to focus on the English-speaking world. However, one alternative region that has often been popular, in one form or another is Central Europe (often highly fictionalized).

### Ruritanias

This tradition goes back at least to the late-19th-century "Ruritanian" adventure novels, by Anthony Hope, starting with *The Prisoner of Zenda*. These spawned a whole minor genre of imitators, and they have been adapted as films several times. In steampunk, both the *Castle Falkenstein* roleplaying game and Phil and Kaja Foglio's *Girl Genius* comic reference them.

A "Ruritania" is typically a pocket-sized kingdom located somewhere slightly indeterminate in Central Europe. The tiny country is based on some fragment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or one of the old German principalities. This allows a lot of backstabbing politics, with scheming neighboring states hoping to move in and take over. The small size and monarchical politics of the state ensure that a single hero with a group of friends can plausibly make a difference to the course of international events. Almost everyone gets to wear fancy uniforms and huge moustaches (or fabulous ball gowns for the ladies) in the worst traditions of 19th-century militarism, and they talk with an indeterminate European accent. In steampunk, these individuals may display a distinctly Teutonic technophilia, building clanking machines – marvels of industry for the good guys, huge war machines for the bad.

### Prussia

The dark side of this tradition, perhaps even more common in steampunk, is the use of *Prussians,* or a fictional nation based on Prussia, as the villains. This has some historical justification and merges with a modern stereotype. It allows settings to have militaristic villains with German accents and an obsession with efficiency. In other words, it can evoke the Nazi era in Germany, decades before the Nazis existed, and without the edge of historical horror that real Nazis imply.

The northern German state of Prussia rose to power in the 18th century under King Frederick the Great, employing the efficient bureaucracy and professional army left him by his father. Prussia combined modern ideas such as widespread education (although Prussian military schooling was horrifically tough on less conformist students) and religious tolerance with militarism, using conscription to build its strength. Early in the Steam Age, it was often Britain's ally, with Prussian troops playing a crucial part in the Battle of Waterloo (see p. 15), although the alliance wasn't terribly strong. As the century went on, Prussian determination to unify Germany (under Prussian leadership) increasingly clashed with the British preference that no continental power should become strong enough to threaten the British Empire.

In 1862, Otto von Bismarck became Prime Minister of Prussia. Bismarck, the "Iron Chancellor," was a diplomatic and political genius. With a series of victorious wars and well-designed treaties, he united Germany, made the king of Prussia into its emperor (*kaiser*), reduced Austria to a secondary ally, and crushed France in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). Bismarck knew when to hold back, though, and used his skills to preserve peace in Europe. Unfortunately, in 1890, the pushy young Kaiser Wilhelm II forced him into retirement – and Germany was on course toward World War I.

Prussians do make good model antagonists for English-speaking (or French, or Bavarian . . .) adventurers, and Bismarck would make a terrifying hostile mastermind. Prussian troops and their aristocratic *junker* officers not only have discipline and training, they even have spiked helmets (a Prussian invention). But they also can be made sympathetic; Prussia was a modern, well-run country which avoided internal conflict by being mostly run fairly. Even the arch-conservative Bismarck created a welfare state to keep the people happy, after all.

# THE LONG AFTERNOON

The late Victorian and Edwardian eras run from around 1870 to 1914, covering the later stages of the Industrial Revolution and the last surge of imperialist expansion. It also runs from the Franco-Prussian War to World War I – two scenes in the great struggle for dominance in Western Europe. It sees the fading of the Steam Age, both technologically and culturally, but also some of its most dramatic achievements. Power moves away from Europe, mostly to America, but also to Japan, which begins the period by opening itself up to the world, and ends it having completely defeated the European power of Russia in war.

## NEW TECHNOLOGIES

In *GURPS* terms, this period marks the crucial transition from full TL5 to early TL6. (The *Basic Set* puts the start of TL6 at 1880; see p. B511.) This roughly corresponds to the climax of the "Second Industrial Revolution." As ever with tech-level changes, though, remember that the "boundary" is fuzzy and uncertain, and that many people continued to operate at the old TL in most respects for years or decades.

Various key technologies appeared around this time. Among the most important were the spread of steel instead of iron in manufacturing (which started in the 1860s), the internal combustion engine (developed through the 1860s, and brought to a basically modern form and first used in automobiles in the 1880s), and the electrification of society. (The electric light bulb was developed to a commercially viable form in the 1870s, and was being used in streets, homes, and theaters by 1881. Electric power stations followed immediately, and electric motors began to be used in factories and for transport in the same decade, though not so much in homes). Ferdinand von Zeppelin built his first airship in 1898, radio voice transmission was developed by Landell de Moura in 1900, and Henry Ford combined two existing ideas, mass production and the automobile, in 1913.

The growth of a synthetic chemical industry was also crucial; for combat-oriented adventurers, one big advance was the development of "smokeless powder" for firearms, in 1885 (see **GURPS High-Tech,** p. 185). But for ordinary people at the time, things like synthetic dyes (p. 44) would have been just as visible.

Of course, not every innovation arrived fully formed. The internal combustion engine allowed power-to-weight ratios that made heavier-than-air flight feasible. However, the engines had to be refined first, and flight had its own engineering problems. For this reason, the Wright brothers didn't take to the skies until 1903. It is fair to say that, even in advanced nations, most people operated at TL5 rather than TL6 in most respects until around 1900.

## Steampunk Tech Level

Steampunk stories and games often feature distinctly TL6-style technology, such as steerable flying machines and reasonably reliable medicine, but the problem with this is that some TL6 developments, such as electric light and the replacement of steam with internal combustion engines, tend to spoil the Steam Age feeling. Hence, many settings are actually alternate histories on *divergent* tech paths (see p. B513). TL(5+1) is often considered the default steampunk tech level; this can imply, for example, steam engines capable of powering useful or gigantic vehicles of all sorts, or mechanical computers or automatons ranging from the impressive to the fantastic.

# STEAM IN THE WEST

The United States had been expanding westward for decades (see p. 17), but steam *really* came to the West in the 1860s with the transcontinental railroad, which was completed in 1869. Although the coming of the railroads is a key element in many Westerns, it also marks the point when the West became rather less Wild, as the native tribes were suppressed and driven onto reservations and the great buffalo herds were wiped out. The invention of barbed wire in the 1870s meant that the prairies would soon be divided up.

# THE LOOMING WAR

The Long 19th Century ends with the First World War. Quite how inevitable this was remains disputed, but late-period Steam Age games may certainly feature a sense of impending doom, with every political conflict threatening to blow up into total war. The political problem was that the major European nations had locked themselves into a set of alliances, originally designed to ensure *peace;* if any two of them went to war, everyone else was obliged to join in. Nations thus prepared for conflict, *just in case,* leading to arms races that increased the sense of uncertainty, while rivalries over colonial claims made things worse (see *The Scramble for Africa,* pp. 20-21). Some people became downright enthusiastic about the prospect of war, thinking that it would clear only problems away and offer chances for glory.

To make matters worse, military technology was becoming terrifyingly powerful, with machine guns and artillery (see **GURPS High-Tech: Adventure Guns**), safely screened by trenches and barbed wire, able to murder enemy advances. Land warfare was forced into a pattern of bloody stalemates. Poison gas merely added extra horrors. Meanwhile, at sea, submarines could threaten any vessel, military or civilian, with sudden death. Air combat seemed more romantic, but as it turned out, the slightest technological imbalance in the air could leave the inferior side subject to brutal casualty rates. Unfortunately, few people understood just how bad things might get; although they knew how powerful modern weapons were, and trench warfare had been seen in lesser conflicts, most planners thought that there were ways that one side or the other could score a quick victory.

In retrospect, disaster thus can appear inevitable, and *any* story set after 1890 or so can end up seeming to foreshadow the war somehow. This can give espionage adventures with steampunk technology a high-stakes feel; for example, in a story set in 1895, Sherlock Holmes had to locate some missing plans for a high-tech submarine.

Those arms races certainly involved distinctly steampunk-ish war machines such as "dreadnought" battleships. Steampunk engineer-heroes may create solutions to military stalemates, just as tanks were invented in the real world. However, a misjudged invention may make things worse rather than better, and the GM should note that adding super-weapons such as high-powered guns to games runs the risk of changing the flavor of combat from flashy swashbuckling to nervous long-range sniping.

Nonetheless, not everyone in the period was obsessed with the threat of war. Even in the days after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the event which triggered the actual war, many politicians and diplomats thought that full-scale conflict might still be averted. Also, steampunk stories are often set in alternate histories, in which things *do* go differently. So, a late-period-historical campaign can be easily haunted by the ghost of millions of deaths to come, but it doesn't *have* to be.

## THE FASHODA INCIDENT

As Britain imagined a railway from the Cape to Cairo, France similarly dreamed of controlling trade all the way from the west coast of Africa to the Nile and beyond to their outpost on the Red Sea. They even thought to force Britain out of Egypt by controlling the Nile; one fantastic (and very steampunk) idea was to build a huge dam on the river, taking control of Egypt's water supplies. Which nation's schemes could succeed depended who controlled South Sudan.

In 1897, a small French military expedition set out from the French Congo with instructions to establish a French protectorate in the Sudan. After a truly epic 14-month journey, they arrived at the village of Fashoda, on the Nile. They were met there by a strong flotilla of British gunboats, who had instructions to find out what the French were up to.

The two party leaders held polite discussions and agreed that neither of them should do anything until they had obtained more orders from home. However, when the news of this encounter reached Europe, it blew up into a full-scale war scare, with each side accusing the other of aggression. In the end, the French blinked first, deciding that they wanted that patch of Africa less than they wanted Britain on their side in future confrontations with Germany. The French troops were ordered to withdraw, the two countries agreed to a border between their respective spheres of influence, and Anglo-French relations went on to improve markedly. However, the French felt humiliated enough to be especially touchy about their interests in Africa from then on.

The Fashoda Incident could make a good model for a scenario. Two exploration parties, thousands of miles from home, meet up, politely discuss local borders, and telegraph home for a ruling. The next thing they know, they're receiving frantic and cryptic telegraph messages telling them not to start shooting, while secret agents from a third nation try to infiltrate the situation and stir up trouble. The protagonists could be members of either or both parties, troubleshooters from home sent to sort out the situation, those secret troublemakers, or locals wondering what all these Europeans are up to and selling them supplies and services.

Nevertheless, the Indian wars and land rushes dragged on past the 1890s, outlaw bands still roamed widely, and the technology which enabled the taming of the West also makes this era a natural fit for steampunk. "Western steampunk" usually involves big machines – either steam-powered vehicles or super-weapons. (Of course, sometimes a vehicle carries a weapon, or *is* a weapon.)

Even at the end of the century, the West is still seen as a land of opportunity, with gold deposits for those who want a quicker fortune than can be obtained by farming or ranching. Far-sighted engineers who know that coal has limitations as a power source might get in a little ahead of the historical development of Texan oil drilling (which began aggressively

after 1901). See **GURPS Old West** for a detailed overview of the era, and *Pyramid #3/74: Wild West* for additional ideas (including Fourth Edition character templates and a Fourth Edition discussion of steamboats and locomotives).

All that space provides opportunities for villains, who can make semi-legitimate fortunes in ranching or mining. Then, they can invest that money in huge, weird schemes in remote locations, constructing giant war machines or building whole private armies undetected by the forces of law. Game scenarios can follow the classic pattern of heroic adventurers discovering such plots and having to defeat them with the limited resources locally available.

New character types become plausible. In the aftermath of the American Civil War, plenty of folk with experience in modern warfare head west. Some may be honest settlers, able to take on against evil masterminds, while others may be embittered NPC leaders, all too willing to launch whole new civil wars. Meanwhile, engineers may have worked on the transcontinental railroad or trained under Edison back east, and some very interesting scientists may show up. Historically, the paleontologists Edward Drinker Cope and Othniel Charles Marsh were locked in a rivalry so intense that it became known as "The Bone Wars" as they combed the West for dinosaur fossils. In a setting with weirder science and maybe supernatural powers, they, or researchers resembling them, might end up releasing something dark and terrible from their fossil digs, and then spend too much time squabbling to help do anything about it.

## THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

The last and most competitive phase of European imperialism kicked in with the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which set the rules for European interaction in Africa. Up until then, European colonies had mostly been limited to the coast, although explorers had mapped the interior and established something of the scale of Africa's resources, at great cost in effort and lives. The major European powers saw Africa as a new source of wealth, and started squabbling over it. Even Germany and Italy joined in, neither of which had been unified for very long and which had previously not been involved much in colonial imperialism. By 1914, 90% of the continent was under European control.

Britain had already taken effective control of Egypt in order to secure the Suez Canal (which had been built in the 1860s), though Egypt was never classed as a colony. Britain also controlled South Africa, over the objections of the Dutch-descended Boer colonists. Now, it began taking control of areas down the east coast of Africa, dreaming of continuous holdings "from the Cape to Cairo." However, this was blocked by German control of Tanganyika, until Britain managed to seize that after the First World War. There was even talk of a "Cape to Cairo Railway," which would make a suitably heroic engineering project in an alternate history. It was never completed in our world, although there are linked railway networks (using various rail gauges) along much of the route.

Meanwhile, France was expanding inland from its holdings on the west coast, and other nations were snapping up outposts where they could. Unfortunately, some people became dramatically greedy.

## The Belgian Congo

Some European imperialists doubtless had good intentions, but some imperial adventures were downright horrific – and the Belgian Congo tops the list.

Until the 1870s, Belgium had no colonial holdings. King Leopold II decided to do something about that, and he settled on the Congo, an unclaimed area of Central Africa with economic promise. He commissioned the Welsh-American explorer Henry Morton Stanley to survey it, and pulled some political sleight of hand to acquire a vast expanse of Africa, the "Congo Free State," as his *personal* property. Then he started leasing parts of his new holdings to private companies to exploit, mostly for ivory and rubber.

Over the next few years, reports began emerging from the Congo of harsh exploitation, but Leopold mostly managed to have them suppressed. Around the end of the century, a senior clerk in the shipping line serving the Congo, Edmund Dene Morel, noticed an oddity in the books. Not only were the goods being shipped back from Africa worth vastly more than the official figures claimed, but nothing was being shipped the other way to pay for them – except for guns and ammunition.

The simple explanation for this turned out to be correct. Leopold's agents were transforming the entire area into a gigantic slave encampment, with native laborers required to work or die – or very often both.

It took until 1908 for Morel and an alliance of missionaries, diplomats, and politicians to close down the Congo Free State. Morel fought on for reform until 1913, by which time Leopold was dead. How many million people died in the "Free State" is impossible to estimate precisely.

### Propaganda Wars

The history of the Congo Free State might make too dark and horrible a background for a roleplaying campaign, but the struggle to expose and stop the abuses illustrates how important noncombat skills can be in life-and-death conflicts. Both Leopold and his opponents used Administration, Politics, and a *lot* of Propaganda to sometimes lethal effect. Leopold had the benefits of Contacts, Status, and Wealth; his opponents had some of the best writers of the time (including Arthur Conan Doyle and Mark Twain) on their side, and supporters who shifted from a Sense of Duty to outright Fanaticism as they learned what was going on. See Chapter 5 of **GURPS Social Engineering** for guidelines on playing out such a conflict.

For more on all of this, see "Across Africa with Iron and Steam" in *Pyramid #3/39: Steampunk.*

# Edwardian Twilight

Queen Victoria died in 1901 and was succeeded by her son, Edward VII. Although he had earned his reputation as a womanizing playboy, Edward's love of society and travel actually represented an asset to British diplomacy, though he didn't get on well with the Kaiser. His funeral in 1910 was the greatest assembly of European royalty in history.

Although it was a time of peace and prosperity, at least in England, the Edwardian era and the period immediately before WWI really saw the decline of Steam Age style. Electricity and automobiles replaced gas and steam as leading-edge technologies, and art nouveau and the first stirrings of modernism succeeded Victorian Gothic and classicism. In the sciences, the failure of old models of the universe raised questions which would be answered in the mind-bending strangeness of relativity and quantum mechanics. The Boer War at the start of the century showed that the army needed serious reforms, and the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912 is the great symbol of the failure of Steam Age confidence in old-style technologies.

Steampunk games can still draw inspiration from this period, but the style should be more "raygun Gothic" (pp. 26-27) than "superior steam" (p. 26), and there may well be a sense of impending apocalypse (see *The Looming War*, p. 19). Still, this is *the* age of sticks-and-string flying machines and adventurers in goggles.

## Non-Western Steampunk

Steampunk often seems like a very European/American genre, being tied to Europe's great Industrial Revolution and age of imperialism, and focusing on Victorian London and the Wild West as locations. However, nothing makes this focus mandatory.

Formal manners and intricate costumes aren't purely Western inventions. Steampunk-style technologies, suited to interested crafters with home workshops, are actually open to almost anyone, from any culture. Steampunk has found fans in non-English-speaking countries such as Brazil, who bring different attitudes to the mix. Artists can enjoy blending the visual styles of different cultures with an iron-and-rivets aesthetic.

Historically, the European empires were largely defined by their interactions with the non-European people who they ruled. In particular, British India was a vast and ancient non-Western society with a thin layer of white rulers trying to control it. Nor were colonial peoples technologically incompetent; Brazilians were actually pioneers in Steam Age technologies such as radio voice transmission (Landell de Moura) and working aircraft (Santos-Dumont), which may help explain their modern interest in steampunk. Then there is Japan, which went from an essentially medieval system to a war-winning industrial society in 30 years flat – an experience which may explain why modern anime sometimes shows a fondness for steampunk imagery within non-Victorian settings (see p. 11).

In an *alternate* history, steam power and the Industrial Revolution might have come to other cultures at other points in history – the ancient Greeks certainly dabbled with (to be truthful, rather low-powered) steam motors; high medieval Islamic culture created highly ingenious mechanical devices which might have become the basis for clockpunk technology; and Chinese artificers have been no less inventive at times. Alternatively, drawing on the example of Japan, a China, India, or Ottoman Empire which acquired ideas from industrializing Europe early enough, and adopted them with determination and efficiency, could have entered the Steam Age more nearly on a par with Europe, creating a "bipolar" steampunk world.

# STEAMPUNK AND GAME WORLDS

*With a mutter of satisfaction, Patrolman Davies gave the camouflage over the conveyor a last tweak. Then he turned around to the team leader. "Remind me again what we know about this timeline," he said.*

*Special Agent Macleod stifled an exasperated sigh. The mission briefing had been hasty but comprehensive, but Davies had been distracted double-checking the conveyor's charge dissipation balance at the time, and no Infinity Patrolman **ever** complained about the mission transfer pilot concentrating on the tech. "It seems that our fugitives bought the coordinates off a bunch of hackers who cracked a university computer, then jumped in here two days ago," he said. "We only just found out, so we haven't had time for much research. The brass want these people extracted quickly, quietly, and ASAP."*

*"So we're going in blind."*

*"Not totally. Survey dropped a drone over the Atlantic," Macleod explained. "Astronomy says that the local date is 1872, and the drone didn't pick up any EM transmissions at all.*

*Background radiation is nominal; atmospheric analysis picked up a lot of $CO_2$ but not much sign of petrochemical byproducts, so they're just burning a lot of coal here."*

*"Could just be a close parallel, then." Davies grinned. Victorian parallels weren't generally too bad.*

*"Quite likely. Though the drone picked up a **lot** of coal combustion byproducts at high altitude . . ."*

*"Guess that may be why," Davies said, looking past Macleod and up. Macleod turned, and then allowed himself an audible sigh. A small airship was chugging gently across the sky, emitting black smoke from two long exhaust pipes. A coat of arms was clearly visible on the side; crossed wrenches on a golden pentagon . . .*

*"Great," Macleod muttered. "One of **those** timelines."*

After defining the outline of a game world, using the advice and inspiration from previous chapters, it's important to fill in the setting's remaining details.

# SUBGENRES

As Chapter 1 showed, the many kinds of steampunk draw on different opinions and different phases in the history of the term. For game purposes, it's useful to sort out some subcategories with the labels by which they are sometimes known. These subgenres are actually fuzzy at the borders, but thinking about these details can help with setting up a campaign. There are three aspects here: *mode, mood,* and *technological base.*

## MODES

The *mode* of a setting is its narrative form – the assumptions that govern what tales are told in this milieu.

### Retro SF

Retro-SF stories go back to the roots of science fiction, very consciously and with attention to detail. They take scientific romances, or at least pre-WWII science fiction, as a model or basis, asking "What if those ideas were true?" or "What if

the world actually worked that way?" The latter idea can even stretch to having protagonists behave as they did in the old stories, although modern writers can rarely resist adding some irony, Furthermore, modeling period behavior and assumptions too faithfully may involve uncomfortable amounts of racism or sexism. Depicting the future (which might mean our recent past or present) as the 19th century imagined it is actually a form of alternate history, albeit with some very weird science.

Quite a few writers dabble with retro-SF ideas, although maintaining period details for more than the length of a short story can be hard work and challenging for the audience, who may not be familiar with the source material. The comic book *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* turns the dial on this idea up to the stop, including ideas and characters from a huge range of period sources, several of them somewhat contradictory. The **Forgotten Futures** game takes a series of period sources as foundations for its various versions, and attempts to work out their implications.

*Retro-SF stories go back to the roots of science fiction . . .*

## Alternate History

Most steampunk stories are alternate histories of a sort, being set on a recognizable Earth but featuring nonhistorical events, characters, and technologies. Some are more explicit and rigorous about this than others, setting up a divergence point and then showing how society and history change as a result; this divergence may be the discovery or invention of some kind of steampunk technology. In some cases, the key is a disparate set of natural laws, which enable different technologies (or paranormal powers) to function, but the strictest writers try to envisage technologies which at least *might* have worked. It seems to be traditional for historical (or occasionally famous fictional) characters to appear in this alternate timeline in new positions, but this isn't mandatory and can look silly if it's overdone.

The steampunk classic that treats its assumptions and divergence most rigorously is Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (p. 9), but plenty of other writers, including Cherie Priest, at least play with the idea. Most of the steampunk and similar timelines mentioned in **GURPS Infinite Worlds** are explicit alternate histories with stated divergence points, and one of them has received published treatment at greater length, in **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6.**

## Gaslight Romance

The term "gaslight romance" was invented by the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* in 1997 for a class of stories separate from steampunk, set in the latter part of the Steam Age but with limited interest in technology. Like much of steampunk, these stories often take place in London, but they tend to be melancholy, with twilight and London fogs setting the tone. Later, Kaja Foglio used the similar term "gaslamp fantasy" for her and her husband Phil's *Girl Genius* comics, which she felt didn't have enough punk to be called steampunk. However, *Girl Genius,* while whimsical, features *plenty* of weird Victorian-style technology.

In practice, lots of things can be called "steampunk" or "gaslight/gaslamp fantasy/romance," depending exactly how anyone looks at them. So "gaslight romance" is defined here as a mode of steampunk: fantastic, whimsical tales, often (though not always) light on the technology. Weird science may be present in the form of paranormal or "spiritual" powers, in keeping with ideas of the time.

Aside from *Girl Genius* (which really doesn't fit here especially well), examples include *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and other fantastical period works set in what was then the present. Among more recent works, Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* has a Napoleonic setting; it's very heavy on the fantasy aspect, but too good to ignore. (The recent BBC TV adaptation is entertaining, too.) Any modern story which has Sherlock Holmes meeting paranormal phenomena also counts. Among roleplaying games, **Cthulhu by Gaslight** translates the science fiction-tinged paranormal horror of **Call of Cthulhu** to the Steam Age, and hence represents dark gaslamp fantasy.

## Secret History

Any game setting can involve a secret history – a set of crucial facts about the past which most people don't know – but some stories and games take secret history as their defining feature. Such settings resemble our world on the surface – they could *be* our world, assuming that the secret is never exposed – but something far-reaching and strange is going on in the background. The world is *not* as it appears, there are probably raging paranoids who are embarrassingly right, and the history we know has been shaped by forces we don't know. This is the stuff of conspiracy thrillers and of historical novels that set out to put a new slant on "common knowledge."

These settings don't have to be steampunk in any way, but a subset of secret history stories does blend in some steampunk ideas. Essentially, if someone – such as a secret conspiracy, mad scientist, or government agency – had access to superior technology in the 19th century, that technology is likely to be drawn as somewhat steampunk, so the story will end up adding steampunk furniture to a realistic setting. Examples include the TV series *Warehouse 13* and Michael Flynn's novel *In the Country of the Blind.*

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# THE ONE BIG DIFFERENCE

A common feature in steampunk stories is the presence of one crucial change to real-world circumstances that "sets up" the world. A blatant difference may be stated in any one-line or one-paragraph descriptions of the setting. Where the difference is more subtle, it may be something for PCs to discover.

This concept of the "one big difference" is most explicit in the more rigorous sort of alternate history, which should have some specific point of historical divergence. However, in other cases, the difference may be one of natural laws, which in turn may lead to an alternate history divergence when someone discovers and exploits it. For example, the Etheria campaign world (**GURPS Steampunk,** pp. 126-130, and **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Lost Worlds,** pp. 5-6) is built around the demonstrated existence of luminiferous ether, a scientific concept which was ultimately disproven in our world. (Etheria also has multiple habitable planets in the solar system *and* an alternate-history divergence point, with Lord Byron surviving to become king of Greece; these do not specifically arise from the difference in natural laws.) In stories tending toward gaslight romance, the difference might be the reality of supernatural powers, probably as some 19th-century people believed in them.

The presence of a single key difference isn't obligatory. Some settings have multiple seemingly unrelated differences, or are just plain fantasy worlds with minimal relationship to our own reality. But it can make a useful descriptive hook or interesting discovery, so it's something for world-designers to think about.

## Steampunked High Fantasy

High fantasy worlds traditionally feature medieval (TL3) or earlier technology with an overlay of magic, but this isn't mandatory. In any case, not all writers have a very strong grasp of what sort of technologies fit together. Some can't resist adding stuff that they think is cool, such as steam or clockwork gadgets, without much regard to what is logically plausible. In some cases, dwarves or gnomes are said to have somewhat anachronistic engineering capabilities, though they keep this technology to themselves. It might be hidden away deep in mountain caves (with a semi-hidden but large civilization of their own providing the required economic base). But credit could equally well lie with dark lords with access to weird lore, as in the movies of *The Lord of the Rings.* It's also possible for a setting to have had a past age of higher technology, now lost apart from some surviving gadgets and snippets of knowledge. And this being fantasy, any such technology doesn't have to be overly realistic or plausible.

Two ways of playing this are to use the map of the real world for a fantasy game with TL5^ technology, or to set up a completely imaginary fantasy world with steampunk quantities of brass and clockwork in places. The former may echo the real world in national boundaries and even the names of famous people; among roleplaying games, **Castle Falkenstein** (p. 10) is an example. Regarding the latter, consider the Underground Engineers of **GURPS Banestorm,** with their patchy access to knowledge from our world in a TL3-4 setting. Among fantasy novels, Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series (see the **Discworld Roleplaying Game**) moves from TL3 to TL5 as it progresses; one of Pratchett's last novels even features steam engines.

Another possibility is a fantasy world with a TL3 or thereabouts baseline, but so much reliable magic that the effective TL rises to something like TL(3+2) or TL(3+3), albeit with heavy dependence on the supernatural. How much this resembles steampunk, either in terms of visual style or social organization, can vary, but see, for example, the video game **Baldur's Gate 2.**

# MOODS

While the mode is the outward and visible view of how a setting is constructed, the *mood* is about tone – how a story set here *reads*. A single world can support a range of moods, but steampunk games often have a tight focus, and world design needs to include some thought about intended mood. In some cases, a sufficiently subtle story or campaign can move gradually from one mood to another as it goes on, and it can aim successfully for multiple effects. Alternatively, the whole thing may be played as a straightforward action-adventure story, with the protagonists too busy shooting it out with Prussian spies in the shiny new London sewer system to worry about anything as fancy as "tone."

The following are some common moods.

## Alternate History Explored

A lot of steampunk is set in some kind of alternate history, and in some cases, the alternate-history design is meticulously thought through. When the main point of the campaign is to *explore* the alternate history, the idea has moved from mode to mood.

This is gaming as an intellectual exercise, working out the historical logic of the setting and examining consequences. It can be a little dry in a written story, let alone in a game. It certainly demands players with a keen interest in the process of history, but things can be kept interesting by wrapping the exploration of historical processes in some kind of conventional adventure plot. For example, *The Difference Engine* (p. 9) is about the information revolution arriving more than a century early – but the plot is a political thriller about stolen secrets and attempted revolutions, exciting enough to draw even casual readers through the full length of the novel.

> *The poor may face a choice between scrabbling in the filth or dying of starvation; the scientist faces the fear that all the old certainties are so much delusion.*

## Social Adventuring ("Mannerspunk")

Steam Age society was not exactly like the present. For one thing, it was sometimes a lot more formal, especially at higher levels, as period fiction brings home to modern readers. Steampunk fiction can bring that difference out, setting antiquated manners off against anachronistic technology and weird science. "Mannerspunk" games can make extensive use of **GURPS Social Engineering,** as social skills and conflict resolution should be more important than *physical* combat. Indeed, the "steam" part of steampunk may be heavily downplayed, and the "punk" part represented mostly by subtle irony and a certain amount of flamboyance in costumes.

The two big inspirations for mannerspunk are 19th-century novels by the likes of Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope (and modern screen adaptations of these), and 21st-century steampunk hobbyists who enjoy playing at Victorian formality (plus a few recent novels which have clearly been aimed at them as a market). Mannerspunk stories don't have to be trivial, though: Political conflict in civilized lands is much more a matter of manners than of lethal weapons, but is also about the fates of nations and empires (for an example, see *Propaganda Wars,* p. 21).

## Horror ("Screampunk")

Steampunk and horror naturally fit together. On the one hand, steampunk draws on the Gothic roots of science fiction and fantasy, and the Gothic is habitually close to horror. On the other hand, it looks to Henry Mayhew's teeming, sordid London streets (see p. 6), and to the radical sciences of the 19th century, both of which have nightmarish aspects. The poor may face a choice between scrabbling in the filth or dying of starvation; the scientist faces the fear that all the old certainties are so much delusion. **GURPS** devotes an entire supplement – **GURPS Screampunk –** to Gothic horror steampunk, giving us "screampunk" as a shorthand label for the subcategory.

Inspiration for screampunk games can come from many sources: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* the original steampunk trio's twisted stories of secret struggles in the Victorian London underworld, or the animated *Jasper Morello and the Lost Airship.* Of course, **GURPS Screampunk** provides an in-depth examination of this mood.

## Period Sense of Wonder

Science fiction and fantasy in general are often concerned with the "sense of wonder" – the breathtaking experience of discovering just how big or strange the universe really is. This is as old as science fiction – *Frankenstein* has its whole core concept, which was a breathtaking wonder in its time, plus visions of the vast, bleak Arctic wilderness – and the concept of wonder certainly appears in some scientific romances.

Steampunk can re-create some of this sense, sometimes with a twist when outdated or bizarre theories (such as the hollow Earth or the existence of multiple habitable worlds in the solar system) turn out to be true in setting. They can be breathtaking surprises for modern readers while having wondrous aspects in their own right. Writers such as Jeter and Blaylock certainly enjoy surprising readers with weirdly grandiose period-style concepts. However, in a roleplaying game, the PCs should feel that they have enough to do, rather than just gaping at the scenery; one solution is to set them grand, wonder-inducing goals, such as saving the world.

> *Frank would never entirely lose the sense of melancholy majesty that stirred his heart when he first saw an airship, moored in the troubled sky . . .*
> *– Michael Chabon, "The Martian Agent"*

## High Weirdness (Just Because)

When all else fails, and the going gets weird, the weird turn pro. Steampunk science and technology tend to look strange to modern eyes, because they draw on theories and principles that are decades out of date. Turn that weirdness up to maximum, have the whole planet threatened on a daily basis by mad geniuses hiding in the London sewers, crash airships into submarines and spiritualists into steam engineers, and you can have a very entertaining game.

This is obviously similar to the idea of sense of wonder, but it doesn't have to involve anything grandiose, or even anything that anyone within the setting will find very strange. The strangeness here comes from the contrast between Steam Age concepts and what modern players are used to. Even a gritty story set in the Victorian criminal underworld, with minimal strange technology, can be interestingly weird to modern eyes, if only because the slang is so cryptic and individuals' existence is so incredibly sordid. Jeter and Blaylock play with this effect, while Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine* has the weirdness of well-detailed mechanical computers. The Qabala campaign world (**GURPS Steampunk,** pp. 134-138)

has a world dominated by the Netherlands through use of technology derived from Jewish mysticism. In such settings, adventurers must adapt to and exploit the strange elements while finding ways to accomplish their goals.

# TECHNOLOGICAL BASES

A steampunk setting needs technology, which will almost always be a little *unusual.* This is, after all, the "steam" part of steampunk. It is actually possible for a setting to *delete* some feature from historical technological development, though in fiction, this somehow usually leads to advances in other areas. For example, electricity may be underused, leading to radical advances in mechanical or chemical engineering to provide power or lighting.

In **GURPS** terms, nonhistorical technology likely involves some kind of explicitly *divergent* tech level (p. B513). Steampunk tends to add things like amazingly efficient steam engines and safe, fast, affordable airships to the TL5 baseline, producing what is practically the default steampunk world at TL(5+1).

In addition, much steampunk adds what is effectively *superscience* (pp. B513-514): devices or power sources, or whole branches of science which just don't fit with our modern world's conception of physical laws. This can range from one or two useful tricks or eccentric theories for adventurers to investigate, up to the bases for wildly divergent alternate histories.

Unlike most versions, though, steampunk superscience is often founded on past, outmoded scientific theories which later were disproved in our history. Examples include the luminiferous ether (**GURPS Steampunk,** pp. 95-98) and what would today be called supernatural phenomena (such as alchemy), which may have had a degree of quasi-scientific credibility in their time. The Qabala campaign world (**GURPS Steampunk,** pp. 134-138) has golems, and the Azoth-7 campaign world (**GURPS Infinite Worlds,** pp. 112-113) has alchemical technology; both of these can be classed as TL(4+2)^ settings. Steampunk superscience technologies are often wildly cinematic, looking cool though literally incredible – but those outmoded physical theories can make great excuses for exciting devices.

The following are some common technological paths.

## Simple Technological Acceleration

Some steampunk doesn't feature very strange technology; it just brings things in a little early. For example, implausibly efficient airships, implausibly soon, are commonplace in steampunk. (See also *What's Wrong With Airships?* on p. 26.) Cherie Priest's *Boneshaker* has transcontinental travel by airship in 1880, whereas this only really became somewhat feasible at the start of the 20th century. (The novel also has other, much wilder, scientific and technological strangeness.) Likewise, Paul J. McAuley's *Pasquale's Angel* has a steam-based industrial revolution taking off in 15th-century Italy – *very* early, but not involving any gross violations of known scientific principles. This kind of relatively minimal technological tweaking can suit rigorous alternate history campaigns, or games that are mostly just exercises in Victorian-style storytelling of one sort or another, but with just enough cool gear to keep technophile players amused.

## Clockpunk

At the base of the mechanical technology which defines much of the aesthetic of steampunk lies a system of cogs and springs: clockwork. It's older than steam power, and as steampunk began to take off, some writers amused themselves by looking to this older technology and asking if that could be punked up, too. Hence, *clockpunk*. A fully clockpunk world will usually diverge at TL4, probably giving a variant quasi-Steam Age world at TL(4+1) and then getting really weird (or converging back to the standard TLs) at higher levels.

The snag with this is a simple one: power. Steam is important because it provides a compact source of useful power; clockwork can do some very clever things, but *by itself* it cannot drive a vehicle or power a factory. Clockwork springs need to be wound up somehow, and TL4 power sources such as harnessed animals or windmills have their limits; they were replaced by steam for a reason.

Hence, any clockpunk story set before our world's Age of Steam which wants to produce big mechanical effects must either insert the invention of steam power (or some viable alternative) into the mix (like *Pasquale's Angel*), add in some huge paranormal or *very* weird superscience power source (as in J. Gregory Keyes' *The Age of Unreason* series, with its fantastic alchemy), or limit itself to subtle effects (like the Providence campaign world, **GURPS Steampunk,** pp. 138-141). Still, a combination of Renaissance/Baroque aesthetics and glittering clockwork can look elegant, and a few subtle clockwork gadgets can add unique interest to a period adventure story.

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# WHAT'S WRONG WITH AIRSHIPS?

Airships are a common feature of steampunk worlds, whereas in our history, that technology only lasted a few decades before being replaced by heavier-than-air craft for most purposes. If you want a plausible setting in which they stay around longer, you need to consider what that requires.

Airships need cheap but reliable workers to act as gasbag riggers, a culture which doesn't place too much emphasis on speed (or at least places higher emphasis on extreme luxury), and a lack of well-publicized accidents, which in turn requires a combination of luck and captains with the sense to avoid storms and refuse unwise orders. They *can* make better use of low power-to-weight engines than can heavier-than-air craft, so a world in which internal combustion engines are slow to develop and steam survives might well feature more airships. In short, airships are indeed a good fit for a world of steampunk culture and technology.

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## Superior Steam

The simplest way to make steam extra-effective is to make it extra-efficient and reliable. This can be achieved by adding some highly ingenious but essentially incremental achievements in mechanical engineering. A few subtle advances in metallurgy during the Age of Steam, or *very* subtle tweaks to the laws of physics, can help by making steam engines a bit

lighter for any given power output. The sextuple-expansion steam engines detailed on pp. 69-70 of **GURPS Steampunk** are an example of appropriate sorts of advances, though really, introducing steam turbines a little earlier in history, aided by better materials, could probably achieve more.

The advanced mechanical engineering of a "superior steam" setting can also have other manifestations, major or minor, such as huge but amazingly effective mechanical computers ("Babbage engines"). Airships may come in early, too, probably propelled by steam. If heavier-than-air flight appears, it may use something implausibly complex, such as flapping ornithopter wings.

## Mad Biology

Steampunk mostly features *mechanical* technologies, but there is an alternative – going back to the first days of science fiction. While biology and medicine advanced considerably in the Age of Steam, they turned out to be vastly complex and subtle sciences. Period dreams such as synthetic life are still futuristic ideas today.

In a "period superscience" world in which alchemical or outmoded theories (such as the *élan vital*, **GURPS Steampunk,** pp. 98-99) are valid, "the secret of life" might be rather more easily discovered. Scientists might accomplish feats at TL5^ that **GURPS Bio-Tech** assigns to TL10 or higher.

This tends to be treated in fiction as leading to nightmarish screampunk stories. "Meddling with the secrets of creation" is assumed to be a bad thing, especially by conventionally religious Victorian writers, and eccentric scientists who casually treat sapient creatures as experimental subjects may have a weak hold on morality. Doctors Frankenstein, Jekyll, and Moreau don't make great role models, and stories mostly treat mad biology as a one-off problem to be stopped rather than the basis for a wondrous future. If the technology is widespread, the world is likely a body-horror dystopia.

Still, a bit of *eccentric* biology can be an interesting feature for a setting in which all the sciences are advancing rapidly on superscience paths. It can certainly justify the sort of reliable, effective medicine that adventurers appreciate. A Steam Age world in which widespread radical biology mostly remains on the right side of moral boundaries, and hence is popularly accepted, might make an interesting change.

## Raygun Gothic/Dieselpunk

The Steam Age blurs, at its later border, into the days of pulp magazines – and modern steampunk fashion certainly often features pulp-style details, notably goggles. Hence, some "steampunk" owes more to the pulp era than to the Steam Age. Exaggerated fictional treatments of that period's technology are sometimes referred to as "dieselpunk," by logical analogy with steampunk and clockpunk, but the art deco-flavored visual *style* of the period is known as *raygun Gothic*, a term coined by cyberpunk writer William Gibson. This is particularly appropriate because a lot of steampunk costume makers do love rayguns.

Raygun Gothic technology is basically that of the future as imagined by pulp magazine writers and their readers, and hence is TL(6+1) or higher, often with large, vague super-science elements. It typically involves all sorts of poorly defined "rays" and "force fields." It may be powered by "atomic energy," but pulp-era writers didn't always show much grasp of TL6 theoretical physics, so "the ether" may also make an appearance. Spaceships are likely to be propelled by rockets. Electronics are usually widespread, but are built around bulky, fragile vacuum tubes. If electronic computers appear at all, they may occupy whole rooms – despite which, sapient human-sized robots are another possibility. **GURPS Tales of the Solar Patrol** serves as one game example of a raygun Gothic setting.

## Paranormal Technology

The borders of steampunk harbor technology with little relationship to anything seen in the real world, based on wildly unorthodox scientific theories or downright super-natural forces. A Victorian-style enthusiasm for installing this technology in smoke-stained brick-built factories, probably full of downtrodden workers, can give such stories a steampunk feel. The Qabala campaign world (**GURPS Steampunk,** pp. 134-138) is one example of this, with its supernatural golems. The parallel Victorian world of Ted Chiang's story "Seventy-Two Letters," with another science based on Jewish mysticism, is another. China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and its sequels depict a world which seems distinctly Steam Age at first glance, with its sprawling smoke-blackened cities and oppressed industrial prole-tariat, but which actually runs largely on the kind of highly organized magic often seen in roleplaying games.

The tech levels of such settings probably diverge at some very low point, then rise several steps on their divergent path. They definitely merit the "superscience" tag, but may not actually reference "science" as we know it at all.

# QUICK AND DIRTY STEAM-TECH

Although steampunk often features exotic variant technologies, it doesn't have to go into excruciating detail about the practicalities. Indeed, much steampunk plays loose with technological details, so long as stuff looks good. This section is about quick, simple rules for bringing various sorts of machines into games where style matters more than physics, and giving them the basic numbers and values that they'll need in play.

## Units of Currency

Note throughout this section that prices are in "**GURPS** $," an abstract unit of game accounting that doesn't always relate closely to historical U.S. dollars. As a general rule, if you want to cross-reference to costs from historical sources, divide the **GURPS** $ price by 22 to get historical dollar prices, or multiply dollar prices from historical sources by 22 to get **GURPS** $ values. For U.K. pound sterling values, divide or multiply by 110, respectively, instead. (See **GURPS Steampunk,** pp. 48-49, for information on U.K. currency.) So, for example,

something listed as costing $500 in a **GURPS** sourcebook probably cost *about* $22.70 or £4 10s historically. This conversion ratio is reasonably reliable for the years 1850-1915; outside that period, the conversion rate can vary, sometimes from year to year.

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## NEO-STEAMPUNK FUTURES

As steampunk *style* has become popular, its influence has extended beyond overtly steampunk stories. In partic-ular, over the last couple of decades, some "mainstream" science-fiction stories have included rather steampunk-like touches. For example, in the world of Neal Stephenson's post-cyberpunk *The Diamond Age*, an array of different cultural groups ("phyles") coexist in the same cities, each following their own rules and interacting through complex protocols – and one of them, New Atlantis, consciously models itself on Victorian cultural patterns. The setting also features sophisticated nanotechnology which func-tions as much mechanically as electronically, giving some-thing of a "retrotech" feel. Conversely, in the 23rd century of Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*, fossil fuels have been badly depleted, leading to a society which makes heavy use of advanced springs for energy storage and genetically engineered animals as power sources, giving the setting something of a clockpunk feel.

This sort of thing provides lots of excuses to have futur-istic worlds with technology and furniture that at least *look* like Victorian brass and clockwork, or formal Victo-rian-style cultures. Such campaigns would not be "truly" steampunk, but they can feature steampunk-style odds and ends, just for show.

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## Descriptive Approach

The easiest method for designing new equipment to start by describing the device in a few simple phrases; crucial infor-mation includes what it does, what its source of power is, how it is controlled, and how large it is. This method is best in very cinematic or whimsical games and when the invention is more of a MacGuffin or plot device. Similar principles also can apply to information extracted from period sources such as product catalogs.

*Example:* The Steam Mole, a tunneling machine, pow-ered by a steam engine, controlled by an elaborate system of levers, 30' long (SM +5 given typical vehicular proportions), and 20 tons.

Once you have the description, you can begin adding game information.

*Weight* should roughly match a real item of comparable size and build strength; see the **Basic Set** and **GURPS** tech supplements for examples. (Note that one ton equals 2,000 lbs.)

*ST/HP* (especially relevant for a vehicle) can be based on something of similar size, or take the cube root of *unladen* weight in pounds and multiply by 4.

*DR* for civilian machinery is typically about equal to SM+3; *at least* double this for armored war machines (which tend to be heavier accordingly). The main thing, though, is that the device shouldn't be breakable by things that the GM considers will shorten the story too easily, but should be vulnerable to *something* that's available to PCs – unless the point is that this thing has to be defeated by guile.

*Example:* The Steam Mole is effectively a vehicle. Based on the above rule, its ST/HP works out as 137. Civilian SM +5 vehicles would usually have a DR around 8, but this has to survive underground, so we'll double that to DR 16, and say that the drill bit on the front is effectively indestructible.

*Movement Rate:* Find a modern-day vehicle with a similar function, and multiply both parts of the Move rating by 0.7 for land vehicles, 0.85 for water or underwater vehicles, or 0.8 for air vehicles; multiply stall speed by 1.25 for air vehicles; multiply acceleration by 0.5 for space vehicles. (Round to the nearest whole number if the value is greater than 1, or to a single significant figure if it is less than 1.) This can be adjusted to fit plot requirements; something described as, say, "the fastest steam engine ever built," should be exactly that.

*Hnd/SR* values for vehicles can be based on those for comparable real vehicles, with both values worsened by 1 because this is weird and probably experimental tech.

*Cost* is based on size and complexity. Assume $2 per pound of weight for a machine which only does one thing, and multiply that by the number of different things the device does. If the machine is exceptionally good or bad at what it does (e.g., the fastest steam engine ever built), feel free to adjust this up or down to suit. The cost may be reduced as low as $1 per pound for mass-produced devices that are well within local technological norms.

Determine other capabilities based on what the description and plot function imply.

*Example:* The Steam Mole moves through solid rock, so let's assume it just hits a brisk walking pace: Move 1/2. It costs $80,000. If we also wanted it to fly, it would cost $160,000, and if we wanted it to tunnel underground, fly through the air, and project a freeze ray, it would cost $240,000.

### Gigantic Infernal Weapons

Steampunk instruments of destruction need some extra guidelines.

*Weight* for exotic fictional weapons is about 2 lbs. times the cube of the damage they do in dice. For example, a magnetic cannon doing 6d×2 damage would weigh about 2 lbs. × $12^3$ = 3,456 lbs., which we can round to 3,500 lbs. (1.75 tons).

*1/2D and Max* are typically about 500/1,000 for such devices. For something with more range, multiply the weight by the same factor as the ranges.

*Acc* is typically 4.

*RoF* is usually 1, with 2d seconds of recharge time between shots – these are erratic contraptions.

*Cost* is calculated as for other machines; see above.

## *Retrotech Approach*

Those who don't want to invent devices from scratch may decide that a lot of it is "retrotech." The idea is to take technological ideas that historically only became viable at mid-TL6 or higher, and imagine how they might have looked if implemented (as well as they could be considering the material and industrial limitations of the time) using a Steam Age-flavored TL(5+1) approach.

This means finding a machine or device from a later date, preferably TL6-7, which does what's required, then adjusting as follows.

*Weight* and *volume* are doubled (steampunk machinery is solidly built and often heavily embellished). Doubling volume while keeping the general shape the same means adding 25% to all linear dimensions, and can usually be assumed to add +1 to SM.

*ST* and *HP* are increased by 25% to reflect increased Weight. *HT* generally remains the same.

*Other performance values* (e.g., speed, endurance, and range) are usually halved.

*Price* can be kept the same, at a level appropriate to a 20th-century economy, especially for advanced steampunk machinery. For mature, mass-produced consumer technology in a setting where wealth is around 19th-century levels, reduce the price to between half and three-quarters that of the higher-TL version. This rule *replaces* the rule for prices of *Anachronistic Devices* (p. B478); a retrotech device isn't anachronistic in its own setting, just advanced (and big, heavy, and slow compared to the thing it's based on).

If nothing akin to the desired device appears in our history until TL8 (or in hypothetical forms later), you can still convert it with the same rules, but base the retrotech on one of the first versions of the technology, double weight and volume *again*, double price for each TL above 7, and reduce performance details even further at whim.

### Vehicles

When defining vehicles with this system, use the same formula as for the descriptive approach (pp. 27-28) to determine Move. Worsen the Hnd rating by -1 and reduce list SR by 1; steampunk vehicles tend to be temperamental, and need skilled handling.

*Example:* The M4 Sherman is an archetypal TL6 tank, and so makes an obvious basis for a TL(5+1) Mobile Fortress. **GURPS High-Tech** gives the tank ST/HP 158, Hnd/SR -3/5, HT 10f, Move 2/12, LWt. 35, Load 2, SM +4, Occ. 5, DR 210/105 (front/sides), Range 120, Cost $477,500, and Locations 2CTX. A little further research shows its dimensions as 19'2" × 8'7" × 9'. So the Mobile Fortress gets ST/HP 198, Hnd/SR -4/4, Move 1/8, LWt. 70, Load 4, SM +5, Range 60, and dimensions about 24' × 11' × 11', with all other values the same as for the Sherman. Cost is optionally reduced if necessary to fit the campaign.

### Weapons

Steam Age guns tend to be bulky, cumbersome, and slow-firing compared to modern armaments. So, when converting weapons, apply the general *Retrotech Approach* guidelines (above), and then reduce *Acc* by 1; halve *Range* values; halve *RoF or* double reload time for RoF 1 single-shot weapons; multiply *ST* and *Bulk* by 1.25 for each doubling of weight required (round all fractions away from zero); and increase Rcl by 1. Since larger ammunition makes bigger holes in targets, raise the category of piercing damage caused by one level (to a maximum of huge) – so pi- becomes pi, pi becomes pi+, and pi+ becomes pi++.

Energy/beam weapons are somewhat advanced to have this system applied to them, but anyone making the attempt should divide Range values by *10* to achieve the right feel.

*Examples:* The Watervliet M1, the main gun on the Sherman tank converted to the Mobile Fortress (see *Vehicles,* p. 28), has Acc 5+1, Range 4,900/16,100, EWt. 1,200/24, RoF 1, Shots 1(3), ST 54M, Bulk -14, Rcl 6, and Cost $65,000. So a steampunk weapon based on it has Acc 4+1, Range 2,450/8,050, EWt. 2,400/48, RoF 1, Shots 1(6), ST 68M, Bulk -18, Rcl 7, and Cost $65,000 (reduced if necessary to fit the campaign). The original fires APEX or HE rounds; HE seems more steampunk, so we'll keep that damage rating – 6d×12(0.5) pi++ with 6d×2 [4d-1] cr ex follow-up.

The hull-mounted machine gun on the same tank converts from Damage 7d pi, Acc 5, Range 1,100/4,500, EWt. 30.9/15.3, RoF 10!, Shots 250(5), ST 17M, Bulk -6, Rcl 2, and Cost $5,700 to Damage 7d pi+, Acc 4, Range 550/2,250, EWt. 61.8/30.6, RoF 5!, Shots 250(5), ST 22M, Bulk -8, Rcl 3, and Cost $5,700 (reduced if necessary to suit).

### Personal Equipment

The same guidelines apply to miscellaneous equipment and consumer goods, if the GM wants to get this detailed about stuff in daily civilian life.

*Example:* A 1980s portable cassette player makes a decent basis for a personal entertainment device, although it's early TL8 and hence needs to be adjusted a little further to fit in a TL(5+1) steampunk world. (Modern MP3 players are just too compact.) Research on the Web shows that a Sony Walkman from 1982 was just over 3" × 4" × 1", weighed about 10 oz., cost around $100, and could play cassettes which ran for an hour or two. So our "Strolling Fellow" clockwork portable music engine is 4" × 6" × 2", weighs 2.5 lbs., plays paper music strips which last 20 minutes, and costs $200 as a rare and fancy device or $100 as a commonplace piece of setting dressing.

# STEAMPUNK INVENTING

The **Basic Set** rules for *New Inventions, Gadgeteering,* and *Gadgets for Non-Gadgeteers* (pp. B473-477) can work fine in steampunk campaigns, and they are indeed tailor-made for "Edisonades" and other games involving weird innovative technology. When applying these rules for devices created at a divergent tech level, note one important concept: The *effective* TL of the device is equal to the sum of both elements of the divergent TL. For example, devices created at TL(5+2)

have an effective TL of 7, and are invented as TL7 devices under the **Basic Set** rules.

Related to this, remember that the "invention skill" employed must be at the TL of the gadget to be created. This makes inventing devices from a higher TL than the campaign world difficult – but not impossible! The best thing is for the inventor to have the High TL advantage (p. B23) – or, for a more limited option, the Cutting-Edge Training perk (**GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks,** p. 16) – and the requisite skill at that TL. Alternatively, if the inventor has the skill at the world's TL, he can always try to use it with -5 for operating at one TL higher (p. B168; invention skills are always IQ-based), which of course requires very high skill (or amazing dice luck).

Successfully inventing a device or two from a higher TL is fully sufficient justification for then buying Cutting-Edge Training and the associated skill with bonus character points. Also, the GM may permit cinematic adventurers to attempt inventions from two or even three TLs above their own, but the greater penalties involved mean that they'll need truly cinematic levels of skill.

For an alternate and more detailed discussion of weird science, consider **GURPS Powers: The Weird.**

## Constraints on Invention

While inventing new gadgets *can* be fun, invention takes time and special skills; in a high-action game, the PCs may not have enough of either. Invention and gadgeteering might be something which takes place off-stage between "chapters" in the campaign story. However, if the GM lets someone take the Gadgeteer advantage, that person should get some benefit from the significant point expenditure; the GM should allow for time to work on technological stuff.

Another issue which might arise is the question of what is feasible given the setting's prevailing superscience and non-standard physical laws. This is for the GM to decide, although a certain amount of negotiation with the players may be necessary to preserve everyone's suspension of disbelief. It's possible that the GM may have failed to notice that assumption X leads logically to technology Y. If the players spot that, either they have to be allowed to pursue that technology, or the GM has to refine the campaign assumptions a little further to turn the idea into a dead end.

If it seems likely that the *PCs* will explore areas where the GM doesn't want them to go, the GM should permit them to make rolls against science or engineering skills – or even against Weird Science – to spot that their assumptions are subtly flawed, or that the universe doesn't work *quite* as they thought it did. The GM should be generous with this; it's no fun for PCs to continually develop completely useless projects. Alternatively, as a compensation, the PCs might gain completely new and crucial scientific knowledge as a result of their failures (perhaps as clues for another adventure or bonus points for improving their science and engineering skills).

## WILD TECHNOLOGICAL MALFUNCTION TABLE

In the more cinematic and melodramatic sorts of steampunk campaign, when devices malfunction, they don't do it in a *small* way – they either keep working or fail catastrophically. In such games, whenever an exotic or experimental vehicle fails a HT roll, the attack roll for an invented weapon equals or exceeds its malfunction number (p. B407), or an operator gets a critical failure on some kind of operation roll, the GM can roll 3d on the following table for inspiration as to the consequences. (Ordinary off-the-shelf devices still use standard critical failure or malfunction rules.) Some of these effects are quite harsh; a kind GM can allow Luck or hasty use of repair skills to avoid problems or reduce them to manageable levels.

**3, 4 –** A spectacular blast! This inflicts twice the weapon's damage, or 10d for other devices, as a crushing explosion centered on the firing chamber or the power source. *Diving for Cover* (p. B377) may be indicated.

**5, 6 –** Reverse function. A vehicle starts running in reverse, a device does the opposite of its normal function, or a weapon backfires, doing its normal damage to the user.

**7, 8 –** The item catches fire (pp. B433-434). A gun on fire does crushing incendiary damage equal to the normal damage from one shot each second to the user until he can toss it away; beam weapons or other devices do 1d burning damage per second to anyone at the controls or inside the device. Users inside burning vehicles or machines may suffer *Suffocation* effects (pp. B436-437) while getting out, due to smoke.

**9, 10 –** The weapon or device makes a weird noise and belches out a cloud of smoke, but then works normally again.

**11, 12 –** Failure is imminent! From now on, the user must make an appropriate skill roll once per second of operation, with failure meaning the device fails immediately. At that point, it must be rebuilt completely before it will work again.

**13, 14 –** The machine works normally for one use (a shot or burst of weapon fire, a minute or so of vehicle travel, etc.), but in the process, destroys itself rather dramatically. It can never be used again.

**15, 16 –** The item starts shaking and giving off smoke as it tears itself apart inside. Weapon users or passengers in a vehicle are blackened but unhurt, but the machine is a total loss.

**17, 18 –** Out of control! Weapons or other devices begin firing wildly until all ammunition or power is expended; vehicles take off at top speed in a random direction. The operator can attempt a skill roll at -3 each second to bring it back under control.

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For another way to limit weird-science tech, see "Out Standing in My Field, All Alone" in *Pyramid #3/46: Weird Science.*

### Free Inventions

Some steampunk or proto-steampunk stories are designed around a hero or a party owning one big, unique, amazing machine that facilitates the plot. This is usually a vehicle of some kind, which gets them to the scene of the adventure and home again, although they might conceivably possess, say, the only weapon that can defeat certain world-threatening villains, or an analytical engine which grants them unique insight into criminal activity in their city.

This could be represented by Unusual Background (Invention) (p. B477) at the 30- or 50-point level. However, if the *only* function of the machine is to get the heroes into the action, it doesn't help the owner significantly in any other way, and the campaign just can't function without it, then that means that one member of the party is being charged 30 or more points for the campaign to exist, which is hardly fair. Hence, if the concept of the campaign is based around such an invention, the GM could simply give it to the PCs *for free.* It's a MacGuffin, not a character feature. In that case, the machine's nominal owner or inventor can spend however many points he chooses on operation and maintenance skills (and maybe a Reputation for being the fellow with the amazing machine), and have fun in play with those. Of course, the PCs shouldn't be permitted to sell their free machine for cash.

# MAGIC AND PSYCHIC POWERS

Some steampunk stories feature paranormal powers, even outright magic. This can take almost any form, but the most common and atmospherically appropriate versions make at least some reference to historical ideas about such things – which may have passed as respectable science for a while.

## CLOCKPUNK ALCHEMY

Immediately before the Steam Age, when science was still evolving into its modern form, many "natural philosophers" were concerned with the ancient mystical study of alchemy. This field had, after all, made a number of useful observations and discoveries which contributed to modern chemistry. Alchemy can thus make an interesting and appropriate element in early-period, clockpunk-flavored games, providing an array of cool effects and character abilities in the absence of big machines or modern science. It might even *be* the true science which gives useful insights into the nature of reality, leading into a very different, more magically flavored alternate Steam Age.

Despite a large element of what would today be considered mysticism, alchemy is at heart a science of matter and transformations. Alchemists also saw the difference between organic and inorganic matter differently from modern science, but they were concerned with both; some noted historical alchemists were also skilled physicians for their time. Thus, in **GURPS** terms, an alchemical steampunk setting would be a world at TL(4+1) or TL(4+2), with *lots* of "period superscience" technology. Alchemy skill itself would mostly serve as the theoretical basis for all of science and engineering, replacing most of Biology, Chemistry, and Physics as we know them in relation to real-world technology. Alchemy could be used to analyze alchemical concoctions or phenomena. *Practical* alchemists should take some of the following skills at the setting TL:

Armoury, Biology, Chemistry, Cryptography, Diagnosis, Engineer, Forensics, Geology, Hazardous Materials, Jeweler, Metallurgy, Pharmacy, Physician, Physics, Physiology, or Poisons.

In addition, they might take Meditation to help in developing the mental balance required by the most advanced researches, Occultism to reflect reading around the edges of their studies and the search for useful secrets among the dross of general folly, Philosophy (Hermetic) to help determine which lines of research aren't *wise,* and Weird Science to help in bravely probing the limits of the possible. Also, given the widespread belief in the "wisdom of the ancients" among historical alchemists, high levels in Research might be obligatory.

Then, they should make full use of the invention and gadgeteering rules (pp. 29-30) to research and create superscience devices, preferably with a Renaissance/Baroque look to them. What is actually possible would have to be up to the GM, given that historical alchemy was often willfully obscure, but one keyword is *transformation*. More active and less scholarly protagonists might simply have a large array of off-the-shelf weird technology.

# VICTORIAN MAGICAL PRACTICES

Victorian belief in the paranormal (see *The Victorian Paranormal,* below) involved more than studying old beliefs (Occultism skill, in **GURPS** terms); there were serious attempts to make things *work.* Hence, steampunk games with a paranormal element have plenty to draw on.

## Spiritualism

If Victorian psychical researchers were correct, ghosts are a psychic phenomenon, a residue of the living after their deaths. They are merely that minority of spirits of the dead who have enough psychic strength to interact with the material world.

**GURPS Horror** has an extensive treatment of ghosts, although most ghosts described by spiritualists are less horrific than the terrors enumerated there; the basic ghost template on p. 78 of **Horror** is more than sufficient, and the apparition variation may serve to represent the weak-minded phantoms that might turn up to most séances. The poltergeist is enough of a nuisance for exorcists to be called in, and if a dybbuk or a primeval ghost shows up when a medium is trying to contact someone's beloved aunt, a group of Victorian spiritualist dabblers may be in serious trouble.

### Mediums

A basic assumption of traditional spiritualism is that certain psychically gifted people have the ability to act as mediums, perceiving and talking with the dead. Such a medium has one or both of Channeling (p. B41), which permits ghosts and other spirits to speak *through* them, or Medium (p. B68), which grants the ability to speak *with* spirits and especially ghosts. Many also have Spirit Empathy (p. B88), which grants useful understanding of spirits.

## THE VICTORIAN PARANORMAL

In a period of dramatic social and technological change, with radical scientific theories undermining traditional religious beliefs and with strange ideas being carried around global empires, some people inevitably turned to interest in the paranormal. Some were true scholars, prepared to doubt and test what they were told. Others were looking for comfort or guidance. Still others were gullible and open to being conned.

The period certainly saw a widespread interest in *spiritualism* – attempts to communicate with spirits of the dead, mostly involving specialist mediums. Starting in 1848 when Margaret and Kate Fox of Hydesville, New York, reported receiving messages from a spirit haunting their cottage, this movement gained many adherents throughout the English-speaking world. The séance became a familiar ritual in the latter half of the 19th century. Notable figures such as the British writer Arthur Conan Doyle and the American psychologist William James became involved in "psychical research," trying to judge the truthfulness of spiritualist beliefs. Ghosts and spirits remained mysterious and terrifying, but they also offered comforting reassurance that a part of a person might really outlive bodily death.

Other ideas had their adherents. Traditional "folk beliefs" were very slow to fade – a surprising number of Victorian adults may seriously have believed in fairies. The idea of Atlantis was adopted by fringe theorists looking for a grand theory of human history. Marginal scientific speculations such as the existence of the "lost continent" of Lemuria survived for decades in increasingly distorted forms in the beliefs of groups such as the Theosophists, who blended spiritualism, fringe science, and Eastern religion. (See **GURPS Atlantis** for more on this.) And some people just thought that traditional ritual magic worked.

At the more respectable end of this spectrum, the Society for Psychical Research was established in London in 1882, and it began investigating a range of paranormal phenomena, without much success. Its American counterpart was founded in 1885, and this sort of research has continued to the present day. The high point of scientific research into "psionics" came after the end of the Steam Age, in the 1930s; Victorian-style psychic powers have more of a traditional, mystical feel to them.

Victorian mediums often claimed to be remarkably effective at dealing with spirits, and might well have either or both of a pair of +50% special enhancements on the Medium advantage: Universal, which grants the ability to speak with any spirit, regardless of language problems, and Visual, which allows them to see any spirit with which they are communicating, even if it is otherwise invisible. However, if the campaign features several types of spirit (such as elementals, demons, etc.), mediums may have the -50% Specialized limitation on their advantages, restricting them to ghosts; they rarely have dealings with other classes of being.

A typical Victorian medium works in a trance state, which may require some time and concentration to accomplish. Hence, these advantages may be acquired with the Preparation Required limitation (p. B114). The Victorians were fascinated by "mesmerism," which could be seen as providing access to paranormal sensitivity; some may have the Accessibility (Only while in a hypnotic trance) limitation (p. B110) on their advantages. Conversely, an exceptionally talented medium may have the Autotrance perk (p. B101) – although members of the public may doubt the authenticity of someone who seems to claim that contacting spirits is *easy!*

### Ectoplasm

Victorian spiritualists often spoke of *ectoplasm,* a tenuous substance of which a ghostly manifestation could be formed. Ectoplasm allows the ghost to touch the living and to have a sense of touch, but not to exert significant force.

The ability to materialize, but only in this weak form, can be represented by a special -35% limitation on Insubstantiality, which first appeared in **GURPS Horror:** *Ectoplasmic Materialization.* The material form of a ghost with this limitation can use its sense of touch and touch-only powers in the material world, but cannot apply any ST, and has DR 0 and HP 1, regardless of its attributes as a spirit. However, its material form does also have Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood). Although ectoplasmic ghosts are very easy to "kill," they may have Unkillable 3 (p. B95), and so can eventually reconstitute themselves.

### Astral Travel

If ghosts and spirits are psychic entities, then the realm where they exist may well be the astral plane. This implies that anyone using "astral projection" abilities of any kind, magical or psionic – a claimed accomplishment of some Victorian mystics – is visiting the realm of the dead, and may meet some of them. Such encounters may be unnerving, making Fright Checks a periodic consequence of astral travel. See also **GURPS Horror,** p. 108, and **GURPS Psionic Powers,** pp. 27-28, for more on the astral plane.

## Ritual Magic

Another model for steampunk magic is the practices of 19th- and early 20th-century ritual magicians, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. These were primarily well-off, scholarly types who investigated historical magical activities, then tried to derive underlying truths and make them work (with a lot of wishful thinking and sometimes outright doubletalk).Their interests and those of the spiritualists often overlapped, but ritual magicians were less involved in séances or attempts to speak with the dead. Their kind of magic takes a long time and uses arcane symbolism such as astrology or the Tarot which requires extended study. The claimed effects are usually subtle, although they can be quite powerful.

This is best represented in game terms by the Path/Book magic detailed in Chapter 5 of **GURPS Thaumatology,** with magicians limited to subtler paths such as Cunning, Dreams, Health, Knowledge, Luck, Protection, or Spirit. Of course, the Path of Gadgets could give this magic a very useful role in a technology-oriented campaign. It's also highly desirable to set the mana level of the campaign world at low (giving -5 to all ritual workings, except perhaps in some strange and obscure "places of power"). Then compensate by allowing magicians to apply Hermetic modifiers from Appendix A of **Thaumatology,** which are actually derived from period sources. Alternatively, to reflect the occasional Victorian belief that magic was better understood in the Mysterious East, use the Chinese mystical modifiers from the same appendix.

Incidentally, although the Path of Spirit provides beneficial effects relating to the spirit world, it gives limited abilities at best in communicating with spirits. This can lead to the historically authentic situation of magicians teaming up with mediums.

# ASSEMBLING THE ELEMENTS

Having drawn inspiration from the traditions of steampunk and the history of the Steam Age, and collected an array of game-mechanical tools, it's time to define the setting (or borrow one from somewhere) and put together a campaign.

## PERIOD VS. PUNK

One big thing to decide early on about any planned campaign is how far to reflect the actual attitudes and stylistic details of the historic Steam Age, and how much to favor a more modern "punk" approach. In other words, how much the campaign is to be a historical setting and how much the setting has a more modern feel – just with brass, rivets, and fancy costumes – or at least exhibits overt rebellion against the period norms. In fact, most published steampunk settings can support both "conformist" and "punky" protagonists, working with the system or trying to bring it down, as the players prefer. (See, for example, "Iron" in **GURPS Steampunk**, which has plenty of adventure opportunities for those willing to go along with the system, but which is also dystopian enough to provoke typical individualist PCs to revolt.)

*According to the ancient doctrines, the soulless elemental spirits were evolved by the ceaseless motion inherent in the astral light.*

– *Helena Blavatsky,* **Isis Unveiled**

Of course, there's also the option to aim for a style that's neither Steam Age nor modern, but reflects some other source, such as traditional fantasy (as with the clockpunk-tinted **GURPS Thaumatology: Alchemical Baroque**) or the interwar pulp era (as with the raygun Gothic **GURPS Tales of the Solar Patrol**).

The question of social attitudes is covered in depth in Chapter 4. The GM and players should review that and discuss what they want to experience and what everyone is comfortable with, so that expectations can be managed.

## COMBINATIONS AND PERMUTATIONS

There are a lot of issues about the practicalities of the setting and the sorts of stories to be created: whether things are to be gritty (as, typically, is the case on **GURPS Steampunk**'s "Iron"), melodramatic (a likely choice when playing with **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6**), or cinematically heroic (see **GURPS Castle Falkenstein**); which historical era to use as the basis or primary inspiration (from, say, the Georgian basis of **GURPS Goblins** to the German Expressionism-meets-*Terminator* "Kaiserreich-4" in **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Worlds of Horror**); what type and level of technology is to be available (and whether other types are going to become available as events progress); whether paranormal powers are to be present; what sorts of PCs will be viable (gentleman adventurers, socialites, career soldiers, consulting detectives, scientists, street-level strivers, time travelers from the 21st century . . .); and so on.

A campaign certainly doesn't have to include every option. Indeed, throwing in too much may make the game too "busy" or difficult for the GM to manage, although there are precedents for this approach, such as **Castle Falkenstein.** Most stories and game campaigns can get enough interest out of the presence of a broad range of exotic or weird sciences (see "Qabala" in **GURPS Steampunk**), *or* a few weird-science elements plus some personal psychic powers or similar (see "The Wisdom of the Ancient Seers" in **GURPS Thaumatology**), *or* a rich array of paranormal powers (see "Azoth-7" in **GURPS Infinite Worlds**), *or* some plausible variant technology and an interesting alternate history (see **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6**) – but which options to include is a matter of personal taste.

If weird technologies and paranormal powers are both present, it can be interesting to have them linked, at least in some vague way using a bit of pseudoscientific bafflegab. If, say, the luminiferous ether exists, and there are "etheric shock" weapons of terrifying power,

"supernatural" spirits might actually be creatures of pure ether, and regard those weapons as an abomination, because they can destroy immaterial spirits. Or if superscience manipulates the élan vital for spectacular effects, perhaps magicians are people who can manipulate it *directly,* causing sorcerous adepts to perceive superscience devices as magical.

Lastly, there is the nature of society. Most steampunk societies are based on Steam Age culture, to a greater or lesser extent. The presence of exotic technologies may lead to changes in society (as technological progress did historically), or at least to social tensions. What is the social position of a mad scientist or a magician? If runaway progress makes technological skills invaluable, will traditional hierarchies be transformed into more of a meritocracy (rare in published settings, Steam Age hierarchies being as they were)? Will analytical engines be used to construct an all-too-modern surveillance society? And will steampunk technology be used to make global empires stronger (which seems to be the norm in published settings), or to fight against them?

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### THE MOB HAS SPOKEN!

The "punk" part of steampunk implies the possibility of outright social revolt. If the uneducated masses' discontent – or, in a screampunk game, terror and hatred – reaches fever pitch, they may succumb to a mass insanity and form mindless mobs, whose only desire is to destroy what they do not understand. Normal social structures break down under the strain. But this implies a breakdown in the social formalities which are a part of what appeals to many people about the genre. Riot and revolution are usually best kept as an ultimate threat, the thing which PCs must prevent – or the ultimate goal toward which they work, aiming to reshape society into something better.

Anyone who wants to keep the system intact, but who becomes involved in doings which might rouse the anger of the masses, must be cautious and ensure that rumors don't get out. Political agitation often leads to public demonstrations and rioting in the streets. Political candidates may hire mobs to cause unrest around election times, and in many games, the French Revolution is recent history; no one needs to wonder what a mob might do if given its head. Those who *want* that result, however, will need to be expert in Propaganda, Public Speaking, and avoiding or escaping the agents of a ruling class that turns brutal when threatened. See **GURPS Social Engineering,** pp. 71-72, for an extended discussion of mobs.

Note that social disorder may trigger Fright Checks of a special kind; see pp. 40-43.

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# HOW TO BE STEAMPUNK

*"Dash it," muttered the Earl, "Who's that woman, and what the blazes is she doin' here?"*

*Oswald Finchley, his secretary, directed his gaze surreptitiously to one of the great polished mirrors adorning the walls of the room, thereby gaining a view of the assembled company. "The young lady in canary yellow, with the most curious hat?" he inquired.*

*"Who else might I be askin' about?" the Earl murmured.*

*"Just so, My Lord. I believe that is Miss Anastasia Quayle, the lady scientist. I understand that her investigations of thermodynamics have contributed substantially to the Great Project in hand."*

*"Doesn't explain what she's doin' dressed like that. Anyway, bluestockin' or not, why do we need her here?"*

*"Given the extent of those contributions, My Lord, I believe that it was considered impolitic not to extend an invitation."*

*For once, Oswald was glad of his employer's stalwart ignorance of any person lacking formal position; it had evidently left the Earl conveniently uninformed regarding Miss Quayle's notorious theories concerning the organization of society.*

*In any event, the Earl gave a final grunt and turned his attention to the nearest knight of the realm. Oswald cast one last glance at the mirror, only to realize that Miss Quayle had evidently become aware of his attention. She met his reflected gaze with a vulpine smile and – oh lord – an unmistakable wink. Worse, he realized that he recognized her chosen hat, which was necessarily complex and ornate, concealing as it did a compact photographic device of Miss Quayle's own design.*

*Oswald's heart sank yet deeper. He respected Miss Quayle most intently, for more than her scientific brilliance, but at this specific moment, he was suffering definite concern for his social prospects . . .*

# THE SPIRIT OF THE STEAM AGE

Even without an added dose of steampunk weirdness, Steam Age society often resembled the proverbial swan – seemingly elegant and serene, but actually propelled by a lot of frantic action below the surface. This was a period of massive technological change, with Western societies shifting from muscle-powered agrarianism to steam-powered industrialization, and yet essentially medieval systems of government by hereditary monarchs and aristocrats tried very hard to retain control.

For the most part, the traditional ruling classes did a remarkably efficient job of staying on top, perhaps because, in times of rapid change, many people cling to traditional certainties. This may also explain why the Victorian period was seemingly such an age of formality and "respectability" (the Georgian and Edwardian periods, not *quite* so much); the new middle classes needed some way to show that they could fit into the old system. Some modern-day steampunks, with their fondness for Victorian formality, may even be chasing the same certainties. And yet, change happened anyway.

Most people within the developing societies probably saw the rapid rate of scientific and technological innovation as a good thing, bringing prosperity, health, and (hopefully) wisdom – but not everybody agreed. Alongside a few upper-class nostalgics, there were workers such as the original Luddites, who found their old jobs replaced by mechanization, and any promised new jobs slow to appear, and who responded by attacking the changes and smashing the new machines.

Meanwhile, new communications technologies brought their own wrinkles. The Steam Age basically created the modern concept of mass media, and for the first time, it was possible to become famous just for being famous. Of course, these new media could spread new and radical ideas – or be used for counter-propaganda to challenge them. (In *GURPS* terms, while the Propaganda skill was invented long before this time, it acquired completely new toolsets, making it *much* more powerful.) And the ruling classes were fully capable of adapting new ideas to reinforce their power. For example, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is concerned with biology, not human society. Though it challenges traditional religious explanations of "creation," where it has any implications for human life, it points out that *dominant* types sometimes lose and die out as circumstances change. And yet, its terminology was eventually borrowed for use in theories of "social Darwinism," which in turn was taken to imply that the aristocracy was born to rule.

# A Flawed Era?

Few good roleplaying-game settings are all sweetness and light, but even so, some gamers may have special difficulty in treating one based on the Steam Age as just a fun place full of fancy costumes and nice manners. In truth, the real 19th century was hardly a utopia. Alongside the primitive medicine (with an, at best, *evolving* understanding of the causes of disease, and not much in the way of anesthetics for most of the period), choking pollution (from the coal-fired engines and medieval sewer systems), and harsh legal codes, this was *not* a tolerant age by modern standards.

To begin with, it was the Age of Empires after all – notably dominated by the British Empire – where *imperialism* was the order of the day. While few people wanted wars for the sake of it (though some did – war was an opportunity to dress up in fancy uniforms and be heroic), the idea of going off somewhere and *conquering* the place for the benefit of one's own country was still basically respectable, though it helped to talk about these conflicts as "spreading civilization."

As this hints, *racism* was also widespread. The most liberal radicals of the age would routinely talk about "superior" and "inferior" races, and might be frighteningly willing to see the latter die out (possibly with help). Even dedicated anti-slavery activists might seem painfully patronizing to modern readers.

Thirdly, *sexism* was quite normal. Not only did women not have the vote anywhere until late in the period (and not until after WWI in Britain), but they had few property rights. Until 1870, for example, married British women could have no money or property of their own; everything belonged to their husbands. Sophisticated Westerners knew of and respected capable women in some fields, but probably assumed that these were exceptions and that other fields were beyond female brains and unstable female emotions.

While not everyone in a Steam Age game must have the Intolerance disadvantage, there's a fair case that *most* NPCs should have the Chauvinistic quirk. Games can tackle these unsavory social aspects in various ways.

The simplest method is, of course, just to ignore it. The world could be one which has passed through modern social developments early (in parallel to developing various technologies very fast), and realistic Victorian patterns of thinking are limited to a few bigots. Alternatively, minority group PCs are the sort of exceptions that even the most bigoted age invariably throws up, and their accomplishments and force of will make them immune to the prejudices which exist in the background. See also *Maybe It's All Just Show?,* below.

Alternatively, remember that the "punk" part of the genre label implies rebellion, and take that as a cue. (See *The Steam Age and Punk,* p. 5.) So this is an age of imperialism and intolerance? That sounds like a job for a band of heroes! Of course, fighting an entire global system really takes more than a small bunch of plucky adventurers, but those adventurers can always take point in the grand struggle. Infiltrate high society to extract key secrets from stiff-necked rulers!

## Maybe It's All Just Show?

To some modern fans of steampunk, it's *all* about the style – the ornate costumes and fancy titles. In extreme cases, players may want games that are about the Steam Age as it "ought" to have been, with social hierarchies serving strictly as an excuse for those titles but no attention paid to the less appealing parts of 19th-century society. See also *A Flawed Era?,* above.

Games *can* be run this way, although it's important to make sure that all of the playing group are on the same page first. If some of the players are aware of the realities of Steam Age history, and are looking forward to exploring a society significantly unlike the modern world, they will be badly disappointed by a "style only" setting. If that's what everyone wants, though, it's not hard to set up.

First, drop any references to **GURPS** tech levels. Simply use wealth and income levels as for a TL8 campaign, ensuring that all but the poorest adventurers can start with plenty of gear.

Either available technology is at late TL5 or early TL6 levels (except perhaps for some anachronistically advanced medicine) for a romanticized pseudo-historical setting, or the world is full of amazing, convenient "steam-tech." In the latter case, most personal equipment known at TL8 is available (except maybe mobile telephones, which don't really fit the style), with the *Quick and Dirty Steam-Tech* rules (pp. 27-29) applied generously; everything is big, a bit cumbersome, and highly decorated, but broadly as efficient and reliable as modern gear. Less powerful firearms do give combatants a better chance of surviving firefights and occasional opportunities to settle things with fisticuffs or melee weapons, though, while any "rayguns" are probably retrotech stun guns, fed through the conversion system. Computers are huge, clunky, and at least partly mechanical, but linking them via the telegraph system can produce a limited sort of internet. Aerial travel should be restricted to a couple of hundred miles per hour or less. It probably all is conducted by lighter-than-air vehicles, which never catch fire unless sabotaged by dastardly villains.

Horses and horse-drawn carriages may also be commonplace – but they require no more maintenance or special attention than motor vehicles. They're probably slower than steam automobiles, of course, but have their advantages. Horses are certainly better over rough ground (and surely never break their legs), and any rider might be able to summon his horse from up to 100 yards away by whistling and making an Animal Handling roll.

Lastly, although social status exists, it's not at all closely linked to titles. In fact, any PC with positive Status should be permitted to have any title that the player thinks is cool, without NPCs questioning this or treating him as a parvenu or poseur. Likewise, the Social Stigma disadvantage should be vanishingly rare; everyone gets treated on their perceived merits, which are determined without stereotyping. If the "punk" part of "steampunk" implies anything here, it's a sense that convention has *already* been successfully overthrown.

Pilot daring airship-reconnaissance missions over the imperialist lines! Assemble brilliant propaganda campaigns over the new telegraph networks which the old regime doesn't really understand! And, of course, one should do all of this with (steampunk) style, because half the appeal of the rebellion has to be that it *looks better* than the opposition.

For those who don't want to ignore the dystopian aspects of historical reality, the world can be played as exactly that – a dystopia. All of the bad stuff is in place; the protagonists don't have to like it, but rebelling effectively against it would be a long haul and need more than the PCs' level of resources. Most of the time, they just work around it. Indeed, some of them may participate in the system – not in the worst parts, hopefully, but surviving in a bad system which isn't going to get much better any time soon always means compromises, while trying not to make anything worse.

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### The Numbers Game

Some changes in the Steam Age came about because populations increased rapidly, partly because it was easier for ordinary people to support large families. Reduced mortality contributed as well; there were few effective medical treatments, other than vaccination for smallpox, but nutrition and sanitation improved. Much of the increased population ended up in large cities. Railroads and bicycles let the cities expand horizontally. Iron- and steel-framed buildings let them expand vertically, creating the characteristic 20th-century urban skyline. For the first time, city people outnumbered country people in a few nations.

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# SOCIAL CLASS

The 19th century was an era of unprecedented social mobility. Commerce and industry created new ways to get rich, open to (almost) any man with energy, ambition, and a good idea. The "self-made man" is a Victorian archetype, and not only in Britain; the French talked of "careers open to talents."

However, these societies *definitely* remained stratified. At the top in most European countries were the aristocrats, set aside not just by wealth but by the *source* of their wealth: inheritance from their ancestors, especially inheritance of land. Making money "in trade" was simply *not done* by the best people, any more than was manual labor. Even the democratic United States distinguished between "new" and "old" money. Aristocratic fortunes paid for large houses, servants to run them, and horses and carriages. The new rich and the middle classes imitated this way of life, as far as they could afford to, and called themselves gentlemen and ladies. Having at least one servant was proof of respectability, which led to more people working in domestic service than in any other non-farming job. Having menservants (as men were paid more than women) and keeping a carriage went with higher levels of status.

*GURPS* Status in steampunk games can follow this historical pattern; it's a good way to get a proper Steam Age feeling. So while Wealth grants some Status, high levels generally require formal titles. Status 3 can be justified by a knighthood (which may come from good service to the nation or a few years of diligently schmoozing the right people), Rank

5+ (which *might* just be Courtesy Rank, if the person is old enough to be retired and can claim to have had a credible career at that rank), or Multimillionaire. Higher levels almost always need an aristocratic title or very high Rank. (In exceptionally democratic countries, notably the United States, vast Wealth and a willingness to spend it flamboyantly may suffice.) Titles *might* be acquired, but that would involve a lot of effort and expense cultivating the right contacts. Some rich families married their offspring off to impoverished aristocrats, raising the family's overall Status over the generations.

In games, Military, Administrative, and Religious Rank grant Status on the usual basis (p. B29), but attaining high levels in those hierarchies often requires a certain amount of higher-class birth to begin with. Thus, the associated Status may reflect that at least as much as respect granted to the Rank.

Status 1 and 2 may be the most interesting levels, as such positions really could be attained by merit and personal accomplishment (though they also could be lost almost as easily). The middle classes expanded massively through the Victorian period. Status 1 covers moderately successful shopkeepers, senior clerks, small-town doctors, and lesser clergymen. Status 2 encompasses fairly wealthy merchants, significant professionals such as barristers (lawyers licensed to plead in court) and medical consultants, and important clergymen. Status 1 individuals often found themselves lumped in with "the masses," although they would try to make it clear that they were a little bit superior. Status 2 folk sometimes associated with the aristocracy, although they might feel uncomfortable about it, if only because they weren't quite sure how to act.

Someone with a knighthood (and his wife) would automatically be at least Status 2. Remember that knighthoods are always (with a *very* few obscure exceptions) awarded by the crown, not inherited; they reflect accomplishment, not birth.

In *GURPS* terms, in an even faintly historically based society, acquiring Savoir-Faire (High Society) skill is a necessity for anyone seeking to rise much above Status 1. *Very* rich individuals may get away with some eccentric errors, but they will be laughed at behind their backs. While Status 0 or 1 individuals don't *need* Savoir-Faire (High Society), and could be considered pretentious if they seemed to be aping the upper classes, they might learn a little about the correct way of doing things, from observation of their "betters" or reading of etiquette books or even popular novels, some of which are much concerned with the lifestyles of the rich and powerful. Also, superior indoor servants, for whom good levels of Savoir-Faire (Servant) is a job prerequisite, quite logically get decent Savoir-Faire (High Society) as a default; they recognize the correct way of doing things.

Status 0 is the common person in the street, but there are subtleties even there. A poor junior clerk at that level would be concerned with respectability and his prospects, because he had a real possibility of reaching Status 1 and little support if he fell lower. In comparison, a successful market trader might rate the same level, but with essentially the standing of a street person made good, having few hopes of rising higher but plenty of chances to lord it over other commoners. Status -1 is the mass of the "urban poor" and hired farmhands, while -2 is beggars and the hopeless.

The fact that there is a drop of just two levels from the majority position to the worst is not lost on Status 0 folk.

Despite the growth of the middle class, the majority were still poor. Nonetheless, industrialization improved their lives, especially in Britain. Although wages were about the same at the end of the century as at the start in currency terms, many products grew cheaper, thanks to more efficient production. Workers could afford canned food, railway tickets, and telegrams. Working-class heroes at the start of the era would have toured the world only if they were soldiers, sailors, or servants to adventurous masters. By the end, they might have got around and seen more independently, although foreign travel was still expensive.

For a more detailed (and slightly different) treatment of Status and Rank in historical Victorian British society, using optional rules from **GURPS Social Engineering,** see "Order of Precedence" in *Pyramid #3/39: Steampunk.*

## Status and Titles

Status 8 is reserved for emperors and empresses, of which there were a (small) number in the Steam Age. Exactly who qualified, and when some of them rose from Status 7 to 8 (or in one or two cases slipped back from 8 to 7), may be debatable, but isn't likely to be important for game purposes. The point is that this was literally an age of empires.

Status 7, a reigning monarch with the title to match – king, queen, or some exotic non-European title such as "rajah" – was more widespread, with plenty of monarchies around the world. Indeed, some "pocket kingdoms" had rulers who only really claimed such titles by courtesy. A prince or archduke who rules a country in his own right might be on the same level.

Status 6 is the norm for other members of royal families and for dukes and duchesses. In Britain, dukes are either members of the royal family or are aristocrats at the top of the hierarchy, with great estates or historic family backgrounds. On the continent, some "grand duchies" are actually small independent nations, making the duke a ruler in his own right.

Status 5 is a marquess, marchioness, earl, or countess. Status 4 is a viscount or viscountess, and is also the effective level for the barons or baronesses of some standing or wealth. Status 3 covers barons and baronesses who don't get out much, along with baronets (the lowest level of nobility, not actually peers) and anyone with *both* a knighthood *and* high Rank of some kind; a bishop will be treated with *at least* this much respect. Status 2 is below any aristocratic level, but some quiet-living knights belong there.

When it comes to *formal* precedence – who sits where at dinner – title is everything. A teenage orphan baron from an impoverished family outranks a mere knight with a lifetime of distinguished government service! Likewise, the offspring of high-ranking aristocrats often use lesser titles which happen to belong to the family. They are addressed accordingly, but this is purely a courtesy; they don't get the political power that goes with the title. The title is a fair measure of their likely Status, though.

Foreign aristocrats may use titles from their own languages, of course; these generally convert directly to English-language titles. See the *Summary Status Table,* below, for some equivalents.

In a relatively meritocratic nation such as the United States, high Status comes from Rank, bolstered by Wealth and a good family background. For example, the president is Administrative Rank 7, which gives +2 Status. Because his background makes him, at the very least, equivalent to a successful lawyer or merchant (Status 2), and he is likely at least Wealthy (Status +1), he easily functions as Status 5 so long as he's in the White House. If he visits Europe, local aristocrats theoretically take precedence, but sensible hosts find ways around that, to avoid offence.

See *Titles and Forms of Address,* p. 48, for the basic rules on how aristocrats should be addressed.

## Summary Status Table

| Status | Typical Social Position or Title |
|---|---|
| 8 | Emperor, empress, czar, sultan |
| 7 | King, queen, rajah, shah |
| 6 | Prince, princess, duke, duchess, herzog |
| 5 | Marquess, marchioness, marquis, margrave, earl, countess, count, comte, graf, burgrave, president of the United States |
| 4 | Viscount, viscountess, vicomte, powerful baron or freiherr, archbishop, state governor, field marshal |
| 3 | Ordinary baron or freiherr, baronet, powerful knight or dame, bishop, high-ranking military officers |
| 2 | Ordinary knight or dame, wealthy merchant, barrister, important clergyman, town mayor, many commissioned military officers |
| 1 | Parish priest, successful shopkeeper, senior clerk, small-town doctor, senior NCO |
| 0 | Junior clerk, smallholder, factory foreman, successful market trader, corporal |
| -1 | "Urban poor," navvy, hired farmhand, infantry private |
| -2 | Beggars, "street people" |

# MASTERS AND SERVANTS

Servants are extremely important to the wealthy in the Steam Age. In the absence of many domestic appliances, they are *necessary* for a home of any size to function, from one live-in maid and a part-time boot-boy in some clerk's terraced house, through four or five individuals in a country parsonage, to hundreds in a great stately home with its estate. Indeed, the availability of domestic servants helps explain the ornate intricacy of many Steam Age items; you need a full-time servant to keep a house full of such things dusted. Once servants became harder to find after WWI, people suddenly discovered the pleasures of modernist minimalism and wipe-clean elegance.

This raises the possibility that an adequately automated TL(5+n) world would have fewer domestic servants – or that the servants would be other than human (e.g. clockwork "dolls" or modified animals). However, that would remove much of the period feel for some people; what is a Steam Age tale of power, politics, and social climbing without the looming butler, nervous maids, or omni-competent manservant? Even in the army, officers would have soldier-servants to look after their personal requirements.

# What Social Status Gets You

The following is a Steam Age counterpart to the table on p. B266, particularly suited to games in which the "settled lifestyle" rule applies (see *Starting Wealth*, p. B26), as it can explain where the 80% of wealth goes without having to account for every penny. If an individual's Wealth level is flagrantly inadequate to fit his Status, though, the GM can insist that he is a wanderer and must account for everything. Personal servants are usually paid out of cost of living, and armed forces are maintained by the state. However, if they are notably loyal, the GM may require the character to take additional advantages such as Allies or a positive Reputation.

*Most* steampunk heroes will be settled; this isn't an age of wandering frontier adventurers (except in the Wild West). Obviously, variant societies may have differences in this area.

*Status 8:* Multiple palaces and estates. Carriages, coaches, and riding horses at your beck and call, a large yacht, and a luxury wardrobe the size of a house. Countless servants, plus a national army to defend you.

*Status 7:* Two or three palaces, a royal coach and a couple of luxury carriages, probably a small yacht, and rooms full of the finest clothes. Countless servants, plus some guard regiments protecting you.

*Status 6:* A palatial home (or apartments in a royal palace) and access to other places to stay. At least one fine coach or carriage, a stable of riding horses, and a large high-quality wardrobe. Plenty of servants to look after you and drive you around, and probably a small force of armed guards.

*Status 5:* At least one good home, possibly a full-scale "stately home," with its own estate, and probably *also* at least one townhouse. A good coach or carriage or a stable of good horses, and clothes for every occasion. Plentiful servants, including some large footmen who you *might* arrange to be armed.

*Status 4:* A substantial house with its own grounds, possibly up to small stately home levels, and probably also a town or city home. A coach or carriage or a stable of horses, and clothes for all regular needs. Servants to look after all of this, some of them tough and trustworthy.

*Status 3:* More than one house (some urban, some rural), or one really grand place. A fine carriage or two or a few good riding horses, and clothes to suit your needs. An adequate servant staff, although you wouldn't ask them to deal with threats worse than burglars or uninvited party guests.

*Status 2:* A very comfortable home, in town or country, and maybe a secondary place somewhere. Probably a carriage for your family, a horse or two for other times, and an appropriate wardrobe. A modest staff of servants.

*Status 1:* A good enough home – a substantial farmhouse in the country or a moderate-sized townhouse. A small gig or a horse or two, clothes for each season and most occasions, and a small handful of servants.

*Status 0:* An adequate house, maybe a poor horse if you live in the country (but more likely good knowledge of public transport services), and a few changes of clothes. Possibly one or two servants, especially if you're pretentious.

*Status -1:* Cramped accommodation, probably rented. One semi-adequate set of clothes, some emergency spares, and (hopefully) a decent pair of boots.

*Status -2:* A flophouse on a good night, a warm grating on a less good one; try to avoid attention. Rags and tatters to wear.

Carriages and coaches are of course powered as appropriate for the TL – typically horse-drawn at TL5, maybe with steam engines at TL(5+1). Yachts (or carriages!) might be replaced by personal airships in some games. Likewise, riding horses or carriages may sometimes be replaced by small steam automobiles or other contraptions.

Those using this table *must* meet their monthly cost of living (p. B265). If they fall short, they might use *Trading Points for Money* (p. B26) to cover the shortfall, either spending bonus character points, or adding levels of Debt (p. B26). If they *can't* cover these costs, they'll ultimately lose Status, although to begin with, they may just acquire a temporary negative Reputation as "embarrassingly impoverished." Some get by for years with a high nominal Status but terrible Reputations among people who know about their monetary problems. They may be taken to court by creditors or pursued by bailiffs. See also ***GURPS Social Engineering,*** pp. 18-20.

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The world of servants was as structured and hierarchical as high society, and reflected it. The servants of a high-born nobleman "outranked" those of someone of lesser standing, regardless of duties, age, or pay. The big house's butler or housekeeper was not only much better paid than the footmen or maids, but that person also had huge effective authority over them, as the personal representative of their employer in a world without much employment law. Such senior servants could themselves quite easily be Status 1.

A *steward* was not classed as a servant at all; he was a business manager, administering a large estate on behalf of the owner. Estate management was a perfectly respectable career choice for younger sons of high-Status families, granting Status 1 or 2.

The work of the top servants – administration, supervision, and direct dealings with their employer – was not only more prestigious than that of the junior staff, it involved shorter hours and a *lot* less unpleasant work. Cleaning, polishing, and dusting were bad enough; getting up first of the entire household to make up and light dusty coal fires was really hard, cold work. One way to make a "realistic" setting a little less harsh for more of its occupants, without changing the feel of the society too far, would be to somehow automate the work of low-level staff. In such a world, high-level servants might often have Mechanic skill to maintain the automated systems.

Then comes the Clockwork Automaton Revolution . . .

## Inside vs. Outside

In a household with substantial gardens, grounds, or horses, the people who look after those might be almost a separate organization to those who work inside. They do colder and dirtier work, but with a *little* more freedom of action. In game terms, few outdoors staff would need Savoir-Faire (Servant), whereas that is the primary job skill for many indoors. In other cases, especially smaller households, "outside" servants would sometimes be called inside to handle fetching and carrying.

Technology may confuse this further; is looking after machines "indoor" or "outdoor" work? Historically, once motor vehicles were introduced, the rich began employing drivers (just as they had for horse-drawn carriages, of course). Even if they liked driving themselves, they needed mechanics to keep these temperamental new contraptions working. Being employed on the model of horse-related servants, these were treated as outdoor servants (albeit with smart uniforms), though the best-respected of them might be given lodgings over the garage. Movies notwithstanding, only a few chauffeurs would ever be on close, first-name terms with their employers – although things might be different in a movie-style steampunk world. Specialist mechanics tending indoor machinery might rate as "indoor" servants, of course, but the stokers and coal-carriers for the steam generator in an outbuilding would certainly be "outdoor" staff.

## The Servant's Life

Domestic service wasn't always a great job, but it had its compensations, especially at medium to high levels. For a start, the pay was sometimes decent, although it partly took the form of accommodation and food. Both might be much better for "upper" than for "lower" servants, the latter living off cheap food and scraps and sleeping in attics. Some clothes were supplied and might be designed to bring prestige to the house. In an age when the poor didn't get to dress very well, even a junior footman might enjoy a flashy, stylish uniform.

British servants were notorious for expecting generous tips ("vails") from guests in the house. It was said that being invited to dinner in a grand house could end up costing as much as buying the same dinner in a tavern, because of all the tips.

Servants sometimes traveled a little of the world – their own country or even fashionable foreign lands. Lucky, hardworking servants could work their way up the system to a well-paid supervisory position, or save enough money to start a shop. Less lucky or capable ex-servants could and did end up dying in poverty.

## Servants in Play

The obvious problem with servants as PCs is the usual one with any protagonist in a long-hours job with a boss with strong authority: lack of agency. Theoretically, servants have limited powers of choice; ignoring their employer's instructions is a quick way to lose the job, especially given Steam Age levels of employment protection (almost nothing). However, few employers supervise everything that servants do; what would be the point of hiring people if they can't be trusted to do the job? If the work gets done,

servants usually receive as much leeway as most competent employees – although Steam Age employers may feel entitled to supervise their staff's morality and private lives. Historically, good servants were hard to find (at least according to standard employer grumbles), and would need some training to fit in with a household's way of doing things, so sacking them on whim would be foolish.

Thus, in game terms, it's quite feasible to have groups of servants as PCs; they can get stuff done while an employer (hopefully a useful Patron) sails through life. Alternatively, games can have "mixed" parties of employers and staff; the former can handle strategic planning and interactions with high-class NPCs, while the servants handle details, deal with the lower classes, and provide sensible advice. Good servants were expected to be alert, anticipate problems, and deal with them smoothly. Some also had useful experience in, say, the military. Few people would happily hire known former criminals, but a high-minded employer might decide to give a reformed rogue, recommended perhaps by the local priest, a second chance. Nonetheless, Social Stigma (Criminal Record) would make a servant the first suspect when something bad happened.

It's also reasonable to have the employers as PCs and personal servants as Allies. In that case, it's best for a servant Ally to have one or two crucial skills at high levels, and probably one strong character trait. The servant then comes in to perform specific tasks, or to provide roleplaying opportunities, without overshadowing the PCs. Alternatively, the PC could be a highly competent servant, with the employer a bit of an idiot and an NPC. An idiot employer may work better as an Ally than as a Patron; he can provide a way to solve specific problems – mostly through Wealth, Status, and roleplaying opportunities – without overshadowing the associated PC (the *Jeeves and Wooster* model).

> *Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them?*
>
> *– Oscar Wilde,*
> **The Importance of Being Earnest**

# HYSTERIA, FAINTING, AND THE VAPORS

One notorious tendency of some individuals in Steam Age fiction is "fainting dead away" or suffering attacks of hysteria at minimal provocation, including minor social gaffes. Steampunk games don't *have* to reflect this, and to the extent that some do, these behaviors can be represented perfectly well by various results on the *Fright Check Table* (pp. B360-361). In other games, the phenomenon merits special treatment. Any Gothic story worth its salt is at least partly about failings in the "respectable" order of things, and screampunk games may feature individuals who just can't deal with this at all.

This is the flipside of another common assumption about Steam Age heroes – that they are notably fearless, with well-starched upper lips (implying high Will and levels of Fearlessness, in **GURPS** terms). In fact, the two things may be linked: A hero with absolute confidence in the social order may withstand threats to life and limb, or the sight of a little gore, by leaning on his core ideals – but then, threats to those ideals become horrific in themselves.

In the fiction of the period, characters who fainted dead away under stress, or suffered attacks of "the vapors," were almost always female. However, steampunk brings a modern sensibility and sense of equality to the setting, so there's no reason to enforce such sexist assumptions. After all, some games will doubtless feature delicate male aesthetes or neurasthenic horror protagonist/victims, who can be far more emotionally fragile than many steampunk heroines.

In settings where this sort of response is common, it may even be *expected;* nobody will be too surprised at persons of delicate sensibilities fainting away. Indeed, a carefully executed "social faint" might *actually* be a way of demonstrating refined sensibilities and showing disapproval of others' behavior. Those who want to use this trick might take a perk, *Perfect Social Faint,* which enables them to seem to faint at will, with the equivalent of Acting skill at IQ, always falling gracefully in a way that avoids the risk of physical injury.

## The Terror of Social Disorder

Terror caused by simple physical danger, violent threats, gore, or confrontations with mortality is handled by the standard **GURPS** Fright Check rules. *Social disorder* merits different treatment.

The terror of social disorder plagues an orderly, formal society in which everyone knows his place. Society dictates what a man is and how he lives, and embodies what is right and wrong in the form of etiquette and taboos – and when things go off track, some people just can't handle it *at all.* The Victorians are proud of their civic institutions, so someone who is deliberately antisocial or tries to isolate himself from conventional society is automatically suspicious. Threats to the fabric of society (such as political scandals, agitation among the working classes, or riots on the streets) are strong thematic indicators that a darkness is at work in the land – and so are *terrifying.* Even rudeness and unfamiliarity are small but real challenges to "good order."

## Fright Checks From Social Disorder

A variant type of Fright Check might be triggered by an event which threatens or shatters someone's "respectable" worldview, such as discovering that an ancestor committed vile crimes, finding oneself open to blackmail, seeing a mob storming the houses of Parliament, or learning that the local vicar does not believe in God. In these terms, the most delicate flowers, who faint away at impoliteness or the slightest unfamiliar sight, are merely displaying hypersensitivity to disorder – failing Fright Checks because of low Will or other disadvantages, despite large bonuses. Because this sort of "Fright" is not a surprise or something requiring a snap response, but is an insidious assault on one's sense of what is right, the Combat Reflexes advantage gives no bonus to these rolls. The Fearlessness (p. B55) and Unfazeable (p. B95) advantages provide their usual resistance even to social-disorder-related Fright Checks.

The snag here is that players may argue that their own characters are people who stand outside the "respectable" order, and who therefore are not especially worried by this sort of experience. There are three ways to handle this, depending on the tone of the game.

● *Those who do not have Unfazeable must be susceptible to any form of social disorder.* However, Unfazeable can be restricted by the type of trauma which a person can endure. Two new special limitations may be available for this advantage: *Upright Soul,* worth -20%, makes the person susceptible to social disorder but *not* to Intimidation or to the sort of terrors that would scare any normal human being, such as rampaging monsters or seeing a friend killed messily (perhaps because he draws absolute confidence from belief in the social order). *Social Outsider,* worth -40%, makes someone susceptible to those ordinary horrors (and to Intimidation) but unworried by social disorder (because what courage he has is at least his own).

For extra detail, these limitations also could apply to Fearlessness (p. B55), while Fearfulness (p. B136) could take a -60% limitation if it doesn't apply to social disorder rolls and -80% if it *only* applies to those.

● *Those who do not have Unfazeable must be susceptible to social disorder, but what each person reacts to varies.* For example, respectable folk will be frightened by a breakdown in the established order. A dedicated anarchist, who would laugh at that, would suffer a social disorder Fright Check at a revelation that implies that human beings *need* strong government. A solipsistic Nietzschean, who disdains the weakness of others, could be instantly terrified by any evidence that he has weaknesses. This requires that everyone has a declared set of ideals which they hate to see violated, with "conventional respectability" as the default; some unusual ideals *also* may qualify as quirks, because they provide roleplaying opportunities.

● *Being terrified by social disorder is a personal weakness.* This is represented by a disadvantage, *Phobia (Social Disorder)*. As with any Phobia (pp. B148-150), exposure to the subject triggers a self-control roll, with failure treated as a failed Fright Check. However, use the *Shocking Revelations Table* (below) instead of the standard *Fright Check Table*. Also, if the person *succeeds* at the self-control roll, he doesn't suffer any continuing DX/IQ/skill penalty, and he must only reroll for continued exposure every 30 minutes, not every 10; social disorder merely offends a sense of propriety, rather than triggering deep terror. Hence, this Phobia's base value is -10 points, despite the fact that social disorder should come up rather frequently in play. If this Phobia is combined with high Will or Fearlessness, it suggests that the hero draws confidence from the conventional order of things. Fearlessness and Unfazeable are no help with Phobia responses, of course.

In any case, when someone fail a Fright Check due to social disorder, determine the result in the usual way, but consult the *Shocking Revelations Table* (below) in place of the one in the **Basic Set.** The results aren't quite as severe overall as for regular Fright Checks, because the triggers are less *terrifying* than bloody gore or immediate threats to life and limb, but are suitably melodramatic.

## Shocking Revelations Table

The effect of *swooning* is identical to being mentally stunned (p. B420), but includes dizziness and breathing difficulties. *Hysteria* has a similar effect in game terms, but involves more noise. Recovery rolls for both are made against IQ, but take *no* bonus for the Combat Reflexes advantage; this is a matter of social propriety, not crisis response. Traditional treatments involve sweet tea, wafting smelling salts around the victim's nose, loosening the collar or corset, or a slap to the face (in the case of hysteria). Any of these allow the victim to make an immediate recovery roll at +2 (one such attempt per distinct type of treatment administered).

Rolls described below as "unmodified" are made against the listed attribute; for rolls described as "modified," the attribute takes the same situational modifiers as the original Fright

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## ALL IS LOST!

Leaving aside social disorder (see *The Terror of Social Disorder*, p. 40), many things might trigger standard Fright Checks in a steampunk game, especially one in the Gothic/screampunk mode. In particular, there is no horror like that of being utterly *powerless*.

What provokes this terror can vary between individuals. People of action feel powerless when it isn't clear that any action will help; perhaps an opponent is unknown, or unassailable. People of science feel powerless when facing the forces of unreason; none of his knowledge will be any use. People of faith feel powerless in the face of untold horrors which no just God would allow. In such a scenario, the skills on which the protagonists have relied are suddenly irrelevant and useless. Anyone may also feel powerless when imprisoned – and Gothic stories are often full of dank dungeons and heavy chains.

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Check, or roll against the Phobia's self-control number if the original roll was actually a failed self-control roll for a Phobia.

**4 –** *Mild shock.* Swoon decorously for one second, then recover automatically.

**5-7 –** *The vapors.* The victim is stricken with a ghastly pallor as the blood rushes from his head. Swoon for one second, then roll vs. unmodified IQ to snap out of it once per second.

**8 –** *Uncontrollable shaking.* Swoon for one second, then roll vs. modified IQ once per second to snap out of it. The victim feels icy cold and is wracked by shivers while the effect lasts (-2 to DX).

**9 –** *Scream!* Snap into hysteria for 1d seconds. The victim can only scream at the top of his lungs, then recovers automatically.

**10 –** *Prostrate with shock.* Faint clean away for 1d seconds, falling to the ground if currently standing, but gently and so without injury on normal surfaces. After that, once per second, roll vs. modified Will to come around.

**11-12 –** *Wild hysteria.* Uncontrollable laughter, screaming, or loud weeping for 2d seconds; then, once per second, roll vs. modified IQ to recover.

**13 –** *Grim understanding.* Past events play out in the victim's mind, and suddenly everything becomes clear! Treat as 2d seconds of Mild Flashbacks effects (p. B136); the GM should describe the content in detail.

**14 –** *Horrid dreams.* Oh, stiff upper lip and all that by day – but such visions at night! Treat as 1d nights of Nightmares (9) (pp. B144-145).

**15 –** *Inadequate repression.* You suffer no immediate effects, but 10 seconds later, reroll the Fright Check at an additional -10.

**16 –** *Sleepwalking.* The victim walks in his sleep, a wraith-like figure who moves under a volition not of his own; 1d nights of Nightmares (6) (pp. B144-145) and Sleepwalker (6) (p. B154).

**17 –** *Blanch!* As 10, but the Will rolls are at -2, and within 24 hours, a lock of the victim's hair turns white with shock, giving Distinctive Features (p. B165).

**18-19 –** *Moments of weakness.* No immediate effect, but if alcohol, drugs, sex, etc. are offered during the next 1d days, the victim must make a Will-3 roll or succumb as if he had failed to resist Alcoholism, Addiction, Lecherousness, etc.

**20 –** *Fit of rage.* The victim flies into a violent frenzy, smashing things and foaming at the mouth. This is similar to a failed self-control roll with Berserk (p. B124), but victims can restrict themselves to inanimate targets if they wish. After the victim breaks something substantial, downs a living target, or does himself an injury, or when a friend tries to calm him down, roll against unmodified Will to snap out of the rage; find a new target if that fails.

**21 –** *Overwhelmed!* It's all too much; even the slightest stimulation interferes with rational thought. The victim just wants to be left alone. Treat as 1d hours of Confused (9) (p. B129).

**22 –** *Rats in the walls.* Low-level hallucinations convince the victim that someone or something is constantly threatening him. Acquire a Minor Delusion (p. B130) *and* Paranoia (p. B148) for the next 1d hours.

**23 –** *Shut out the world!* The traumatized victim retreats into himself, losing both the desire and the ability to interact with others. Treat as 1d hours of Crippling Shyness (p. B154). Any further Fright Checks of any sort in this period are at an additional *-15.*

**24 –** *Numb to it all.* In his shocked state, the victim ceases to care whether he lives or dies. Treat as 1d hours of On the Edge (6) (pp. B146-7).

**25 –** *Transient fear.* Acquire a Phobia (pp. B148-150) of the GM's choice, worth -10 points, lasting for the next 2d days.

**26 –** *Discouraged.* Just as the victim's confidence in the world has been shaken, so too has his confidence in himself. The victim suffers from Low Self-Image (p. B143) for 3d hours.

**27 –** *Hysterical incapacity.* Faint for 1d minutes, and lose *either* the sense of sight *or* the ability to speak, for 1d hours (GM decides or selects randomly); treat as either Blindness (p. B124) or Mute (p. B125).

**28 –** *Regression.* Faint for 1d minutes. When he comes round, the victim has retreated for 1d hours into a happier, child-like state as a temporary respite from the horrors around him. Treat as -5 to IQ and a Major Delusion (p. B130).

**29-30 –** *Transient desire.* Acquire an unhealthy, ghoulish long-term Obsession (9) (p. B146). After 2d weeks, roll once a week against Will-2 to get rid of this.

**31 –** *Depressed.* The victim goes into a dark funk of incessant suicidal thoughts. Treat as 1d days of Chronic Depression (9) (p. B126).

**32-33 –** *Darkness revealed!* Once the world has revealed its secrets, the stressed mind is bound to do the same. Treat as 1d+1 days of Split Personality (9) (p. B156), with the GM shifting some of the victim's defining traits to one personality "package" and then creating a secondary personality with a completely different "package" which embodies the victim's darkest urges.

**34 –** *Loss of identity.* Identity is your place in the world. Once that is turned upside down, who are you really? Treat as 1d days of Callous (p. B125), Confused (12) (p. B129), Indecisive (9) (p. B140), *and* Short Attention Span (9) (p. B153).

**35-36 –** *Dark revelation!* This traumatic experience is a sign from the Lord! The victim has had a conversion on the road to Damascus and just found God . . . or *something.*

# SCANDALOUS VICTORIANS

The Victorian era has a strait-laced reputation, as compared to the modern era, which in many respects is deserved. (These Victorian attitudes actually developed partly as a reaction to more casual Georgian standards.) However, on some issues, a tolerant Victorian attitude has today been replaced by restrictiveness. To capture the flavor of the time, think *different* more than *prudish.* Also, note that strict morality was largely the concern of the middle classes, who had the most to lose if they were thought less than respectable. The upper classes could get away with more, because money buys tolerance (although anything that threatened the secure inheritance of wealth was beyond the pale), while the poor didn't have to care what people thought.

## *Sexuality*

In matters of sex, many Victorians held to the stereotype that women were incapable of enjoying such matters, and endured their husbands' attentions out of affection and a desire for children. Yet, many knew at heart that this wasn't true. This led to some weird intellectual contortions and occasionally a tendency to treat female sexual desire as a medical problem. Men, conversely, were quietly acknowledged to have sexual desires, which needed outlets.

So, while respectable women were supposed to protect their chastity at any cost, and phrases such as "a ruined woman" and "a fate worse than death" were meant seriously, *prostitution* thrived, from celebrity demimondaines, through house girls, down to the poor streetwalkers. Many (possibly most) men were at least occasional customers – which, in an era when there was no safe treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, was a significant public health problem.

For the unhappily married, divorce was incredibly hard to arrange, and even more scandalous and disgraceful. Moreover, those who could afford the process could equally afford to keep up appearances while doing as they pleased. Hence, *adultery* was far from unknown. Both men and women had love affairs, sometimes prolonged ones. In France, it was taken for granted that a man who could afford it would have a mistress. In Britain, the upper classes often thought the same way. In either country, married women sometimes had discreet affairs. The important thing was to avoid scandal. A gentleman didn't talk about his conquests, write explicit love letters (although some slipped up, leading to classic detective story blackmail plots), or make physical demonstrations before witnesses. A lady was even more discreet. If such rules were followed, it was possible for an affair to go on for years, sometimes without hard feelings on any side. For example, when Edward VII was on his deathbed, Queen Alexandra made a point of giving his last mistress a chance to visit him.

Treat as 1d days of Fanaticism (p. B136) toward a cause or ideal as dark, twisted, and weird as the GM can create. Then roll vs. IQ-3 at the end of each day; one success on this roll converts the Fanaticism to an Obsession (p. B146) with promoting the belief, a second reduces it to a quirk-level belief, and a third eliminates that quirk. But if the victim does anything horrible while following the temporary belief, he may have to make another Fright Check when he returns to his proper mind, possibly at large penalties.

**37-38 –** *Devastated!* What does anything matter now? The victim becomes a shuffling husk of his former self. Treat as 1d days of Slave Mentality (p. B154), with anyone who tells the victim at all forcefully to do anything treated as the "master."

**39+ –** *Forever changed.* Acquire a *permanent* Phobia or other mental disadvantage(s) of the GM's choice, worth -15 points.

> *Dress becomes a very symbolic language – a kind of personal glossary – a special body of phrenology, the study of which it would be madness to neglect . . .*
> **– The Quarterly Review**
> *(1847)*

# DRESSING THE PART

When people talk about "period costume," for the Steam Age or most other periods, they all too often mean *upper-class* costume, along with a few military uniforms and maybe oddities such as explorers' gear. The plain smocks, rough jackets and pants, or rugged overalls of the mass of the working classes aren't as interesting, and didn't change as often or as much. However, the Steam Age did see a degree of democratization in fashion which meant that many aspects discussed below were seen on the streets as well as in fashionable salons – albeit perhaps in scruffy, second-hand, or even parodic form. This was, after all, the period that invented something like the modern popular fashion business. And steampunk fashion often involves playing games with historical styles.

One consequence of the stratification of Steam Age society is that the skill used to keep up to date with higher-class (Status 1+) fashions is Current Affairs (High Society); one reads high-class journals for the latest news of court dress as well as grand opera. Characters operating at Status 0 or lower use Current Affairs (Popular Culture) to track trends appropriate to that milieu, which sometimes shadow higher-class trends a few months behind, and sometimes go their own way.

In any case, the key feature of Steam Age dress, especially for women, is of course a concern with modesty that would seem bizarre to modern Westerners. In particular, no faintly respectable woman would ever show her legs in public. Even ankles were too much for most people, most of the time. Other parts of the body were sometimes tolerated; daring Napoleonic-period dresses were practically transparent, and grand early Victorian dresses left the shoulders bare and showed impressive amounts of upper chest. But by the end of the century, dress design quite deliberately set out to hide any hint of the wearer's real shape. Modern steampunk fashions, though, are more relaxed.

Etiquette often required lots of different clothes for different situations and times of day, again especially for women. However, this wasn't as expensive as it might have been, because ladies, even at quite high Status levels, could respectably make up or adjust a lot of their own clothes. A high-Status lady also had a personal "lady's maid" whose duties included maintaining and adjusting her clothes. If more effort or skill was needed, there were plenty of freelance professional seamstresses. Of course, this in turn required a good working knowledge of current fashions. Being a lady within a household of any substance was a full-time job requiring skills such as Current Affairs (High Culture), Merchant, Savoir-Faire (High Society), and Sewing.

## Fashion Sense

Fashion Sense (p. B21) becomes very useful for "dressing the part." Someone with this advantage automatically knows what will look appropriate in a situation, which gives +1 (or more, if the GM thinks it's especially useful) to any skill roll where correct clothing styles matter, such as Savoir-Faire to fit into a high-society event or Sewing to adjust a costume to match current trends. Someone in a new area or returning from far away must spend a day watching fashionable people around town, or spend 1d hours with a stack of appropriate magazines and then make a successful roll against Current Affairs (High Culture), to claim this bonus.

Fashion Sense is a wonderful advantage for a lady's maid. It also can enable a lower-class woman with Sewing skill to become a successful seamstress (+2 to job rolls, p. B516) – a potentially profitable occupation which can lead to useful connections in high society.

In addition, someone with this advantage may be able to create fashionable-looking costumes that negate some of the problems with period garb, such as restrictive movement. Creating a socially acceptable outfit that is less inconvenient than it looks requires extra time (for complex adjustments or careful shopping) and either extensive use of Sewing skill or a 50% increase in clothing costs. However, the weight for the outfit is then halved, reducing encumbrance accordingly, and all other penalties due to inconvenient clothing are halved when that outfit is the one being worn. How long it remains intact and fashionable is then up to the GM.

# GEORGIAN COSTUME

The very beginning of the Steam Age saw a lot of fancy early Georgian styles going out of fashion. Gentlemen mostly gave up wearing wigs or powdering their hair by the end of the 18th century. Wealthy ladies found themselves being mocked for the sort of fancy headpieces which once would have been admired, and they gave up huge hooped skirts (except at court). Plainer styles became a mark of respectability – though only *relatively* plain; silks and fine embroidery remained a good way to proclaim one's wealth and taste for both men and women, if chosen carefully. Umbrellas, once seen as pretentious, became widespread.

The basic pattern of costumes for well-off men featured a hat, a cravat, a coat or jacket over a short waistcoat (often the fanciest part of the outfit) and undershirt, knee-breeches, stockings, and shoes. In the early 19th century, the courtier and dandy Beau Brummell led a revolution in British male fashion. Fashionable gentlemen began to spend hours constructing an image of elegant simplicity, and top hats replaced the older bicorns and tricorns.

Wealthy women wore ornate dresses for show. By late in the 18th century, these changed from highly decorated gowns (worn over rigid stays) to a more "neoclassical" style, with thin fabrics (semitransparent, even, in the 1790s), low necklines, and high waists.

Working-class men went from smocks to shirts with trousers or breeches. (In France, the fancy silk knee-breeches worn by the rich were called *culottes,* so working class revolutionaries, who wore plain trousers, were known as *sans-culottes* – "without-breeches.") Working-class women's dresses became simpler, more comfortable, and cleaner, as global trade and the Industrial Revolution brought cheap cotton. This fabric made lighter dresses which could be washed more easily.

# VICTORIAN COSTUME

Victorian clothing evolved from this starting point to something fairly modern. Higher-class men adopted trousers instead of breeches in the 1830s (except for very formal occasions and horseback riding), showing their wealth with colorful and expensive fabrics. Long, tight-fitting frock coats (for indoor as well as outdoor wear) became the norm in the 1840s. Modern-style three-piece suits appeared in the 1870s, and blazers for casual wear in the 1890s. The fashion in neckwear shifted from cravats to ties through the century. Top hats remained the norm, although other styles also appeared – bowlers (initially for the working classes), for example, and straw boaters for outdoor casual wear.

Women's fashion took increasingly substantial forms early in this period. Skirts were initially bulked up with lots of petticoats, and later with the crinoline (a rigid, circular, cage-like structure). In the 1870s, the full crinoline was replaced by the bustle – a framework or pad, worn to raise and extend the back of a woman's skirt – which lasted to the end of the century. The Victorian corset was originally a lighter structure than the cumbersome "stays" of the Georgian era, but it developed for the worse in the middle of the century, being increasingly reinforced, first with whalebone and then with steel. However, probably only extreme fashion victims actually used tight-lacing to give themselves 18-inch waists. (Incidentally, quite a few men also wore corsets, to give themselves slim waists and upright postures, if not usually as extreme as the female versions.)

The invention of the sewing machine in the middle of the 19th century made an important difference to clothing styles, as complex decorations and fittings could now be attached to ordinary clothes reasonably cheaply. Similarly, machine-made lace provided another affordable option.

Women's hats often included fancy feathers – tragic news for a lot of tropical birds, as whole populations around the world were wiped out by feather hunters.

Clothing styles were immensely important in the Victorian era, especially for women, as this was an incredibly status-conscious era. Everyone was expected to show their standing in how they dressed, sometimes in quite complex and subtle ways. Good levels of Savoir-Faire skill include detailed knowledge of what is appropriate for any given individual. (Sex Appeal for respectable women might mean a *lot* of fluttering of fans, because dressing sexy was unthinkable, whereas fan-fluttering was a fine art.) Well-off ladies in small towns could be fairly relaxed about this, as they all knew each other and didn't have to flag their standing too specifically, but when they visited the big city, they consulted etiquette manuals or fashion magazines first, to avoid embarrassing errors. Something which had been considered flashy or daring or classy a few years before might have become the norm.

For even more complications, when someone died, their friends and relations would go into mourning for extended periods, which meant wearing only the correct, black clothes. There were complex rules for how long mourning should last for people with a particular degree of connection to the deceased, and what this meant in terms of clothing.

## Dyes

Cloth has to be dyed if it is to be at all fancy. That isn't as trivial as it sounds, and the story of dyes is important in the Steam Age.

At the start of the period, most dyes were "natural" products, often plant extracts, and tended to be expensive and not colorfast. Many chemists dabbled in this area – good dyes fetched good prices. For example, "Scheele's Green," a rich emerald color created in 1775, became popular in the early 19th century for clothing, paints, wallpaper, and even in foodstuffs. Unfortunately, Scheele's Green was an arsenic compound and seriously toxic (see p. B439). Even given the lack of safety standards of Victorian industry, this was widely recognized as a bad idea; there are stories of fashionable young women dying in agony after inhaling particles flaking off their ball gowns. Arsenic-based dyes were eventually phased out.

In 1856, a British chemist discovered a purple dye, which he named "mauveine," and the modern synthetic dye industry was born. Synthetic dyes were much cheaper, lasted longer, and were easier to use. Other researchers created other colors, and in the 1870s, the highly organized German chemical industry took the lead in the field. This, combined with other technological and social developments, ensured that popular women's fashion could henceforth feature bold, colorful designs. Although the pendulum of fashion sometimes swung back to subtlety, clothing colors in general tended to be much brighter from then on. In *GURPS* terms, standard clothes for even moderate-Status folk at TL6 and above can look quite different from those at TL5.

### Rational Dress and Bloomers

Not everyone saw cumbersome Victorian high-fashion styles as a good thing. All that bulky fabric obviously got in the way, the sheer weight was exhausting, and tight-laced corsets were worse; they could actually damage a woman's internal organs, and some doctors actively campaigned against them. Feminists of the period created the "rational dress movement" from the 1850s onward, which was associated with campaigns for temperance, votes for women, and moral purity.

Although the movement had allies among clergymen (who thought that tight-lacing was vain) and doctors (who knew that it was downright dangerous), the fashion world fought back determinedly. All "rational dress" advocates really achieved was to convince some women to wear less restrictive underwear, and when the bicycle became popular, some daring ladies adopted short-skirted costumes when riding. Despite achieving only limited success, though, they kept fighting, and female PCs in historical campaigns may well be sympathizers.

By the end of the century, the Rational Dress Society also was campaigning for the weight of a fashionable woman's costume to be *reduced* to about 7 lbs. – from *37*. Related movements, mostly in Britain from the 1860s on, promoted simple "artistic" dress in muted colors and pseudo-medieval styles. This was mostly an aesthetic reaction to complicated and artificial Victorian fashions, but "artistic" dress was also more comfortable and easier to wear.

One of the most outrageous-seeming ideas, by the standards of the time, appeared in 1849. Baggy "Turkish style" pantaloons for women were invented in America to replace the heavy multi-layered petticoats of the time. They became a popular fad, promoted by temperance activist Amelia Bloomer. However, "bloomers" were made so baggy and bulky themselves, to preserve respectability, that they were only a marginal improvement. Bloomer herself abandoned the idea in 1857, saying that she found the new crinoline more comfortable. Still, bloomers remained popular among hardworking women on the western U.S. frontier, and enjoyed new popularity in the 1890s as cycling and athletic wear.

## EDWARDIAN AND PRE-WWI COSTUME

In the early 20th century, clothing styles hit various extremes, before the austerity and materials shortages of WWI brought things back down to earth, and the end of the Steam Age was reflected in fashion. Corsets evolved into rigid S-shaped designs, pushing the bust forward and the bottom backward (and making the bustle unnecessary), but at least reducing pressure on the abdomen. Women then began demanding lighter "dance corsets" which permitted easier movement at social events, before corsets fell out of fashion entirely. Around the same time, designers were developing what would eventually become the modern bra, although it did not really catch on until after WWI.

Although there was a passing fashion for "hobble skirts," so narrow at the hem as to prevent fast movement, skirt lengths began to shorten a little; ankles stopped being seen as indecent, prefiguring the radical shift in standards after WWI. Fashionable ladies wore big hats; the arrival of the motor car made veils popular for ladies who wanted to drive or be driven at speed, which might describe many steampunk heroines. After 1910, fashionable clothes became softer and looser, with a fad for an "oriental" look.

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## STEAMPUNKING OTHER GENRES

For those who want to insert bits of steampunk stuff into games which aren't explicitly steampunk, the trick is to isolate the bits that matter for the purpose. If it's just the look, that's mostly a question of verbal descriptions. For example, a **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** knight in armor can wear polished steel or smoke-darkened brass with large rivets, and if it weighs the same for the same cost and DR value, there's no game-mechanical issue. Likewise, maybe a TL10 spaceship has circular portholes and a computer that speaks through a conical horn because the designers thought that it was cool and could afford the small extra weight.

If the GM want functional steampunk technology, he *can* throw it in at whim, but players may want to know where they send their characters to purchase more or get it fixed. Some players may suffer problems with suspension of disbelief if a TL3 society produces TL6 steam trains, or TL11 robots have clockwork limbs that seem to have been built at TL4. The latter might be a matter purely of appearance – those limbs are actually built at TL11, with advanced materials and powerful microtech actuators, and the look is just how the technology evolved. The former could be a hint that there's actually a more advanced technological culture in some corner of the map; see *Steampunked High Fantasy,* p. 24.

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## PERIOD PUNK AND RAYGUN GOTHIC

Steampunk often approaches things – including clothing – anachronistically, and mechanic-adventurers and mad scientists can certainly be expected to dress unusually. Steampunk fashion often appears as a witty parody of real period styles, which would fit the mood of many steampunk stories. Most notably, steampunks often treat corsets as outerwear, in a way which would have been considered grossly indecent historically; they are rarely very tight-laced and may well be highly decorated.

When adding in a dose of raygun Gothic (pp. 26-27), things get rather more modern. Styles of the 1920s and 1930s allow more comfortable and practical clothing, with, for example, bras replacing corsets, and active women wearing pants (albeit often tight pants) rather than skirts. Raygun Gothic clothes can involve leather in quantities which would have been unthinkable for women historically, and unlikely for men apart from specialist driving or sports gear.

The love of weird and wonderful machinery means that clothes appropriate for mechanics and pilots are seen as status symbols rather than work wear.

## Goggles

Modern steampunks love goggles, which provide a quick way to make period costumes look offbeat. They are appropriate for drivers or pilots who operate fast vehicles, or scientists or inventors working with exotic rays or risking splashes from dangerous chemicals. (Cosplayers aiming for the vehicle operator look add flying helmets and other practical leather garb; those aiming for the scientist/maker look may wear little tools slung through loops, and protective gauntlets and aprons.) *Tinted* goggles may be available in some settings. These also protect against bright light, for those operating in equatorial deserts or arctic snowfields, but they are not usually effective against unnatural effects such as superscience rays unless specifically developed for the purpose.

All this is historically reasonable enough. Goggles (or other eye protection, such as veils) were a necessity with early open-topped automobiles with minimal windscreens, and aviation pioneers adopted them for the same reason. Likewise, inventors or craftsmen might indeed need their own eye protection.

# ETIQUETTE

Modern steampunk tends to romanticize one very real feature of the Steam Age: an obsession with etiquette. The Steam Age was certainly one of high formality by modern standards, and period stories give enough hint of the complexities to fascinate modern readers. Whether such formality is entertaining or aggravating is a matter of personal taste – and also of how far it limits one's own prospects. Mannerspunk stories and games (p. 24) focus on this.

At middling to higher levels of society, etiquette determines a large part of someone's life – especially if they are a respectable lady. It not only defines which cutlery to use when eating, correct clothing (see pp. 43-48), and correct forms of address (pp. 37, 48), but also requires an extensive pattern of visiting and being visited, sometimes actually meeting the other person, sometimes just leaving a card. In extreme circumstances, it determines when and how to "cut" others, pointedly ignoring them to make it clear that they are *unacceptable.*

> *By his millions of followers the Aga Khan is regarded as a direct descendant of God. An English Duke takes precedence.*
>
> *– apocryphal, attributed to* **Debrett's Correct Form**

## FORMAL MANNERS

Formal systems of "good manners," represented in **GURPS** by Savoir-Faire (High Society) skill (p. B218), are a way of dividing the properly brought-up from the rabble. When manners are complicated enough, they can be used very effectively to make outsiders feel unwanted. If they are very specific and written down, as is the case in Steam Age society, they can also provide a key to social advancement for those with the time and dedication to master them. An etiquette manual and preferably a friendly higher-class advisor can be invaluable to the social adventurer seeking to learn the rules, or just get by for a short time. Not only can Savoir-Faire skill be learned by self-teaching or education (p. B293), but points to put in Status also might be acquired the same way.

Furthermore, Victorian-style etiquette makes it challenging for the *less* wealthy to gain access to high society, by prescribing rules that cost a lot of money to obey. When someone who wants to be respected may have to wear several different, smart sets of clothes in one day; host large formal dinners from time to time; and give appropriate gifts on specific occasions, respectability *costs.* A hero who somehow acquires Status without the Wealth or cash reserves to support it by paying the appropriate cost of living (p. B265) will soon, effectively, drop back down.

### Passing for Posh

Those attempting short-term infiltrations of high society, in places where their actual Status is currently unknown, might use mastery of formal manners to create a deceptive impression, or might try a bluff based on well-placed expenditures. Someone's current effective Status is the level for which he is paying the appropriate cost of living. Maintaining an illusion of higher Status requires a Savoir-Faire (High Society) roll on each encounter with high-Status NPCs, at -2 for each level by which the adventurer's effective level falls short of the target. Alternatively, spend at least 10% of the usual monthly cost of living for the target level *per day,* and make one unmodified Savoir-Faire roll on each day. Spending more gives a cumulative +1 to the roll for each *extra* 5% paid out, up to +5 for +25% on top of the 10%. In all cases, Acting or Fast-Talk, both at -4, can substitute for Savoir-Faire; a really good bluff can stand in for actual manners.

*Example:* Clarissa is currently living at Status 1, paying the appropriate $1,200 a month, but needs to pass as Status 3 when she arrives in town, in order to infiltrate an aristocratic conspiracy. She could try to make a Savoir-Faire roll at -4 on *each* encounter with the conspirators, in order to bamboozle them with perfect manners, or spend $1,200 a day (10% of the $12,000 monthly cost of living for Status 3) and make just one unmodified roll each day. But as she's very well-funded, can complete her mission within 24 hours, and is an extremely good actress, she actually spends $2,400 (an extra 10%), which allows her one roll against Savoir-Faire at +2. As her Acting is far better than her Savoir-Faire, she instead chooses to use Acting (at a net -2) to pass as "Lady Clarissa."

Also, a *lot* of money *might* serve to cover lapses of manners – especially for someone who is prepared, say, to pay gambling debts promptly, or buy plenty of drinks, or donate to good causes, providing a polite cover for the process of buying people off. As a guideline, a failed Savoir-Faire roll with significant consequences might be negated by taking one day and spending at least 5% of the monthly cost of living for the Status you are attempting to present per point of failure on that roll. One or more rolls also may be needed against whatever skills the GM considers relevant (such as Connoisseur to play the "patron of the arts" card, or Heraldry to pull an outrageous bluff with a faked coat of arms).

*Example (continued):* Clarissa fails that Acting roll, but only by one, so the GM allows her player to attempt a recovery. A roll against Current Affairs (People) provides the information that the most influential ladies of the town are sponsoring a missionary society, so Clarissa sends an "anonymous" donation of $600, carried by a servant in her own livery. This ensures that she is noticed by one of those ladies in the street; 10 minutes of excruciatingly trivial conversation and a successful Diplomacy roll later, and "Lady Clarissa" is back in the social game, her mistake treated as some kind of forgivable provincial lapse.

### Low-End Fakery

Characters with negative Status trying to fake slightly higher standing can also use these rules, but with different skills. A Status -2 character seeking to fake Status -1 uses IQ or Streetwise in place of Savoir-Faire. Status -2 or -1 trying to pass as Status 0 uses IQ or Acting.

## More on Savoir-Faire Skills

As the above illustrates, Savoir-Faire can be a crucial skill in play. The required specialty for High Society is the most important one in most steampunk games, providing knowledge of all sorts of signs and signals. No one can know everything, of course, so the sensible social climber keeps an etiquette book or two at home, to check how to deal with new situations – guessing isn't good enough! *Not* having access to such references (which are normally covered by cost of living) may give penalties to the skill, at the GM's whim; this is an unfamiliarity penalty for specific circumstances. Failures caused by this lack can include things like getting obscure titles or detailed orders of precedence wrong.

Low-Status individuals who have occasion to deal with the upper classes can use Savoir-Faire (High Society) to show off "surprisingly good manners," employing it as an Influence skill (p. B359) in contexts where the GM agrees that this will

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# MORE SCANDALOUS VICTORIANS

If Victorian views of sex (see *Scandalous Victorians,* p. 42) seem confused today, the period view of other vices can seem more simply dated.

## Smoking

No laws against tobacco existed, but in the middle and upper classes, there was a strict etiquette. One did not smoke in the presence of one's superiors unless invited to do so – and some, such as Queen Victoria, were fiercely opposed to the habit. In fact, ladies often found smoking repulsive, so after dinner, gentlemen went to a separate room for brandy and cigars. The smoking jacket was invented to keep the smell of tobacco (and also smudgy, often *hot* ash) off one's regular clothing. The question "Shall we join the ladies?" was then the signal to leave the smoking room.

Under less formal circumstances, one might ask permission to smoke, especially of one's equals. In environments where ladies were not expected to be present, including bars and many businesses, men smoked freely. (Barmaids didn't count as ladies.) Women were generally not supposed to smoke at all, though some did – normally in private, to avoid a bad reputation. Female smoking could symbolize independent thought.

## Other Drugs

The Steam Age was *not* engaged in a "war on drugs." Several recreational substances were known, and their addictive properties were *partly* understood, but addiction was seen in Western countries mostly as a personal weakness or tragedy, not as an issue for governments. Few drugs would count as "illegal" when assessing the value of the Addiction disadvantage.

The power of opiates was known, and "opium dens" were seen as the haunts of sad addicts, often of Asian origin. However, opium could still find its way into unregulated proprietary medicines. Many a respectable elderly Victorian lady with a bottle of some favorite medicine on the shelf was, actually, a hopeless addict. The association of opium with China was of course ironic, given that Chinese governments *did* ban opium, but had to deal with European opium importers (see *Drug Dealing,* p. 17). Cocaine was considered a useful medicine from the 1880s on; Sherlock Holmes, with his occasional cocaine habit, was being depicted as a cerebral eccentric, not a junkie. Other drugs were mostly seen as weird foreign habits, although marijuana too enjoyed a period as the Victorian wonder drug.

The fiercest social campaigning actually focused on alcohol – the "curse of the working classes." There was some logic to this. In the Steam Age, the derelicts slumped semiconscious on city streets, who would look like junkies to modern eyes, were very likely alcoholics, drunk on cheap and nasty gin.

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be acceptable, while taking care not to get presumptuous. They can also benefit a *lot* from Social Chameleon (p. B86), if it is available in the campaign. Indeed, it is likely to be mandatory for low-Status adventurers in games where most people they interact with have high levels of Status. Going through the game perpetually making social errors quickly gets boring.

High Society aside, domestic staff need Savoir-Faire (Servant), and adventurers may also use it; passing as a servant to get into high-class locations is often easier and cheaper than faking high Status. Savoir-Faire (Military) is required in military campaigns; Steam Age armies were as obsessed with formality as civilian society. For more details on interpersonal interactions, see *GURPS Social Engineering.*

## Titles and Forms of Address

If a setting is going to feature titles of nobility based on reality – and steampunk settings often do – it makes sense to get these *right*, especially as mistakes can jar badly with people who are familiar with the rules. This can be a little fiddly, but isn't too hard. The following are basic rules for the United Kingdom; other countries in Europe have their own systems on similar lines. Further details, such as how to address a letter or personal invitation, can be found on the Web. See *Status and Titles,* p. 37, for the Status levels that go with each title.

Remember that historical Steam Age society was institutionally sexist; women did not generally inherit aristocratic positions, although they were given titles as the wives and family of aristocrats. Some games may reflect more modern rules, whereby women may have full social and political power as aristocrats. However, even today, whereas the wife of a male knight or aristocrat gets the female version of his title as a courtesy, the husband of a dame or female aristocrat remains plain Mr. Smith. Likewise, games may feature *life peerages,* which give the recipient full noble status, including crucially the right to sit in the House of Lords and thus take part in the government of the country, but which are *not* inherited by the recipient's children. Historically, these were actually limited to a handful of senior judges until 1958, which was also when women were first permitted to sit in the House of Lords.

### Knights, Dames, and Baronets

Knighthood is *not* an aristocratic title. It is a personal honor, nominally awarded by the monarch, *not* inherited (although until 1827, oldest sons of baronets were automatically entitled to knighthoods). If John Smith is knighted, he becomes Sir John Smith, addressed as "Sir John" (*not, ever,* as "Sir Smith" – a glaring mistake); his wife is addressed as "Lady Smith." The female equivalent, damehood, was almost unknown in the Steam Age, but the concept would have been understood, so a more egalitarian world could easily feature dames; if Ann Jones became Dame Ann Jones, she would be addressed as "Dame Ann."

The lowest-ranking hereditary title, *baronet,* is not actually a peerage – that is, a baronet isn't entitled to sit in the House of Lords and exert political power. Hence, baronets are not technically "noble." A very few baronetcies have been inherited by daughters on occasion. A baronet or baronetess is addressed like a knight or dame.

### The Peerage

Peers (barons and above) have titles associated with places, which are *usually* within the United Kingdom. These are *not* the same as family surnames. Hereditary peers inherit them from distant ancestors whose power and personal holdings were based on those places. However, in many cases, by the Steam Age, this connection has long since been broken by the vagaries of chance; Lord Godalming *may* have a family holding in or near Godalming, and may visit regularly or even have

a sentimental attachment to the place, but it's perfectly possible that he's never been to Godalming in his life. Life peers usually select titles based on their birthplace, home town, or favorite location, or somewhere else to which they have a connection, provided that nobody else has already claimed it. In any case, peers may sometimes be addressed or referred to by their title, formally or informally – a friend could say "Hello, Godalming."

Generally, a nobleman (baron, viscount, earl, or marquess) whose birth name was David Brown would be addressed as "Lord Brown," and his wife, or a woman who held her title in her own right, would be "Lady Brown." (His friends are welcome to call him "Dave," however; aristocrats can be informal in private.) A duke or duchess, though, is addressed as "Duke" or "Duchess." Similarly, a duke often signs letters with just his title – so the Duke of Hertfordshire might well just sign "Hertfordshire." Kings and queens are addressed as "Your Majesty" at the start of the conversation, then as "sir" or "ma'am," although "Your Majesty" is always used instead of "you." Princes and princesses generally use "Your Royal Highness" in the same way.

Foreign rulers can have exotic titles and forms of address which may sound quite odd to English speakers. The GM can either research this on the Internet, improvise stylishly, or tell players that following the U.K. model is good enough.

# PUTTING SOME PUNK ON IT

Reading up on Victorian etiquette and morality is all very well, but there's some danger of paying too much attention to historical Steam Age society's most complacent view of itself, and missing the important second half of the word "steampunk." There's obviously stuff to dislike about Steam Age thinking, and even the most idealized steampunk world is unlikely to be a utopia. So, there's an obvious question to deal with: How does one set about being a functional rebel in a very formal society?

On one level, it's easy. When everyone is supposed to be respectable and to know their place, simply breaking a few rules makes one a scary rebel. Respectable Victorians found the surly costermongers and professional rogues described by Mayhew (p. 6) unnerving and doubtless a little thrilling. Nor was the real Steam Age short of rebels, from machine-smashing Luddites through vote-demanding Chartists to backward-looking Pre-Raphaelite painters, not to mention exiled German socialist-philosophers in the British Library and the odd bomb-throwing anarchist.

On another level, it takes hard work and focus. Merely annoying the easily offended achieves little. In a game, the point must surely be to take full advantage of the weirdness of the setting. Steampunk PCs, like modern steampunk fashion fans, need to remember a cyberpunk principle: *the street finds uses for things.* Steampunks need to be technically competent and resourceful, and even if they occasionally save the world – because they have to live there, too, alongside the reactionaries and conformists – they can't expect too many thanks.

But no matter. There's always tomorrow – even if it is our smoke-filled yesterday.

# GLOSSARY

Working period terminology into a game is a great way to add atmosphere, so long as both GM and players can keep track of what it means. Underworld slang in particular is often rich and cryptic. However, respectable folk would not want to be heard using low-class language, and criminal slang is often specifically intended to be obscure to outsiders.

Note also that slang and jargon do evolve over time; many of these words only appeared partway through the Steam Age, or even near its end. Nonetheless, steampunk rarely worries about a little anachronism.

*There is nothing more difficult than a good definition, for it is scarcely possible to express in a few words the abstracted view of an infinite variety of facts.*
*– Humphrey Davy,*
**Consolations in Travel**

## General Terminology

**antimacassar:** A doily pinned to the back of a chair to protect the fabric from the macassar oil that many men wear on their hair.

**barouche:** A substantial, four-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage with a driver outside and four seats inside.

**bobbies:** Policemen – from Sir *Robert* Peel, founder of London's Metropolitan Police.

**brougham:** Pronounced "broom" or "brome." A moderately priced carriage that many middle-class families can afford, especially favored by physicians, with an enclosed body and two or four wheels, usually drawn by one horse.

**chapel:** Often used to refer to a place of worship used by dissenters (q.v.), contrasting with the "church" frequented by mainstream Anglicans.

**clarence:** An enclosed four-wheeled, four-seat coach.

**college:** An educational establishment, but in British usage, specifically one of the subdivisions of Cambridge, Oxford, and one or two newer universities established after the same pattern, with its own buildings, where members of the university reside, dine, socialize, and receive personal instruction. The university, organized as a confederation of colleges, also has subject-based faculties to organize lectures and research; runs examinations; and awards degrees.

**consumption:** An advanced stage of pulmonary tuberculosis, usually leading to death fairly quickly. A notoriously common illness among tragic heroines, who die looking picturesquely pale after coughing a little blood into their handkerchiefs.

**corn:** In British usage, any grain, but especially wheat. The American product is called "Indian corn" or "maize."

**costermonger:** An urban-based street seller of fruit and vegetables (sometimes, any street vendor). Costermongers in Victorian London are practically a social class in their own right, noted for their tough independence, "low habits," and animosity toward the police.

**cut:** Ignoring a person with whom one does not wish to speak – an insult of variable subtlety. There were said to be at least four types of cut: the *cut direct* is to look an acquaintance in the face and pretend not to know him, the *cut indirect* is to stare the other way and pretend not to see him, the *cut sublime* is to admire the clouds or some tall building until he has gone by, and the *cut infernal* is to bend over to adjust one's boots until he is past.

**dissenter:** In England and Wales, a member of a Protestant church not part of the Anglican hierarchy; for example, a Methodist. Dissenters are seen as lower-class, puritanical, and often politically radical.

**dreadnought:** An extremely large and heavily armored steel battleship, so named from HMS *Dreadnought* (launched 1906).

**fancy, the:** The sport of boxing.

**Fenian:** A member of an Irish organization devoted to freeing Ireland from British rule through illegal methods, including murder and terrorism.

**hansom cab:** Sometimes just "hansom." A type of two-wheeled cab with two passenger seats and the driver riding outside, drawn by a single horse. Cheap to operate, and maneuverable in crowded city streets.

**hussar:** A type of light cavalry, generally with colorful, elaborately ornamented uniforms modeled on those of the original (Hungarian) hussars. Hussars are seen as especially dashing and flamboyant.

**ironclad:** A warship with iron armor – on early ironclads, mostly above the waterline, to protect against other ships' guns.

**laudanum:** A solution of opium in alcohol, widely (and legally) sold in the 19th century.

**lucifer:** An early type of match that can be struck on any rough surface (first manufactured 1830).

**making love:** Courting or wooing. A man "making love" to a woman is declaring his affections and trying to persuade her to return them, as his wife or less formally; he is not expressing himself physically.

**Marquess of Queensberry rules:** A set of rules for boxing as a sport, adopted at the end of the 19th century and named for an aristocrat who endorsed them. The first boxing rules to mention gloves, and the basis for the later development of the sport.

**Miss –:** The oldest daughter of the – family, indicated by her first name not being used in talking about her.

**navvy:** A manual laborer working on a major civil engineering project. Early canal projects were known as "navigations," and the men who built them were thus known as "navigators" – "navvies" for short.

**omnibus:** A large vehicle carrying 20 or more passengers, horse-drawn or motorized, usually working a fixed route; the name, meaning "for everyone" in Latin, was quickly shortened to "bus."

**peerage:** The aristocracy (as opposed to nontitled gentry), entitled to a seat in the House of Lords: barons, viscounts, earls, marquises, and nonroyal dukes.

**plum-duff:** A plain, boiled pudding with raisins or currants in it.

**political economy:** Economics.

**pug:** A servants' term for high-ranking servants in a household. The housekeeper's or steward's room is the "pug's parlor."

**resurrectionist:** A merchant dealing in illegally procured corpses for use at medical schools.

**sent down:** Expelled from Oxford or Cambridge Universities for serious misconduct. For example, Percy Shelley was sent down for publishing *The Necessity of Atheism*.

**sepoy:** An infantry private in the British-run Indian army.

**street orderly:** A street sweeper or scavenger.

**transportation:** Punishing criminals by sending them to remote colonies, usually in Australia.

**tripos:** The examination taken at Cambridge to qualify for honors in mathematics, named from the three-legged stool that candidates sat on in medieval times. The term is also occasionally used for the final honors exams in other subjects.

**uhlan:** A type of cavalry, mostly associated with Eastern European and German armies.

**white slavery:** The recruitment of women into prostitution by coercive methods ranging from threats to drugs to fraudulent job offers. A major concern for Victorian social reformers.

**workhouse:** A building established by local authorities to house poor people who are unable to support themselves; the occupants are set to some kind of useful work. Workhouses have a reputation for being brutal as well as shameful – no better than prisons for people who have committed no actual crime. People will do almost anything to avoid being put in the workhouse.

**zouave:** Originally light infantry recruited into the French army from Algerian tribesmen, who gained a reputation as tough and dashing. Later, other armies organized troops in imitation of the original model, complete with fancy "eastern-style" uniforms.

## Low-Class and Underworld Slang and Vulgarity

**barker:** A pistol or other gun.

**bester:** Someone who gets what they want by fast-talk or intimidation.

**Billingsgate:** Crude, abusive language. Named after a London fish-market district where the porters are notoriously foul-mouthed.

**bloody:** Often claimed to be a contraction of "By Our Lady." Most Victorians don't know the etymology but do know it as extremely bad language.

**camister:** A clergyman.

**crow:** A thief's lookout man.

**death-hunter:** Someone who provides newspapers with reports of dying speeches and confessions.

**doing quisby:** Idling, not working.

**dollymop:** A streetwalker.

**dragsman:** Somebody who steals from carts and coaches.

**Jack Ketch:** The hangman.

**lushington:** A drunkard.

**peelers:** Policemen – from Sir Robert *Peel*, founder of London's Metropolitan Police.

**pure:** Dogs' dung, collected (by "pure-finders") for use in preparing leather.

**rampsman:** Someone who commits robbery with some form of violence.

**rookery:** A densely populated urban slum district, generally assumed to be a nest of criminals where even the police only venture in groups.

**snoozer:** A thief who stays in a hotel in order to steal from it.

**square-rigged:** Well-dressed.

**stook-buzzer:** A thief who steals handkerchiefs.

**tallyman:** A merchant who sells goods on credit and takes payment by installments.

**tosher:** Someone who scavenges for valuable refuse in drains and sewers.

*If any strangers are present, the conversation is still further clothed in slang, so as to be unintelligible even to the partially initiated. The evident puzzlement of any listener is of course gratifying to the costermonger's vanity . . .*

*– Henry Mayhew,* **London Labour and the London Poor**

## Scientific and Technological Jargon

**aeronef:** An aircraft that has a stall speed; that is, a heavier-than-air craft.

**aerostat:** An aircraft that has a zero stall speed; that is, a lighter-than-air craft such as a balloon or airship.

**analytical engine:** A proposed design for a general-purpose computing engine working purely mechanically, with steam power, gears, and punched-card programming.

**animal magnetism:** Sometimes just "magnetism." Hypnotism; also called *mesmerism,* after Anton Mesmer.

**apergy:** A hypothetical repulsive gravitational force.

**bertillonage:** A technique for criminal identification based on exact measurement of 11 parts of the body.

**catastrophism:** The theory that certain great geological or biological changes were caused by sudden, dramatic catastrophes, rather than by gradual processes.

**condenser:** (1) Part of a steam engine where steam is turned back into liquid water than can be reused, reducing the need to take on new water regularly. (2) The 19th-century name for what is now called an electrical capacitor.

**difference engine:** The precursor to the analytical engine (q.v.), a dedicated mechanical computer designed to calculate and typeset mathematical tables.

**dirigible:** Any lighter-than-air craft that can be steered, implying the use of engines.

***élan vital****:* A "vital force" or "fluid" believed to pervade living matter. Sometimes known as *vitality* in English; scientific theories involving the existence of this force (eventually discarded) are *vitalism.*

**ether, luminiferous:** A hypothetical (and eventually disproven) invisible and intangible substance filling all of space that carries light waves and other electromagnetic waves.

**eugenics:** Proposals to supervise human breeding scientifically, to enhance desirable characteristics or eliminate undesirable ones.

**heliograph:** A device for sending messages in Morse code, using mirrors to reflect flashes of sunlight.

**montgolfier:** A hot-air balloon (named for the brothers who were the first to build such, in 1783).

**N-rays:** A supposed new form of radiation reported by René Blondlot in 1903 but subsequently shown not to exist.

**natural philosophy:** A traditional term for the physical sciences – primarily Physics in **GURPS** terms, but also covering Astronomy, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics (Applied), and other fields.
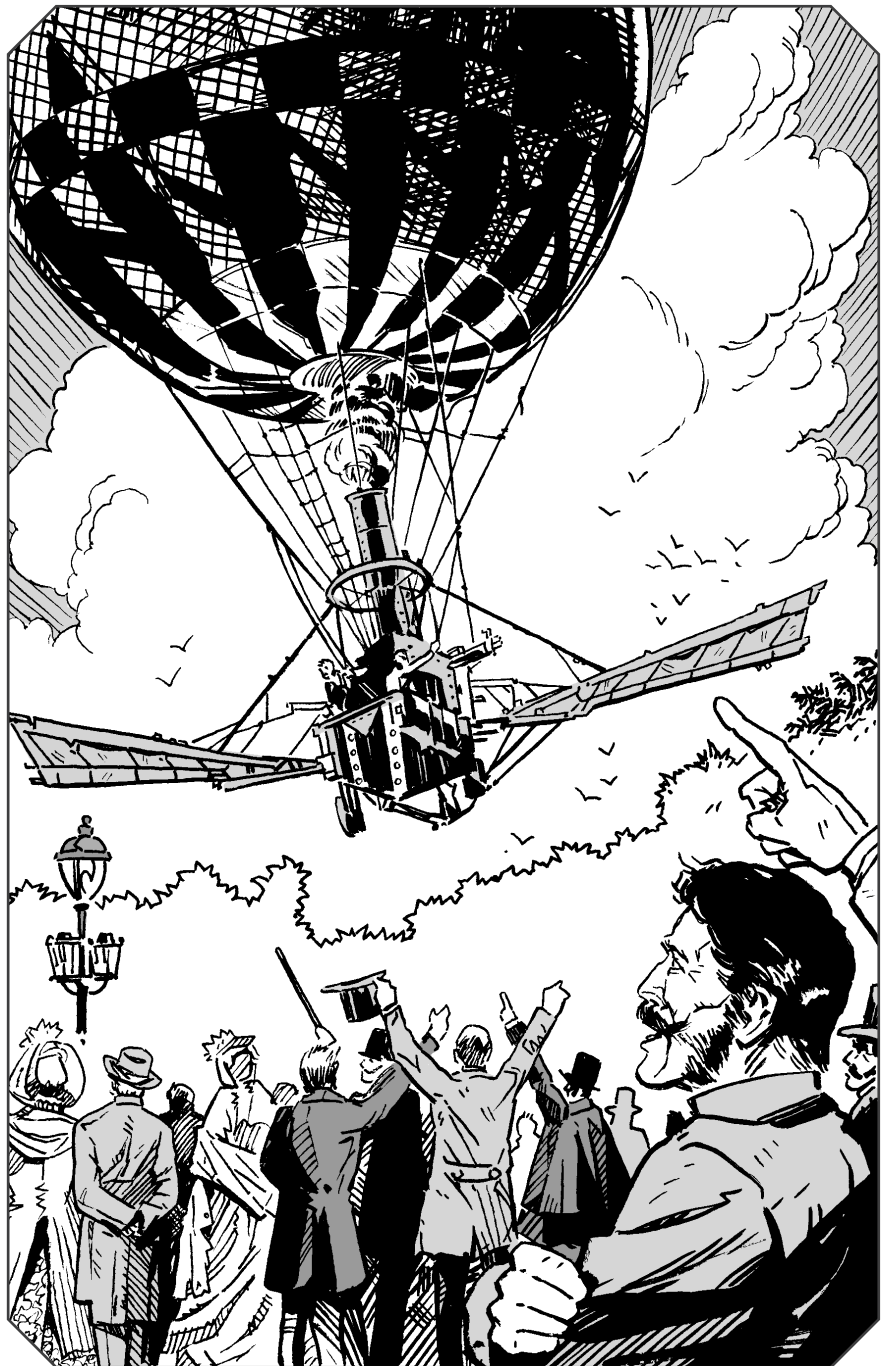
**phrenology:** A proposed science of human character, based on assigning functions to sections of the brain and measuring their relative sizes.

**psychical research:** The scientific study of what would later be called psionic powers and the afterlife.

**telodynamics:** A system of power transmission using wire ropes stretched between large pulleys, effective over several miles.

**wireless:** Radio communication; shortened from "wireless telegraphy" (and later "wireless telephony").

**zeppelin:** A rigid-bodied airship. Named for Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin, who developed the idea in the 1890s.

# FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

This is not a fully comprehensive bibliography or filmography; a complete list of useful sources regarding the history of the Long 19th Century, steam technology, early science fiction, and steampunk literature and fashion, would itself be the size of a book. See the original **GURPS Steampunk** for a good selection of the material published or released prior to its publication, and **GURPS Screampunk** for a useful bibliography of the Gothic. The items listed here are particularly helpful or interesting sources of information or ideas, especially if they were released in the last 15 years, and one or two things that just can't be left out.

> ***Dracula** also displays a near-technothriller concern with the practical details of travel . . .*

## Nonfiction

Clute, John and Nicholls, Peter (editors). *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Orbit, 1993). An invaluable reference for anything to do with the genre. A free version is online at **sf-encyclopedia.com,** which is regularly updated. The follow-up *Encyclopedia of Fantasy,* edited by Clute and John Grant (Orbit, 1997), is similarly useful; that too is available online and linked at the above address.

Hibbert, Christopher. *The English: A Social History 1066-1945* (HarperCollins, 1994). A useful general reference on period society.

Holmes, Richard. *The Age of Wonder* (HarperPress, 2009). A fascinating history of scientific and technological innovation in the Georgian era – the age of "Romantic Science." Holmes followed it with *Falling Upwards* (William Collins, 2014), a history of ballooning in the 19th century, which is essential reading for anyone wanting to run a game featuring early lighter-than-air aviation.

Nevins, Jess. *The Encyclopedia of Fantastic Victoriana* (MonkeyBrain Books, 2005). An amazingly comprehensive (if sometimes idiosyncratic) survey of Steam Age genre fiction.

VanderMeer, Jeff, with Chambers, S.J. *The Steampunk Bible* (Abrams Image, 2011). A colorfully illustrated and comprehensive guide to the history and present state of steampunk in all its forms.

## Period Fiction

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey* (Random House, 2014). Austen is always good for mannerspunk, and this happens to be a satire on the Gothic novel.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (CreateSpace, 2014). The first novel about an artificial being. An intensely thoughtful tale about a man who creates a monster and then abandons it. See p. 5.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (CreateSpace, 2014). A classic chilling tale of mad science and divided personalities.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula* (CreateSpace, 2014). *The* classic vampire tale, whose protagonists band together to fight an ancient, supernatural evil. *Dracula* also displays a near-technothriller concern with the practical details of travel and other arrangements for the vampire hunt.

## Modern Fiction

Blaylock, James P. *Homunculus* (Titan Books, 2013). An early novel by one of the trio who gave steampunk its name and, at the time, its style. An intricate if not downright confused story; mad scientists and occultists compete for control of airships, alien spacecraft, and dark secrets in the sordid and chaotic underworld of Victorian London. Some of the same characters also appear in *Lord Kelvin's Machine* and in other novels by Blaylock.

Clarke, Susanna. *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* (Tor Books, 2006). Magic and mannerspunk in a Napoleonic-era setting. See p. 23.

Di Filippo, Paul. *The Steampunk Trilogy* (Open Road Media, 2014). See p. 10.

Flynn, Michael. *In the Country of the Blind* (Baen, 1990). Demonstrates how to transplant steampunk tropes to a contemporary conspiracy thriller; secret societies have been using Babbage engines to organize their long-term manipulations.

Fowles, John. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Back Bay, 1998). A handy postmodern deconstruction of the Victorian novel.

Fraser, George MacDonald. *Flashman* (Plume, 1984). The first novel in the Flashman series (there are many more); see p. 9.

Gibson, William, and Sterling, Bruce. *The Difference Engine* (Victor Gollancz, 1990). The quintessential early 1990s non-fantastical steampunk novel (whether or not the authors thought that they were writing steampunk), transplanting the dreams and nightmares of the information technology revolution to Victorian London. See p. 9.

Greenland, Colin. *Harm's Way* (Avon Books, 1993). Gives the kind of space travel seen in scientific romances a modern twist, as the plucky but innocent heroine travels the solar system and encounters charming assassins, winged Martians, clanking cyborgs, and darker forces than she seems able to comprehend.

Jeter, K.W. *Morlock Night* (Angry Robot, 2011). Originally published in 1979, and hence the first steampunk-style work by one of the founding trio of modern steampunk; see p. 9. Jeter's later *Infernal Devices* (1987) is a better book, being both a more purely steampunk story and a satire on the horror fiction of H.P. Lovecraft.

McAuley, Paul J. *Pasquale's Angel* (VGSF, 1995). A deft attempt to do for clockpunk what *The Difference Engine* did for steampunk. The novel is a *noir* detective story set in an alternate Renaissance Florence where Leonardo da Vinci has triggered an industrial revolution; the hero teams up with hard-drinking journalist Niccolo Machiavelli to pursue a case involving a *femme fatale* with the most enigmatic smile of all.

Moorcock, Michael. *The Warlord of the Air, The Land Leviathan,* and *The Steel Tsar* (Titan Books, 2013). Three volumes make up the *Nomad of the Time Streams* series, Captain Oswald Bastable's adventures across three alternate 20th centuries. See p. 8.

Peake, Mervyn. *Titus Groan* (Overlook Press, 2007). Not really steampunk, but potentially an essential reference for mannerspunk games with a touch of screampunk. This novel and its sequels form a Gothic fantasy epic, in which the eponymous hero is born and brought up in an impossibly large, old, and stagnant castle.

Powers, Tim. *The Anubis Gates* (Ace, 1997). This early novel by the least steampunk of the founding trio of the genre does feature a rich and sordid depiction of the underworld of Georgian London in a story of magical time travel.

Pratchett, Terry. *The Fifth Elephant* (Doubleday, 1999) and *Raising Steam* (Doubleday, 2013). The setting of Pratchett's lengthy *Discworld* fantasy series, itself the basis for a **GURPS**-based roleplaying game, developed from a parody of traditional medieval-style fantasy to more of a clockpunk/steampunk world, and these two books are of special interest. *The Fifth Elephant* includes several relevant elements: rapid communications via semaphore, economies based on mineral resources, and archaic feudal realms coming into contact with progressive urbanized countries. *Raising Steam* brings the Discworld fully into a quasi-Victorian era with the invention of steam trains. See also Pratchett's non-Discworld historical fantasy *Dodger* (Doubleday, 2012), which is set in (more or less) Victorian London, and features Henry Mayhew (see p. 6).

Priest, Cherie. *Boneshaker* (Tor, 2012). A novel which incorporates all the standard features of 21st-century steampunk – goggles, gas masks, airships, weird-tech guns – and then adds zombies. Several sequels have been published, adding more detail to *Boneshaker*'s picture of an alternate 19th-century America, the "Clockwork Century."

Priest, Christopher. *The Space Machine* (Futura Publications, 1977). See p. 8.

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass* (Del Rey, 1999). Also known as *Northern Lights*. The first book of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy – young-adult novels about a cross-universal revolution against God – is set on an alternate Earth with steampunk technology and other, very fantastical strangeness.

Smith, Philip and McCullough, Joseph A. *Steampunk Soldiers* (Osprey, 2014). Partly an art book, but incorporating extensive annotations which together create a picture of an alternative Steam Age in which rapidly advancing technology found many military uses.

VanderMeer, Ann and Jeff (editors). *Steampunk* (Tachyon, 2008). A useful anthology of short stories and extracts from novels, including proto-steampunk and both early and more recent works in the subgenre, some by very significant authors. Also contains some interesting essays.

> *All the workers wore goggles with polarized lenses. For reasons no one fully understood, such lenses allowed the wearer to see the dreaded Blight.*
> – *Cherie Priest,* **Boneshaker**

## Comics

Kelly, Joe. *Steampunk* (Cliffhanger, 2000-2002). An abortive comics series set in an alternate 19th century rendered hellish and bizarre by time travel and mad science. The hero, a steam-powered cyborg, is involved in a revolution against the overlord responsible for his condition.

Moore, Alan. *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (America's Best Comics, 1999-present). In the first two volumes (1999-2000), Moore assembles a team of proto-super-heroes of the late Victorian Era. Subsequent sequels move into later eras and hence draw on different, less Steam Age-styled inspirations. The 2003 movie is a loose adaptation, and less highly regarded, but has some moments of strong style.

Talbot, Bryan. *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* (Valkyrie Press, 1987-1989). The story of an apocalyptic secret war across multiple alternate histories, some with a distinctly steampunk flavor.

## Films and Television

*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Richard Fleischer, 1954). See p. 8.

*Assassination Bureau, The* (Basil Dearden, 1969). On the eve of the Great War, a crusading female reporter investigates a conspiracy of assassins. With corsets, Prussians in spiky helmets, and an airship.

*Belle* (Amma Asante, 2013). A model for early-period mannerspunk. Unusual themes of race and legal morality cut across a story of love and courtship in Georgian high society.

*Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963-present). Two stories from the early years of this long-running TV series, "Pyramids of Mars" (1975) and "The Talons of Weng-Chiang" (1977), are classics of proto-steampunk. Since the show was relaunched in the 21st century, the production design has often shown steampunk influences.

*Howl's Moving Castle* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2004). This anime adaptation of a fantasy novel by Diana Wynne Jones sets it in a quasi-Edwardian world with a lot of steampunk-style features, not least the titular castle.

*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (Hayao Miyazaki, 1986). Also known as simply *Castle in the Sky.* In a world of steam engines, airships, and primitive radio, a floating city becomes the focus of power struggles, as witnessed by two children. See p. 11.

*Master of the World* (William Witney, 1961). A low-budget Jules Verne adaptation, with Vincent Price. See p. 8.

*Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello, The: Jasper Morello and the Lost Airship* (Anthony Lucas, 2005). This short silhouette-based animation was supposed to be the first of a series that doesn't seem to have materialized. However, it's a wonderful piece of screampunk.

*Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (Hideaki Anno, 1990). Anime TV series inspired by the works of Jules Verne. See p. 11.

*Robot Carnival* (various, 1987). Anime anthology of robot-related stories, some of them with steampunk stylings. See p. 11.

*Sherlock Holmes* (Guy Ritchie, 2009). The great detective is reimagined as an action hero in a movie with a steampunk aesthetic. The sequel is *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (Guy Ritchie, 2011).

*Steamboy* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 2004). A major exercise in steampunk anime, featuring a boy inventor-hero in an alternate 19th century of steam-powered monowheels, airships, and tanks.

*Time Machine, The* (George Pal, 1960). A film loosely based on the 1895 novella by H.G. Wells, with influential visuals. See p. 8.

*Wild Wild West, The* (Michael Garrison, 1965-1969). See p. 8. The less well-regarded movie (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1999) does at least also display a selection of steampunk gadgets and vehicles.

## *Games*

Cakebread, Peter and Walton, Ken. ***Abney Park's Airship Pirates*** (Cubicle 7, 2011). A roleplaying adaptation of the mythology created by the titular steampunk rock band. In a neo-Victorian post-apocalypse alternate future, heroic airship pirates seek to undo the damage caused by careless time travelers.

Chadwick, Frank. ***Space: 1889*** (Game Designers' Workshop, 1988). At the time of writing, both a slightly revised version of the original game (from Heliograph, Inc.) and a new edition (from Clockwork Publishing) are available in PDF format for online purchase. An adaptation for the **Savage Worlds** rule system, called **Space 1889: Red Sands,** from Pinnacle Entertainment Group, is in shops. See p. 10.

Pondsmith, Mike. ***Castle Falkenstein*** (R. Talsorian Games, 1994). The supplement ***Steam Age*** (R. Talsorian Games, 1994) brings the steam-tech elements front and center. See also the ***GURPS*** adaptation. See p. 10.

Rowland, Marcus L. ***Forgotten Futures*** (Heliograph, 1999). This (plus a 2000 reprint) is the only full-scale paper publication of this game to date, but multiple digital releases for the line are still available online. See p. 10.

## *GURPS Supplements*

A significant number of ***GURPS*** supplements available from Warehouse 23 (**warehouse23.com**), for both Third and Fourth Edition, are somewhat relevant to steampunk gaming. The most obvious titles to mention are discussed in several places in this book: ***GURPS Steampunk*** (William H. Stoddard, 2000), ***GURPS Steam-Tech*** (William H. Stoddard, ed., 2001), ***GURPS Screampunk*** (Jo Ramsay, 2001), ***GURPS Castle Falkenstein*** (Phil Masters and James L. Cambias, 2000), and ***GURPS Castle Falkenstein: The Ottoman Empire*** (Phil Masters, 2002). However, there are also others.

### Technology

The current edition of ***GURPS High-Tech*** (Shawn Fisher, Michael Hurst, and Hans-Christian Vortisch, 2007) provides a wide selection of weapons and equipment suitable for use in historical settings and those which are technologically similar to the Steam Age. In addition, ***GURPS High-Tech: Adventure Guns*** (Hans-Christian Vortisch, 2014) expands the options for early TL6 weaponry considerably, with some eccentric and steampunk-ish options.

***GURPS Spaceships 7: Divergent and Paranormal Tech*** (David L. Pulver, 2010), part of the ***GURPS Spaceships*** series, offers ways to create spacefaring vessels which use all sorts of divergent tech – with many steampunk-style options.

### Other Rules

***GURPS Powers: The Weird*** (William H. Stoddard, 2016) covers many of the sort of bizarre effects that might be generated by steampunk-period superscience, and introduces the concept of *styles* of weird science.

***GURPS Thaumatology*** (Phil Masters, 2008) provides rules for a wide range of methods for depicting magic in ***GURPS,*** some of them very useful for gaslight romance games. One of the example settings in the book, "The Wisdom of the Ancient Seers," is actually an exercise in gaslight romance.

### History

Several Third Edition books focus on historical detail.

***GURPS Age of Napoleon*** (Nicholas Caldwell, 2003) depicts the Napoleonic era and the Napoleonic wars in depth, with game mechanics and cross-references to steampunk.

***GURPS Cliffhangers*** (second edition, Brian J. Underhill, 2002) covers the period after the end of the Steam Age, but could be a useful reference for games heavy on raygun Gothic style.

***GURPS Old West*** (second edition, Ann Dupuis, Lynda Manning-Schwartz, Robert E. Smith, and Liz Tornabene, revised and expanded by Stephen Dedman, 2000) is of course the definitive ***GURPS*** treatment of the Steam Age West.
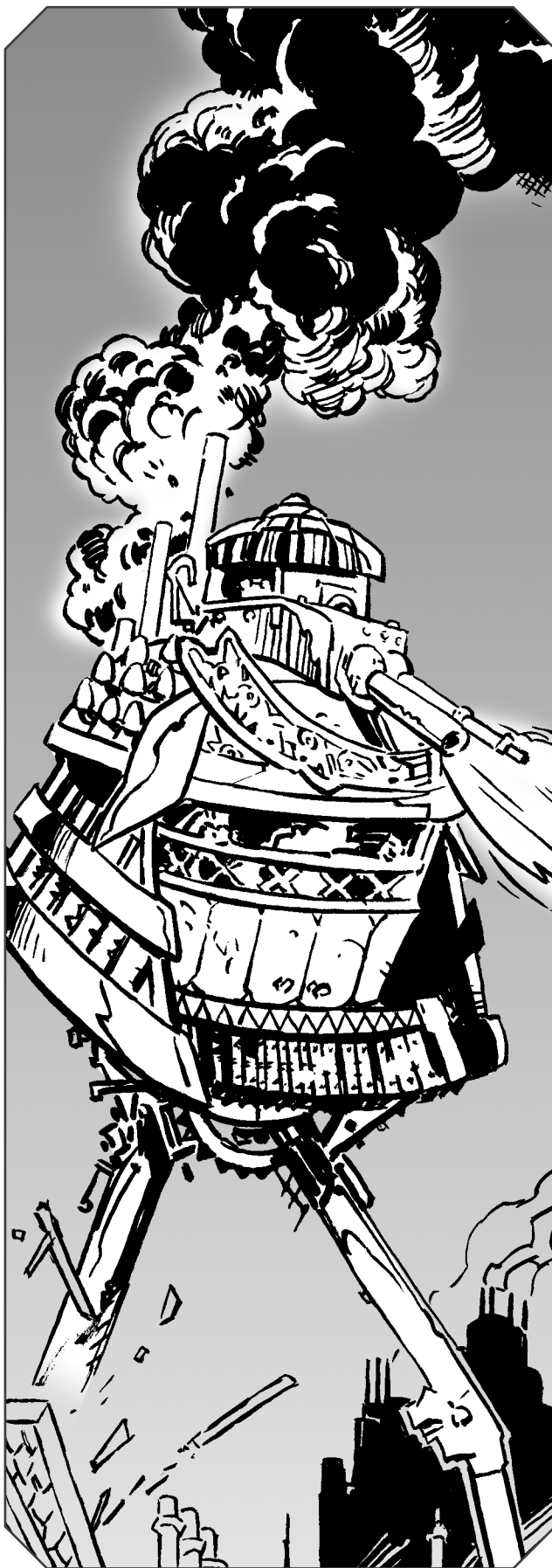
**GURPS Scarlet Pimpernel** (Lisa Evans and Bob Traynor, 1991) is technically a literary adaptation rather than a historical supplement, but offers a useful source for the French Revolution, the defined starting point of the Long 19th Century – although the emphasis is more on swashbuckling than on technology.

## Settings

Some Third Edition books may be of interest here.

**GURPS Atlantis** (Phil Masters, 2001) is stuffed full of the sort of quasi-scientific weirdness which appealed to the Steam Age. Chapter 6, "Lords of the Deep," specifically presents a treatment of Atlantis which can be used in steampunk games.

**GURPS Dragons** (Phil Masters, 2004) has an extended example setting, "The Dragons Return," which is pure gaslight romance.

**GURPS Goblins** (Malcolm Dale and Klaude Thomas, 1996) is an unnervingly accurate picture of Georgian London as a game setting. Just with goblins.

In addition, a number of genre-oriented Fourth Edition works contain some highly relevant material.

**GURPS Horror** (Kenneth Hite, 2011) naturally covers the Gothic in detail; see p. 5. It also features worked example settings; "Seas of Dread" permits some clockpunk elements, while "Blood in the Craters" is steampunk post-apocalypse horror.

**GURPS Infinite Worlds** (Kenneth Hite, Steve Jackson, and John M. Ford, 2004) has a lengthy chapter's worth of alternate worlds, some of them with steampunk or clockpunk features. In particular Azoth-7 is a world of alchemical clockpunk, with space travel. **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Lost Worlds** (Kenneth Hite, 2008) and **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Worlds of Horror** (Kenneth Hite, 2011) provide similar amounts of detail on various further worlds; the former mentions Etheria, as seen in **GURPS Steampunk,** while the latter has several border-line-steampunk settings. Also, **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6** (Phil Masters, 2008) expands a steampunk world mentioned in the main book to supplement length.

**GURPS Tales of the Solar Patrol** (Lizard, 2008) is a good example of a "mature" raygun Gothic setting.

### Pyramid

This monthly PDF magazine (edited by Steven Marsh) supports **GURPS** with a broad assortment of material referencing any and every genre and period. See, in particular, the following.

"The Air Loom," by Graeme Davis, in *Pyramid #3/32: Fears of Days Past* (2011), describes a "historical" example of Romantic Science creating evil technology.

"Thinking Machines," by Thomas Weigel, in *Pyramid #3/37: Tech and Toys II* (2011), offers systems for creating all manner of computers, including a steampunk option.

*Pyramid #3/39: Steampunk* (2012) is of course *highly* relevant throughout.

*Pyramid #3/46: Weird Science* (2012) includes a lot of material that might be useful in steampunk games featuring period superscience.

*Pyramid #3/74: Wild West* (2014) has more information on the Steam Age West.

# INDEX

*I sell here, sir, what all the world desires to have – POWER.*

*– Matthew Boulton (to James Boswell)*