STRANGE POWERS

ANTHROPOMORPHIZED HIGH-TECH WEAPONS
by David L. Pulver

MASK OF HUMANITY
by Christopher R. Rice

HIGH PSI
by Kelly Pedersen

SNAKES WHO WALK
by W.A. Frick

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Article Colors

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Cover Art

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In This Issue

Check the shadows, check the skies, and check the corners of *your mind* – this issue of *Pyramid* is dedicated to searching out bizarre new phenomena! We're exploring strange powers, from a variety of angles.

If you're tired of your psionic abilities being kept in check, it's time to ramp things up with *High Psi.* Unchain **GURPS Psionic Powers** with powerful new techniques including Screaming Sanctuary, Deadly Slumber, and Split Focus. It also provides a guide to how to make psi traits epic, including how to structure extra attacks, unlock modular abilities, power up regeneration, and more.

When you hide within the mortal world, sometimes you need to adopt a *Mask of Humanity.* Long-time *Pyramid* contributor and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic** co-author Christopher R. Rice presents the Façade, a detailed way for entities to remain hidden and unseen by human eyes, plus new skills that work well with a campaign featuring the Façade.

It's a crazy, dangerous world sometimes . . . and it can get even crazier and more dangerous with *Anthropomorphized High-Tech Weapons.* Unleash the power of this anime-flavored concept with four sample **GURPS** characters who each bridge the worlds of humanity and gear.

The shadows hold other secrets, thanks to the *Snakes Who Walk.* The Serpent-Lords slither off the pages of **GURPS Cabal** and into your campaign. Discover their outlook, motivation, magical powers, and more. These serpentine sapients would also make a dangerous adversary – or even uncertain ally – in your **GURPS Horror, GURPS Monster Hunters,** or **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** campaigns.

This issue further features a Random Thought Table that tries to make sense of one-shot powers – including some cutting-edge ideas you might try in your own campaign. New powers and abilities can give the heroes the edge they need, or keep them on their toes. There's power in this issue of *Pyramid,* and it's stranger than ever!

Raw talent only gets you so far in this old world and the rest is a whole lot of practice, persistence, and perspiration.

– Victoria Forester, **The Girl Who Could Fly**

FROM THE EDITOR

THE SECRET ORIGINS OF STRANGENESS

This issue had its genesis from thinking, "Y'know, we have a lot of magic and magic-themed issues. Is it possible to do something that's like a *Thaumatology* issue, only without the magic?" In other words, if the *Thaumatology* issues are devoted to strange re-considerations of what magic is, what it does, and who wields it, then could we do something with that flavor, only focused on other parts of the *GURPS*-iverse?

And the answer is, "Sure! We can do whatever we want! We're *mad with power!!!*" And then I started thinking about "mad" and "power," and – long story short – that's why you're holding the *Strange Powers* issue here.
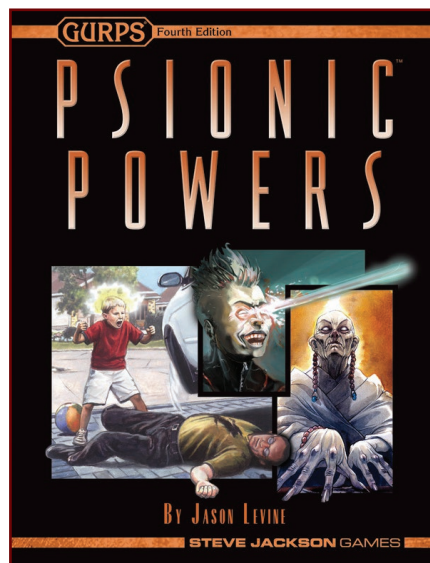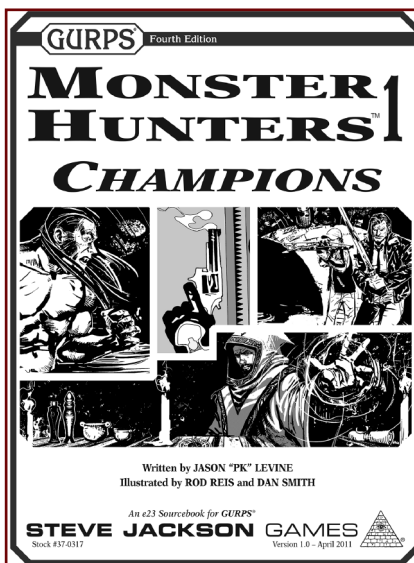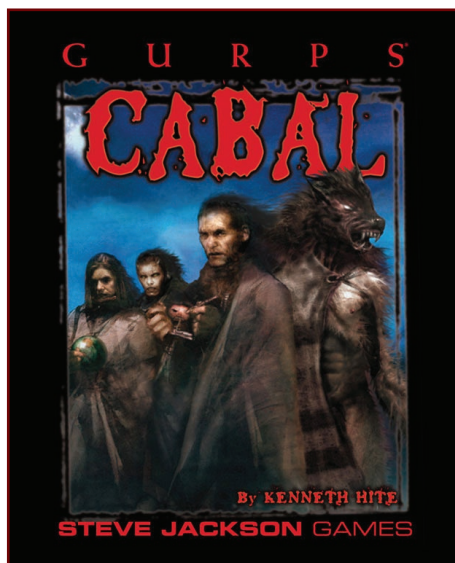
Of course, this issue isn't *all* about non-magical goodness. I think those creepy snake-people on pp. 27-34 sneaked something magical in . . . but they're hewing pretty close to the *weirdness* I'm striving for with this issue.

This is a looser theme than others in the past, but it makes sense to me. And it also cuts across a wide enough swath of genres – weird shadow-lurking things, high-powered effects, conspiracy-type creepiness – that I'm hopeful there's *something* here for you, whatever you're a fan of.

This issue also features David L. Pulver's heavily anime-flavored article (pp. 21-25). We haven't run too many articles that tie into anime or manga, and I don't recall ever seeing much feedback on them. So now's a really good time to make your thoughts known on that.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of strange powers and feedback, *you* can shape the future with your thoughts . . . but only if you share them with us! Did you want to see more of one thing or less of another? Let us know via the email at **pyramid@sjgames.com,** or join the place where everyone knows your username, online at **forums.sjgames.com.**

HIGH PSI

BY KELLY PEDERSEN

The potency of the abilities in **GURPS Psionic Powers** occupy a healthy middle ground. There are some impressive powers contained within it, and a high point-value psi is quite effective. But the built-in restrictions – required skills, fatigue costs, and limitations on how potent extra effort or psi techniques can be – all keep characters under rein.

Not all campaigns *need* brakes like these. Some genres demand access to psi powers far beyond the level laid out in **Psionic Powers**. Mentalists in superhero games, for instance, need to keep up with other heroes who can juggle planets or work epic spells. And even some games where psychic powers are the focus require extraordinary deeds. Several science-fiction settings (such as Julian May's *Galactic Milieu* and *Pliocene Exile* novels) involve psionic characters performing literally Earth-shattering feats. This article provides support for such campaigns, by offering advice on traits, new psi techniques that go beyond the established limits, and suggestions on managing such power levels.

GUIDING THE MIGHTY

When planning a campaign with high-powered psionics, there are several important elements to consider.

First, abilities should still *feel like psionics*. While the GM could allow characters to just buy any advantages they want with a Psionic, -10% limitation, this sacrifices the distinctive nature of the psionic powers framework. The elements of *How Psi Works* (**Psionic Powers,** p. 6) contribute greatly to the flavor of a psychic character. Using psionic skills means that powers are not just random mutations or strokes of good luck, but distinct abilities that have been deliberately trained. Psi techniques also contribute to this, making psionics feel flexible while rewarding experienced users who have focused on a special trick. And the fatigue associated with psi techniques and extra effort give each ability a cost, ensuring that they always seem like work. These are very useful in distinguishing psionics from other powers, beyond the limitations inherent in their power modifiers.

Second, impressive displays of psi often *depend on external aid.* More than most, psychics will employ assistance from outside in order to boost their abilities, whether drugs, enhancing technology, or gestalts with other minds. The GM can retain some control by requiring such devices for high-level feats.

Mentalists who become a little *too* potent can find enemies or simple misfortune conspiring to take away the nifty toys that facilitate their strength.

Finally, psychic abilities *have inherent limitations*, courtesy of the Psionic power modifier. This -10% limitation is composed of two parts: -5% stems from the existence of technology that can weaken or eliminate psi, while the other -5% comes from anti-powers, abilities that interfere with psi use. In a game of high psionic power, the countermeasures should be equally potent. Psychic-nullification-field generators might span cities or even entire worlds, while Anti-Psi abilities might affect targets from great distances by simply looking at their picture. Of course, it's easy to overdo such methods. Players paid points for their mighty advantages, and finding them stymied at every turn is frustrating. When introducing psi-canceling abilities that work on a large scale or from a great distance, consider ones that *penalize* ability use, rather than negate it entirely. Dr. Rationalism's Ultimate Negator Field only covers the heart of her sanctum, while her lesser psi-draining rat swarms wander the city streets, making it harder to use powers but not impossible.

That system where 10,000 Ability Users are connected through a network of synapses, call it a huge brain. If she can control that, she could cause things impossible for a human brain.

*– Kuroko Shirai, in **A Certain Scientific Railgun***

EPIC PSI TRAITS

Some advantages and skills, while not themselves psionic, nevertheless are crucial to allowing truly stupendous psychic feats to occur.

ADVANTAGES

There are several notable advantages.

Compartmentalized Mind

see p. B43

This is a staple for mighty mentalists. The more levels of Compartmentalized Mind one has, the more psychic abilities that require concentration can be used simultaneously. This is a serious force multiplier. Since so many psi abilities are strictly mental, Compartmentalized Mind is almost as good at letting one hero do the work of many as the Duplication advantage. A good limit is no more levels of Compartmentalized Mind than a psi's highest Talent level, or up to twice that in a *very* high-powered game.

Energy Reserve

GURPS Powers, p. 119

Energy Reserves are practically *de rigueur* for potent psychic characters. They allow the cost of psi techniques and extra effort to be paid without eating up too much core fatigue. Since they regenerate at the same time as FP and don't require physical rest, they let someone get back in the fight faster without investing in advantages that speed recovery. Numerous levels of Energy Reserve makes FP costs effectively irrelevant. To maintain the feeling that psi requires mental exertion, five levels of Energy Reserve per level in Talent is about right. A psychic with abilities from more than one power may take Energy Reserve with the One Power limitation (-50%), allowing someone to be notably more epic in one field.

Extra Attack

see p. B53 and *Powers,* p. 49

Mundane attacks like punches, stabs, or gunshots can be combined with psychic ones like Astral Sword, Lightning, or TK Bullet, as long as they use the Attack maneuver. Unless otherwise specified, a psionic ability that requires a touch against an unwilling victim does count as an attack. Abilities used at range often do not (they are Concentrate maneuvers), so heroes with Extra Attack may use their gifts at lower levels than the maximum, in order to strike more often. This advantage has a very similar force-multiplying effect to Compartmentalized Mind; consider similar restrictions on levels (see above).

If an additional assault can only come from a particular ability, take the Single Skill limitation (-20%). Someone who can attack more than once with the same psi ability should take the Multi-Strike enhancement (+20%). The Accessibility limitation can restrict a psychic hero's extra attacks. For example, if the additional offenses can only be psionic, -10%; to limit the esper to one psionic attack a turn, -10%; or to limit them to only using extra attacks when *all* assaults are psionic, -20%.

Modular Abilities

see p. B71 and *Powers,* p. 62

Cosmic Power, limited to psi abilities only, models those who are so versatile that they can try anything at all. Without skills, they'll be limited to using the abilities at default, but in campaigns at this level, attribute defaults are likely pretty high anyway. A Modular Ability pool of (20 + levels in Talent) points is quite sufficient for most games. Additionally, enforcing a requirement to buy a significant number of abilities before purchasing levels in the Modular Abilities is also reasonable.

Super-Memorization can represent a hero who picks up psionic *skills* incredibly quickly, without necessarily having access to all the *abilities*. This does presume that psi skills are something that can be meaningfully conveyed to others. There may be limits on access to sources of very high skill levels; anyone can wander into an occult bookstore and pick up 1 point of Astral Travel or Prognostication skill, but a source for 16 points in Steal Energy can only be found in an obscure monastery. The same applies for psi techniques – casually acquiring a few points in common tricks is reasonable, but many in obscure ones requires more work.

Protected Power

GURPS Powers, p. 69

Protected Power is so core to psionics in general that every power includes it as an option. It's absolutely key to any high-powered psi character, since they should expect to encounter anti-psi abilities and technology on a regular basis (see *Guiding the Mighty,* p. 4). In a world with incredible barriers, incredible ability to overcome them is appropriate, too. Protected Power may be treated as a leveled trait, costing 5 points/level, with each level adding 5 to rolls to resist Neutralize and Static or to shrug off drugs or technology that produce similar effects. Under this rule, it's cheap to buy up enough Protected Power that resisting psi-dampening becomes trivial, and that makes limitations insignificant. To prevent this, determine what level of anti-psi will appear (in terms of penalties applied) and allow enough Protected Power levels to cancel most, but not all, of it.

Regeneration

see p. B80 and *Powers,* p. 70

Like Energy Reserve, Regeneration with the Recovers Fatigue enhancement (+100%, *Powers,* p. 70) allows an esper who has used up their FP to get back in the game quicker, but on an even faster timescale. Too high a level of Regeneration may produce someone who simply doesn't care about FP costs for using powers at all, since he can recover almost any amount of expenditure in seconds or less. To counter this tendency, permit Regeneration of fatigue only in specific circumstances that helps the psi to "charge."

This can be modeled with Accessibility (p. B110) or Environmental (**Powers,** p. 110) limitations. A classic example is "Only while in gestalt." This sort of limitation can even be applied to each level of Regeneration separately, to represent a scaling recovery speed. For example, a mentalist could take Regeneration (Fast) with Accessibility, Only while in gestalt with five other psis, -20%, and then buy Regeneration (Very Fast) with Accessibility, Only while in gestalt with 20 other psis, -30% (which only applies to the 50-point difference between the two levels), and recover 1 FP per minute while in contact with five or more other minds, or 1 FP per second if they are in contact with 20 others.

Talent

Power Talents are the *ne plus ultra* of traits for high-level psionics games. To facilitate extreme feats, allow more than the normal four levels of Talent. However, too much Talent can trivialize the penalties imposed by significant exertions and make them commonplace. Capping Talent at six for a 500-point game, eight for an earth-shaking 1,000-point game, and 10 for anything higher than that makes sense.

There are also ways to artificially improve Talent – that is the main effect of technology such as psi amplifiers (**GURPS Ultra-Tech,** p. 94 or **GURPS Psi-Tech,** p. 12). In settings where such equipment is in common use, raising the limit on Talents may be unnecessary. Heroes looking for a boost can just find themselves an amplifier. Allowing higher levels of Talent *and* the benefits of gear may throw game balance out of whack entirely. Then again, truly high-level settings might demand such means; cracking planets with only the force of mighty brains needs a lot of power. Having the top end of power require technological assistance can also allow the GM greater control, since such aids can always be taken away.

In settings where protagonists and their adversaries are generally expected to have powers, whether psionic or from other sources, Talent needs no special balancing – just allow psychic characters to take the same number of levels as everyone else. In campaigns where powerful mentalists will rub shoulders with equally high point value but mundane protagonists, however, high levels of Talent need a bit more care. Unusual Backgrounds can control this.

Unusual Background

Unusual Backgrounds are priced both on how much edge the rarity of an ability provides to a character, and to what degree the GM wants to discourage taking a trait. Since the latter consideration depends entirely on individual preference, only the former will be addressed here. Putting upper levels of Talent and high-powered techniques behind an Unusual Background helps prevent epic-level psionic heroes rendering low-powered or mundane characters irrelevant. The cost of the Unusual Background means that the former will have to focus on their abilities, while those who didn't pay this surcharge will have points to be flexible.

If the GM decides to put high-powered techniques and Talent behind such a barrier, then Unusual Background (High Psi) grants the following bonuses for one psionic power, chosen with the background. First, it allows the psi to use psionic techniques within the power that have a default of -11 or greater; lesser psionic lights cannot even try such techniques, even if they have the skill levels to have a chance. It also allows the psychic hero to buy one additional level of Talent in the power. Finally, the GM may permit a character with this background to use the *Godlike Extra Effort* rules (**GURPS Powers,** p. 161), spending additional fatigue on extra effort and multiplying the effect proportionately, up to a maximum number of extra FP equal to the level in Unusual Background (High Psi). The GM should decide how many levels of the Unusual Background are permissible, with each additional level allowing a psi to buy another level of Talent and to spend more FP on extra effort.

The point value of Unusual Background (High Psi) depends on how rare and unknown such power levels are in the setting. If powerful psychics have been heard of, but the average opponent doesn't expect to encounter them, 5 points per level is reasonable. If almost no one believes such feats are possible, 10 per level is more appropriate. Higher prices should be reserved for campaigns where the very existence of psionics is questioned.

SKILLS

A few skills deserve a closer examination.

Energy-Recovery Skills

Other types of powers that expend fatigue (notably magic and chi) have skills for rapid recuperation. The Psychic Recovery skill below similarly permits espers to recover quicker, but not at the extreme speed allowed by Regeneration (Recovers Fatigue) (pp. 5-6). Be careful about allowing Regeneration and energy-recovery skills to stack – this leads to low fatigue being a momentary inconvenience, rather than lasting for a few minutes.

Psychic Recovery

Will/Hard

Default: Meditation-6

You recover from psionic exertions faster, by focusing your internal energy through mental discipline. Recovery requires five minutes of peaceful, uninterrupted concentration, after which you can roll against Psychic Recovery. If you succeed, you recover 1 FP spent on psionic powers (whether inherent FP costs for an ability, psi techniques, or extra effort). Psychic Recovery never restores FP spent on physical exertion or on non-psionic supernatural abilities (such as magic).

Modifiers: -5 to recover 1 FP in only 2 minutes, or -10 to recover in 1 minute; -5 if you don't have peace and quiet (actually being attacked while concentrating makes a Psychic Recovery roll impossible).

Wildcard Skills

Instead of buying each psionic skill separately, several can be combined into a single wildcard skill. As suggested in **GURPS Power-Ups 7: Wildcard Skills** (*How Many,* pp. 9-10), a balanced wildcard covers about six to seven Hard skills.

Most of the powers in **Psionic Powers** include about that many skills, making them logical sources for potential wild-cards: Anti-Psi!, Probability Control!, Teleportation!, and so on. There are exceptions: Ergokinesis has 14 skills, ESP has 11, and Telepathy has *19*. Conveniently, in these cases the powers are already subdivided – just use Cyberpsi! within Ergokinesis, Divination! within ESP, and so on.

Besides the psionic skills they cover, wildcards may provide additional benefits. Each can substitute for Electronics Operation (Psychotronic) and Expert Skill (Psionics) with regard to psionic devices and phenomena related to their focus (or Hidden Lore (Psionics) if psychic knowledge is concealed in the setting). Improved defaults for psi techniques are also appropriate. Halve the default (rounding in favor of a smaller penalty) for any technique that defaults to one of the psionic skills covered by a wildcard. For example, a psi with Astral Projection! could try the Expansion technique for Astral Armor at -3 to the wildcard, since that technique defaults to the Astral Armor skill at -6.

EPIC TECHNIQUES

Many of the following break the normal limits upon psi techniques (see *Under the Hood: Psi Techniques* and *Additional Psi Technique Guidelines*, **Psionic Powers,** p. 9 and p. 10 respectively). Mentalist heroes can also use the psi techniques listed in *Cinematic Psis and Uber-Techniques* (**Psionic Powers,** p. 76).

ANTI-PSI

Screaming Sanctuary

Hard

Default: Screaming-15; cannot exceed Screaming.
Prerequisite: Screaming level 2 or higher.

When you "scream," you can choose to exclude targets within your area of effect. You can choose which targets are excluded or included based on any criteria that are obvious to you, and you can change who is affected every turn.

Ultimate Negator

Hard

Default: Cancellation-30; cannot exceed Cancellation.

Psionic experts claim that every human accomplishment is at least partially psionic, since they are all linked to the mind. This technique draws on that idea and lets you expand your skill to nullify any ability that is vulnerable to such interference – any power source that includes -5% for being potentially canceled by other special "anti-powers" (*Anti-Powers*, **GURPS Powers,** p. 20), such as Magical, Moral, or Super. If you succeed, you turn off *all* the subject's powers that come from one source.

If you have the Interruption ability, you can apply this technique with it as well, suspending uses of abilities from any vulnerable source, rather than canceling them.

ASTRAL PROJECTION

Ectoplasmic Materialization

Hard

Default: Astral Travel-10; cannot exceed Astral Travel.

While in astral form, you can reach into the material plane, using ectoplasm to give temporary substance to any part of your body you want. This allows you to touch, manipulate, or even attack a material target. The body part used is equally vulnerable to physical attack!

If you have acquired an item on the Astral Plane, you can materialize it as well, by making the hand holding it substantial. If you let go of an item while it is materialized, it becomes effectively "real," and will remain solid. Many astral items are too fragile to survive the gravity and stresses of the material realm, however.

The same technique also allows you to convert items you are wearing or carrying into astral equivalents when projecting. Roll against Ectoplasmic Materialization, at an additional penalty based on how much the objects encumber you: -1 for no encumbrance, -2 for Light, -5 for Medium, or -10 for Heavy. These penalties *can* be bought off. Objects have an astral form, leaving their physical shell in the material world, just like yourself. Something whose astral form is damaged or destroyed will have the same effect applied to its physical form. If you break contact with an astral item, its physical form loses 1 point of HT every hour, until you either recover the astral representation (which restores HT at the same rate), or it drops to 0 HT, at which point it crumbles into dust.

> *. . . and there are even rumors, Miss Grey, of mutants so powerful that they can enter our minds and control our thoughts, taking away our God-given free will.*
>
> *– Senator Kelly, in* **X-Men** *(2000)*

ERGOKINESIS

Hyper-Compression

Hard

Default: Data Retrieval-15; cannot exceed Data Retrieval.

You store the information you take from a computer in a massively compressed form that occupies effectively no space within your mind. This works like the Mirror technique for Data Retrieval (**Psionic Powers,** p. 30), except that any systems you copy do not count against the storage limit of your IQ.

Knockout Burst

Hard

Default: Confuse-20; cannot exceed Confuse.

Rather than simply disrupt the subject's thought processes for an instant, you shut them down! The person falls unconscious for a number of minutes equal to your margin of victory. Once this ends, the victim is stunned until he successfully rolls vs. HT (once per second) to recover.

Terminal Burst

Hard

Default: Confuse-25; cannot exceed Confuse.

You disrupt the subject's mind so thoroughly that he may never recover. If he loses the Quick Contest, the person falls into a coma (p. B429). The victim gets the usual single chance to awaken after 12 hours, after which he will probably die unless he receives medical attention.

Blanket Dampening

Hard

Default: Dampen-10; cannot exceed Dampen.
Prerequisite: Dampen level 3 or higher.

You can shut down electricity flow on a scale of *miles*, rather than just yards. Your dampening radius is increased to Dampen level × 0.1 miles.

Current Analysis

Hard

Default: Electric Vision-10; cannot exceed Electric Vision.

In addition to seeing electric fields with your Electric Vision ability, you can analyze them. If you notice a field while using this technique, you automatically know basic facts about it: its voltage, amperage, wattage, the resistance of the material it travels through, and so on – anything an electrician's tools could tell you. If you succeed at an IQ roll, you can make even more detailed analyses, learning things like what type of source generated a current, whether a field is produced by a living being or a machine, or how likely a charge is to suddenly increase or decrease.

Strobe Light

Hard

Default: Flash-13; cannot exceed Flash.

You flicker your light burst to create neurological effects. If a target fails his roll to resist, he also suffers a crippling migraine (treat as agony, p. B428) for the same period as he is stunned. If the person fails by 5 or more, he also suffers a seizure (p. B429) for minutes equal to the margin of failure.

ESP

Hyper-Awareness

Hard

Default: Awareness-10; cannot exceed Awareness.

Your extra-sensory awareness becomes acute. Not only do you sense the presence of objects or beings, you know their nature intimately. You gain a great deal of information on anything you detect with Awareness: vital signs and biochemical information for living creatures, and material composition, energy output, radiation emissions, etc. of any object. This information is sufficient to allow an appropriate skill roll to analyze anything you sense.

Universal Techniques

Certain psi techniques can be applied to many or even all psionic powers. Note that all these techniques must be bought up for each psi skill individually.

Fire and Forget

Hard

Default: Appropriate psi skill-4; cannot exceed default skill.

Many psionic abilities that affect an area have a version of this. A successful roll against this technique lets you leave behind an effect, which will persist in place as normal for 10 seconds before ending. If the ability would usually require concentration, it stays on as long as you continue to concentrate, then for an additional 10 seconds. All effects become fixed once control is relinquished; you can no longer alter them. A power released in this manner no longer counts as "on" for purposes of multiple abilities – in effect, it has become a passive ability.

This technique is available for Screaming (at level 2 or higher), Flash, Hologram, Cryokinesis, and Pyrokinesis. It can also be used in conjunction with other techniques that allow an ability to cover an area. An ability no longer under its source's control affects *everyone* who enters the area – even the original user!

Use this in combination with the Permanent Effect technique (***Psionic Powers,*** p. 76) to create a result that lasts *forever*, without counting as an ability "on" for the rest of your existence.

Inviolate Defense

Hard

Default: Appropriate psi skill-12; cannot exceed default skill.

This technique can enhance any defensive ability that uses the Damage Resistance advantage. When your defense is activated with this technique, ignore any effect that would divide or reduce your effective DR, as long as the attack doing so would normally be stopped by your DR at all. For example, using PK Shield, you could ignore the armor divisor 2 from a PK Bullet attack with the Sharp Edge technique. You could not, however, gain DR against a laser beam, because PK Shield's limitation to only physical damage still applies. Inviolate Defense techniques exist for the following abilities: Psychic Armor, Astral Armor, EK Shield, and PK Shield.

Out-of-Body Experience

Hard

Default: Clairvoyance-14; cannot exceed Clairvoyance.

This technique blurs the line between ESP and Astral Projection powers. Instead of just projecting your senses to a distant location, you project your *consciousness*. This effectively creates an astral body for you at the location you are sensing (see *Projection,* **GURPS Powers**, p. 44, and *Astral Projection,* **Psionic Powers**, p. 26), although you cannot view the astral plane, only the material. Because your mind is present at the place you are sensing, *you can use psionic powers there*. This functions exactly as if you were physically present at the location you are sensing; calculate all ranges and areas from that point. Your "presence" is invisible, and only abilities capable of seeing astral entities will detect you. While projected, you cannot use abilities at your body's location.

PROBABILITY ALTERATION

Revenge of the Curse!

Hard

Default: Curse-8; cannot exceed Curse.

You change your Curse into something more insidious. If you have Curse level 1, when you roll using this technique, the target doesn't immediately suffer horrible wrong. Instead, roll 2d. The target must make a second Will roll, with a penalty equal to half the previous total rounded down. If they fail, they suffer a bout of bad luck: a roll they should have made becomes a failure or even a critical failure, an unlikely but-plausible event occurs to hinder them, etc. These should never be immediately fatal, but should be inconvenient.

Once a bad situation occurs, the target's luck returns to normal *for now.* Once every hour in game after the curse has been placed, roll 2d and have the target roll Will with a penalty, as above. Every time the subject fails, he suffers another bout of bad luck. This continues for a number of hours equal to the victim's margin of failure on the original roll to resist the Curse, or eight hours, whichever is shorter. If the victim ever critically succeeds on one of the resistance rolls, the curse is broken.

For each additional level in the Curse ability you have, the maximum possible duration extends by one hour (nine hours at level 2, 10 at level 3, and so on).

Curse by Association

Hard

Default: Curse-4; cannot exceed Curse.

This technique can *only* be used in conjunction with the Revenge of the Curse! technique (above). If you successfully curse someone with an insidious curse, that person becomes capable of *spreading* the curse to others. When you invoke the curse, you choose how it spreads and anyone who is immune. Methods of spreading the curse can include having an extended conversation (including remotely) with a target, touching someone (skin contact *not* required) for a significant length of time, or any other vector with a similar level of difficulty. Immunity can be conferred based on any feature that would be obvious if you saw a potential target or interacted with the person briefly; age, sex, race, or obvious allegiance are all valid categories.

Those who are not included in the immune category must make a Quick Contest of Will against your original roll to activate the Curse, just as if they were the original target. If they fail, they suffer all the effects of Curse (as modified by the Revenge of the Curse! technique) – the cycles of bad luck start fresh with each target. Once a curse has run its course on a target, that person is no longer infectious. Subjects who have been infected by a particular use of Curse with this technique are immune to further infections from the same instance.

If you take an additional -3 penalty when rolling against Curse by Association (which *cannot* be bought off), you can either include two or three possible vectors of the size described above, or one much broader vector for infection (seeing a target in person, for example, or hearing him speak for only a few seconds).

Many of these techniques break the normal limits on psi technique.

PSYCHIC HEALING

Deadly Slumber

Hard

Default: Sleep-25; cannot exceed Sleep.

By overloading the neurological systems that cause sleep, you can send someone so deeply into slumberland that the victim may never return! A target who fails to resist your Sleep ability falls into a coma (p. B429), with the usual effects.

PSYCHIC VAMPIRISM

Agonizing Drain

Hard

Default: Drain (Attribute)-10; cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

This is a separate technique for each Drain (Attribute) skill. When you take an attribute while using Agonizing Drain, you forcibly *rip* the target's physical or mental integrity from him, causing enormous pain. In addition to the reduced attribute, he suffers from agony (p. B428) for the duration.

Empowering Drain

Hard

Default: Drain (Attribute)-8; cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

This is a separate technique for each Drain (Attribute) skill. You not only reduce your target's attribute, you *add* some of it to your own! This is much harder to accomplish, and thus requires skin-to-skin contact. You may use the Far Draining technique to get around that limitation (restoring your range to -1/yard, *not* to standard range modifiers!), but at an extra -1.

If you succeed, your own attribute is raised for the next 1d×5 seconds, regardless of your Drain (Attribute) power level. (At level 1, use the same roll for the duration of the target's attribute loss and your gain.) Drain ST gives you +1 ST (not HP). Drain DX gives you +1 DX (not Basic Speed), but you must decide whether it applies in combat or non-combat situations; it cannot do both. Drain IQ gives you +1 IQ (not Will or Per). And Drain HT gives you *+2* HT (not Basic Speed).

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: EMPOWERING DRAIN

Empowering Drain is trickier to build than a standard psi technique. It is an example of using abilities at default (*GURPS Powers,* p. 173), to add one of the following: ST+1 (No HP bonus, -20%; Psychic Vampirism, -10%; Reduced Duration, 1/10, -20%) [5]; DX+1 (Aspected, Combat *or* Non-combat, -20%; No Basic Speed bonus, -25%; Psychic Vampirism, -10%; Reduced Duration, 1/10, -20%) [5]; IQ+1 (No Will or Per bonus, -50%; Psychic Vampirism, -10%; Reduced Duration, 1/10, -20%) [4]; or HT+2 (No Basic Speed bonus, -50%; Psychic Vampirism, -10%; Reduced Duration, 1/10, -20%) [4].

However, using an ability at default makes the core ability unavailable. That doesn't work here, as we need the attribute boost and attribute drain to coexist! So, in addition to the attribute boost, we *also* add a second ability: a more limited version of Drain (Attribute). This version adds Contact Agent (-30%) and Melee Attack (-30%), reducing its cost from 24 points to 18. When this is added to the attribute boost, the total cost comes to 22 or 23 points, safely under the main ability's 24-point cost. (Further levels raise the base ability and this weaker ability at the same flat rate of +2 points/level, which is why the attribute boost retains Reduced Duration at higher levels.)

Multiple Drain

Hard

Default: Drain (Attribute)-40; cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

You aren't limited to draining someone only once! If you successfully roll against this technique on a target who you have already used Drain (Attribute) upon, stack the reduction from this use with that one. You can do this more than once, as long as you use this technique on each drain after the first.

Ultimate Power Theft

Hard

Default: Steal Power-30; cannot exceed Steal Power.

This works like the Ultimate Negator technique (p. 7), except that instead of neutralizing powers from other sources, you can steal them.

PSYCHOKINESIS

Bullet in the Back

Hard

Default: TK Bullet-15; cannot exceed TK Bullet.

Instead of accelerating a small object in your immediate vicinity, you do the same to something behind your foe, which usually results in a surprise attack that can't be defended against. Roll against TK Bullet, with the technique penalty and a range modifier based on the distance between you and your target (*not* the object and the target). If you succeed, only an opponent with Peripheral Vision or 360° Vision may defend normally, while someone with Danger Sense may defend at -2 on a successful Per roll. All others cannot defend.

Heartbreaker

Hard

Default: TK Crush-30; cannot exceed TK Crush.

You directly squeeze your target's heart, potentially stopping it. If the subject takes more than 2/3 of their HP in damage from your TK Crush using this technique, they suffer a heart attack (p. B429), and will probably die without medical attention.

Ultimate TK

Hard

Default: TK Grab-20; cannot exceed TK Grab.

This technique amps up the psi's TK Grab ability to god-like levels; it must be used in conjunction with the *Extra-Effort* rules (*Psionic Powers,* p. 7). Instead of receiving the normal bonus to power level, look up *half* your TK Grab level on the "Size" column of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550), read across to the "Linear Measurement" column, and use that number as your TK Grab level for the next use of that ability to a lift subject. For an additional -25 penalty (that can be bought off, at the GM's option), you can use your higher value to *damage* a subject as well.

Split Focus

Hard

Default: TK Grab-8; cannot exceed TK Grab.
Prerequisite: TK Grab at level 4 or higher.

When you use this technique, reduce your TK Grab level by any amount evenly divisible by three. For every three levels you reduce it, you can control one additional object at the ST and Move indicated by the lowered level. Each object controlled by TK Grab acts completely independently of the others, and can be controlled without penalty.

Example: Marvelous Woman has TK Grab at level 44. She can roll against this technique, reduce her TK Grab level by 33 to 11, and then simultaneously control 12 objects. She could pick up six swords to fence with, a pair of laser rifles to shoot, and levitate four of her teammates, all at once.

Tactile Telekinesis

Hard

Default: TK Grab-10; cannot exceed TK Grab.

Instead of projecting your telekinetic force at range, you use it to bolster your own physical strength. Add your TK Grab level to your ST for all active uses, such as lifting objects, determining damage from unarmed attacks and melee weapon strikes, etc. You must still concentrate to maintain Tactile Telekinesis as per TK Grab, but uses of your ST (such as physical attacks or lifting) are permitted as part of the Concentrate maneuver. If your concentration is broken, you revert to your original ST, which can be problematic!

TELEPATHY

Acausal Comm

Hard

Defaults: Telereceive-12 *or* Telesend-12; cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

This is actually two separate techniques, one for Telereceive and one for Telesend. Your telepathic communications are not limited by the speed of light. No matter how far away your target is, you hear his thoughts, or your message reaches him almost as if he was right next to you. In order to hold a full two-way FTL conversation, you must roll against both Telereceive and Telesend skills at the penalty for Acausal Comm, or the other party must use Telesend and take the penalty for the technique as well.

Deadly Echo

Hard

Default: Mental Stab-10; cannot exceed Mental Stab.

When you attack a target with your Mental Stab ability, you induce his mind to "remember" the pain you dealt it, inflicting the same damage over again! If you win the Quick Contest while using this technique, first do damage as normal. Then, one second later, the target takes the same amount of damage *again* (there is no roll to resist this second damage). For every 10 points by which you make your (modified) skill, the damage reoccurs another time, after another one-second delay.

TELEPORTATION

Back to Square One

Hard

Default: Exoteleport-10; cannot exceed Exoteleport.

When you use Exoteleport (or Range-Limited Exoteleport) on a target, you infuse him with extra teleportation energy that affects him repeatedly, yanking him back to the same place over and over. After a target is teleported, on each of the next two seconds, that person must make another HT roll to resist your original roll. If he fails, he is returned to the place he was initially 'ported to, and must make a Body Sense roll once again (this applies even if he didn't move). For every five points you made your (modified) roll by, the target must resist one additional teleportation.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: PSYCHOKINESIS

Here are some notes about a few of the new techniques.

Split Focus Explained

Split Focus is an example of using abilities at default (***GURPS Powers,*** p. 173). The ability being defaulted to is Compartmentalized Mind (Limited, Telekinesis Only, -30%; Mentalism, -10%; No Mental Separation, -20%) [20]. Since three levels of TK Grab is 21 points, this is what is used as the ability being defaulted from. Thus, for every four levels of TK Grab, three levels are sacrificed to provide the default ability, and the remaining level sets the power available for all compartments.

Split Focus With Other TK Variants

This technique can be used with other abilities based on the Telekinesis advantage, such as the short-ranged version of TK Grab or the broader Telekinetic Control. Determine how many levels would equal 20 points. The ability's levels must be reduced in increments of this size to determine the number of simultaneous uses and the effective levels remaining. For example, TK Grab (Short Ranged) is worth four points per level. Five levels would add up to 20 points, so when using the Split Focus technique, reducing it by five levels would provide one additional compartment.

Tactile Telekinesis Explained

Tactile Telekinesis is an adaptation of the ST-Based enhancement (***GURPS Power-Ups 4: Enhancements,*** p. 20), taking it beyond its normal realm of Innate Attacks. The cost of Telekinesis with ST-Based is comparable to buying a level of ST without HP (8 points) and a level of Telekinesis as an Alternate Ability of the ST (1 point). The former requires concentration to accomplish normally physical actions, while the latter requires a turn to switch between "modes."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mask of Humanity

by Christopher R. Rice

In settings where the supernatural is real, what keeps the mundane from discovering the paranormal world? In some campaigns, a massive, organized conspiracy makes sure the "norms" never find out about the occult. But what if no such organization exists? Humanity, however rational, will eventually stumble across something science cannot explain. What happens then? Humanity does not *want* to believe in monsters, no matter how much we fantasize about them. A common trope in fiction is that the paranormal world protects itself by enhancing this belief. That wasn't a were-wolf; it was a big dog. The bellhop's eyes didn't glow red; it was a trick of the light. That guy didn't just hurl a ball of fire; it was a busted gas pipe. And so on. White Wolf's **World of Darkness** features *multiple* such systems, as do many works of fiction, such as Esther Friesner's *Gnome Man's Land* and Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*.

This article presents such a concept as an organized system with detailed mechanics.

The Façade

The idea of an otherworldly force hiding supernatural monsters and beings isn't necessarily new. Many cultures believe supernatural forces separate the worlds of humans and the paranormal. The supernatural might inhabit a different reality (like the Otherworld of Celtic folklore) or a "field" emitted by a specific type of being (like a faerie's glamour). Regardless of its origin, this *Façade* protects humanity from supernatural forces and vice versa.

The GM should make a note of which supernatural creatures are protected by the Façade. For monsters and NPCs, this is all that's required. Where costs matter (such as for racial templates), having the ability to actively tap into the Façade (see *Shrouding*, p. 20) is an Unusual Background worth 50 points in a setting where the supernatural is completely unknown and where no countermeasures exist, 30 points if countermeasures and people aware of the truth are both rare, 15 points if they're uncommon, and 5 points if common. Here, "countermeasures" refers to abilities like Awareness (pp. 19-20), Detect (p. 17), See Invisible (p. 18), etc., as well as equipment anyone can get (see p. 16). In campaigns where everything supernatural is automatically hidden by the Façade (but can't necessarily call on it directly), it is effectively a 0-point feature.

What Is the Façade?

The Façade is best described as a metaphysical field that hides supernatural forces (magic, psionics, etc.), wielders of those forces (mages, psis, etc.), beings (vampires, ghosts, etc.), and places (haunted houses, portals to other dimensions, etc.). The Façade tricks "mundane" sapients (typically human beings and hereafter referred to as mundanes) by creating a paranatural "feedback loop" that causes uncertainty within their minds. When they doubt what they see when they encounter the paranormal, the Façade alters their memories to something "plausible."

The Façade is thickest in cities and other regions where large numbers of sapients congregate. It is thinnest in rural areas and wild places. It also varies depending on the subject himself. For example, skeptics and atheists are more deeply affected than someone who has an open mind or outright believes in the paranormal. This is because the Façade draws on disbelief to reinforce its obfuscation while believers weaken it with their convictions. It also depends on what the force, being, or place is doing at that time. For instance, a brownie simply trying to hide his presence will increase the power of the Façade, while a vampire attacking someone will weaken it. For campaigns where this is *not* the case, see *It's an Ordinary World,* p. 19, for some ideas.

Façade Rating

The Façade is measured on a scale of 0 (absent) to 20+ (amazingly strong). This is not a uniform score; it changes depending on the area, the person it affects, and the actions of the protected individual. Areas where the Façade Rating (FR) is 6 or less do *not* obscure memories; instead, they can cause Fright Checks (p. B360)! Some areas have *no* Façade Rating at all; whatever mundanes see there, they perceive it as it actually happens. In most campaigns, these are other dimensions or areas with many supernatural inhabitants and very few mundanes. See p. 14 for some general examples, and pp. 14-15 for determining a more precise current Façade Rating.

Façade Examples

Typical Façade Rating	Strength	Rarity	Example
0	–	Very Rare	Otherworldly planes, areas used by huge numbers of supernatural beings for centuries.
1-2	Nonexistent	Very Rare	Haunted houses or places of "power."
3-6	Faint	Rare	Site of a repeated summoning of otherworldly being.
7-9	Weak	Very Uncommon	Place where something "spooky" happened once or twice or is reputed to have happened.
10-12	Average	Common	Most cities or towns.
13-15	Robust	Very Uncommon	New York City or Chicago suburbs or similar urban sprawl.
16-19	High	Rare	Heart of New York or similar "center" of a teeming metropolis.
20 or higher	Very High	Very Rare	Time Square on New Year's Eve.

HOW DOES THE FAÇADE FUNCTION?

The Façade has both a "passive" and "active" form. In either case, the Façade warps memories of paranormal events to seem "mundane." In its active form, it can hide anything supernatural from the eyes of the mundane world, but requires special skills or abilities, such as the new Shrouding skill (p. 20).

If a mundane witnesses supernatural forces or beings, then he must make two rolls. The first is a Quick Contest of Will vs. the Façade Rating (see *The Façade's Current Strength*, p. 15). This determines a mundane's initial reaction (see the table, below). The second is a Will roll, modified by the "Long-Term Modifier" column from the *Initial Response Table*. For example, assuming the first roll failed by 5, the second roll would be at -2. This determines any long-term consequences (see the table, p. 15). Both rolls are adjusted by relevant circumstances from *Affected Subject Will Modifiers* (p. 15), equipment (p. 16), advantages, etc.

In the Façade's active form, supernatural creatures and forces can draw on it to help them hide, make others forget them, or become invisible. See the new skill Shrouding (p. 20) for how an example of how this works.

Initial Response Table

Subject's Roll	Result	Long-Term Modifier
Victory by 10 or more	No effects!	+2
Victory by 5 or more	No effects!	+1
Victory by 0-4	No effects!	+0
Loss by 1	The subject suffers one of the following for seconds equal to (20 - Will), minimum of one second. Roll 1d: On 1, the subject is Nauseated (p. B428). On 2, subject goes Berserk (p. B124), even if he doesn't have that disadvantage. On 3-4, the subject temporarily gains Delusion (False Memories) (**GURPS Horror,** p. 24) as his conscious mind refuses to believe what he just saw. On 5-6, the subject becomes giddy (treat as Euphoria; see p. B428).	-1
Loss by 2	As for "Loss by 1," but duration is increased to *minutes*.	-1
Loss by 3-4	As for "Loss by 1,"but duration is increased to *hours*.	-1
Loss by 5-6	The subject suffers one of the following for seconds equal to (20 - Will), minimum of one. Roll 1d: On 1, subject is Dazed*. On 2-3, the subject panics and flees the area as fast as he can. If attacked and he cannot escape, he takes an All-Out Defense maneuver until he can. On 4, the subject must make a *immediate* Fright Check (p. B360). On 5, the subject Hallucinates (p. B429). On 6, the subject falls Unconscious (p. B429).	-2
Loss by 6-7	As for "Loss by 5-6," but duration is increased to *minutes*.	-3
Loss by 8-9	As for "Loss by 5-6," but duration is increased to *hours*.	-4
Loss by 10 or more	Subject must make an *immediate* Fright Check (p. B360), adding *half* his margin of failure to the Will roll as a penalty.	-5

* Unlike the standard Daze condition (p. B428), the subject *can* take Move actions and remains peripherally aware of his surroundings enough to attempt active defenses, albeit at -4.

It's funny how each day you wake up and never really know if it will be one that will change your life forever.

– Shawn, in **The Secret World of Arrietty**

Long-Term Consequences Table

Die Roll Margin	Result
Critical success	The subject's brush with the supernatural has enlightened him! If he has Mundane Background or any Delusion (False Memories) gained from the Façade, he loses them. At the GM's option, he may also immediately spend available character points to purchase any supernatural or exotic trait the campaign allows. For better or worse, he knows the truth now. If the GM is using the rules from *It's an Ordinary World*, p. 19, the subject also gains whatever trait represents enlightenment for the campaign.
Success by 5 or more	Subject remembers the events fully. He might not believe them, but he remembers them in perfect detail.
Success by 3-4	Subject remembers the events, but they're blurry and dreamlike. All rolls to recall details are at -5.
Success by 1-2	As for "Success by 0," but the subject may roll once per day.
Success by 0	Subject gains a Delusion* related to the event, but may make a Will roll (using the same modifiers he originally had) once per week. Success means he loses the Delusion and remembers *something* (the GM determines what).
Failure by 1-2	As for "Success by 0," but the subject may roll once per *month*.
Failure by 3-4	As for "Success by 0," but the subject may roll once per *year*.
Failure by 5-9	Subject gains a Delusion* related to the event.
Failure by 10 or more *or* critical failure	Subject immediately gains Mundane Background (p. 19 and p. B144) if he didn't already have it, *and* gains a Delusion* related to the event. Those that already have Mundane Background add the Banal enhancement (p. 19). Should the subject already have that, he loses one level of Will.

* The subject believes *something* other than what he actually saw, and he gains the disadvantage Delusion (False Memories) (**GURPS Horror,** p. 24) at the -5-point level. At the GM's discretion, if the victim continues to witness paranormal events and to fail his roll, either he continues to gain Delusions or the level of the disadvantage increases to -10 points after a handful of occurrences and later to -15 points if he's constantly encountering such incidents and forgetting them.

Affected Subject Will Modifiers

Affected Subject Is:	Modifier
Open-minded about the supernatural.	+1
Skeptical of the supernatural.	-2
Has witnessed (and remembered) a supernatural occurrence before.	+1 per occurrence (up to +3)
Being attacked by supernatural creature(s).	+5
In the presence of a supernatural creature that is simply trying to avoid detection.	-2

THE FAÇADE'S CURRENT STRENGTH

The GM should select a value for the Façade Rating from the *Façade Examples* table (p. 14) or use the following tables to determine the number, which starts at a base of 10 and uses these modifiers to get the current FR.

Location Modifiers

Location Is:	Modifier
An abandoned town, area of wilderness, or not populated by human beings.	-4 to -5
A small town, a rural area, otherwise is sparsely populated by human beings.	-2 to -3
A city, a nature preserve or park outside the bounds of a human settlement, or moderately populated by human beings.	0 to -1
A large city or an area with an moderate human population.	+1 to +2
A huge city or an area with a large human population.	+3 to +4
A vast city or an area with a dense human population.	+5 or more

Situational Modifiers

Subject Is:	Modifier
In a crowd (Times Square, movie theater, night club, etc.).	+2
In the dark.	1/3 of the Darkness penalty, rounded down, as a bonus
In an area with uncertain lighting (e.g., strobes, flickering lights, candles, etc.).	+1
In an area with perfect lighting (e.g., well-lit room, in the open on a bright summer day, etc.).	+2

Piercing the Façade

Despite the Façade's pervasive nature, those who know about it can learn how to guard against it. They don't have to be enlightened or supernatural themselves, just superstitious. The following are a few ways that mundanes can see through to the world beyond.

Horseshoes: While traditionally associated with fairies, horseshoes (or any loop of iron, like the eye of a needle) can allow the viewer to see past the Façade. When used, such devices provide +3 to resist the Façade.

Innate Capability: The GM might allow protagonists to buy See Invisible (Façade), Resistant to the Façade, or Unusual Background (Enlightened) without any reason other than being born that way. Examples include those born with a caul over their eyes, with strange birthmarks, with two different color eyes (heterochromia), of a certain birth order (the seventh son of the seventh son or the 13th child), and so on. Of course, a brush with the supernatural can justify these advantages, such as a child rescued from fairies, or someone with elvish blood.

Mirrors: Mirrors are said to reveal the true face of those reflected within. While mirrors of glass are typical, any reflective surface will do. Mirrors grant +1 to resist the Façade. This bonus is doubled for mirrors that were designed as such (e.g., not "any" reflective surface), and doubled again to resist active Façade use (see p. 20); add 1 if the mirrored surface is made of silver. Beings that don't normally have reflections (e.g., vampires) are immune to this.

Oculus Stones: Stones that have had a hole bored naturally into them by wind or water are powerful tools against the Façade. They're also called adder stones, *aggry,* Druids' glass, seeing stones, and witch stones. Anyone looking through such a stone gains *+10* on rolls to resist the Façade (this bonus doesn't count when determining if a critical success was rolled). They range in size from monocle-like stones to hoops big enough to wear like a bracelet. Stones with monocle-sized holes (SM -10) weigh 0.1 lbs. and cost $500, while "bracelets" (SM -8) weigh 1 lb. and cost $5,000. The GM might allow bigger ones, increasing both cost and weight by ×10 per +2 SM. The cost takes into account the fact that such stones must be naturally made and are thus rare; if that doesn't matter, divide the final cost by 100. Additionally, some types of stone (such as those made of translucent minerals like quartz or other crystals) might be more potent than others, giving a higher bonus for a much higher price.

Plants: Some plants ward off the energies of the Façade by merely being worn. Examples include elder wood, moly, primroses (typically worn as a garland), and a four-leaf clover (typically worn on a lapel). The GM will have to decide what works in his campaign, but most grant a bonus from +1 to +10. Certain plants might need to be processed into a "fairy ointment." Applied underneath the eyes, it grants the advantage See Invisible (Façade) for 4d hours. If the ointment is removed, washed away, etc., the effects last for 1d more minutes and then end. The GM might allow versions that *permanently* help the user to peer past the Façade. Costs and weights for plants vary from campaign to campaign. Fairy ointment might be available at "real" occult stores. Typical cost is $1,500 *per dose* ($7,500 for ointment with permanent effects, if available at all), and weight is negligible. Fairy ointment with permanent effects also costs character points to buy the See Invisible advantage in *addition* to the cost of the ointment.

Technology: Some forms of technology can assist a subject with seeing through the Façade. Most of the time, this is based on other natural laws or principles. For instance, modern recording equipment such as cameras or camcorders are not sapient; therefore, the Façade "ignores" them, permitting users to look *through* the equipment to see at what's happening. Depending on the campaign, technology could either allow someone to see through the Façade completely (no rolls required) or grant a hefty bonus (between +2 and +6). Especially clever investigators might even adapt older methods to new devices. For example, a pair of glasses fitted with two oculus stones, while *modified* by non-natural means, still grant their bonus because the inner loop wasn't damaged.

> *Richard did not believe in angels, he never had. He was damned if he was going to start now. Still, it was much easier not to believe in something when it was not actually looking directly at you and saying your name.*
>
> – Neil Gaiman, **Neverwhere**

Interactions With *Safe as Houses*

The Façade's mechanics and those of Thresholds (see *Pyramid #3/58 Urban Fantasy II,* p. 4) are *intended* to be compatible; they represent two sides of the same coin! Areas with damaged Thresholds have a weaker Façade Rating; those with higher Thresholds tend to have stronger ones. This is the Façade reinforcing Threshold energy and vice versa. Of course, this goes right out the window when supernatural creatures try to get at those inside. When using both systems, the following rules apply.

- When rolling against the Façade in a dwelling with a damaged Threshold, add the Threshold's penalty it bestows on Fright Checks, self-control rolls, etc. as a penalty to the local Façade's Rating.

- When a supernatural creature tries to *forcibly* penetrate a dwelling's Threshold, he cannot rely on any sort of active Façade use (p. 20), and all rolls against passive Façade activation (pp. 14-15) are at +2.

CHARACTER TRAITS

The following traits are relevant in campaigns using the Façade.

ADVANTAGES

Certain advantages need some minor adjustments for a campaign with the Façade in it.

Blessed

see p. B40

Deities can grant a version of Blessed that allows those who have it to be hidden by the Façade as if they were supernatural creatures. The rules are the same, but is notated as Blessed (Hidden by Façade) and costs 10 points.

Detect

see p. B48

The GM might allow Detect (Façade-Masked Beings) [10] with the Vague and Reflexive (see **GURPS Powers,** see p. 109) modifiers to perceive creatures hidden by the Façade. To peer through the Façade, use See Invisible (p. 18). The following advantage *replaces* the Awareness skill (pp. 19-20), for the GM who doesn't wish to use it.

Awareness: Detect (Auras) [4*] + Detect (All Supernatural Phenomena and Beings) [30] + See Invisible (Façade; Partially Exclusive, -20%) [3*] + Sensitive (Accessibility, Only after you've examined a subject's aura, -40%) [3]. *Notes:* You can detect the presence of supernatural phenomena, beings, and auras. Additionally, after you analyze someone's aura, you get all the benefits of Sensitive (p. B51). Finally, you can see through the Façade (active or passive). *40 points.*

* An alternative ability of Detect (All Supernatural Phenomena and Beings).

Eidetic Memory

see p. B51

Eidetic Memory helps you remember what you see through the Façade, which could justify disadvantages (Nightmares, Flashbacks, etc.). Either version makes you immune to basic memory alteration due the Façade, unless you gained a Delusion (False Memories). If the GM allows, "Cosmic, Affects the Façade" can be added to this trait for +100%, in which case you are *immune* to all long-term effects of the field. However, the GM may rule that you must have the +100% Cosmic modifier to get the bonus. The supernatural doesn't play by the same rules!

Illuminated

see p. B60

In campaigns where the Façade is rarely encountered, Illuminated makes you immune to the effects of the Façade. In other campaigns, it simply gives you +3 to resist active attempts to use the Façade.

Some Illuminated beings have the ability to temporarily make others as aware as they are. The new enhancement reflects this.

New Special Enhancement

Affects Others: By touching another person, you may temporarily bestow the effects of your advantage on them; this lasts for as long as you remain in physical contact (or via use of other esoteric powers, overlapping via Astral Projection, using telepathic links, etc.). These effects last for as long as you maintain contact plus 3d seconds afterward. *+100%.*

Aurasight: In addition to being able to spot supernatural beings and phenomena, you can also see auras. To do this, roll IQ-3 – success gives you all the benefits of the Sensitive advantage (p. B51). This includes the bonuses to Detect Lies, Fortune-Telling, etc.; allows you to spot impostors *if* you've met the "real" person at least once before; and tell when others are lying. *+33%.*

Potent Aurasight: This enhancement functions as above, but you get the benefits of Empathy instead. *+100%.*

> *We're ostriches and the whole world is sand.*
>
> *– Jim Butcher,* **Small Favor**

Invisibility

see p. B63

If not using the Shrouding skill (p. 20) in a campaign, the following ability is appropriate for beings who can actively hide themselves with the Façade.

Shrouding: Invisibility (Environmental, Areas with a Façade Rating (p. 13), -5%; Glamour, Will+0, -25%; Nuisance Effect, Can be seen when using certain items, -5%; Substantial Only, -10%; Switchable, +10%; Visible Reflection, -10%) [22]. *Notes:* In campaigns where the Façade works against camera, film, etc., add the Affect Machines enhancement, increasing cost by 20 points. Particularly potent creatures can decrease the penalty on Will rolls to affect others; each -1 (up to Will-5) increases the cost by 2 points. The GM might also allow the Can Carry Objects enhancement as well; increase cost by 4 points for No Encumbrance, 8 for Light, 20 for Medium, and 40 for Heavy.

Mind Shield

see p. B70

The Mind Shield advantage adds to *all* rolls to resist the Façade.

New Special Limitation

Façade Only: Your Mind Shield only protects you from the Façade, nothing else. *-75%.*

Obscure

The GM may wish to allow Obscure for non-senses, as long as they "record" or "sense" information somehow. For instance, Obscure (Memory) might give a penalty to others on rolls to recognize you in a lineup, in photographs or videos, to recall specifics about you, all attempts to gather facts mundanely, and so on. The higher the penalty, the harder it is for someone to recall who you are.

Ten levels of Obscure (Memory) means no one *ever* remembers who you are when your advantage is active; you're just another face in the crowd! These effects persist even after your advantage is off. For example, if your ability was on while you eluded the police, and you later turned it off, they'd take a penalty to rolls to recall you equal to your level. If you came across them again without Obscure active, they'd remember you normally, but not what you did before.

Levels of Obscure higher than 10 are possible. Each level beyond the first gives a further -1 to rolls to discern the subject. At level 20 or more, the subject doesn't even get a Sense roll!

The GM may permit the following ability for those who are particularly skilled with the Façade.

Arcanus: Chameleon (Accessibility, Only while Silence is active, -10%; Can Carry Objects, No Encumbrance, +10%; Environmental, Areas with a Façade Rating (p. 13), -5%; Nuisance Effect, Is negated by using certain items (p. 16), -5%; Requires Will vs. Will Roll, -15%) [3.75/level] + Obscure (Divination; Defensive, +50%; Environmental, Areas with a Façade Rating, -5%; Extended, Clairsentience, Memory, Records, +60%; Nuisance Effect, Is negated by using certain items, -5%; Requires Will vs. Will Roll, -15%; Stealthy, +100%) [5.7/level] + Silence (Environmental, areas with a Façade Rating, -5%; Nuisance Effect, is negated by using certain items, -5%; Requires Will vs. Will Roll, -15%) [3.75/level]. *Notes:* Roll a Quick Contest of Will vs. Will. Success gives those using divination or clairsentience against you -1 to their rolls per level of this ability. Additionally, they have -1 per level on rolls to remember you (see description), as well as rolls to use Research or Administration to find records on you, Electronics Operation rolls to pick you up on CCTVs, and so on. At level 10, you are *immune* to divination and clairsentience, people can't remember you (even if they just met you), and records on you simply don't exist.

You can gain +2 to Stealth against a target (*doubled* if you're standing still; halved if he relies only on one of vision or hearing). At level 9+, you are effectively invisible and completely silent to anyone affected. *14/27/40/53/66/80/93/106/119/132 for levels 1-10.*

Resistant

The Façade counts as an Occasional threat. Resistant to Façade adds to all contests and rolls for both passive and active effects. Additionally, the GM who wants extra detail for values other than +3 or +8 can interpolate using the *Alternate Resistant Bonus Table* (below).

See Invisible

See Invisible (Façade) allows you to see through the Façade. Optionally, the GM might allow other forms of this advantage for other senses. For example, "Hear Inaudible" might permit someone to hear the whispers of ghosts, while "Feel Intangible" might help a person to touch the etheric plane.

New Special Limitation

Exclusive: You must switch your sight between normal vision and the ability to see invisible things, making this an active ability (requiring a Ready maneuver to switch) instead of a passive one. If *Partially Exclusive* (-20%), the real world is a dark, muted gray while your See Invisible is on; all Vision rolls are at -4. If *Completely Exclusive* (-50%), you are effectively blind to the real world while using it. The GM may allow these limitations for versions of See Invisible that rely on other senses.

Unusual Background

The GM may charge an Unusual Background to be unaffected by the Façade, or even to *purchase* traits that negate or reduce penalties to see through it. See p. 13 for an example of uses and costs for different campaigns.

Zeroed

Zeroed is a useful advantage in campaigns with the Façade.

New Special Enhancements

Alias: You do *not* have to deal in strictly cash or commodities; can have a legal ID, etc. When someone begins to investigate or research you, the files mysteriously disappear or there is so little evidence that it's unusable. This allows you to have a normal life, while also being protected. *+100%.*

Alternate Resistant Bonus Table

Bonus to Rolls	Cost Multiplier	Very Common	Common	Occasional	Rare
Immunity	×1	30	15	10	5
+14	×4/5	24	12	8	4
+12	×2/3	20	10	7	4
+10	×3/5	18	9	6	3
+8	×1/2	15	8	5	3
+5	×2/5	12	6	4	2
+3	×1/3	10	5	4	2
+1	×1/5	6	3	2	1

Universal: You get both benefits of Zeroed. In a fantasy setting, records and evidence of you disappear; in high-tech worlds, supernatural abilities to divine your presence or true identity fizzle and do not work. *+50%.*

DISADVANTAGES

A few existing disadvantages warrant further discussion.

Susceptible

see p. B158

Being Susceptible to Façade Effects is considered an Occasional condition in most campaigns and Rare in others. See *Pyramid #3/58: Urban Fantasy,* p. 10, for more details on paranormal sensitivities.

Mundane Background

see p. B144

This trait represents the total lack of experience with anything remotely weird or occult. Those with it suffer -5 on all rolls to resist the effects of the Façade. Depending on the campaign, this trait might be a mandatory disadvantage (p. B120) or even a feature; everyone in the campaign world without the appropriate Unusual Background has it! The GM might also allow those with this trait to purchase Neutralize or Static (*Powers*, pp. 98-97), even if he permits them to purchase no other exotic or supernatural abilities. See also the Mundane advantage (*GURPS IOU,* p. 19), for a beneficial form of this disadvantage!

An optional enhancement for this disadvantage may be taken by those are who truly, *truly* pedestrian.

New Special Enhancement

Banal: Your life is not just one filled with mundanity; it is filled with awful, *everyday* banality. You cannot have *any* supernatural traits. Furthermore, because you don't believe in such hogwash as "magic, psychic powers, and other unexplained phenomena," you are at -8 against spells, abilities, or paranormal forces that alter your memories of such powers used against you or in your presence. Furthermore, if you actually *encounter* a supernatural creature or phenomenon, you must *fail* an IQ+4 roll or rationalize the event away somehow. For example, if you were attacked by a werewolf and succeeded your IQ roll, you would believe you were attacked by a *really* large dog or even a wolf, but you couldn't even imagine that you'd been mauled by a *werewolf.* The GM may assign bonuses or penalties to this roll for specific circumstances. For games that use the Façade, use those rules instead (pp. 13-16); anyone with this enhancement has *-10* on rolls to resist the Façade. *+100%.*

New Special Limitation

Daydreamer: While you are not truly "awake" to the supernatural world around you, neither are you completely unaware of it. You may spend points in Magic spells, cinematic skills, Occultism, Hidden Lore, etc., but you *roll* at default regardless of skill level. If they have no normal default, this advantage allows you a default roll at the standard penalty (Very Hard skills are attribute-7, Hard skills are attribute-6, and so on).

As long as you've spent at least one point in them. If you buy this disadvantage off later, you may use your full skill levels. The GM may permit you to use your full skill levels if in an altered state of mind (hypnotized, drunk, in a trance, etc.) or under extreme duress (like situations described under *Emergencies Only,* p. B112). *-50%.*

Vulnerability

see p. B161

The GM may allow the Vulnerability disadvantage to be applied to more than just damaging effects. For instance, if a psi has Vulnerability (Neutralize) ×2 and fails his Will roll against that power by a margin of 5, he loses access to all his abilities for *10* minutes, not five minutes.

Façade Effects are an Occasional Vulnerability in most settings, but Rare in others. Vulnerability (Façade Effects) multiplies your margin of failure when determining initial and long-term effects (pp. 14-15), how long active Façade use (p. 20) works against you, and so on.

> ## It's an Ordinary World
>
> This article makes a few assumptions about how the Façade functions. Chiefly is that supernatural beings cannot use the Façade to hide if they are aggressive, and that it only affects mundane beings. But what if this wasn't the case? The GM can change this, but it results in additional challenges. For example, a world where the Façade protects supernatural predators, even if they attack mundanes, will be downright scary for ordinary people. Depending on the campaign though, this could be a feature, not a bug.

NEW SKILLS

The following new skills suit campaigns using the rules presented in this article, but could also be adapted for "secret powers" campaigns.

Awareness

Per/Very Hard

Default: Per-7*.
Prerequisites: Power Talent† 1+ *or* belonging to a supernatural race.

You can focus your "inner eye" to perceive the unseeable. The chief use of this ability is to resist supernatural obfuscation like Invisibility Art (p. B202), Shrouding (p. 20), and so on. This includes advantages, spells, psionic powers, etc. that hide the user. Rely on the better of Awareness or whichever attribute or skill you'd normally resist with. This skill taps into your senses to detect the presence of the supernatural. However, if you couldn't normally be aware of it, it does *not* grant the ability to do so (e.g., a person with blindness using this skill couldn't suddenly see).

Additionally, you may rely on this skill to notice if someone uses paranormal forces or is a supernatural creature. This

requires a Quick Contest of your Awareness skill vs. their Will. Success gives you a general idea of what your target is (demon, undead, mage, etc.). Success by 3 or more allows you to make an immediate roll versus Occultism-4 or appropriate Hidden Lore skill to tell you exactly what your target is or what forces he wields. Critical success tells you what your target is *and* gives you the same bonuses as if you had read his aura (see below). Certain advantages or traits might provides you with a bonus against this skill or make you completely undetectable!

At -3 to skill, you may attempt to read a target's aura. Success gives you the benefits of the Sensitive advantage (p. B51) against that specific target for as long as your ability is active; roll once per minute to keep it active. Critical success gives you the benefits of the Empathy (p. B51) advantage instead, *and* tells you if he is a supernatural being or uses supernatural abilities (see above). These bonuses *stack* with the Empathy advantage, but not other abilities to read auras.

Modifiers: +3 if you use a special focusing device (crystal, tarot cards, etc.). -5 to "extend" your Awareness to detect nearby beings or power-use that you cannot locate via your standard senses; normal range penalties apply (p. B550). Add the bonus from your *highest* Power Talent.

* There is *no* default in a setting without supernatural abilities, or characters who have never witnessed "paranormal" events.

† Such as Magery, Power Investiture, Telepathy Talent, and so on.

Shrouding

Will/Very Hard

Default: Will-7*.

Prerequisite: Power Talent† 1+ *and* Meditation 12+ *or* Stealth 12+, *or* belonging to a supernatural race *and* Stealth 12+.

This skill is one part meditation and one part sheer will. It helps you to manipulate the Façade to hide in plain sight. It's similar to Invisibility Art (p. B202), but instead of convincing the target you "aren't there," it's the Façade doing the convincing.

The skill requires one second of concentration to use. Once activated, roll a Quick Contest of your skill vs. the Will of everyone who can see you; normal vision penalties apply. Viewers who are distracted are at -3 to this roll, those who are on alert receive +3, and those with Mundane Background resist at -5 (-10 if they also have the Banal enhancement, p. 19). If there are multiple viewers, but only one noticed you, he can point you out to the others, allowing them another roll. If you win, all those affected cannot see you as long as you move at a slow walk (Move 1). If you move faster than this, you must make another skill roll with the normal results. Even if you are noticed, they'll still have to roll against the Façade (if it affects the area you are on in; see pp. 13-15). Normally, this skill cannot be used offensively (you couldn't attack someone and remain invisible), though this depends on the setting (see p. 19).
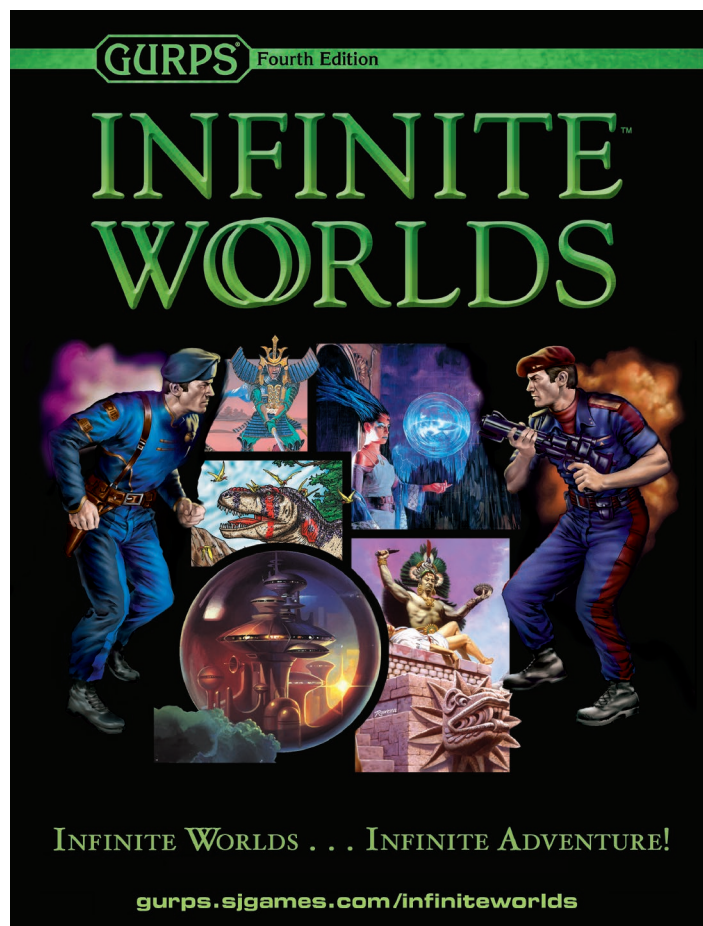
Modifiers: +3 if you use a distraction. Your movement modifies your skill roll rather than viewers' Vision rolls: +2 if you stand still (Move 0), -2 at a fast walk (Move 2), or -5 at a run (Move 3+). If you stand *perfectly* still (which requires a successful Breath Control or Meditation roll), you get an additional +1. You can use Invisibility Art to supplement this skill. Make a skill roll; success gives +1, failures -1, critical failure -2, and critical success +2. Add the bonus from your *highest* Power Talent.

* There is *no* default in a setting without supernatural abilities, or characters who have never witnessed "paranormal" events.

† Such as Magery, Power Investiture, Telepathy Talent, and so on.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eidetic Memory

Anthropomorphized High-Tech Weapons

by David L. Pulver

Anthropomorphized high-tech weapons and combat vehicles are modern weapons such as tanks, aircraft, ships, or even guns that have assumed a life of their own and taken human form. Others are people who wield artifacts that turn a ship or airplane into a battlesuit, which also shares some of the characteristics of the original archetype.

The best-known depictions of these powers are the *mecha musume* (mecha girls) that appear in some Japanese anime, games, and Internet memes, but they need not be limited to anime-influenced campaigns – they are also suitable for supers, science-fantasy, or monster-hunter settings.

Anthropomorphized Weapon

Sources: Divine, Magical, Super, or Superscience.
Focus: Alternate Form, Gadgets.

This is the power to embody certain traits of a mechanical weapon or weapon system, such as a gun, tank, or combat aircraft. Someone with this set of abilities may even be the essence or soul of an iconic weapon or fighting vehicle come to life in humanoid form – a martial embodiment of the animist belief that everything, or at least certain valued objects, possesses their own spirits. Other possible origins include anthropomorphic weapons that are sacred tools of a particular war god, ghostly weapons formed from a fusion of spirits of ace pilots or crew with their destroyed vehicle that have returned to fight again, or even martial toys. Weapon avatars could also simply exist as a superscience or divergent-technology battlesuit created by gadgeteers and powered by psychic or magical energy. Perhaps in an alternative universe, conventional tanks, aircraft, or ships don't even exist!

For instance, a personified warship might be the spirit of a warship given human form, with supernatural durability and the ability to use the spiritual power to energize a variety of wearable devices. Such an entity might have:

- Headgear resembling antenna.
- Strap-on and hand weapons like gun turrets or launchers.
- A backpack from which emerges a vertical mast and stack.
- Skate-like water boots.
- Armor plates over strategic parts of the body.

Weapon-related powers are scaled down to match the human size. Generally, the person is as fast as whatever is embodied, but HP, damage, DR, etc. are only about 1/5 to 1/10 as effective as the namesake. Secondary weapons are often not included.

Individuals typically have several other abilities depending on the specific vehicle or weapon class; these traits may form the basis of a racial template. The additional abilities could represent scaled-down abstractions of certain features (main gun turrets, sensors, torpedo tubes, etc.) of that ship or weapons. For instance, a ship might have +1-2 ST for every 50' of length, and a Basic Move designed to equal 1/4 the fastest speed in knots. Other common advantages include Extra Attack, Innate Attack, Radar, Sonar, and higher levels of Telescopic Vision. Submarines will have Amphibious and some form of Doesn't Breathe. Warships with embarked helicopters or aircraft may take them as an Allies, creating a (scaled-down) familiar of sorts.

Jordan Scott ("Tank Guy")

727 points

Seven-year-old Jordan was playing soldier with his cherished set of plastic Army Men when the nice woman from Social Services arrived to tell him that both his parents had been caught up in a super-villain battle, and he was now an orphan.

A tearful Jordan swore a childish vow of revenge, wishing he could crush and blast criminals the way his green plastic tank scattered toy soldiers. A passing demon heard the child's heartfelt plea, and offered the boy the strength, mobility, and armor of a tank in exchange for two-thirds of his future lifespan, so that the boy could avenge himself.

M48 Patton

Remember Army Men? These little green U.S. Army soldiers were sold in bulk bags from the 1950s on. Sometimes they came with plastic tanks, often modeled after the M48 Patton. That was the third tank named after General Patton and the first U.S. Army main battle tank with the now-standard four-crew layout, a 90mm main gun and coaxial 7.62mm machine gun, with a .50 caliber on the turret roof for the commander. The M48 was used in Vietnam War, the Arab-Israeli wars, Indo-Pakistan wars. It still soldiers on in some armies to this day.

Designing Tank Avatars

Tank avatars have additional abilities as part of a racial template. The racial template's ST typically has an attribute modifier relative to the weight of the tank it personifies, sufficient to give it ST about 1/5 the actual tank's. (Thus, if a 30-ton tank had ST 155, a personified tank might be ST 31, requiring a modifier of ST +21.) Weapon damage and DR also should be scaled appropriately.

Common advantages include more DR (often with the Directional or Hardened modifiers), Enhanced Move 1-2 (Ground), a level or so of Extra Attack, Obscure (Vision), Innate Attack, Radio, and Telescopic Vision. For TL7+ designs, it could have DR (with Laminate), Filter Lungs, Infravision, and Sealed. The most common disadvantages are Fragile (Explosive) and a modest degree of Maintenance.

Jordan can summon forth from his dreams Tank Guy, an armored figure in a tank-like suit of armor, complete with a handheld cannon and a turret-like helmet with white U.S. Army stars. His abilities are scaled down from M48A1 Patton, a 1950s-era battle tank that the green plastic toy was based on.

In his boy form, Jordan Scott has the following statistics.

ST 7 [-30]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 9 [-20]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 9.8 lbs.; HP 7 [0]; Will 12 [15]; Per 10 [5]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.
4'2"; 51 lbs.

Social Background
TL: 7 or 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages
Alternate Form (835-point tank; Non-Reciprocal Damage, +50%; Projected Form, -50%; Super, -10%) [766]; Pitiable [5].
Perks: Deep Sleeper; Telepathic goldfish. [2]

Disadvantages
Enemies (Various weird foes) [-20]; Obsession (Fight criminals) (12) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Weirdness Magnet [-15].
Quirks: Divine Curse (Lose 2/3 lifespan) [-1]

Skills
Bicycling (E) DX [1]-11; Gunner/TL7 or 8 (Machine Gun) (E) DX [1]-11; Gunner TL7 or 8 (Cannon) (E) DX [1]-11; Tactics (H) IQ-1 [2]-8.

Tank Form

835 points

Jordan's a were-tank! Or, at least, a were-battle-suit. When transformed, heavy armor plates surround his body. A large cannon-like rifle appears in his hand, braced against the shoulder, with a secondary machine gun next to it. Another machine gun protrudes from the turret-like helmet he wears, emblazoned with three white stars. Its capabilities have been scaled down to 1/6 the power of an actual tank, to reflect their human size. Thus, instead of a 90mm tank gun and a heavy machine gun, its gun is equivalent to a 15mm anti-tank rifle, and the machine gun equal to a machine pistol. Armor protection is similarly reduced. Jordan's tank form is 7' tall and weighs 400 lbs.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+13 [130].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: None.
Advantages: DR 25 [125]. • Remove Pitiable [-5].
 • All of the following:

 • *Boots With Retractable Caterpillar Tracks:* Enhanced Move 1.5 (Ground Speed 15; Temporary Disadvantage, No Legs (Tracked), -20%) [24]
 • *Frontal Armor Plates:* DR 80 (Directional, Front, -20%) [320].
 • *Buttoned Up:* Filter Lungs [5]; Night Vision 3 [3]; Sealed [15].
 • *Handheld Tank Gun:* Large Piercing Attack 6d×3 (Accurate +2, +10%; Armor Divisor (2), +50%; Breakable, DR 20, SM -2, Can Breakdown, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of ST, Will not work for thief, -15%; Increased Range ×50, +50%; Limited Use 1, Fast Reload, -20%) [157].
 • *Head-Mounted Machine Gun:* Piercing Attack 2d (Accurate +3, +15%; Armor Divisor (2), +50%; Increased Range ×20, +40%; Rapid Fire 10, +100%) [31]; Extra Attack 1 [25].
 • *Smoke Grenade Launcher:* Obscure Vision 8 (Ranged, +50%) [24].

Disadvantages: No Peripheral Vision [-15]; Noisy 2 [-4].

Mack Ingram

397 points

Mack Ingram is an anthropomorphized submachine gun, a human-appearing entity born from the swirling energies of the media gestalt of the late 20th century. He is the animist spirit of the MAC-10 "Ingram" machine pistol (see p. 23), a thought-form that coalesced in the turbulent crime-ridden 1970s and 1980s from the collective unconsciousness of all those who used, admired, or died from the M10.

Unlike some personified weapons, Mack doesn't *resemble* a gun. Instead, he metaphorically embodies the traits of a classic machine pistol: he's fast, concealable, not too accurate, and associated with murder and mayhem.

He was born fully formed with a delusional history that seems real to him: A tough guy, he attempted to join U.S. Army Special Forces. Fast and strong, he washed out of training due to his impetuous temper. Leaving the military, he moved to Hollywood to become a stuntman.

That's about all anyone gets about his past. Mack currently works as an actor and stuntman while living a double life as a contract killer and mercenary. He goes by the codename "Whispering Death" (the nickname one of the gun's designers gave the M10 while attempting to sell its silenced version to the U.S. Army).

Although Mack may look human, his inhuman origin gives him several special traits that reflect the essence of his namesake weapon. He's incredibly fast (for brief periods only). In close combat, he can generate a field of silence. His skills reflect the gun's special ops, Hollywood, and criminal associations. His Signature Gear is, of course, the M10 itself; although he keeps one in his shoulder holster, he'll always find another if he loses it. Like the M10, he's also durable, and he won't stay dead . . .

Mack eats too much and too quickly (a reflection of the ammunition consumption of the M10). He has a little sister Michelle Ingram, who is growing up to be a personification of the .380 caliber M11. She's smaller than MAC, but potentially even faster.

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 13 [30].
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 14 [10]; Per 12 [0]; FP 13 [0].
Basic Speed 8.00 [30]; Basic Move 8 [0]; Dodge 12*.
5'10"; 175 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 7 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Altered Time Rate 1 (Super, -10%) [90]; Charisma +2 [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contact Group (L.A. Underworld; Skill-18; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [3]; Extra Attack 1 [25]; Reputation +2 (Fast and deadly; Among criminals) [4]; Silence 2 [10]; Signature Gear (Cosmic, +50%) [2]; Unkillable 1 (Super, -10%) [45]; Zeroed [10].

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Gluttony (12) [-5]; Intolerance (Gun control activists) [-5]; Secret (Hitman, living weapon [-20].

Skills

Acting (A) IQ [2]-12; Area Knowledge (Los Angeles) (E) IQ [1]-12; Armoury/TL7 (Small Arms) (A) IQ [2]-12; Brawling (E) DX+3 [8]-16; Driving/TL7 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-13; Guns/TL7 (SMG) (E) DX+4 [12]-17; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-12; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-15; Shadowing (A) IQ [2]-12; Soldier/TL7 (A) IQ [1]-11; Stealth (A) DX+2 [8]-15; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-13.

* Includes +1 for Combat Reflexes.

Equipment

Mack always wears a jacket with a shoulder sling under his coat for his M10. He carries the .45 model. He usually fires it one handed with stock retracted (Acc 2, ST 10, Rcl 3). He often screws on the sound suppressor (1.2 lbs., -2 to Hearing, -1 Bulk), though his power means he doesn't need to use it if he's very close to his foe.

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
7	MAC-Ingram M10, .45 ACP	2d+1 pi+	3	140/1,500	8.4/2.2	30(3)	10	8†	-3*	$425/$29	2	2

The MAC/Ingram M10

Mack personifies the Military Armaments Corporation M10 machine pistol, popularly known as the MAC-10 or "Ingram" after its designer, Gordon Ingram. Introduced in 1970, the M10 and (its sister weapon, the smaller M11) were compact boxy pistol-shaped submachine guns known for their extremely high rate of fire (which emptied their magazines very quickly), indifferent accuracy, and their effective sound suppressor (designed by Ingram's colorful business partner, the soldier of fortune Mitchell Wer-Bell). The M10 was tried out by the U.S. Army and several police and special ops units (including the British SAS). It proved great for close-quarter slaughter but of limited use otherwise. With no large-scale sales, Military Armaments Corporation went out of business. However, the little submachine gun never faded into obscurity – instead, its distinct silhouette made it *the* weapon for tough guys and bad guys to use in 1980s action movies and TV shows. Its concealability and indiscriminate capability for full auto mayhem also saw it equally popular with criminals, as the Ingrams were used in several high-profile murders and assassinations, leading to the marketing slogan "the gun that made the 80s roar." Other gun companies sold M10 variants or copies including semi-automatic versions (the latter often illicitly converted to full auto), ultimately leading to several hundred thousand copies being sold.

Using Mack Ingram

Mack Ingram could appear as a villain, mercenary, or vigilante in a supers game set anywhere from the mid-1970s to the present day. If using the **GURPS Technomancer** setting, he might also be appropriate for a **GURPS Funny New Guys** Vietnam War-era game. Mac might also appear in a **GURPS Horror** or **GURPS Monster Hunters** game, emphasizing his nature as a corporeal spirit avatar. Another horror association: the Ingram features in Whitley Strieber's horror classic *The Wolfen,* where its high rate of fire made it the only effective weapon the police protagonists had to stop the eponymous monsters. The GM who taps into that could give Mac some silver bullets and make him a werewolf hunter!

Gabrielle Sa'ar III

824 points

Between heaven and hell meanders the river Styx, where Charon's fleet of ghostly boats carries souls through the misty realm of the afterlife to their reward. But the freedom of the Styx is now under threat! The enemy is the Leviathan, an infernal armada of sea monsters and demonic corsairs. To protect the safe passage of souls from being devoured or enslaved and dragged down to hell, the spirit mechanics of the Celestial Court fused select innocent spirits of the elect with regalia – "spirit vessels" – imbued with the supernatural power of iconic warships. Able to walk on water at high speed, and armed with powerful mystical firearms that meld divine magic and human technology, the Celestial Squadron patrols the River Styx and, also, is occasionally dispatched to Earth to hunt straying aquatic demons or infernal sea monsters summoned by foolish mortal magicians.

Gabrielle is one such celestial sailor: the incarnate spirit of an Israeli Sa'ar II missile boat. Gabrielle (who also goes by the name "Tempest" after the English translation of Sa'ar) appears as a teenage girl with long black hair and intense, piercing eyes, dressed in an Israeli naval cadet's uniform. Her Reawakened ability is derived from the historical experiences of the warship being personified, the traditions of its navy, or the skills of its human crew.

She still sometimes misses her life as a human back on Earth, where she died while saving a drowning companion. Even so, she enjoys her exciting roll as a naval psychopomp and demon hunter for the Celestial Court. She has made several friends among other spirit-sailors, who come from various nations and times.

At the fleet naval base – a steampunk city located on a fortress-island near the Styx's headwaters – she can power up what is called her "spirit vessel" – a rakish, steel-gray superstructure backpack with radar antenna and ECM gear, a pair of radio headphones, heavy metallic footgear, and multi-part strap-on missile launchers attached to her thighs and lower back, and atop the superstructure, a football-sized gun turret.

In combat, she wears her cadet "sailor suit" uniform and cap plus the superstructure backpack, naval motor boots, and weaponry that represent the Sa'ar III spirit vessel she is bonded with. If destroyed, she can be rebuilt, but this requires a month-long process performed by the Celestial Fleet's angelic admirals and their supernatural machines.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 12 [20].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 12 [4]; Will 15 [10]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10*.
5'4"; 125 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 7 [0].
CF: Heaven [0].
Languages: Hebrew (Native) [0]; Enochian (Native) [6]; English (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Alternate Form (644-point personification of Sa'ar III; Can Be Stolen, By force, Will not work for thief, -5%; Divine, -10%; Preparation Required, 10 minutes, -30%) [589]; Appearance (Beautiful) [12]; Blessed [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Empathy [15]; Fearlessness 3 [6]; Fit [5]; Higher Purpose (Defend souls from demons) [5]; Jumper (Spirit) (Divine, -10%, Limited Use, 1/day, -40%, Only in large body of water, -30%) [20]; Rank 2 [10]; Reawakened [10], Unaging [15].

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]; Duty (Celestial Fleet; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]; Sense of Duty (Comrades) [-10]; Truthfulness (12) [-5].

Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1].

Skills

Area Knowledge (River Styx) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Artillery/TL7 (Guided Missile) (A) IQ [2]-13; Guns/TL7 (Rifle) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Scuba/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Shadowing (A) IQ [2]-13; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-13.

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

Notes

On Earth, Gabrielle would count as a spirit, but since most of her adventures take place in other realms, she doesn't have to buy that trait.

Sa'ar III Personification

644 points

The traits detailed below are appropriate for a personification of a mid-sized TL6 warship (such as a destroyer or escort) or a small TL7+ warship (such as a missile boat, fast attack craft, or corvette). Increase statistics to represent a more powerful cruiser or battleship.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+5 [50].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP-3 [-9].

Sa'ar III

The Sa'ar III class are small but lethal warships that were used by the Israeli Navy in the 1970s and 80s. They are 147' long, with a steel hull, displacing 250 short tons. They are crewed by 40 sailors. Based on a upgraded German design, they were built in France and had just been completed when the French government placed an arms embargo on Israel in the wake of the Six Day War. In a legendary caper, the undelivered boats were manned covertly, then sailed out of Cherbourg to Israel, to become the centerpiece of the Jewish state's small fleet. The Sa'ar ("Tempest") and her sister ships were originally armed primarily with 40mm or 76mm guns, but soon received various upgrades (hence the moniker Sa'ar III for this model) including the Israeli-made Gabriel anti-ship missile and various ECM systems such as radar detectors and radar-obscuring chaff launchers. During the hard-fought Yom Kippur War (1973), Israel's small flotilla of missile boats defeated their Syrian navy counterparts at the Battle of Latakia, the first naval engagement in history in which both sides used guided missiles.

Advantages: The following abilities described below: Chaff Decoy Launcher [51]; ESM [20]; Extra Attack [25]; Gun Turret [96]; Missile Battery [318]; Naval Radar [55]; Radio Antenna [17]; Rapid Water-Walking 2 [32]; Temperature Tolerance 4 [4]; Walk on Liquid [15].

Disadvantages: Fragile (Explosive) [-10]; Maintenance (3-5 persons, Bi-Weekly) [-10]; Restricted Diet (Fuel from sea monster oil; Common; Substitution, -50%) [-10].

Personified Warship Abilities

Some typical warship abilities, some of which are included in the Sa'ar III template:

● *Anti-Aircraft Gun Mount:* Piercing Attack 5d (Accurate +2, +10%; Extra Recoil, -10%; Increased Range ×20, +40%; Rapid Fire, RoF 10, +100%) [60].

● *Chaff-Decoy Launcher:* Obscure Radar 10 (Area Effect, 8 yards, +100%; Extended, Para-radar, +20%; Limited Use, 4/day, Slow Reload, -15%; Ranged, +50%) [51].

● *Depth Charges:* Crushing Attack 6d×4 (Accessibility, Only vs. underwater target, -50%; Explosion 1, +50%, Inaccurate 2, -10%; Limited Use, 4/day, Slow Reload, -15%; Underwater, +20%) [114].

● *Electronic Support Measures* (ESM): Detect (Radar and Radio; Precise, +100%; Signal Detection, +0%) [20].

● *Gun Turret*: Large Piercing Attack 10d (Accurate +2, +10%; Increased Range ×50, +50%) [96].

● *Missile Battery:* Crushing Attack 6d×4 (Explosion 1, +50%; Fragmentation, +15%; Homing, Radar, +70%; Increased Range ×50, +50%; Limited Use, 5/day, -10%; Minimum Range 1%, -5%; Nuisance Effect, Hazardous backblast, -5%;) [318].

● *Naval Radar:* Radar (Extended Arc, 360°, +125%; Increased Range ×20, +30%; Targeting, +20%) [55].

● *Passive Sonar:* Discriminatory Hearing (Accessibility, Only underwater, -30%; Link, +10%; Profiling, +50%) [20] + Vibration Sense (Water; Link, +10%; Targeting, +20%) [13].

● *Radio Antenna:* Radio (Increased Range ×5, +20%; Short-wave, +50%) [17].

● *Rapid Water-Walking:* Enhanced Move (Water) 1-4 (Full Power in Emergencies Only, -20%) [16/level].

● *Sonar:* Sonar (Increased Range ×2, +10%; Targeting, +20%) [26].

● *Torpedo Tubes:* Crushing Attack 6d×5 (Accessibility, Only in Water, -30%; Explosion 1, +50%; Increased Range ×20, +40%; Limited Use, 3/day, -20%; Underwater, +20%) [240].

● *Triple Gun Turret:* Large Piercing Attack 10d (Accurate +2, +10%; Extra Recoil, -20%; Increased Range ×50, +50%; Rapid Fire, RoF 3, +50%) [114].

Sky Witch

250 points

Another common concept in anthropomorphic weapons is the idea of strap-on engine or drive pods – often worn as a backpack or on the legs – that are powered by psionics or magic and allow the wearer to fly through the air or space.

Troubled teens – often teenage girls still adjusting to puberty – will sometimes manifest poltergeist-like telekinetic abilities. In the past, these abilities were channeled by witches and warlocks to ride broomsticks. While this technique has been lost, the development of the Psi-Resonator crystalline blades and Psycho-Turbine has created the so-called

psychoprop or PK engine, which help the teenage psychic to generate defensive force fields and carry a sizable payload, such as a handheld assault rifle or machine gun. Now troubled teens are being recruited, trained, and mated with psychoprop-turbines for a secret government project . . . but what is the enemy?

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Resistant to Acceleration (+8) [3]. ● 25 points chosen from among: Absolute Direction [5] *or* 3D Spatial Sense [10], Acute Vision [2/level], Appearance (Attractive) [4] *or* (Beautiful/Handsome) [12], Combat Reflexes [15], Fit [5], Luck [varies], or Rank [5/level].

Disadvantages: -20 points of mental disadvantages appropriate to a troubled teen.

Power: Spend 132 points on the Talent and abilities from the following Psycho-Witch power (power modifier is Psi, Super, or Superscience, depending on the campaign):

● *Psycho-Witch Talent 1-4* [5/level].

● *Alloy Skin:* DR 5 (Partial, Legs, -20%; PM, -10%; Can Be Stolen, By Force, -10%) [15].

● *Antenna Ears:* Protected Hearing (Headgear†, -65%) [2] + Radio (Headgear†, -65%; Increased Range ×2, +10%) [5] + Radar (Headgear†, -65%; Targeting, +20%) [11].

● *Gun Sight Eyes:* Gunslinger (Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; PM, -10%) [22].

● *PK Engine:* Energy Reserve 10-25 (Leg Engine Pods*, -70%) [0.9/level] + Enhanced Move (Air) (Leg Engine Pods*, -70%) [6/level] + Flight (Leg Engine Pods*, -70%) [12].

● *PK Shield Generator:* DR 40 (Costs Fatigue, 3 FP, -15%; Force Field, +20%; Hardened 1, +20%; Leg Engine Pods*, -70%; Limited, Physical, -20%) [70].

● *Telekinesis:* Telekinesis 1-10 (Costs Fatigue, 4 FP, -20%; PM, -10%; Uncontrollable, -30%) [2/level].

* Leg Engine Pods (-70%) is a limitation combining Breakable, DR 15, Complex Mechanism, SM -2, -35%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Leg and foot hit locations may still be hit, +0%; Nuisance Effect, Engine Noise or Exhaust, -5%; PM, -10%; Required Disadvantage, Legless, Aerial, +0%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, Daily, -10%.
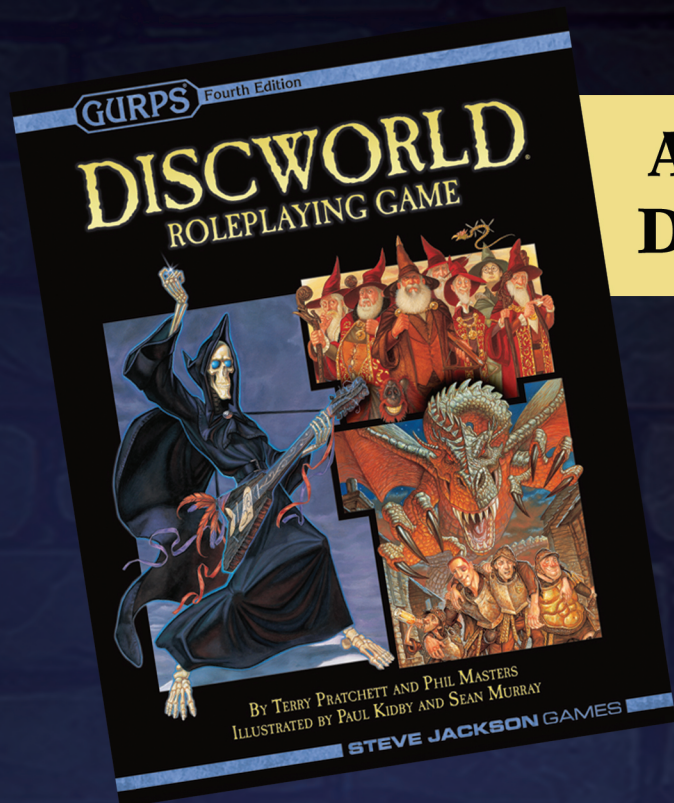
† Headgear (-65%) is a limitation combining Breakable, DR 4, Complex Mechanism, SM -7, -25%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of DX, -30%; PM, -10%.

About the Columnist

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

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Snakes Who Walk

by W.A. Frick

Tales of magical, talking, even *walking* serpents are found throughout mythology and folklore, from the seductive Serpent in the Garden of Eden (popularly equated with Lucifer, though this is hardly conclusive from primary sources) and the mysterious Naga of Buddhist and Hindu mythology to the sinister "Visitors" of *V* and reptoids of modern conspiracy lore. What these snakes have in common is that they're very seldom who they claim or appear to be – they're tricksters, magicians, disguised invaders, even demons.

This is because they're all based on ancient myths and whispered rumors of the Serpent-Lords, a hidden race of magical reptiles who claim to have built great cities in the jungles of the Jurassic Period, while humanity's distant ancestors were still picking bugs out of each others' fur. Adept shape-shifters and sorcerers, consummate conspirators, and deadly adversaries, the Serpent-Lords make an ideal villain for **GURPS Horror, GURPS Monster Hunters** (as a variation of the Reptoids introduced in **GURPS Monster Hunters 5: Applied Xenology**), dark fantasy (including **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**), or other games looking for an ancient and insidious "enemy within."

The Lords of Amenthes

Illuminated groups (such as the Cabal) have only recently and gradually become aware of the extent of Serpent-Lord infiltration of humanity's civilization and power-structure (see **GURPS Cabal,** p. 117), but "fringe" historians have been talking about them for centuries without knowing it. However, the missing piece was *Amenthes* – the lost kingdom, long believed by esoteric scholars to have existed somewhere beneath Europe. This piece was *not* in fact an extension of the Atlantean civilization as once believed. It was (and may still be) an empire of the Serpent-Lords. This revelation has sent occult researchers into fits, poring over snake myths and conspiracy theories for more clues about the "reptoids" and their many slithering coils of influence.

Motivation

The Serpent-Lords aren't necessarily evil per se, they're just higher up the food chain than humanity. Like a livestock farmer, they wish to maintain some control over the herd, and are often concerned more with crop yield than with the comfort or well-being of the animals waiting (quite unknowingly) to be slaughtered. Of course, they're also generally callous to the suffering of the warm-blooded cattle (though there are elements within serpent society that oppose needless cruelty to the livestock). In some cases, such as the fabled Gladiatorial Pits of the Serpents, they actually derive amusement from it. They're also habitually conspiratorial and ruthlessly predatory in the *social* arena, using any means necessary to retain their hidden position atop the food chain. Thus, in many ways, even if they're not "evil," they act very much like a race of carnivorous, shape-shifting, James Bond villains.

Organization

As powerful as their sorcery is, as cunning as their schemes may be, the Serpent-Lords need mechanisms and media with which to spread and exert their influence. Most of their organizations exist *beneath* and *within* human society, often covered by unwitting and infiltrated front groups – see *The Order of the Serpent,* p. 31. Although they're as rife with factions and internecine intrigues as any human group, they're unified in their disdain for the warm-bloods, and in the need to keep themselves, their agendas, and their disagreements from public knowledge.

At the heart of Serpent-Lord society is *family* (see *The House of Seth,* p. 30). All are descended from the reptilian aristocracy of Amenthes, and as both rare and long-lived creatures (a lifespan of centuries *at least*), the degrees of blood relation separating any two reptoids is likely no more than three or four. This makes it a simple matter for a Serpent-Lord to exert unexpected influence when dealing with nosy mammals – if there's a reptoid in a position to pull a certain set of strings, any other reptoid can request that they be pulled to assist him. Even deadly rivals will put aside their cold-blooded feuds in the interest of "family business."

Sutekh and Apophis

One element of serpent-lore that also made it into esoteric history was the connection between the reptoids, the ancient Egyptian reptile cults of Set and Sobekh (see also *The Order of the Serpent*, p. 31), and the semi-divine serpentine entity known as Apep or Apophis. As with most things that ancient, the surviving accounts are both vague and contradicting, made even worse by the habit of Egyptian clergy and royalty of *erasing* large swaths of history that they didn't like from the temple hieroglyphs.

From what occult theorists have put together, Sutekh was a Serpent-Lord sorcerer who entered into a bargain with Apophis to acquire power (possibly including the magical Path of Nonexistence – see **GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic,** p. 37). Sutekh indeed defeated his rival – a mighty sorcerer-pharaoh, whose brother he'd killed and replaced to assume the throne – and scattered his dismembered corpse along the Nile for the crocodiles to eat. The pharaoh's wife, a skilled sorceress herself, gathered *most* of her husband's parts and brought him back to some semblance of life, for at least long enough to exact his revenge and defeat Sutekh.

But *that is not dead which can eternal lie,* as the saying goes. Whatever dark bargain Sutekh had struck with Apophis, the signs, portends, and rumors all suggest that he has returned and ascended to the leadership of a powerful faction within the Serpent-Lords.

The Serpent-Lords and the Cabal

Although they've nurtured a somewhat tepid alliance with the reptoids for a fair stretch, even granting Grand Master status to a Serpent-Lord emissary (Lord Carson of Seth, also known as Kaas'sth'raa, p. 29), the Order has always been wary of the snakes in their midst. Fearful of being yet another of the serpents' false fronts, used and shed like an old skin (see *The Order of the Serpent,* p. 30), Cabalists cautiously tend their alliance with the reptoids.

VILLAINS AND ARCHVILLAINS

In an adventure, even a small coterie of Serpent-Lords (or a single powerful serpent, with a force of minions and servants, on the order of Lord Carson of Seth, p. 29) can keep the PCs guessing. Plots featuring Serpent-Lord villains are likely to have layers of intrigue and deception, seen through smoke and mirrors, all punctuated by brief, deadly flashes of violence when the serpent strikes. It may not be until the very end that the heroes even realize they've been dealing with Serpent-Lords (not that the reptoids don't habitually leave clues in the form of reptile-themed plots and covers).

If the first reptoid scheme the protagonists uncover is only the vanguard of a much larger campaign, the serpents could become an overall villain for an entire story arc. Such a game will be much like a smaller Serpent-Lord-themed adventure, but *even* more twisting, funhouse-mirror crazy as the vast conspiracy is unraveled. Serpentine strings could reach into any other group the PCs have encountered, from enemies to presumed allies to their own patron or employer. Paranoia will rule the day, as any human face could hide a forked tongue.

The focus of such a campaign could be on the faceless "reptoid menace," with the serpentine influence itself being more important than any individual Serpent-Lord. Alternatively, the GM could look to a more classic "evil overlord" model with the return of the Ancient One (see *Sutekh and Apophis,* above).

Frames and Hooks

Virtually any group who has an interest in looking into mysterious or criminal activities could encounter reptoids, from medieval adventurers investigating reports of a snake cult, to modern monster hunters who've caught a whiff of the supernatural behind a human trafficking ring – or even ordinary cops, private investigators, or concerned citizens who are drawn unwittingly into the coils of a serpentine conspiracy. Though they may have heard of the reptoids in myth, rumor, or conspiracy lore, the optimum way to introduce Serpent-Lords to a campaign is to have the group of investigators or other protagonists accidentally uncover one of their nested plots.

Even in a "shadow wars" campaign, where the Serpent-Lords are just one of a number of hidden factions, their guile and subtlety should be a cut above the rest. In their native setting (**GURPS Cabal**), they existed under the nose of *another* giant supernatural conspiracy for millennia before being sniffed out, and then coolly accepted "honorary membership" in the Order (see *The Serpent-Lords and the Cabal,* above). Secrecy and intrigue are their meat and wine (they don't eat potatoes, bread, or butter), and they've been perfecting their arts since before the first cavemen huddled around a fire.

The Shadow Wars

Creatures of conspiracy, the Serpent-Lords will invariably find their way to the front lines of the secret shadow wars in a "hidden supernatural" campaign (such as **GURPS Cabal** or **GURPS Monster Hunters**). It may be years or centuries before the other factions even realize that snakes wearing human faces are in their midst; indeed, the entire focus of a conspiratorial campaign may be to chart the extent of the serpentine network. Virtually any other faction – or any apparently mundane organization – could be an infiltrated Serpent-Lord puppet. If their membership in the Cabal (see *The Serpent-Lords and the Cabal,* above) is anything like their membership in other human secret societies, it's to use the Order as a cover or cat's paw in their greater schemes.

Lesser Evils

By the smoggy electric nights of 2043, the Serpent-Lords have all but formally split from the Cabal. In the wake of a devastating blow to the Order from a dictatorial regime (Pro-Gov) and the "anti-cult taskforce" of its powerful secret police (the NERCC), the reptoids have withdrawn from their dealings with the Cabal. This has left many Cabalists to speculate that the serpents are *behind* the attacks, and ProGov's ongoing war against the supernatural more generally. Pointing to alleged connections between The Order of the Serpent (p. 31), various Ivy League secret societies such as the Blade and Serpent, and the U.S. intelligence community, they theorize a reptoid conspiracy running from the House of Seth (p. 30) to the Hammond Administration (**GURPS Cyberworld,** p. 26).

LORD CARSON OF SETH (KAAS'STH'RAA)

A Grand Master of the Cabal (see *Lord Kaas'sth'raa, Cabal,* p. 36), if mostly as an honorary title, Lord Carson is relatively typical of a Serpent-Lord, in and out of his human persona – aristocrat, sorcerer, businessman, shape-shifter, carnivore. Not necessarily in that order. Although he works with humans every day, he sees them as a snake sees a mouse, both those that are in on his little secret and those who have no idea. Perhaps not literal food (well, sometimes), but to him their existence has no purpose other than to serve his needs and sustenance.

With minions and preparation, Lord Carson could easily challenge an entire party of champions.

ST: 14	**HP:** 16	**Speed:** 8.00
DX: 14	**Will:** 16	**Move:** 8
IQ: 16	**Per:** 17	
HT: 14	**FP:** 14	**SM:** 0
Dodge: 12	**Parry:** 12 (unarmed)	**DR:** 2

Fright Check: -4.

Bite (16): 1d+1 impaling + follow-up 1d toxic (resisted by HT-2, 4 one-second cycles). Reach C.
Claws (16): 1d+1 cutting. Reach C.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Energy Reserve 20 (Magic); Intolerance (Total; Non-Reptiles); Magery 6; Patron (House of Seth; 12 or less); Serpent-Lord (p. 33); Wealth (Multimillionaire 3).
Skills: Acting-16; Administration-16; Brawling-16; Detect Lies-16; Finance-16; Intimidation-20; Mind Block-16; Thaumatology-20; plus an assortment of spells of the Animal (specialized in snakes and reptiles), Body Control, Communication/Empathy, Food, Healing, Illusion/Creation, Knowledge, Meta-Spell, Mind Control, and Protection/Warning Colleges, all at level 20.
Notes: All of Lord Carson's spells have -2 to FP cost due to high skill. These stats assume default **GURPS** magic. For a campaign using *Ritual Path magic,* reduce Thaumatology to 18, and replace spells with the Paths of Body, Energy, Magic, Mind, and Spirit (all at level 18). If using *Path/Book magic,* replace Thaumatology with Ritual Magic (Serpent-Lord)-18, and spells with the Paths of Cunning, Form, Health, Knowledge, Protection, and Spirit (all at level 18). In the latter two cases, it's up to the GM whether or not he has Path/Book Adept (**GURPS Thaumatology,** p. 123) or Ritual Adept (**GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions,** p. 25); either of these would increase the reptoid's power even more. In any setting that has them, Lord Carson will have an abundance of useful magical items, charms (**GURPS Monster Hunters 1,** p. 38), powerstones (**GURPS Magic,** p. 20), or even technological gadgets for every contingency.

See **GURPS Cyberworld** for more on the mundane backdrop to this futuristic shadow war; *Agents of ORCID* (*Pyramid #3/73: Monster Hunters II,* pp. 23-30) for info on monster hunting in the dark future of 2043; and *Hunting the Cabal* (*Pyramid #3/58: Urban Fantasy II,* pp. 20-27) for ideas on integrating the Order into such a campaign.

APOPHIS AND THE QLIPPOTH

For campaigns that feature the Qlippoth (**Cabal,** p. 123), Apophis is a prime candidate for being a Qlippothic Ur-Lord of the Abyss, scheming to help bring about the end of this world by swallowing – extinguishing or otherwise blotting out – the sun. Such an event would, of course, be a massive boon for the Forces of Darkness, as anyone who's seen season 4 of *Angel* needn't imagine.

In myth, Apophis was dismembered and scattered throughout the Underworld by the servants of his eternal enemy, Ra (or Horus-Re, depending on the myth you're looking at). A campaign could center around a team of heroes opposing the Serpent-Lords in their plan to reassemble the giant creature. In this scenario, the serpents would naturally have enemies – the Guardians of the Sun, the Priests of Horus-Re, etc. – who would oppose them through the ages. Such a group makes an ideal background for an Egyptian-themed and/or sun-worshiping cleric, crusader, holy warrior, or similar character (PC or NPC) in a campaign which features Sutekh and Apophis as foes.

Likewise, the servants of Apophis could have terrifying powers of darkness and night. See *Gods of Night* and *Sun Gods* (p. 23 and p. 28, respectively, of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 7: Clerics**) for ideas on both kinds of characters and their powers.

Light-Drinker (Spawn of Apophis)

Deadly serpentine spirits of darkness that serve Apophis and his minions, Light-Drinkers are otherworldly horrors that can be summoned by dark sorcerers and cultists to terrorize their enemies. It appears to most as a floating 50' cloud of darkness – visible at night only as it passes between the viewer and the stars or other light source. The creature's true form is that of a giant black serpent with red eyes that seems to "slither" through the air, and extinguishes lights with a gaze. Its venom can steal a victim's sight, assuming it leaves him alive.

A Light-Drinker is a powerful and elusive adversary in the dark. One or two could likely a challenge a whole party of champions.

ST: 30	**HP:** 30	**Speed:** 7.00
DX: 14	**Will:** 16	**Move:** 7 (Flight 14)
IQ: 6	**Per:** 14	
HT: 14	**FP:** 14	**SM:** +2
Dodge: 11	**Parry:** N/A	**DR:** 6

Fright Check: -6.

Bite (18): 3d+2 impaling + follow-up 1d+2 toxic (resisted by HT-2). Reach C, 1. Anyone taking toxic damage must roll vs. HT, at -1 per 2 full points of toxic injury or suffer Blindness until the damage is healed.

Extinguish Light (16): By concentrating on a light source it can see and making a Quick Contest of Will (with standard range penalties, p. B550) vs. the target's HT (assume 10 for most ordinary light sources, but use a caster's spell level for magical light, a car's HT for headlights, etc.) to quench the light – torches and candles gutter out, light bulbs die or explode, magical illumination is dispelled, etc.

Traits: Appearance (Horrific); Callous; Cannot Speak (Mute); Combat Reflexes; Compartmentalized Mind 1 (Only to extinguish light); Compulsive Behavior (Extinguish light) (6); Dark Vision; Fanaticism (Extreme; Apophis); Flight; High Pain Threshold; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous); Intolerance (Good or holy beings); Obscure 10 (Vision; Area Effect, 8 yards; Defensive; Extended, Infravision); Spirit of Darkness*; Teeth (Fangs); Vermiform; Vulnerability (Fire, laser, or similar damage, x2); Vulnerability (Holy or mystical damage, ×2); Warp (Must begin and end in Darkness -4 or more; Reliable 5); Weakness (Blessed or sacred ground, 1d/minute); Weakness (Contact with holy water or objects, 1d/minute); Weakness (Direct sunlight, 1d/minute).

Skills: Brawling-18; Stealth-16.

Notes: The creature normally flies or slithers around in a cloud of absolute darkness (-6 to target it, -4 to defend against it, penetrable only with Dark Vision, Hyperspectral Vision, Scanning Sense, or Ultravision; the Blind Fighting skill can also help). This can only be seen during the day if it pays FP to become substantial and visible. At night and in dark underground or inside locations (Darkness -5 or more), it can shift between substantial and insubstantial at will.

* As for the Spirit meta-trait, p. B263, but Insubstantiality is fully Switchable instead of Usually On in ambient darkness of -5 or more.

The Serpent's Coils

Serpentine organizations tend to begin with the family and then build nested layers around it – shell corporations, front groups, infiltrated *human* secret societies, and criminal organizations. Most people looking from the outside will see an apparently innocuous organization and pass right along. The few who sense something amiss will peel back the first layer and find what seems to be a very human explanation – criminal enterprise, internal corruption or incompetence, and so forth. For those who still aren't satisfied, such as groups who are used to looking for *supernatural* explanations, another layer in might point to vampires or skin-changers. For the truly dedicated, who are determined to see scales beneath the scheme, the final few cover layers might indeed point to reptiles . . . but in such a way as to seem absurd or ridiculous, tying in fiction or conspiracy lore, hoping to make the researcher look or feel foolish.

The House of Seth

Almost certainly the largest node of serpentine influence in the human world is a relatively obscure European royal bloodline called the House of Seth. They trace their lineage through the Merovingians and other continental dynasties back to the pharaohs – though they don't trumpet this to the world at large, content to boast to those who can fully appreciate the implications. The House's family tree has roots and branches reaching into nearly every European ruling family, up to the latter half of the 20th century when such things were no longer relevant. At that time, they began to infiltrate the New Money families – Gettys, Rothschilds, the usual Bilderberg Group suspects – and shifted their focus to modernizing their financial and political empire. One result of that shift: Ouroboros Industries.

SERPENTINE ABOMINATION

The Serpent-Lords have many minions, witting and unwitting. Modern or conspiratorial snakes likely have cadres of human guards, muscle, and employees, many of whom are completely unaware of their masters' true nature. In a fantasy setting, or in the viper-filled cities of Amenthes, they may be served by lizard-folk, reptilians, or other slave-races (see *Lizard Man* in **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level,** p. 15, and *Dinoman* in **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1,** p. 11, for a few candidates).

Then there are the monstrous, venomous scaly things that they create in their magical or genetic labs. Below is one such creatures, a multi-headed serpent that could be an escaped experiment terrorizing the city, or a monster in the gladiatorial pits who devours slaves for the amusement of reptoid aristocrats.

Big, mean, and toxic, a serpentine abomination is a decent challenge for at least two or three strong heroes.

ST: 20	**HP:** 30	**Speed:** 8.00
DX: 14	**Will:** 12	**Move:** 8
IQ: 4	**Per:** 14	
HT: 14	**FP:** 14	**SM:** +3
Dodge: 12	**Parry:** N/A	**DR:** 6

Fright Check: -6.

Bite (18): 2d impaling + follow-up 1d+1 toxic (resisted by HT-2; 4 one-second cycles). Reach C-2.

Constriction (16): ST 22 grapple; on the second and subsequent turns after a successful grapple, automatic constriction damage equals the snake's margin of victory on a Quick Contest of ST vs. the better of the victim's ST or HT.

Traits: 360° Vision; Appearance (Horrific); Cold-Blooded (50°F); Combat Reflexes; Constriction Attack; Extra Attack 5; Extra Head 5; High Pain Threshold; Infravision; Teeth (Fangs); Vermiform; Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-18; Wrestling-16.

Ouroboros International Industries

The serpent encircling the world in its coils was the perfect image of what the Serpent-Lords intended to accomplish with the financial group that formed the basis of Ouroboros International Industries, a holding company to quietly and untraceably coordinate the global assets and interests of the House of Seth and its allies. In the age of the megacorporation, this was a snap: liquidate some Old World holdings, aggressively acquire some up-and-coming companies, and do it all through the well-oiled machinery of modern vulture capitalism. There was simply no need for the serpents to reinvent the wheel; humans had become so adept at cannibalizing one another, the existing system was designed to do exactly what they needed.

Now Ouroboros is the shadowy holding corporation behind dozens of smallish but cutting-edge bio-research labs, pharmaceutical companies, and tech firms. Their focus tends to be bio-tech, but they've recently developed an interest in the technology for space travel and long-term off-world habitation.

The Order of the Serpent

At the heart of the Serpent-Lords' coiled network of hidden influence lies an ancient reptoid secret society known to outsiders as the Order of the Serpent. (Even outsiders who know its Serpent-Lord name call it that, because they can't pronounce the proper name.) Allegedly first surfacing in human history among the Egyptians cults of Set and Sobekh (see *Sutekh and Apophis,* p. 28), the Order is thought by some to have operated within various human secret societies throughout history, most notably those with Egyptian or Masonic leanings – which certainly qualifies Cabalistic lodges such as the Brotherhood of Luxor (*Cabal,* p. 28) and the Sons of Imhotep (*Cabal,* p. 29) as possible dupes and front organizations. They recruit the mad and the gullible to form a "false secret society" around theirs – a shield of useful idiots who *think* they're in on the conspiracy, but are really just playing interference for the serpents of the Inner Circle.

The Serpent-Lord's Homeland

Like Atlantis, Lemuria, and Thule, the homeland of the reptoids is one of those things that vexes occult scholars because they can find *references* to it in multiple, reliable sources, but no *direct* evidence of its location, culture, people, or even its mere existence. Many researchers have simply lumped it in with the other legendary civilizations, as "probably fictional." Others sought to place it on the shattered Supercontinent, in the Hollow Earth, or on the Antichthon (the planet which follows Earth's orbit perfectly, but always stays exactly and perpetually occulted from our view by the sun).

When Cabalists began to notice the serpents speaking of their homeland, and in particular expressing their interest in occult historical references to it, they started to put the pieces together. Cabalists are still not sure where it is – the leading theories put it somewhere underneath central and southern Europe, *probably* on the shores of the vast underground Sea of Amenthes. The sea's name would seem to be dead giveaway, until one remembers that the Atlantic Ocean wasn't really helpful in finding Atlantis either.

> *In fact, some Serpent-Lords have established themselves in positions of power and influence in human society, especially in the oldest and most exalted European aristocracies. (The reptoids are great liars, however, and will often claim to have ruled humanity since the days of Sumer.)*
>
> **– GURPS Cabal**

SNAKE MAGIC

The Serpent-Lords claim to have *invented* magic, and their aristocracy has bred for magical talent since before human history. Magic is in their blood; many master the arcane arts, while others develop innate magical abilities that enhance their natural talents and aptitudes.

NEW POWER: SERPENT MAGIC

By focusing their inherent magical power, Serpent-Lords can develop a number of supernatural abilities related to their reptilian nature. The Serpent Magic power is intended only for Serpent-Lords, though the GM may allow an Unusual Background (Snake Blood) [10] which, combined with Magery 0, gives a non-reptoid access to the power.

Power Modifier: Magical

-10%

Serpent Magic is indeed magical and subject to all the rules governing magic in the campaign. It's detected, dispelled, and countered by the same means as magical spells or rituals. In a game using standard **GURPS** magic, this also means it's affected by mana levels.

Serpent Magic Abilities

The following abilities are available to Serpent-Lords. All require Magery 0 or better, but as that's included with the Serpent-Lord racial template (p. 33), it isn't listed as a prerequisite for each ability.

Command Serpents

30 points

Not just serpents, actually, you can command reptiles of any description by speaking to them aloud in Amenthean (p. 33). You may target a specific reptile that you know can hear you, or you may roll at -4 to attempt to command *all* reptiles that can hear your voice. In many places, this won't have a huge effect; there *might* be a few small, harmless snakes and lizards within earshot in a standard downtown area. In a place where a considerable number of venomous snakes live (the jungle, the reptile house at the zoo, a Serpent-Lord's lair, etc.), you can call upon a slithering mass (below) to attack your foes. The size of the mass with be four hexes (20 HP) plus additional hexes equal to your margin of success; it takes 1d+1 turns for the mass to form.

Statistics: Mind Control (Accessibility, Reptiles only, -60%; Broadcast, Variant, +50%; Hearing-Based, -20%; PM, -10%) [30].

SLITHERING MASS

Commanded by some preternatural force (like Command Serpents, above), this mass of hissing, striking vipers is deadly to an unprotected victim. It's not as much of a threat to armored adventurers, mostly just *really unnerving;* the GM might require a Fright Check when confronted with such a group of snakes. Additionally, the GM may roll each turn that someone is inside the swarm, to see if the snakes get a critical hit that bypasses DR. See *Swarm Attacks* (p. B400) for more details.

ST: 5	**HP:** 20	**Speed:** 6.00
DX: 13	**Will:** 11	**Move:** 6
IQ: 2	**Per:** 14	
HT: 11	**FP:** 11	**SM:** +1
Dodge: 12	**Parry:** n/a	**DR:** 0

Fright Check: -6.

Striking Vipers (13): 1 point impaling + follow-up 1d toxic (resisted by HT, 2 one-minute cycles) *per turn* to anyone in the same hex as the swarm on its turn, including if it moved into their hex.

Traits: Appearance (Horrific); Cold-Blooded (65°F); Combat Reflexes; Double-Jointed; Infravision; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse; Body of Swarm); Teeth (Fangs); Vermiform; Wild Animal.

Notes: This is a swarm of about four hexes, roughly a human mass of small venomous snakes. Larger swarms add 5 HP per hex.

Flickering Tongue

20 points

Don't let the mammals see you do it, but if you flick out your forked tongue, you can identify specific odors in fine detail, get +4 to smelling (including Tracking by scent), and can even get a sense of the emotional state of a living being as if you had Empathy. If someone who doesn't know your true nature sees you do this, they react at -2 and get +2 on any rolls to attempt to figure out what you are.

Statistics: Discriminatory Smell (Emotion Sense, +50%; Nuisance Effect, Supernatural Feature, -10%; PM, -10%) [20].

Forked Tongue

9 or 27 points

With a little boost of magic to make your voice ever so slightly more enchanting, you can really turn on the charm. At level 1, this has the effects of Voice (p. B97), +2 to reactions from those who can hear you, and +2 to voice-based skills such as Fast-Talk, Public Speaking, Singing, etc. At level 2, you get a further +2 to all skills listed for Smooth Operator (p. B91), but no learning-time reduction or further reaction bonus.

Statistics: Voice (PM, -10%) [9]. Level 2 adds Smooth Operator 2 (No learning bonus, -10%; No reaction bonus, -20%; PM, -10%) [18].

Hypnotic Gaze

15, 35, or 60 points

By gazing into the eyes of your victim, you can put him into a hypnotic trance and implant suggestions. At level 1, you can only implant a general course of action, as for the Suggest skill (p. B191). At level 2, you use the full rules for ordinary Mind Control (p. B68), except that eye contact is required. At level 3, you can condition your victim, adding or removing mental disadvantages.

Statistics: Mind Control (PM, -10%; Suggestion, -40%; Vision-Based, -20%) [15]. Level 2 removes Suggestion [35]. Level 3 adds Conditioning (+50%) [60].

Monkey Skin

16 points

You've learned to control your appearance more flexibly than most Serpent-Lords, and you can adjust it to look like *any* human. Changing appearance takes only a single second, requiring a Disguise roll (at +4) to duplicate a specific person.

Statistics: Elastic Skin drops One form only (-80%), for +16 points (see *Inhuman Option: Serpent-Lord*, p. 33).

Reptilian Inscrutability

3.6 points/level*

Your mind is naturally difficult to probe, read, control, attack, or even detect. You have +1 per level to resist psionic, magical, or other attempts to do those things.

Statistics: Mind Shield (PM, -10%) [3.6/level*].

* Figure the total cost and then round fractions up to the nearest point.

INHUMAN OPTION: SERPENT-LORD

Like other inhumans, some serpents develop warm-fuzzy feelings for the squishy little mammals their brethren eat, and oppose their predations. With the GM's permission, use the following racial template to create an inhuman (*GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions,* p. 13) or monstrous (*GURPS Monster Hunters 4: Sidekicks,* p. 21) Serpent-Lord champion. In a *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* campaign, add one of the 62-point templates from *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 15: Henchmen,* along with an extra -12 points in disadvantages, for a playable 250-point Serpent-Lord delver.

Serpent-Lord

200 points

You're an unusually sympathetic and open-minded Serpent-Lord, who has turned his back on his serpentine kin, and now defends humanity from them and other paranormal predators. In spite of this, you still suffer from your race's well-known predilections, in the form of -3 to reactions from any warm-blood who knows what you are. You're quite likely a powerful sorcerer, whether using the Serpent Magic power (pp. 31-34) or other occult disciplines (see *Serpent Sorcery,* p. 34), though you may also be a deadly combatant with a venomous bite.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+1 [10]; IQ+3 [60]; HT+2 [20].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Per +1 [5]; Basic Speed +0.50 [10].
Advantages: Acute Smell/Taste 3 [6]; Animal Empathy (Reptiles only, -60%) [2]; Born Biter 1 [0]; Claws (Sharp; Switchable, +10%) [6]; Damage Resistance 2 [10]; Elastic Skin (Magical, -10%; One form only, -80%; Reduced Time 4, +80%) [18]; Language (Amenthean; Native) [0]; Language (Chosen human tongue; Fluent) [6]; Flexibility [5]; Infravision [10]; Magery 0 [5]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Scales [1]; Speak with Animals (Reptiles Only, -50%) [13]; Teeth (Fangs; Switchable, +10%) [3].
● Choose *one* of the following racial packages:

1. DX +2 [40]; Basic Speed -0.50 [-10]; Born Biter 2 [0]; Striking ST 4 (Bite Only, -60%) [8]; Toxic Attack 1d (Follow-Up, Bite, +0%; Cyclic, 4 one-second cycles, Resistible, +200%; Resistible, HT-2, -20%) [12].
2. *Upgrade* to Magery 3 [30], and spend 20 points on spells, magical and Path skills, etc. See *Snake Magic,* pp. 31-34.
3. Serpent Magic Talent 1 [5], and spend 45 points on Serpent Magic abilities, pp. 32-34.

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Appearance (Monstrous; Mitigated, Elastic Skin, -70%) [-6]; Callous [-5]; Chauvinistic (Reptiles) [-1]; Cold-Blooded (50°F) [-5]; Color-blindness [-10]; Frightens Animals (Non-reptiles only, -20%) [-8]; Restricted Diet (Carnivore) [-10]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15].
Features: Temperature range is higher than a human's; Serpent-Lords are cold-blooded, so thrive in climates between 55°F and 110°F. Below 50°F, they "stiffen up;" see p. B127.

New Language: Amenthean

Serpent-Lords speak their own language, unrelated to human tongues. They speak it natively, and acquire fluency in a human language appropriate to their persona. Non-reptoids can learn Amenthean, but lacking abilities such as Mimicry, they may never speak it without a thick accent that makes Serpent-Lords snicker. Well, they never *actually* snicker, but you can see they're looking down on you even more than usual. Full fluency thus only costs 5 points for non-reptiles, to be able to read, write, and understand Amenthean perfectly, but speak it like a fat-tongued warm-blood.

Resistant to Poison

5, 9, or 14 points

Your natural affinity for venom has allowed you to develop a resistance to all toxins. At level 1, you get +3 on rolls to resist or recover from poisoning. This becomes +8 at level 2, and total immunity at level 3.

Statistics: Resistant to Poisons (+3) (PM, -10%) [5]. Level 2 improves this to (+8) [9]. Level 3 turns it into Immunity to Poisons [14].

Shed the Skin

20 points

If you are killed, you can "shed your skin" and come out good as new. This generally includes choosing a new human identity, and changing your Elastic Face so that people don't *think* you came back from the dead.

Statistics: Extra Life 1 (Nuisance Effect, Requires new identity, -10%; PM, -10%) [20].

Spit Venom

20 points

Prerequisites: Toxic Attack (Follow-up to Bite).

You can attempt to spit venom into someone's face and eyes, damaging and possibly blinding the person. You must target the face to have a chance of blinding, but you do so at only -2 to skill instead of the normal -5. Your attack is a jet, thus treated as a melee attack with Reach 10 (half damage past five yards), which can be dodged or blocked; roll vs. DX-2 or Innate Attack (Breath) to hit. Like all corrosive damage, the venom does ×1.5 damage to the face, and any major wound blinds one eye – *both* eyes on damage over full HP (see the Face hit location, p. B552). The linked toxic damage, 1 point/turn for eight turns, only affects a living target if it hits an open wound or exposed mucus membrane – including the eyes, nose, and mouth.

Statistics: Corrosive Attack 1d (Jet, +0%; Linked, +10%; PM, -10%) [10] + Toxic Attack 1 point (Blood Agent, -40%; Cyclic, 8 one-second cycles, Resistible, +400%; Jet, +0%; Linked, +10%; PM, -10%; Resistible, HT-2, -20%) [6] + Targeted Attack (Spit in face) (H) Skill-2 [4].

Serpent Magic Talent

5 points/level

This is the power talent for Serpent Magic, giving +1 per level to all attempts to activate or use power abilities.

SERPENT SORCERY

In addition to their innate magical abilities, Serpent-Lords have a knack for sorcery – whatever form that may take in the campaign. In any setting, reptoid organizations can be assumed to have accumulated a vast body of magical knowledge, whether than means spell colleges, magical paths, books and grimoire, etc. Although they'll learn and use direct attack spells when necessary, they tend to favor more insidious and retrospect magical tactics.

GURPS Magic

Serpent-Lords who use standard **GURPS** magic tend to have large Energy Reserves (10+), and favor spells from the Animal (specializing in snakes, where appropriate), Body Control, Communication/Empathy, Earth, Enchantment, Food, Healing, Illusion/Creation, Knowledge, Meta-Spell, Mind Control, Movement, and Protection/Warning colleges.

Path/Book Magic

Path/Book magic (see Chapter Four of **GURPS Thaumatology**) is particularly appropriate for Serpent-Lord sorcerers. The foundational skill is Ritual Magic (Serpent-Lord), and they favor the paths of Cunning, Form, Health, Knowledge, Luck, Nature, Protection, and Spirit (see **Thaumatology,** pp. 140-162).

Ritual Path Magic

Campaigns using Ritual Path magic (**GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions,** pp. 32-39, or **GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic**) need do nothing special to accommodate Serpent-Lord casters. If using the rules for traditions (**Ritual Path Magic,** p. 5), Serpent-Lords might specialize in *Snake Magic,* which involves serpents, venom, or spells with an appropriate "snake theme."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Definitely *not* a reptoid, W.A. Frick lives in the proverbial Undisclosed Location, in a super-secret underground lair somewhere below The City. He's warm-blooded and mammalian in every way, from having genuine hair on his head and body, to sharing play and affection with other mammals. And smaller mammals like him, too; they're just a little shy at first. He can look them right in the eyes, and they calm down remarkably – almost as if in a trance. He doesn't eat them, though. Why would you think he did?

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Random Thought Table

We've Got the Power . . . Let's Never Use It!

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

Random Thought Table has traditionally been about ideas that I've gotten to work in my own campaign, or musings that I'm pretty sure will work in the hands of the right GM. However, this issue is devoted to the unusual, so this month I'm going farther afield and talking about something that hasn't worked for me . . . but I really want it to. Maybe my chaotic musings here will help *me* sort this out and perhaps inspire one of you to pick up where I've failed.

One type of strange power I'm a bit fascinated by is the one-shot power. These are abilities that can only be used once . . . ever. Unsurprisingly, the TV Tropes website has a page for this – "It Only Works Once" – but I can't recommend searching for it unless you've got a few spare hours or an incredibly strong will to break free of the site's grasp.

Now, I'm not super-interested in one-shot powers, per se; I'm more interested in powers that can be used a multiple-but-finite number of times. Thus, a hero might have a super-powerful nova blast that only can be used 10 times ever before it burns out, or the Deity of Healing might be willing to perform a full restoration for its champion thrice before never responding to that person again.

I liked the idea so much I used it for a hero I created for Green Ronin's **Paragons** setting for **Mutants & Masterminds.** He could receive a full, complete, and honest answer to any question he asked for a total of 20 times; he used the ability three times already, so he calls himself 17. (Presumably he'll change his name as he burns through more questions.) I intended him primarily as an NPC to be used as a prompt for epic adventures, or as a last-resort method of figuring out or revealing something that the heroes can't uncover themselves. My assumption is that the GM will know if it's a serious enough situation to use that power.

But I haven't had much success with such abilities in other campaigns in player hands. In one campaign, I gave one of the players the ability to know any piece of information that was knowable by humans, usable only 10 times. And yet, it didn't work out as I'd intended.

So what's the problem? Well, my players tend not to use their snazzy one-time powers. Whether it's a weapon that can be used once to kill any enemy, an ability to tap into impossible knowledge, or a power to go wherever the heroes desire, they tend not to rely on them. Eventually, the abilities end up forgotten on the character sheet.

So what's going on?

> *. . . Nova Boy, who had the power to make the sun go nova. Once.*
>
> **– GURPS Wild Cards**

Notions Regarding Potions

Of course, many roleplaying games have one-time powers already. They've just called something different – usually potions or scrolls. But in those games, there's a flow of such devices that keeps heroes (and players) from worrying about it too much. Sure, you might need to drink that healing potion to stay alive, but the odds are good that there's a double-strength version just around the corner.

This is reinforced in two ways. First, the fact that these items exist as tangible stuff means that they need to be lugged around. Any game that pays serious consideration to encumbrance, weight, or inventory limits will find its heroes needing to drink up that Potion of Slight Mechanical Edge lest they find they don't have room for cooler gear down the road. Of course, they can sell unused items and make some money that way, but it's still a matter of "resource management" more than "tapping impossible powers."

"It Just Doesn't Matter!"

Readers of this column might have a question: Why is it any concern for me if the players don't want to use their cool abilities?

It's a fair point. Normally I *wouldn't* care. If the heroes forgets they have an intriguing mind-reading ability, exotic weapon, or unique contact that would threaten to short-circuit my adventure if utilized, then I'm perfectly fine with them failing to use it. And in any long-running campaign, the adventurers are going to accumulate a fair amount of random abilities, contacts, and gear that all serve as "one-shot powers" for this purpose.

Plus it's not my "job" to coerce the players' actions. If they don't want to use their heroes' abilities, I'd much rather they retain their autonomy; after all, that's why we have players!

Still, I want to make the one-shot powers as enticing as possible for a couple of reasons:

- *It's cool!* The dramatic possibilities of bringing out the "one power or ability" adds tension and remembrance. Like Aladdin and the three wishes, each use of that limited power – when done correctly – has the ability to make a memorable moment . . . which is what a lot of gamers are looking for!
- *It helps adventure design.* If I know the heroes have Cool Ability X, I can design encounters I'm certain they can untangle if they use that ability. If the heroes *don't* use those abilities, a situation that I envision taking 5-10 minutes can turn into an hour-long slog of muddling through without the built-in shortcut.

It's entirely possible I *could* just not worry about it, but – in a point-based character-creation system – if I give everyone 25-point one-shot abilities and they never use them, then I shouldn't really designing adventures for (say) 200-point heroes; I'm actually designing them for 175.

Most games of the sort that feature such one-shot items also have another feature: They tend to be more simulationist or gamist, which means that such items can be destroyed through the environment. Scrolls could burn, potions might break when the heroes fall from a height, etc. The risk of something happening to those items tends to give the players extra incentive to use them when they see a moderately good opportunity, since if they get destroyed for no gain, then the protagonists considerably worse off than if they'd used them for suboptimal purposes.

Such simulationist or gamist roleplaying games are also usually willing to kill the heroes in the course of a mundane encounter. This tends to provide the heroes with another incentive to tap into their one-shot powers, since dying with a bandolier of useful potions is a waste.

Unfortunately, most of these aspects don't translate well to the kind of campaigns I tend to run, where narrative stakes matter more than surviving a random pit trap. In these adventures, there's little threat of dying with an unused cool ability . . . which means that players often see little reason to expend their one-shot Plan Z power if they still have Plans A through Y. So, it's back to the drawing board.

Failures of the Past

Since I've allowed this type of ability a few times, what *hasn't* worked for me?

Well, giving multiples of a one-shot – "You can only use this ability 10 times" instead of "you can only wield it once" – hasn't really made them more enticing in a way that feels satisfying to the campaign. What tends to happen is that folks will rely on them a couple of times in the first handful of adventures, and then never tap into them again.

I've tried having limited-use powers in mini-series campaigns, where the players are told how many adventures are left. My reasoning is that, if the players know that (say) they can avail themselves of their cool ability 10 times before the end of the campaign, and the campaign is five adventures long, they can tap into it twice an adventure. That didn't happen. At best, the heroes hoarded their limited-use power until the end, when they burned through them with abandon like a *Metroid* player letting loose with a barrage of missiles for the final boss. That makes a fair bit of sense, except then the heroes often ended up with a bunch of unspent charges of their power at the end.

I've tried being honest with the players when a time was good or not to consider using their one-shot powers, or to remind them about those line items on their character sheets. But I never forced the players (obviously), so – as often as not – they didn't want to rely on them . . . which sometimes led to the problems (see the boxed text).

And, curiously, the lack of use of one-shot powers didn't matter if they were given by me as the GM or chosen by the heroes (at character creation or later); often, the heroes would just have an ability they didn't want to tap into.

Again, none of this is a problem, per se; if the players are having fun, then great! But it seems a shame to have cool powers that will never be used . . . like not crossing the streams in *Ghostbusters* or never activating the Omega 13 from *Galaxy Quest*.

Maybe *This* Will Work?

So, as promised at the beginning, here's where we get to the cutting edge of random thoughts.

Upon reflection, I've concluded that the reason these abilities aren't enticing to players (at least the ones I've been with) is that they cost part of what makes your character cool. In other words, being able to (say) kill any enemy once at some time in the future is cooler to consider than having *had* the power to kill any enemy once.

I had originally thought such powers might be more enticing if I let players repurpose points from a one-shot ability into other abilities, once they use the trait. But I don't think that'll work. Either the replacement abilities will be too intriguing (in which case players will burn through the one-shots quickly to get the better stuff) or not exciting enough ("Sure, I lost my Read Any Mind power, but I'm now a better accountant!").

The Doctor: Rose, you've got to stop this, you've got to stop this now! You've got the entire vortex running through your head! You're gonna burn!

Rose Tyler: I want you safe, my Doctor. Protected from the false god.

Emperor Dalek: You cannot hurt me. I am immortal.

Rose Tyler: You are tiny. I can see the whole of time and space, every single atom of your existence, and I divide them. Everything must come to dust. All things, everything dies.

*– **Doctor Who** #1.13*

However, what *might* work is if the one-shot power is replaced with another one-shot power . . . and so on, for as long as the campaign lasts. This may well even work if the one-shot isn't picked by the players. In this way, one-shots become more like potions and whatnot in other games: things you're *expected* to use, and which are expected to return in similar degree.

I can envision further tweaks, whose suitability depends on the campaign:

● One-shot powers don't replenish until all other players have burned through their one-shot powers (perhaps with a limit of once per adventure or storyline). This might add a bit of metagame as players who haven't used up their powers look for opportunities to do so, so that the entire team can be powered up again.

● Replacement one-shot powers are *more* powerful than the ones they replace. Thus, once a hero uses a 25-point power, it may be replaced with a (different) 30-pointer, and so on. There may be other limits – perhaps the hero has to go an adventure without the new power once he uses the old one – but the adventurer should still come out ahead when the dust settles.

Thank you for indulging me in this trip around the GM's workshop. If anyone has had experiences in this regard – similar or different – or if anyone uses any of the ideas I haven't had a chance to try yet, I'd love to hear from you.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

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