PSIONIC CAMPAIGNS™

Written by JASON "PK" LEVINE
Edited by NIKOLA VRTIS
Illustrated by DAN SMITH
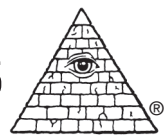
*An e23 Sourcebook for **GURPS**®*

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Psi is a potent spice that can add flavor to any genre. Psionic abilities can be dropped into a wide range of campaigns, from the historical to the far future, and from the grittiest conspiracy story to the most over-the-top supers game.

Regardless of the underlying setting, games featuring psi have common needs and issues. The GM must make decisions about what psi is, how it works, and what purpose it serves in his particular game. Players need this information as well, to make psis who fit into (and make sense in) the setting. *GURPS Psionic Campaigns* offers help with these needs, along with campaign ideas, tweaks to help psi model fiction, and answers to questions like "How do I challenge a group that can read minds and see the future?"

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

This book requires the *GURPS Basic Set* to use. Both *GURPS Psionic Powers* and *GURPS Powers* are recommended, though not strictly necessary. This book references rules and advice found in both and uses the former as the default assumption for several examples; for clarity, abilities from *Psionic Powers* are always expressed in **boldface.** Readers may also find the psychotronics in *GURPS Ultra-Tech* and the campaign suggestions in *GURPS Supers* useful.

GURPS Psionic Powers

For those without *Psionic Powers,* the following information should keep the examples in this book clear.

The powers in the *Basic Set* (pp. B254-257) have been expanded to 10: *Anti-Psi* (defenses and countermeasures against psi); *Astral Projection* (the ability to see, interact with, and visit the astral plane); *Ergokinesis* (control over electromagnetic energy, allowing command of computers, electricity, and light); *ESP* (perceiving things without using one's normal senses); *Probability Alteration* (using subtle influence to affect how likely things are to happen); *Psychic Healing* (repairing and preventing damage to the body); *Psychic Vampirism* (feeding on the energy of others); *Psychokinesis* (affecting kinetic energy); *Telepathy* (direct mind-to-mind contact); and *Teleportation* (movement without traversing the space in between). Each power has many predefined abilities, each of which requires a skill (*Psionic Skills,* p. 12); for example, Psychic Hunches is an ESP *ability* that lets a psi make accurate guesses by rolling against his Psychic Hunches *skill* (bought separately).

PUBLICATION HISTORY

While *Psionic Campaigns* does not incorporate any previous *GURPS* books, some of the campaign advice within was influenced by *GURPS Psionics* (for Third Edition) and *GURPS Powers.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Jason "PK" Levine has been a *GURPS* fanatic for nearly two decades and the assistant *GURPS* line editor for a small percentage of that time. He is the author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies* and *GURPS Psionic Powers,* and co-author of the *GURPS Creatures of the Night* series and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 10: Taverns.* He runs a *GURPS* fan site (**www.mygurps.com**) and lives in north Georgia with his wonderful wife, a few cats and dogs, and several hundred Transformers.

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: **info@sjgames.com**. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. **GURPS** continues to grow – see what's new at **www.sjgames.com/gurps**.

e23. Our e-publishing division offers **GURPS** adventures, play aids, and support in PDF form . . . digital copies of our books, plus exclusive material available only on e23! Just head over to **e23.sjgames.com**.

Pyramid (**www.sjgames.com/pyramid**). Our monthly PDF magazine includes new rules and articles for **GURPS**, systemless locations, adventures, and much more. Look for each themed issue from e23!

Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at **www.sjgames.com** for errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. To discuss **GURPS** with our staff and your fellow gamers, visit our forums at **forums.sjgames.com**. The **GURPS Psionic Campaigns** web page can be found at **www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/psioniccampaigns**.

Bibliographies. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all **GURPS** releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

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

CHAPTER ONE
WHAT IS PSI?

"What is psi?" seems like a simple question, but the answers reveal a world of possibilities. Psi can be a poorly understood ability that flares up in a few kids each generation, the backbone of a society that trains every adult in basic psionic abilities, the weapon that humanity needs to wrest control from its alien invaders, or any number of other scenarios.

Getting everyone on the same page before the game starts is crucial to any campaign involving psionic powers. Players can't decide what to play until they know what purpose psi serves in the game and how it actually works. At the same time, the GM can't really gauge the effects of psi on his world (see Chapter 2) until he establishes the basics of what "psi" really means.

So the real question is not "What is psi?" but "What is psi . . . in this campaign?"

Glossary

latent psi: A person with a dormant psionic ability (see p. 14).
parapsychology: The study of psionics and psychics. Originally known as psychical research.
psi: 1. Synonym for *psionics*. **2.** A person with psionic abilities.
psionic: Possessing or related to *psionics*.
psionics: The class of supernatural mental abilities represented (in **GURPS**) by advantages with the Psionic (-10%) power modifier.
psychic: Possessing or related to a supernatural or paranormal power, such as *psionics*.
psychotronics: Mundane technology (typified by electronic devices and drugs) capable of interacting with psionics in some way. Also known as psi-tech.

PSYCHIC BELIEFS

Belief in the supernatural has always permeated every level of society, whether as superstition, true belief, or just flights of fancy – a mix of hoping and believing that life is more than meets the eye. The specific belief in psionic abilities is one of the most common subsets of this, with stories about empowered humans going back to the dawn of the written word – and still selling well today.

PSI THROUGHOUT HISTORY

The time in which a game is set determines much about the attitudes and beliefs toward psionics. However, even if the GM is starting a modern game, he needs to think about history – specifically, about how long psi has existed. People have believed in the existence of personal supernatural empowerment since the dawn of humanity; it's up to the GM whether those beliefs ever held any water, or if actual psionic abilities are the result of a recent mutation. See *Discovery* (pp. 19-20) for some campaign frames that assume the latter.

Ancient Beliefs

Tales of those gifted with "sight beyond sight" or "the evil eye" are as old as history itself. While unexplainable events that affected the world were credited to the gods or spirits, unexplainable personal knowledge or ability was often labeled "witchcraft" or "the sight." If the special person was very lucky, his gifts were seen as "holy" and thus acceptable as the *indirect* work of the gods.

Other than that, however, no real attempt was made to distinguish between personal power and power drawn from an outside source (*Internal vs. External*, p. 6). A mystic in a game set far in the past might be represented as well by Magery and spells as with personal psionic abilities. It's the GM's call: Spells allow for such adventurers to have a wide range of effects that tend to require time, energy, and ritual, while psi usually means fewer abilities that are easier to use and more reliable.

Games set this far in the past may need to adjust the psionic power modifier; see *Old-Time Psi* (p. 5) for more on this.

Mesmerism and Magnetism

Though humanity's belief in mysticism slowly shrank as its understanding of the world (and the sciences behind it) grew, not all such phenomena were easily dismissed. While the world slowly came to agree that flashy magics and ground-shaking miracles didn't exist (or no *longer* existed, as many said), concepts like "mind over matter" and "intuitive knowledge" were plausible enough not to stretch the average person's disbelief, even if supported solely by anecdotal or sketchy evidence.

The Victorian era introduced the world to the concept of "psychical research" – the first attempt to truly distinguish personal psionic ability from other supernatural phenomenon. This was the birth of Expert Skill (Psionics), as well as the optional specialty Psychology (Parapsychology). In general, psychical researchers asserted that the mind could be trained to influence the world around it. Specific beliefs varied considerably, however. Many felt that the mind was sending out ripples through the "ether" that permeated all things. Some were convinced that sufficient psychic power would let a person transcend death – either as a ghost (perhaps psis can buy the Spirit meta-trait as a potential advantage; see pp. B263 and B33) or by fixing and reinhabiting the original body (treat as either Extra Life or Unkillable).

Most such researchers agreed that "personal magnetism" was tied directly to superhuman mental power – a person who could charm those around him had the sort of mind that could manipulate reality. This was not limited to telepathy – this was believed to apply even to ESP, psychokinesis, etc. In a game set in this era, the GM may require all psis to have at least Charisma 1, and rule that no power Talent can be equal to or greater than Charisma in level (e.g., you cannot buy ESP Talent 3 unless you first have Charisma 4).

Modern Day

"Psi" is a relatively modern term, proposed in 1942 by psychological researchers Bertold Wiesner and Robert Thouless, who believed that feats such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and telekinesis were all manifestations of the same basic ability. The concept was introduced to the rest of the world (as "psionics") by John Campbell and other science-fiction authors, who foresaw a future in which an understanding of the mind would allow humanity to unlock this potential. Inspired by this scientific approach to paranormal abilities, "parapsychologists" (a new name for psychical researchers) began developing tests to detect and measure psionic ability; see *Psychical Testing* (p. 7) for details. Interest in this field ballooned during the Cold War when the KGB was discovered to be researching remote viewing and other psionic abilities. The United States quickly followed suit in 1978 with Project Stargate, first under the U.S. Army's Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) and later under the DIA and CIA.

The modern attitude toward psi tends to be one of overall skepticism. No psychic has *ever* passed an independent test of his abilities, a fact trumpeted by debunkers such as James Randi (who has offered a $1 million reward to anyone who can prove such powers under rigorous testing). However, the world still has psychic hotlines and television faith healers, and a significant minority of believers remains (see *Suspected*, pp. 16-17). While modern science has answered many questions that once required humanity to believe in supernatural forces to explain, it has also shown the public that the universe is a much stranger place than previously imagined. The world reeled from the theory of relativity ("Wait, space is time? And energy is matter?") and was just recovering when quantum physics appeared ("All matter is just a wave of probability? And particles teleport?"). For many people, the belief in mind over matter is no stranger than these accepted branches of science; even some scientists have been known to pursue the study of Physics (Paraphysics) . . . as a theoretical exercise, of course.

Old-Time Psi

The -10% power modifier for psi assumes the existence of both an Anti-Psi power (-5%) and scientific countermeasures to psi known as *psychotronics* (-5%). While the former can exist in any psionic setting, the latter only makes sense in a fairly modern (or futuristic) game. Because of this, games featuring psionics in the past may need to redefine the power modifier, replacing the vulnerability to psychotronics with a different -5% limitation.

Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, is a reasonable swap; instead of psis worrying about neutralization rays, they have to worry about wearing themselves out from overexertion. Pact, Minor Vow, is also common, with psis often having to abstain from something (such as sexual activity) or following a "path" (such as vegetarianism). Any Nuisance Effect can fit, such as causing hostile astral entities to sometimes notice the psi (6 or less chance every time he uses psionics), or forcing weird facial contortions that get a -1 reaction from anyone who witnesses the psi working his mojo.

Psychobotanics

A different alternative is to assume that the *equivalent* of psychotronics exists in the campaign world, in the form of natural preparations. Perhaps drinking a reduction of boiled peony seed and zinnia leaf gives the imbiber Resistant to Psionics for a day. A properly crafted headband of gold, amber, and iron might provide some form of **Psionic Shield.** Maybe a dart covered in bindweed sap and motherwort pollen can temporarily Neutralize a psi's abilities. If one or more of these or similar combinations works, Naturalist (possibly along with Herb Lore and Metallurgy) fills the role of Engineer (Psychotronics) in the setting.

Countermeasures may exist naturally (without requiring preparation) as well. For example, some natural substance – such as a plant's pollen or fragrance, a gem that resonates with psionic frequencies, etc. – may interfere slightly with all psi use in the area. In a setting in which psionics take the place of magic, or are indicative of fairy blood, psi may instead be vulnerable to traditional materials (*GURPS Thaumatology,* p. 244) such as "cold iron" and salt.

DEFINING PSI

Despite attempts to take a scientific approach toward understanding psionics, it remains conflated with other paranormal phenomena in the minds of most people. Some parapsychologists assert that everything from magic to haunted houses can be explained as controlled or uncontrolled use of psionics. Others believe that "psi" is just another word for magic, useful only for its veneer of scientific respectability. Reading a person's future is a divine miracle, magic spell, spiritual communication, heightened mental ability, or something else – depending on whom you're asking. In *GURPS,* however, certain aspects set psi apart from other mystical forces.

Internal vs. External

Magic use draws upon external energy (mana), shamanism relies upon the actions of other beings, and true religious miracles require the active participation of a deity. These abilities draw upon external forces; if the user is somehow cut off from these forces, he is unable to use his power (***GURPS Powers,*** p. 24). Psionics originate from within the psi's mind. Certain powers (e.g., Psychokinesis) involve energy coming out of the psi, which may be blockable, but the only way to stop him from using his abilities in the first place is to do something *to him* to suppress it. Using an ability like Neutralize or Cancellation isn't "cutting off" the psi from anything – it's making a fundamental change within the psi himself.

Contacting Spirits

Psychic powers and ghosts have been linked together since humanity began believing in both, but this link was reinforced in the Victorian era (*Mesmerism and Magnetism,* pp. 4-5), when both the Spiritualist movement and psychical research began to overlap significantly. Many people believed that the ability to contact spirits was *the* essential psychic ability, and all others were derived from this. While this begins to extend into the realm of spirit powers (***Powers,*** p. 28), it can also be represented by having either Medium (ESP, -10%), Channeling (Astral Projection, -10%), or **Spirit Communication** as a prerequisite advantage for any other psi.

Mental vs. Physical

While no consensus exists on whether it is a genetic trait or a learned one (*Psionic Potential,* pp. 8-10), everyone agrees that psi comes from the mind. This may mean the brain, the sense of self, or the soul, but the point is that psi is an intellectual pursuit. Most fictional psis hone their skills through intense training, demonstrating greater finesse and versatility (and sometimes sheer power) as they develop better control. Psionic abilities generally reflect this. A psi can know the future or project invisible energy with his mind, but not grow 12' tall or shoot a jet of water out of his finger. Some physicality can occur, of course, but most believers draw the line at healing oneself or subtly enhancing one's physical abilities – typical interpretations of psi can justify someone flying via levitation, but not by sprouting feathered wings.

Pseudo-Science vs. Mysticism

This is a recent split. As discussed in *Psi Throughout History* (pp. 4-5), up until the Victorian era, no effort was made to examine superhuman mental abilities from a scientific perspective. Today, psi is usually portrayed as more scientific than mystical. While many uses of psi seem to involve the spontaneous creation of energy, what is done *with* that energy usually follows the normal rules of physics. A psychokinetic can melt a plastic toy, but he cannot change it into metal or grant it intelligence. Likewise, in most settings, the energy wielded by a psi can often be detected, blocked, and suppressed by specialized technology known as *psychotronics* (pp. 32-33). In a world where psionics

are real, even mundane equipment and procedures may be able to detect and measure psi – see *Psychical Testing* (p. 7).

THEMES

Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, but psi is often a metaphor. Psionics can be more interesting and natural in a game if the GM and players consider what it really means. This doesn't mean that everyone has to mesh – it's fine if the GM is going for a "*Homo superior*" theme and one player decides to build his psi around the idea of "empowering the powerless." Rather, it's something that should be brought up from the start of the campaign. If the GM sees psi as a curse, for example, and doesn't make this clear, the players will be disappointed when all of their shiny, fun abilities end up actually ruining their adventurers' lives.

Any list of themes can only scratch the surface of possibilities, of course. What follows are simply some of the most common approaches to supernatural mental power.

Going Through Changes

In many takes on psi, it tends to manifest when the subject is just starting to become a teenager. Suddenly, the psi has to deal with something unexpected and serious, without having any experience in these matters. There are awkward moments when abilities trigger uncontrollably; surges in power or control due to hormonal changes; the fear that everyone around the psi is staring as they realize what's happening; a tendency to become withdrawn while trying to figure out what's going on . . .

The psi-as-puberty metaphor nearly always includes teenage subjects, but it doesn't have to. The theme here is one of self-realization and a gradual assumption of both abilities and responsibilities – something that fits adult psis just fine. A game about going through changes should usually start the party off with minimal psionic powers (*Starting Conditions*, pp. 13-14), perhaps uncontrolled, and have them develop and master their abilities over the course of the campaign. Just as many chances should occur to make things worse by using psi as there are to fix things – to promote responsibility and restraint when necessary. A PC built around the idea of going through changes is often unsure of himself and distressed about when he should rely on his psi; this can be represented by disadvantages like Confused, Indecisive, Low Self-Image, and perhaps Mundane Background. He has a drive (perhaps even an Obsession) for learning more about his abilities and developing them carefully.

Empowering the Powerless

Everyone who's ever had to deal with bullies, enemies, or any rude, overbearing authority figure has fantasized about developing some sort of superpower and using it to turn the tables. Psi is the kind of superpower that's just barely within the threshold of belief – especially for those who are already brainy (or who think they are).

This is pure wish fulfillment, with a question about abuse of power (do you start mentally blasting everyone who ever called you a name?) hanging in the air. An "empowering the powerless" campaign should probably get the bully beating-up out of the way early on, after which it can move on to the group using their abilities to help defend others who can't defend themselves.

Psychical Testing

If psychotronic means of detecting psis do not exist (or are not available), researchers can try other methods to determine whether a subject has a certain latent (p. 14) psionic ability or power. (If he has an *actual* psionic ability, ignore these rules; successful use of it demonstrates its existence just fine!)

The researcher first sets up a basic demonstrative test, such as with Zener Cards (TL6). In this, cards with five different symbols (circle, cross, wavy lines, square, star) are shuffled and the subject either attempts to predict which card will be drawn (for Precognition) or to read the image of the card from the hand or mind of the researcher who is holding it (for Clairsentience or Telepathy). Parapsychologists use electronic random number generators (TL7) to test for Probability Alteration, by having the subject attempt to influence the result. Similarly, they test for Psychokinesis by having the subject try to affect a scale, thermometer, bowl of water, or even grains of salt.

For each test, the researcher must roll against Expert Skill (Psionics)+4 or Psychology to administer the test and interpret the results properly; on a failure, the subject comes up negative regardless of the truth. Otherwise, *if the subject is cooperating*, he may then roll against IQ, plus any Talent for the power in question. (*Exception:* If the ability being tested for would normally be covered by a Per or Will roll, use that attribute instead.) On a success by 10+ or a critical success, he demonstrates his latent ability in a measurable way. Of course, if the subject is not cooperating, the experiment fails – although at the GM's discretion it be may possible to trick the subject into revealing powers.

Some parapsychologists use medical equipment such as an EEG (TL7) to map the subject's brain-wave patterns during experiments. Use the rules above, but first the operator makes an Electronics Operation (Medical *or* Scientific) roll. On a failure, the subject automatically comes up negative. Otherwise, add one-third of the margin of success (round down) to the *subject's* roll to demonstrate his latent ability.

A Watched Pyro Never Boils

The real world is full of self-proclaimed psis whose abilities mysteriously fail to work when tested. Putting the most obvious explanation aside, this may be due to what has been dubbed "the observer effect": The act of observing affects the observed. If the campaign would benefit from psis being unable to reliably demonstrate their abilities for a rigorous test, the GM may decide that active psi "turns latent" when scientifically observed; psis cannot use their abilities freely and must follow the rules above to demonstrate them. This may be due to self-consciousness on the part of the psis or evidence of latent anti-psi found in the average researcher – see *Anti-Psi* (pp. 31-32) for more on the latter.

A psi created with this theme in mind tends to start off as both overprotective (often with Charitable, Sense of Duty, or a protective Code of Honor) and prone to lashing out at perceived slights (Bad Temper and, ironically, Bully may be common). Once he gets his emotions under control, he fits into society better, but he may still have an attitude, often represented by an Intolerance of either bullies or authority figures.

Homo Superior

Many people assume that if humanity eventually evolves into a new species, it will be because people have learned to harness their latent psionic abilities. This theme shares common threads with the previous two – it's about going through changes and gaining personal power. What makes it different is the approach: psi is not scary, dangerous, unexplainable, or the "salvation" of a victim. Instead, psi is a natural development that shifts normal people to a new level, where the only reasonable response (or perhaps just the response they have) is to see themselves as a separate species: *Homo superior*.

This doesn't mean they're nice, however. In fact, such a game can certainly play out as a war between those who stand with humanity versus those who think humanity should be slaves, destroyed, etc. (See the *X-Men* movies for a recent example, although it substitutes "mutant" for "psi.") However, just as frequently, humanity is the antagonist, as the authorities try to chase down and dissect any psis they can. Someone who sees himself as *Homo superior* tends toward arrogance and a detachment from humanity. Callous, Delusion ("I'm not even somewhat human"), Odious Personal Habit (Arrogant), and Overconfidence are all common; in some fiction, the *Homo superior* package automatically comes with Low Empathy, No Sense of Humor, or Oblivious. If he still respects humans, he is often patronizing but willing to go out of his way to "shepherd" them; if not, he may be downright sociopathic (and Intolerant of all non-psis).

Your Head Asplode

Sometimes psi is just straight-up horror. While *Carrie* was psionics as puberty, *Scanners* is about nasty psychics popping heads like balloons. Psi may be a twisted curse that drives its users insane and makes them incredibly difficult to track, counter, and put down. If this is the case, such psis are NPCs, unless the group's tastes run to some gruesome activities.

However, the "psi as a curse" theme can be scaled down. If all psi is Uncontrollable, all information powers come with Backlash, and psis have to take disadvantages (or at least Temporary Disadvantage limitations) like Chronic Pain, Flashbacks, Neurological Disorder, and Phantom Voices . . . psi can be usable, but at what cost? Such a game should focus on situations where using psionics would be useful but where the "cost" to use them may cause complications, as well as on the need to keep people at a distance to avoid hurting them (or being hurt). Obviously, this kind of game appeals to fewer people than the other themes presented here.

Alien Minds

In some sci-fi games, psi is the biggest feature that differentiates aliens from humans. (In fact, in many cases, it's the *only* thing, along with perhaps a bumpy nose or excess facial hair.)

When Race X can read minds and Race Y can control computers, it provides the writers – or the GM – with a quick hook to capture the flavor of the race. When building a sci-fi setting from scratch (in which case, **GURPS Space** is invaluable), the GM should decide if psi is restricted to certain races, and if so, whether each psionic race only has access to certain powers. The racial template for a psionic alien may even include inborn psionic abilities that *every* member of the race has.

Alien psis often appear in modern, non-sci-fi settings as well. They are usually crash survivors, advance scouts, or some other small group that is currently cut off from the rest of their race. This set-up is necessary; a few aliens on Earth adds color to a modern game, but *thousands* of aliens turns it into a sci-fi game, even if the players don't realize it yet! As above, the GM may incorporate whatever traits (psionic or otherwise) he wishes into their racial template, though there is a long-standing tradition in fiction for the aliens to either look like or be able to disguise themselves as humans. See *Inhuman Ability* (p. 10) for more ideas.

> *I know you don't want accept it, but it's true. She's not human.*
> – Jim Valenti, **Roswell** #3.14

PSIONIC POTENTIAL

What makes a psi? Some believers say that every human being has the potential to develop powerful mental gifts. Some stories focus on psionic families, each member passing down latent abilities to the next generation. Other campaigns work well when the PCs are the *only* people on the planet who can learn psionic abilities.

This doesn't mean the players *or* their adventurers need to start the game knowing this answer, of course! If the source of psi is a central mystery in the campaign, the GM should feel free to keep this decision to himself, giving away as little as possible when vetting origin stories ("You discovered your powers after getting hit by a car? Fine, but note that you were unconscious for a few days before coming around.")

It's important to distinguish the question "What kind of person has the *potential* to be a psi?" from "How common are true psis?" The two are not necessarily related. For example, in a campaign with universal latency (below), psis may be common, but because so few people are *aware* of psi, only a small number have trained actual abilities. See *The World in Your Mind* (pp. 15-19) for more ideas.

parts of the brain can have drastic effects on thoughts, personality, and other "purely mental" things. Because of this, a person's body may have to come properly "pre-wired" before he has a chance of developing powers.

Player's Choice

Some GMs, particularly those running a game with open powers (p. 12), may not really care to define who has the potential for psi; if a player wants to build a psi, the background details don't really matter. If the GM doesn't want the "world of latent psis" implied by *Universal Latency* (below), he can take that option off the menu while letting a player choose any of the *other* explanations for why his adventurer has psi. For example, one may have been a government test subject, another may come from a long line of telepaths, and a third may have developed powers when trapped in a house fire.

UNIVERSAL LATENCY

Perhaps the simplest decision is to say that *everyone* has psionic potential. The world is full of latent psis, which implies that anyone can develop actual powers with the right motivation or training. Everyone may have a level of Talent (*Latent Powers,* p. 14) or they may just have Weak Latency (Psi) (**Psionic Powers,** p. 19), either as a perk or a 0-point feature. This doesn't *necessarily* mean that active psis are common (see *Frequency,* pp. 15-16), but if that's not the case, the GM must consider why. A world with universal latency doesn't require much thought about background on the players' end; anyone can build a psi, because anyone can *be* a psi.

WITHIN THE MEAT

Psionics may be mental abilities (*Mental vs. Physical*, p. 6), but that doesn't necessarily remove physicality from the equation. On a fundamental level, mental capacity is governed by the way each brain is built; damage or alteration to certain

Genetics

Many stories feature psionic bloodlines – entire families with latent or actual abilities, who pass this psionic potential down from generation to generation. In some cases, it may skip generations, or be a realistic trait (in a genetic sense) – that is, it may be recessive or dominant, with a varying probability of showing up in any one descendant. Some families may only have a gift for one psionic power; interbreeding between bloodlines may be the only way to birth multi-talented psis (see *Range of Abilities,* pp. 13-14).

If the campaign will feature genetic lines of psis, the GM may wish to decide how far back up the genealogical tree the psychic blood can be traced. If the potential in a family can all be traced back to one ancestor, an investigative adventure (or full campaign arc) may reveal hitherto unknown facts about the bloodline in question or even about psionics in general. For extra intrigue, what if *all* psionic families can trace their potential back to a single *common* ancestor?

Genetic engineering poses another possibility – what if a given line of psis was created intentionally? This shades into *Intervention* (below) but requires scientists willing to engage in long-term planning, possibly to create a self-sustaining supply of psis. See *GURPS Bio-Tech* for details and rules on this kind of tampering.

Dain Bramage

In *GURPS,* some physical effects and mental trauma can cause the permanent or temporary loss of IQ or other mental traits. Psi, being a mental trait, is vulnerable to this; someone who fails a Fright Check badly enough may lose levels in one of his psionic abilities! Optionally, if the GM wants to emphasize the tie between the physical brain and the abilities it allows (*Within the Meat,* pp. 8-9), he may rule that any physical trauma that results in the loss of IQ or mental traits *also* causes the victim to lose the same number of character points' worth of psi. This can be harsh, but it can ensure that those with psionic abilities value their heads . . . literally.

Intervention

Perhaps the body can be *adapted* to bring out psi? If so, experiments on brain tissue or hormone therapy may be able to turn a non-psi into a latent (or actual) psi. This is often the domain of secret government doctors and mad scientists, though some settings feature benevolent groups who simply want to bring people to the next level. This may be mixed with *Genetics* (pp. 8-9), as doctors examine the brains of the gifted and use that knowledge to "upgrade" others – or it could be the *only* way to create psis in the campaign. The latter could be the result of an experimental cocktail of hormones and/or surgery. It may be permanent, or it may require the psi to return for regular medicine to avoid losing his powers. See *Brain Grafts* (below) for another, gruesome possibility.

At higher TLs, doctors may be able to give subjects a "psionic upgrade" via a tailored proteus nanovirus (*Bio-Tech,* p. 184). Mere minutes after being infected, a normal human may find himself developing strange mental powers! This is an intriguing alternative to normal neurosurgery, from a game perspective, due to the possibility of such a virus becoming contagious: By spreading out of control, it could drastically increase the number of psis in the setting in less than a month.

Instead of doctors, psi may represent the result of *alien* meddling! Extraterrestrial visitors may be forcibly "uplifting" abductees as part of a long-term plan. Deciding what that plan *is* will have a major effect on the campaign. The aliens may just be trying to help by raising humanity to the next level (*Homo Superior,* p. 7). This may be a humanitarian effort (no pun intended), a need for an ally (militarily, economically, etc.), or an attempt to evolve humans enough not to head into space and nuke everything they meet. Alternatively, it could be a devious plot: Along with their powers, the psis are unknowingly implanted with Will -10 (Only to resist the Greys' psi, -80%) [-10], and their Mind

Shield is useless against the aliens! With psionic agents in place all over the world, the aliens could accomplish a lot . . . unless *someone* can stop them, that is.

A FOCUSED MIND

A common belief regarding psi is that, while anyone could become psychic *in theory,* in practice it requires a special state of mind. This is different from *Universal Latency* (p. 8) in that the average person is *not* a latent psi and, in fact, has no special inherent psionic aptitude. Instead, anyone could undergo some sort of *experience* that shapes his mind into the right mold for paranormal abilities. The catalyst required depends on the setting (examples follow), though some worlds allow *any* of them to act as a psionic "trigger."

The experience may require a "trigger roll" against Will to awaken psionic powers instead of it happening automatically; see *Awakenings* (**Powers,** p. 36) for detailed rules. Alternatively, it may give the subject a latent power (p. 14) rather than actual abilities. As a compromise, success on the trigger roll reveals a gain of actual powers, with a failed roll granting latent ones instead.

Adrenaline Shock

In times of incredible stress or trauma, people have been known to demonstrate some amazing abilities. When a mother lifts a car off her child to save his life, that may be pure adrenaline charging her muscles, or a latent psychokinesis being triggered. This is a very common theme in fiction, and meshes well with *Going Through Changes* (p. 6), where a shocking event is the catalyst for latent abilities blooming into real ones.

Brain Grafts

In TL7+ worlds where *Intervention* (above) is true, desperate or mad scientists might attempt to create new psis by adding brain tissue from *existing* ones. The donor psi can be dead (if not, this procedure *kills* him), but not from damage to the brain; if deceased, he must have been put on life support within four minutes of death. Brain tissue from the donor is good for (1d/2) brain grafts, +1 for every *full* 50 points in psionic abilities, Talent, and skills he had. (Or, if the GM allows cloned neural tissue to work, one donor can provide *infinite* grafts.)

This procedure takes 24 hours and is at -15 to Surgery skill at TL7, -10 at TL8, and -5 at TL9+. Use the full surgery rules from *Bio-Tech* (pp. 135-139) or the simpler modifiers on p. B223. If the Surgery roll fails, the victim permanently loses one point of IQ (1d+1 points on a critical failure) and gains nothing psionic. On a normal success, the subject gains one level of Talent in up to (1d/2) powers that the donor had; as a latent psi (p. 14), he can go on to learn actual abilities. On a critical success, he *also* gains one psionic ability of the donor's (at the minimum possible level).

Brain tissue does not suffer from rejection, but the subject must make a HT-1 roll to assimilate the new brain tissue. At TL9+, the use of nanotherapy adds a bonus of (TL-8)×2 to this roll. There is no special effect on a success or critical success. On a failure, he permanently loses points of IQ equal to the margin of failure; on a critical failure, he dies!

Psionic Institutes

A staple of modern and sci-fi fiction, the psionic institute is made up of a few dozen psis, devoted to training those who need it. It's possible for there to just be one such institute, but one location for every 10 million to 100 million people is more common in most games and fiction, even if these are only different branches of a single organization. Some designate entrance requirements – ranging from specific religious beliefs and social standing to "anyone willing to give us $1,000" – while some take anyone with psionic potential.

Once in, training generally proceeds like a normal school; see *Improvement Through Study* (p. B292). Many institutes begin to "make use" of their students once they've developed a few abilities, however. This can range from the innocuous (e.g., helping victims of a bombing while wearing T-shirts to advertise the school) to the shady (e.g., breaking into offices to alter financial records). The institute may openly oppose a rival institute (or faction) – some settings are riddled with competing schools, each with a different vision.

In some campaigns, these institutes work openly, with advertisements in the Yellow Pages and the occasional billboard. In others, they are forced deep underground, requiring the use of Contacts and Streetwise skill to find them, where they swear all students to secrecy (and may even back it up with a little **Mental Surgery**).

For a thorough take on this subject (in a sci-fi setting), see ***GURPS Traveller: Psionic Institutes.***

Altered Consciousness

There is a long tradition of using chemicals to achieve a "higher state." Vedic clergy consumed *soma* to see visions, Bolivian shamans inhaled burnt cohoba seeds for inner clarity, and Native Americans ingested peyote to commune with spirits. In practice, this is often easier and safer than adrenaline shock, with similar results. It always requires a trigger roll to get something *useful* out of the experience without losing oneself.

Training

Instead of a sudden, dramatic event, truly developing one's psi may require serious, intense training. (Or the shock may bring out latent powers, which training then brings forth fully.) This generally requires weeks of study (if not longer) with successful Teaching rolls by the trainer. Instead of a Will roll to trigger abilities, students may have to make *IQ* rolls to absorb the lessons. In a cinematic game, the *Training Sequence* rules from ***GURPS Martial Arts*** (p. 147) can be adapted to speed this up.

Obviously, this choice requires the GM to decide who can (and does) train psis. Two common fictional tropes are the psionic institute (p. 10) and the wise, old master (or small group of wise, old monks). The latter can usually be found in a remote location, where he (or they) train students in basic techniques before sending off the potential psis off on bizarre quests ("Head north, and fetch me the topmost apple from the first tree you come to when you can no longer see this temple"). These errands invariably turn out to be full of complications that require the use of the psionic abilities the students have. If the campaign will be sufficiently long-lived, it may be fun to start in this situation, moving on to the "real game" once the party is ready.

SPECIAL SOULS

If psi isn't connected to the flesh and blood, and it isn't formed from the mind, then that leaves the esoteric as an option. This can be anything the GM (or player – see *Player's Choice,* p. 8) feels is a plausible explanation for who can be a psi. Maybe it's not tied to any specific family lines, but *any* seventh son of a seventh son can learn psionics freely. Or anyone whose cradle was left under a weeping willow during the first thunderstorm of their existence. Or all who enter the temple of Amun-Ra with an offering of a priest of Apep's decapitated head. (Or all three, but that'd be a strange world . . .)

While deciding this, bear in mind that if anyone is able to do a scientific study on a large number of psis, the origin of superhuman abilities will eventually become public knowledge. If parents know about the "weeping willow and thunderstorm" trick, they can effectively *choose* whether to gift their child with psionic abilities. If being struck by lightning is known to have a 1-in-6 chance of triggering latent abilities, many people are going to die of electrocution each year. Be sure to consider the ramifications, and how this will affect the game world. This option may be best for campaign where psionic powers are a mixed blessing – if half of all psis turn into rampaging monsters (*Your Head Asplode,* p. 7), folks will be less likely to run into storms with a lightning rod in one hand.

> *Here await the birth of the son*
> *The seventh, the heavenly, the chosen one*
>
> *– Iron Maiden,*
> *"Seventh Son of a Seventh Son"*

INHUMAN ABILITY

It's possible that humans *can't* become psis – but others can! In a sci-fi setting, this is often what sets aliens apart from humans. For more on this, see *Alien Minds* (pp. 7-9).

This does not preclude psionic characters, of course. Thematically, little difference exists between psionic humans and psionic aliens – both have abilities beyond those of normal people, and both are likely to be viewed with fear and distrust. If the aliens just happen to look like humans (a *very* common approach in fiction, despite being mind-bogglingly unlikely) or can use psi or technology to disguise themselves as such, all of the advice for human psis in this book can be applied with no significant changes. If not, the advice on aliens found in ***GURPS Space*** is invaluable for the GM.

REPRESENTING PSI

While most players want enough game-world information to build psis that will be interesting while still fitting in, their first question usually is "What cool powers can we get?" It's up to the GM what sort of "shopping list" to hand the group during character creation.

Freak of nature, born with a certain form of ESP; derangement of the synapses which we call telepathy.
– *Paul Ruth,* **Scanners**

POWERS AND ABILITIES

In **GURPS,** psionics use the *power* system, as defined on p. B254 and *greatly* expanded on in **Powers.** Past that, it's up to the GM as to how much is predefined.

Closed List

Psionic Powers takes the "closed list" approach: All of the powers available are defined *and* the GM creates all of the abilities available within those powers ahead of time. The players are given the list, and may buy anything on it, but cannot make their own. This approach takes the most work (unless using **Psionic Powers**), but often gives the best results for the GM *and* the players. The GM doesn't have to worry about anyone designing a game-breaking ability, and he doesn't need to include anything that he feels *would* break the game – even a predefined list (like **Psionic Powers**) can be pared down by simply excluding any "problem abilities." The players don't have to do any extra effort – they can choose from the list, pay the points, and build their characters in little time. However, this may not appeal to players who feel comfortable enough with **GURPS** to create their own abilities and want the freedom to do so.

Fuzzy Abilities

This is the method used by both the **Basic Set** and **Powers.** All of the powers available are defined ahead of time by the GM, along with a list of appropriate advantages for each. Any advantage that must have certain modifiers (or lack of modifiers) to make sense with a power needs to be noted – for example, the Telepathy power might list "Affliction (only with Based on Will and Malediction; can't make any physical changes)" among its available advantages. The players then decide which powers they want, and use the listed advantages to build the abilities. This approach retains many of the advantages of *Closed List* (above) while adding more freedom – but it requires experienced players who understand advantages and modifiers well (or who are comfortable with simply taking the basic advantage plus a power modifier, where allowed).

Open Abilities

For an even more free-form approach, the GM can skip defining abilities and merely list the powers; the players then create whatever abilities they feel would fit the power. This necessitates defining the powers in enough detail that players can reasonably tell what abilities would be appropriate. For example, one entry might say, "ESP: The ability to perceive things without involving your normal five senses. Involves getting info from the past or future, from a distance, through barriers, etc., but nothing involving someone else's mind, which is Telepathy's domain." This approach offers even more freedom than *Fuzzy Abilities* (above) but with similar results, as long as the GM retains veto power. It requires even more player knowledge, however – without even a list of advantages to go by, inexperienced gamers may not realize what their options are.

Nonetheless, an experienced GM with enough free time to put in the extra work can still use this option with a mixed group of players. As long as the player who's unfamiliar with **GURPS** is willing to trust the GM, simply have the player describe what he wants his adventurer to be able to do. The GM then "custom builds" the ability *for* him.

Decisions, Decisions

When relying on **Psionic Powers** in a game, it's important to take a moment and consider which of its optional rules and suggestions to use. Note that all page references in this box are to **Psionic Powers,** not this book.

- Is *Ergokinesis* split into *Cyberpsi, Electrokinesis,* and *Photokinesis?*
- Is *Psychic Healing* split into *Biokinesis* and *Psychometabolism?*
- Does *Animal Telepathy* exist? If so, normal *Telepathy* does not work on animals; use the racial costs provided on p. 81.
- Does *Dream Control* exist – and if so, is the dream world a separate plane?
- Are you using *Optional Crippling Rules* (p. 7)?
- Can psis (or anyone) use the new mental maneuvers (p. 11)?
- Does the Jam technique (p. 31) exist, and if so, for what abilities? Be aware that as Jam becomes more common, "psi vs. psi" becomes more prevalent than "psi vs. anti-psi," which weakens the impact of facing anti-psis.
- Does **Telekinetic Control** (p. 54) exist, and if so, does it replace the separate Telekinesis abilities?
- Does **Telespeak** (p. 59) exist, and if so, does it replace **Telesend** and/or **Telereceive?**
- Does **RL Exoteleport** (p. 70) exist, and if so, does it replace the standard **Exoteleport?**
- Are you using *Abilities as Advantages* (p. 74)?
- Is the game going to be so insanely over-the-top that you'll allow "uber-techniques" (p. 76)?

Options and the Power Modifier

Powers (pp. 156-174) introduced a number of power options, both empowering and limiting, which the GM may use to add flavor to a given power. The easiest way to keep this balanced is to include roughly an equal number of good and bad options with each power. Thus, if the GM feels that a psionic person should be able to use *Combining Powers,* he might balance that with the *Multiple Feats* penalty, and so on. **Powers** (p. 177) and **Psionic Powers** (*Powers and Options,* p. 6) each provide a balanced list of options that are especially appropriate for psi.

If the benefits *severely* outweigh the drawbacks, or vice-versa, it makes sense to adjust the power modifier. No fixed rule applies to this; it is the GM's call. A suggested guideline:

If there are at least twice as many benefits as there are drawbacks *and* at least two more benefits than drawbacks, increase the power modifier by +5% (normally from -10% to -5%). If the reverse is true, reduce the power modifier by -5% (from -10%to -15%). Extremely lopsided arrangements may justify a larger change (up to ±10%), at the GM's discretion.

Example: Joan is running a game in which psionic powers can use extra effort, but can be crippled, are penalized for multiple feats, and require a special skill. As there are at least twice as many drawbacks as benefits, and at least two more drawbacks than benefits, Joan reduces the Psionic power modifier to -15% for this game.

Open Powers

For supers games and other over-the-top settings, the GM can let players invent whatever powers and abilities they want. As long as a player can rationalize (to the GM) a concept as a psionic power, he can then design whatever abilities fit that new power. This is generally only appropriate in a campaign that already permits every (or nearly every) advantage in the book – if a hero could already buy Shadow Form as a normal advantage, no harm is done in letting him buy it as part of a new Umbra-kinesis power.

Ordaz was standing quietly beside me, letting me make my examination without interruption. Naturally he had no way of knowing about my restricted psi powers.

*– Larry Niven, **Flatlander***

PSIONIC SKILLS

Psi, more so than most powers, is often heavily associated with training (p. 10). The idea that true power comes from control over inner strength is centuries old. Because of this, psionic abilities often have associated skills – one unique Hard skill for each ability, based on whatever attribute is used to control it. See *Skills* (**Psionic Powers,** p. 5) or *Skills for Everyone* (**Powers,** p. 162) for more on this approach. Note that this requirement adds to the cost of these abilities, and thus should be balanced by giving the power a beneficial option of some sort – see *Options and the Power Modifier* (above) for more ideas.

When using unique psionic skills in this way, be aware that they interact poorly with the Reliable limitation. If players are allowed to build their own abilities, they're likely to take high

levels of Reliable instead of buying up skill, as this is often more point-efficient. Because of this, the GM may wish to limit Reliable to only buying off inherent penalties (e.g., the -8 penalty to use Precognition actively).

A compromise is bundling Reliable 6 into the Psionic power modifier, raising the power modifier from -10% to +20%. As psionic skills usually default to (controlling attribute)-6, this would allow untrained psis to use their abilities at the full attribute level, while making psis who did put points into the skill *very* talented!

A different, yet related, approach is to focus on *mundane* skills, as discussed in *Using Abilities With Skills* (**Powers,** pp. 161-163). Instead of requiring a specific skill for each ability, the GM and players can decide which skills could be used to enhance abilities and vice-versa. For example, a telepath might not *have* to learn any skills to use Mind Control, but he may learn high levels of Brainwashing and Hypnotism anyway to use it *better*.

Esoteric Skills as Psi

Cinematic martial-arts skills (such as Breaking Blow, Invisibility Art, and Light Walk) are generally associated with chi powers, if any. However, it's perfectly reasonable to make them available to psis, especially in a campaign with a martial bent. The same goes for other esoteric skills, such as the Enthrallment skills, Musical Influence, etc. It's up to the GM whether to let psionic powers *replace* the prerequisite for Trained by a Master or Weapon Master, or to make it an *additional* one. Note that this choice is for flavor more than play balance – each skill is already balanced in terms of time and circumstances required.

Imbuement Skills as Psi

These skills, introduced in **GURPS Power-Ups 1: Imbuements,** allow warriors to bend the rules for (or outright transform) their weapon attacks. As such, a game featuring "psychic warriors" could benefit from using Imbuements in addition to, or *instead* of, the normal psionic powers. If so, they should be changed from DX/VH to IQ/VH, as befitting the mental nature of psi. For more detail, each power group could govern a different set of Imbuement Skills. For a complete treatment of this approach, see *Psi-Powered Imbuements* (*Pyramid* #3/12, p. 24).

STARTING CONDITIONS

There's no rule saying that the GM has to put any restrictions on psi – "buy whatever you can afford" is a valid instruction in **GURPS.** However, if the heroes are supposed to be people first and psis second, it may be better for the campaign to impose some reasonable limits.

POWER LEVEL

When setting the starting power level (p. B487) for a game, it can be helpful for the GM to mentally separate the points he envisions people spending on mundane traits from the points he sees them spending on psi. This helps prevent a disconnect between how he envisioned the PCs and how the players create them.

Example: Cliff is going to run a "commandos with psi" game, so he tells his players to build on 150 points – enough to build a reasonably skilled commando. He figures any points spent on psi are a wash, as far as effectiveness goes. When the game starts, the party is full of commandos who spent around 90 points on attributes, skills, etc., and 60 points on psi. While the psionics do prove useful, the commandos lack the basic skills and abilities to make it through Cliff's first adventure in one piece. Oops!

Psionics can substitute for *some* missing skills or abilities, but not all. With many games, the best approach is to think of psi as an add-on – treating the group as "X-point heroes with Y points of psi." For example, if Cliff expected fully skilled commandos who also had a small measure of psi, he should have considered them 150-point heroes with 50 points of psi, and run a 200-point game.

It's important for the GM to communicate this to the players when the game starts. It can be as casual as saying, "Build 150-point investigators, and try to spend around a third of it on psi," or as restrictive as setting strict spending limits, like "Build 105-point investigators with only mundane traits, and then add 45 points in psionic abilities, Talent, and skills."

Knowing how much psi to allow can be tricky. As a general guideline, the power levels listed on p. B487 apply well to psi campaigns if you *halve* the points. That is, spending 13-25 points on psionics gives you an "average" psi, spending 100-150 points on it gets you a "larger-than-life" psi, and so on. Thus, a 150-point hero needs to add about 75 points' worth of psi to be both a hero *and* an equally heroic psi. This does not include the cost of any Unusual Background (see below) required by the GM.

RANGE OF ABILITIES

In a game focused on psionic development, it can be unrealistic for some of the psis to start with multiple powers and a handful of abilities for each. Therefore, *if* it fits the campaign, the GM may wish to impose some starting limits. In some games, especially those where psi is not the focus, these limits can even be imposed throughout the game.

One Ability

Psis can have only one psionic ability (and only one power, of course). This can help keep players from feeling overwhelmed when creating a psi, though some may chafe at the lack of versatility. As a compromise, the GM may allow them to buy additional *latent* abilities (p. 14), to be developed as the campaign goes on.

Unusual Background (Psi)

In a game where psionics are uncommon enough to count as a surprise, the GM may require psis to take an Unusual Background (UB). This covers the "unfair" advantage of having mental powers in a world where most people do not (and will not commonly be expecting their use). The following steps may be used to approximate a fair UB. This is completely optional, however; these guidelines exist to *help* the GM's decision, not to replace it.

After taking all the factors below into consideration, if the UB ends up 0 or less, there is no need for a psionic UB in this game. Note that the GM may choose to require a *separate* UB for access to specific powers or abilities (e.g., in addition to the UB to be a psi, teleporters may need an *extra* 10-point UB), but this is a campaign-specific decision.

1. Consider what the public knows about psi – see *Public Awareness* (pp. 16-18) for more. If psi is completely unknown, the base UB is 30 points. Suspected psi is 15 points; denied is 5 points; and acknowledged is 0 points.

2. Consider how common psi is – see *Frequency* (pp. 15-16) for details. Very rare adds 10 points; rare or uncommon adds 5 points; common adds 0 points; very common *subtracts* 5 points; and ubiquitous subtracts 10 points.

3. (*Optional*) Consider any limits on power – see *Starting Conditions* (above) for suggestions. If the PCs are limited to spending less than 1/5 of their points on psionic abilities, skills, and Talent, subtract 10 points.

4. (*Optional*) If starting characters can only buy latent powers, *either* subtract 15 points *or* halve the final cost of the UB (rounding down to the nearest 5 points), whichever makes it smaller.

Example: Beth is running a psi-sci-fi game where psis are denied and rare, and players will spend about half of their characters' points on psionics. The UB is (5+5), or 10 points.

Example: John is running an adolescent psi game where psis are completely unknown and uncommon, and will only start off with a single level of Talent (as a latent power), which will cost *far* less than 1/5 of their points. The UB is (30+5-10-15), or 10 points.

Note that "one ability" doesn't necessarily mean "one advantage." Many psionic abilities are designed with multiple advantages, often joined with Link. This is not an issue if players are just choosing from a list (*Closed List,* p. 11). In a game where players can design their own abilities, they should be limited to one *concept* built from two or three advantages at the most.

In a world where every psi only has his one particular knack (such as in the *Necroscope* series), this may be a rule for the entire game, instead of just a starting condition. Bear in mind that this can lead to psis trying to turn every situation into one suited to their particular abilities ("How can we three use **TK Grab, Retrocognition,** and **Mental Blow** to get those bank records?").

One Power

Less restrictive than *One Ability,* this allows the psi some versatility while still establishing boundaries. This usually comes in one of two flavors: Either every psi must pick a *different* power (to give everyone their own niche), or everyone has to build from the *same* power (e.g., if they're all part of the same family or experiment). If this is a permanent restriction, it may prevent anyone from willingly starting with a power that has few abilities (e.g., Astral Projection).

Unrestricted

This is the default assumption in most games. Psis can start with whatever abilities and powers they want. Their only restriction is the campaign's power level (p. 13). This is usually the best choice for games that aren't going to be focused on development, and don't otherwise have a special need to limit starting psi.

Latent Powers

In **GURPS,** the term "latent psionic power" can mean two things. Most commonly, it refers to having Talent in a psionic power without possessing actual abilities. However, it can also refer to buying a psionic ability as a potential advantage (p. B33) with or without Talent in that power. The two are equivalent in that neither can be used in any meaningful way, but both serve as "placeholders" to later improve one's psi.

Example: Jonathan has Telepathy Talent 1. Robbie has **Telereceive** 1 bought as a potential advantage (for half price). Michelle has Telepathy Talent 1 and **Telereceive** 1, bought normally. Jonathan and Robbie are both latent telepaths, while Michelle is a telepath (no "latent").

If psis are not allowed to learn new abilities or powers as the campaign goes on, there is *no* reason to take latent powers. The GM must make this clear, to prevent a player from wasting points.

DEGREE OF SKILL

In many ways, skill *is* power with psionic abilities – the effectiveness of most psi is dependent on the user's margin of success (or victory). Because of this, the GM may wish to consider just how talented psis can be.
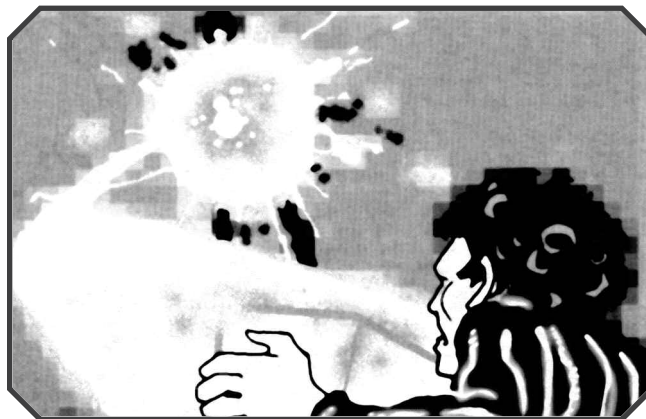
Talent

In a game featuring new psis, or one with a focus on development and self-exploration, the GM may wish to restrict starting adventurers to only one level of Talent (or no Talent at all). If psionic skills (p. 12 and below) are not being used, this means starting psis are limited by their attribute levels, primarily IQ. Since Talent is an important part of psionics, the GM should make it clear whether psis will have the opportunity to raise Talent as the game goes on.

In addition to the above, the GM has the option of setting the maximum levels of Talent available in the game. By default, a power Talent is limited to four levels. However, this can be raised to fit a more cinematic game. As a general guideline, a limit of six levels is reasonable for a campaign featuring extremely well-trained psis. Settings that include other powerful forces (e.g., high technology, super abilities, etc.) may be able to justify up to eight levels, if necessary to keep psis on an even footing. A completely over-the-top game – where a group saves the world before breakfast each morning – might run fine with up to 10 levels!

Generally, a higher ceiling on Talent gives psis more reason to focus on one or two power groups. Someone with *one* power can spend 30 points on Telepathy Talent 6, for +6 to every psionic skill he knows; one with *three* powers might spread the same 30 points among ESP Talent 2, Psychokinesis Talent 2, and Telepathy Talent 2, for only a +2 bonus to his skills. If the GM wishes to encourage the opposite, he should lower the ceiling on Talent. *Completely* removing Talent has the effect of eliminating *any* benefit from focusing on a single power, leading to psis "cherry picking" their favorite abilities from different powers.

Skill Level

Psionic skills (p. 12) are an easy way to allow variety in a psi's abilities – a telepath might be amazing at controlling minds, but only competent at reading them. Because of this, it's usually best not to set any special restrictions on skill level. An exception to this is for a game about new psis learning to control and develop their powers. In this instance, the GM may wish to set a *starting* cap, either limiting psionic skills to a fixed maximum (e.g., none higher than 15) or a relative cost (e.g., no more than 4 points spent).

MIND GAMES

Psionic abilities change things. The inclusion of psis in a setting, whether as the focus or as one feature among many, will have a significant effect on the campaign as a whole. Even if the existence of psi is a closely guarded secret, and the world *looks* the same as the real world, the mere fact that some people can use supernatural gifts to accomplish their goals will have a huge impact behind the scenes. Of course, it doesn't *have* to be a secret – psis could be anything from the common man to the undisputed rulers of the planet!

More than the world changes. A "realistic mob war" game will look and feel very different from a "psionic mob war" game; the GM has to take this into account, both when designing the setting and when crafting adventures. With a little extra effort, psi can even advance beyond a campaign feature, adding a thematic element to the game and providing another direction in which the setting *and* the adventurers can grow.

THE WORLD IN YOUR MIND

Anyone building a new, custom setting *or* adapting an existing one must consider how long psi has existed; see *Psi Throughout History* (pp. 4-5) for more-detailed ideas. In some worlds, psi has been a part of humanity's nature since it first evolved, while others posit a mutation or other change that occurred in the recent past – or is happening as the campaign starts. Either way, the GM has to determine what effect psi has had on the world's background. If building a history from scratch, this means accounting for psionic influence when designing the timeline. If adapting a setting, it often involves looking at past events that some superhuman faculty could have prevented (often Precognition) and asking why they happened anyway.

To make these decisions about the past, it makes sense to first decide how psionic abilities affect the campaign world in the present. Once the GM knows how common psis are, how informed the public is, etc., it's easier to work backward and set those factors for 10 years ago, then 50 years ago, then 100 years ago, and so on. The following section represents some of the most important considerations, with advice on the ramifications of each.

FREQUENCY

How many actual psis (as opposed to those with latent abilities; see p. 14) exist in the setting? The rarity of psis can have a significant effect on public awareness (pp. 16-18) and public reaction (pp. 18-19); as psis become more prevalent, it becomes harder to keep their existence a secret.

When making this decision, it's important to remember that the number of psis cannot exceed the number of people with psionic potential (pp. 8-10); it is usually much lower.

Very Rare: One psi per 100,000,000 people – this is about 60 psis worldwide, assuming modern-day Earth (but see *Common for When?* in the box). Most nations have no psis, and only a few have more than one. Keeping paranormal abilities

a secret is easy on this small of a scale. If the populace *is* aware of it, any known psis become instant celebrities.

Rare: One psi per 3,000,000 people (about 2,000 psis worldwide). Most – but still not all – nations have at least one psi, and some have 100 or more. A large state (e.g., California) has a dozen psis, on average. This is a good choice for globetrotting psionic-conspiracy games, with a pool of psis small enough to necessitate secrecy and caution, but large enough to keep anyone from automatically knowing all the major players. If psis rule the world (whether openly or secretly), they are very powerful.

Common for When?

The examples in *Frequency* (above) use modern illustrations of nations, population, etc. This is done to help players more easily visualize the effects on the world. For any setting in which cities and metropolises exist, the options are applicable as-is, regardless of actual population. If the star empire has 45 trillion subjects and 10 million are psis, that's still about one psi per three million people, so psis are rare.

In much older or post-apocalyptic campaigns, where villages and small townships are the rule of the day, travel is a difficult process, and/or mass media is nonexistent (or at least unreliable), it may be necessary to make psis from 10 to 100 times more common than the options suggest. For example, in an alternate reality where technology is the same but everyone lives in decentralized rural areas, even one psi per 300,000 people is still considered rare – while in a medieval game where few people ever even leave their hamlet, "rare" may mean one psi per 30,000 people.

Uncommon: One psi per 100,000 people (about 60,000 psis worldwide). At least one psi exists in every significant nation, with up to 100 found in each of the largest cities (e.g., New York, Tokyo) alone. If psionics are supposed to be a secret, they likely are at least suspected (below), as a significant percentage of people have had some contact with a psi. With this many psis, any factions that form cannot be all-encompassing; even if one or two "psionic guilds" dominate, a significant number of free agents will always be around. This is a good choice for "secretive psi" games with a local scope, as it's possible to have multiple large, underground groups in a single nation.

Common: One psi per 3,000 people (about 2 million psis worldwide). All but the smallest towns have at least one psi; major cities have over a thousand. The government is almost certainly aware of psionic abilities (if it's supposed to be secret) and a few psis are in key positions even without a conspiracy. Almost everyone has had at least brief interaction with a psi, and stories about psionic abilities are somewhat common (whether as hushed "urban legends" or as open news). If people are aware and afraid of psis, lynchings and bashing are common at the local level, though unlikely to gather any national momentum.

Very Common: One psi per 100 people (about 60 million psis worldwide). Psis are roughly as prevalent as twins; nearly everyone either knows a psi or knows someone who does. Psis make up a significant part of the workforce, the armed forces, etc. It is almost impossible for psi to avoid being known, whether acknowledged or not. Ironically, psis are a large enough group to garner *serious* persecution at this point, but not quite numerous enough to guarantee their own rights.

Ubiquitous: Psis make up somewhere between 5% to 100% of the population. At the lower end, they are essentially a "racial" minority; toward the higher end, they dominate society. Even if they don't run society, statistically, *many* psis hold positions of power. Short of a massive conspiracy by the world's most powerful telepaths, the existence of supernatural faculties cannot be kept a secret at this level. The public reaction may vary, but even if many people fear and hate psis, there are too many psis for them to risk openly committing hate crimes.

In addition to determining how many psis there are, it is useful to think about how they are distributed throughout the world; the decision for psionic potential (pp. 8-10) affects this as well. For example, statistically speaking, about 5% of the psis in the world are United States citizens. However, if a pregnant mother can raise the chances of birthing a psi by taking expensive, legal, psychotronic drugs, closer to 30% of the world's psis may be American. See **GURPS Supers** (p. 132) for more on this, including detailed rules for additional distribution models.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

One of the coolest things about psi is how little suspension of disbelief it requires. With a few exceptions, psionic use is invisible, undetectable by normal folks, and often has effects that could be considered coincidence. It's *easy* to imagine that these abilities are out there and that people just don't know about them. Because of this, the "secret psionic conspiracy" is a much more common trope in modern-day stories than openly acknowledged psi.

The further the setting's era moves away from today, however, the closer the ratios come to flipping. Near-future stories often feature the realization (and the beginnings of acceptance) of psi, while more distant science fiction often treats psi as just another skill that humanity – or, at least, alien-kind (pp. 7-8 and 10) – has mastered. Moving backward, classic fantasy tends to stick to magic (or to blur psi and magic together), but the few stories that feature people obviously exhibiting psionic abilities rarely have them hiding their gifts from the rest of the world.

Regardless of the situation in common literature, the public awareness of psi can be at any level in *any* game, and should be chosen to best fit the campaign.

Suspected

In this setting, the world as a whole agrees that psionics do not exist. No conclusive proof has been found, and the media has never captured any clear use of supernatural abilities. Nonetheless, enough circumstantial evidence has come up to make the average person at least *consider* that such abilities may be real, even if he'd never admit it publicly. About one person in 10 wholeheartedly believes in psi (even if not by that name), with about a quarter of those doing so openly and proudly. Networks of believers exist, along with small, poorly funded research teams set on proving its existence.

Debunkers

If psi is *Suspected* (above) or *Denied* (p. 17), there are certainly debunkers – researchers who attempt to reveal charlatans for what they really are. Their motivations are wide-ranging, but they generally fall into one of the following three mindsets.

The Quester. He believes that paranormal abilities may exist (and he may even be a genuine parapsychologist; see p. 5). He hopes to find a psi who can prove his abilities in an independent test. In the meantime, he's committed to stopping the charlatans who are preying on the weak and muddying the field of actual psi research!

The Skeptic. He has serious doubts about psi and sees most of them as delusional or con artists. He tries to debunk them to help humanity move past the need for such wishful thinking, and focus on *actual* personal development. If confronted with a demonstrable, repeatable psionic ability, he would search for a more believable answer first, but would eventually acknowledge it.

The Gainsayer. He *knows* that psi is bunk and aims to free believers of their ridiculous mindset. Upon encountering a demonstration of actual psi, he attempts to find any other justification for the result (up to and including "coincidence"). He may require more tests with increasingly stringent requirements ("Sure, you guessed seven out of 10 cards, but can you guess *nine* out of 10?") until the psi manages to fail one.

In all cases, the debunker who happens to be an anti-psi is a very common trope – so much so that most groups who encounter an NPC debunker will be expecting it.

Unknown Psi

Suspected (pp. 16-17) posits a world that doesn't believe in psi. However, it's possible to go a step further, for a setting where hardly anyone even knows what psi *is*.

In such a world, less than one person in 100 even understands the concept of "psionic powers," and less than one in 1,000 actually believes in such things beyond simple superstition. It's even possible that no one's come up with an accepted term for psi yet – if so, the first part of convincing a person that psi exists is explaining the actual concept to him! Only those with Expert Skill (Psionics) have any idea that psi breaks down into powers like Psychokinesis, Telepathy, etc., and that skill is extremely hard to come by.

Unless psis are especially rare, this is likely to be the effect of some sort of conspiracy to keep their existence in the dark. This is often a covert group of psis who are also out for control and world domination, or a similar but well-meaning organization with no goal other than protecting their own. This type of group makes an excellent Patron or Enemy – or both, if multiple factions exist.

Alternatively, psi may be unknown because anti-psi is *very* widespread. If half the population has the **Skeptic** perk, psi becomes something nearly impossible to do in front of others! (See *Anti-Psi,* pp. 31-32, for more on this.)

The Monkey Wrench

While a world in which psi is completely unknown may be hard to fathom, it may make more sense when mixed with other powers (as discussed on p. 21). If magic is common and well-known, while only a handful of people have psionic abilities, psi may be seen as a magical aberration instead of as a separate power. Psychics who can use their abilities in no-mana zones may cause amazement and confusion, while still being thought of as "wizards."

Charlatans abound, unfortunately – some just looking for attention; others seeking to get rich at the expense of the gullible. Some charlatans may even be sponsored by a psionic conspiracy, to discredit the whole idea of psi. If the campaign is modern, the result looks much like the real world (*Modern Day,* p. 5).

Psis need to take a Secret (p. 18) and be careful how they use their abilities. The GM may wish to even forbid blatant powers like Psychokinesis and Teleportation as inappropriate for the setting! On the plus side, psis in a world of disbelievers can get away with a lot – for example, when no one believes in telepathy, people are much more likely to write off the feeling of someone else in their head. A slight chance exists of a believer coming across their work, though . . . one who may recognize the actions of a mind controller or teleporter! With word of mouth spreading rumors and news, it's very likely that psis will meet up – first on the local level, but eventually forming larger groups – and organize for their own protection. Underground psionic groups, perhaps even full psionic institutes (p. 10), exist; the frequency (pp. 15-16) of psi determines how large and numerous these groups are.

One common twist on this approach is "Nobody has proof that psi exists . . . except the government!" In this type of campaign, a super-secret, black-ops task force is not only aware of psi, but is actively studying it, and doesn't want the public to know to avoid a panic. In reality, a secret this huge would be nearly impossible to hide for more than a decade or two, but some fictional depictions have them doing it since the government was first formed centuries ago. This is generally as "in the dark" as a game world gets, but for a setting with even less awareness, see *Unknown Psi* (above).

Denied

In this setting, psi does not exist officially. The government, police, media, etc., all have perfect explanations for all strange events. Even so, the average person has reason to suspect that people with supernatural powers are out there. If psis are particularly rare, perhaps one of them was caught on film and the government's explanation just didn't quite ring true; if not, then enough people have seen some sort of psionic display to make it a *very* common urban legend. Still, no one wants to look like an idiot, so even though somewhere between one-quarter to one-half of the population is sure that *some* sort of psi exists (and almost *everyone* at least suspects it), people never discuss it openly with anyone other than very close friends. For an excellent depiction of this state (but for "general weirdness" instead of just psi), see Sunnydale in the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.*

Those with superhuman abilities may need a Secret (p. 18), but it's possible for someone to operate openly as long as he's discreet in using and discussing his abilities. Many people suspect psi use if something seems "fishy" – regardless of whether psionics were actually involved! In fact, most people *think* they know more about psi than they actually do; this often takes the form of exaggerated ideas about psionic capabilities. While this allows a known esper to bluff more effectively, it also means his enemies may assume he's a much larger threat than he really is and react accordingly ("He blinked! Shoot him!").

Unfortunately, charlatans are as common as they are for *Suspected* (pp. 16-17), along with a large number of delusional folk who are convinced that they have supernatural abilities. This can make psionic support groups (or conspiracies) difficult to form, as effort must be expended figuring out who's really a psi and who just thinks he is. (Of course, in a world with universal latency – see p. 8 – *everyone* technically qualifies as at least a weak psi.)

The government, media, etc. may be equally as aware as the rest of the world, but until enough members sit down together and openly admit what they suspect, the group *as a whole* is officially ignorant. Alternatively, they may be perfectly aware of what's going on, but have decided that openly acknowledging it is not in the world's (or their own) best interest. A common literary device for the government in this situation is the existence of a small, secret scientific group dedicated to the study of psis, whose leaders are actively working to keep the rest of the government from going public about this issue.

Acknowledged

Psi exists and everyone knows it. (Well, there are a few disbelievers, but they're looked at the same way as those who still insist that the Earth is flat.) It's been demonstrated for the media, and the government has openly acknowledged it. Parapsychology (and possibly psychotronic research) is a valid scientific field.

The biggest decision involved with this option is "For how long?" A world that has come to terms with the existence of psi last week is very different from one that's known about psi for several centuries. In general, the longer psi has been known, the more casual society's attitude is toward it.

Having psi openly acknowledged brings up more questions about the world. Do psychotronics exist? If so, how available are they? (This can vary; tech stores may sell a **Psionic Shield** 4 headband off the shelf, while only a written order from the president can get you a one with power 12.) Is psionic aptitude tested for? If so, when? (Most countries will do it either in school or when reaching the legal age of adulthood.) Are psis drafted into a particular occupation or forbidden from one? (Many settings draft all psis into the armed forces; some forbid them from holding political office.) The GM may want to consider the public's reaction to psis (below) when determining how they fit into the world.

Secret (Psi)

Depending on public awareness (pp. 17-18), psis may be required to take a Secret. To determine the value of this disadvantage, decide what traits the psi gains if people discover the truth. First, consider the effects of the public's reaction (pp. 18-19), and then add any of the following, if applicable.

Duty: Psis may be forced to serve in the military, or to do other service for their country. For a person in hiding, this Duty is Involuntary.

Enemies: If psionics are unknown, scientists may kidnap a discovered psi so that he can be probed and experimented upon by them. This is Enemy (Medium group; 6 or less; Hunter) [-10] for most psis, or (9 or less) [-20] if psis are also especially rare.

Loss of Social Advantages: If being "outed" would cause the psi to lose Status, Wealth, etc., treat that as a disadvantage for these purposes.

Total the traits; if they end up positive, or no worse than -5 points, the Secret is a quirk. Otherwise, halve their value, and round to the nearest value of Secret (-5, -10, -20, or -30 points).

Example: In a modern psi game, psionic abilities are suspected (pp. 16-17) and psis are somewhat feared (p. 18). All known psis have Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5] and the Enemy listed above on a 6 or less [-10]. In addition, the average citizen is Comfortable; being outed forces a person to work menial or "gray market" jobs, losing that advantage [-10]. This comes to a total of -25 points. Halving -25 produces -12.5, which is closest to Secret (Utter Rejection) [-10].

PUBLIC REACTION

Everyone will have a different reaction when meeting someone with psionic abilities, but it's possible to generalize how the average citizen will feel. If psi is secret, this is a question of how most people will react when they discover the truth. If psi is openly known, this decision is the same as determining the status of *any* minority group (in the majority's eyes).

Fear

Unfortunately, fear is one of humanity's most common reactions to anything truly *different*. If psis are a minority, this can lead to persecution – from insults and snubbing to bashing and lynching. In general, known psis in a world that fears them have a Social Stigma. This is most often Social Stigma (Minority Group), but this can vary; psis that are only slightly feared may have Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen), while those in a world that sees them as inhuman may have Social Stigma (Monster). This may be combined with a loss of Status or Wealth, if society has a "glass ceiling" that keeps psis "in their place."

If psis are not a minority, or if the average psi is (or is considered to be) powerful enough to single-handedly take on an entire lynch mob without blinking, known psis may have levels of Social Regard (Feared) instead! While people may talk trash about the psi after he's gone, they'll defer to him when present and avoid making trouble out of fear that he may scramble their brains or set them on fire.

Note that many people are especially afraid of telepaths – to some, the thought of being picked up, having their future scanned, or getting teleported against their will is annoying, but the idea of having their thoughts read or (even worse) altered is terrifying! Campaigns in which this is true can use this new Social Stigma:

Telepath: You are a known telepath; people believe that you can read and control minds, regardless of your actual capabilities. You receive -1 to reactions from normal folk; in some games, this even includes other (nontelepathic) psis. This reaction penalty becomes -2 from anyone who has a reason to believe you may use your ability on him. *If* the setting requires all psis to take a Social Stigma, or Social Regard (Feared), you may have that trait as well. *-5 points.*

Acceptance

The world may just treat psis as a normal part of society. This is most likely if psionic abilities have been openly acknowledged (above) for a long time. In such a setting, psis do not have to take any special traits to reflect their social standing. Most people react to psis normally, with those who have relevant Intolerances or quirks being the exception.

Deference

In some societies (especially far-future utopias and dystopias), psionic power may be seen as a sign of intelligence, implying that psis are smarter or otherwise more competent than the average person. This can lead to a world in which psis are the natural leaders.

Psionic ability may be a prerequisite for holding government office, for being a military officer, and so on. If psis are rare or very rare, this often develops into a unique form of oligarchy; if not, it looks more like a class-based society, with a clear division between the psis and the "norms."

Psychics in a world like this must buy Social Regard (Respected). All psis may have the same level of Social Regard, or it may be based on measurable power level, skill, or what powers the psi knows. For example, a society may value insight above all else, requiring anyone with ESP power to add Social Regard 4; telepaths to take Social Regard 3; those with Astral Projection or Psychic Healing to buy Social Regard 2; and all other psis to have Social Regard 1. In addition to Social Regard, psis may have to purchase some level of Rank or Status; the specific levels depend on the setting.

The Astral Plane

If astral projection exists, the astral plane can be customized to better fit the setting. **Psionic Powers** (pp. 27-28) covers the general concept and game mechanics behind the plane, but it leaves many details open for the GM.

In a game that revolves around a certain theme or concept, the inner plane can reflect that concept. For example, if psi is achieved through cybernetic implants, and loss of humanity is a major question, the inner plane may appear as a circuit board floating atop a circulatory system, with visitors choosing whether to journey via the electric pathways or the blood vessels. Populating the plane with native denizens and large "astral cities" can add a lot of color to the game. If travel to the inner plane will be a major part of the campaign, the GM can introduce a psychotronic drug that extends or suspends the time limit for the Piggyback technique (or even for the projector's entire **Astral Travel** ability) while visiting the inner plane *only*.

The outer plane rarely changes much, as it is simply an "overlay" on the physical world. However, in an interplanar game, where every world has its own astral plane, the GM should decide if they're connected, and how. **GURPS Infinite Worlds** assumes that each world's outer astral plane is unique and discrete, but that one can journey from one *inner* astral plane to another – allowing a projector to visit any world with enough time and effort.

The default assumption is that the outer plane only extends as far as the atmosphere (or an equivalent distance, on an airless planet), restricting projectors to a single world. Removing this restriction allows projectors with enough duration (and provisions for long-term care of their unconscious bodies) to explore other planets, possibly replacing space probes with trained psis.

CAMPAIGN FRAMES

A campaign frame is a simple description that comprises the focus, the theme, and the overall plot of a campaign, such as "adolescent psis trying to find somewhere they fit in," or "hardened psi-soldiers caught between fighting the enemy and unraveling corruption in their own ranks." The GM can build a meta-plot around the frame – in which each story arc becomes a means to advance the overall plot, and each adventure is a way to further the current story arc – or use it as inspiration for coming up with self-contained adventures.

The following suggested campaign frames are focused on games where psi plays a large role. The list is far from exhaustive! In particular, if psionics are not a major part of the game, the GM should come up with a campaign frame that adequately captures whatever the focus *is*. In that case, it's still worth considering the theme (pp. 6-8) of psi in the game, and what that means for the PCs. For example, a game about cops with minor psionic abilities cleaning up the local streets might focus on dealing with the gangs and the legal system; the campaign can add depth by *also* having a subfocus on the necessity of hiding their abilities from the rest of the force (*Hiding*, pp. 21-22).

DISCOVERY

The campaign begins as the heroes realize that they have mental powers. What do they do with these strange new abilities, and who can help them figure out what's going on? Tales of personal psychic exploration go together with *Going Through Changes* (p. 6), but the concept meshes just as well with most psionic themes.

Psionic abilities are either unknown or suspected (*Public Awareness,* pp. 16-18). The party members may even be the only psis on the planet, if this is a recent mutation in the human race. If not, they should still *feel* like the only psis – at least at first. The beginning of a discovery campaign is one of confusion and feeling like an outcast until coming to grips with these new abilities. For all of the following frames, a low starting power level (p. 13) is generally a good idea; the PCs are not yet heroes.

Adolescence

The psis are children (teens or younger) who begin developing strange new powers. At first, their abilities are difficult to control, and manifest in times of stress. This may be because the players bought them with the Uncontrollable and Unreliable limitations, or the GM can simply make it a campaign feature that new abilities are "wild" until the psi has practiced with them heavily every day for a week (or longer). Since most kids are interacting with adults (be they relatives, teachers, truant officers, gang leaders, city guards, etc.) daily, the first few games can involve the excuses and challenges involved in keeping their secret a secret.

After this, the campaign can move in a few different directions, as the PCs continue to develop and control their abilities. They may want to find someone who can teach them more about their psi (*Training,* below); this could be as simple as a friendly librarian who is much more than he appears to be, or as complex as having to abandon their lives and sneak into another country. Likewise, the campaign could take on a "kids investigating strange things" bent, drawing inspiration from *The Hardy Boys, Scooby-Doo, The Zack Files,* and early episodes of *Smallville* as the group pokes into local weirdness and crimes. For a taste of empowerment (pp. 6-7), they may become "playground protectors," standing up against bullies while trying to fix bigger problems (e.g., abusive parents, a big brother getting pulled into a gang). The eventual appearance of a big, psionic bully is inevitable; the comic *PS238* (especially issues 17-24) may provide inspiration for this.

Apocalypse Soon

For an interesting twist in any game, an esper (preferably a PC with some form of Oracle or Precognition, but a friendly, trustworthy NPC can work as well) might get a clear, unmistakable vision of a coming apocalypse! Can the party head it off before the world is consumed?

The "end of the world" part is always clear, but the details may vary. The vision may include the doomsday method (e.g., "atomic war" or "a plague of mutated influenza") so the psis get an idea of *what* they have to stop. A glimpse of specific people or organizations can give the precog a good starting point for investigations, though the premonition may not be clear on *how* the party is involved. A sense of time (or even an exact date) can provide a feeling of urgency. However, the GM may want to be careful not to be *too* specific, or he may have to railroad the plot when that time grows near.

Alternatively, the precog may have a disturbing *lack* of visions. Suppose he used to get flashes from events up to four years away . . . then up to three . . . then two . . . eventually, it becomes obvious that everything past a certain date is a complete blank! Talking to other espers reveals that they've experienced the same thing. This is similar to the above situation, but lacking *any* useful information except the date; the GM should be generous with the first few clues if the party decides to investigate. See *The Wall* in **GURPS Y2K** for more on this concept (and apocalyptic gaming in general).

The Psychics Next Door

The party is a bunch of average folks who end up with superhuman powers. Players shouldn't build excessively "heroic" characters – these are nurses, lawyers, auto mechanics, etc., who find themselves gifted with supernatural abilities. The most important decision is how this happened; see *Psionic Potential* (pp. 8-10) for many suggestions. It may be as simple as a genetic mutation or as involved as a shared alien abduction, exposure to a chemical, or a common traumatic experience.

Much like the adolescent campaign (pp. 19-20), the game can take a few different paths, including a quest for more information and training. Adults may take the protector idea a bit further, becoming "superheroes" of a sort, using what abilities they have to Do Good wherever possible. If other groups are aware of what's happened, they may be pursuing the new psis – government labs may want to examine alien abductees, the

company that made the chemical may want to find out why this happened, and so on. If said group is powerful enough to act openly, this can turn the campaign's focus to hiding (pp. 21-22).

Spotlight

The world is made aware of the reality of psionics by being introduced to the group! This could happen through one of many ways, depending on how psionic potential (pp. 8-10) is determined in the game. If scientists "created" the psis, they may hold a press conference to prove their work to the world. If parapsychologists discovered the group's abilities, they may do the same. Alien abductees may be returned publicly, their new psi manifesting itself before they've learned to control it. Alternatively, the group may have just been indiscreet one too many times, and now a cable news network is running video of the ergokinetic and 'porter stomping on the laws of physics.

Regardless of the method, the party has just become world-famous as the poster children for psi. If other psis exist, they may use this a reason to come forward, as will thousands of people who *think* that they are. The public's reaction (pp. 18-19) will vary greatly – it takes years for a social shock wave like this to settle down enough for there to be a typical, homogeneous reaction. Typically, the more widespread psionic potential is, the more likely people are to accept the existence of psi.

For a less drastic approach, start an *Adolescence* (pp. 19-20) or *Psychics Next Door* (above) game, and midway through the campaign, have the spotlight fall on someone *else.* Suddenly the world knows about psi – how does that affect the PCs and their choices?

IMPROVEMENT

Having powerful mental abilities is useful, but a true master of the mind has learned to control and develop those abilities. Because of this, many campaigns focus on personal improvement – from formalized training to self-actualization. This can be the sole point of the game, but it can also work as a subfocus for a different frame. For example, a group of psionic investigators (p. 23) may have become friends with a local sufi who they encountered on a previous case; if they sometimes meet with him as students, it can justify an occasional training adventure without shifting the overall focus of the campaign.

Training

As discussed on p. 10, most training involves either a wise master (or small group of such) or a larger, more-formalized psionic institute (p. 14). Both are very different in design and worldly influence, but very similar from a plot perspective. Trainees can expect to be given duties to perform; these are rarely dangerous and, though they may be rather difficult, the goal is always something the trainers believe the psis can accomplish. Morality can be an issue – many fictional trainers have a dark side, which the heroes only discover as their missions become increasingly questionable.

Realistically, though, if anyone knows how far *not* to push their students, it is a group of highly trained psis! Because of this, the GM may find the "evil" tag better hung on a rival organization, or perhaps a small corrupt *part* of the training environment – a single monk or a few institute administrators who've crossed the moral threshold.

Personal Journeys

Improvement doesn't have to involve trainers. Many accounts of psionic ability teach that everyone has unlimited potential within himself – the only barriers are the ones that he must break down within his own mind. A journey of improvement can be a spiritual road trip, as the psis resolve issues in the world to heal themselves within.

This kind of campaign requires a great deal of cooperation between the players and GM, of course. The background for each PC must include at least a handful of unresolved issues. These can be personal ("I never got to say goodbye to my grandfather") or general ("Racism needs to be stamped out"); ideally, there'll be a mix of both. The GM may even wish to treat these as extra quirks, letting adventurers go beyond the normal limit of five. As the game tackles each problem, the player can buy off that quirk once he feels that it's been properly addressed, and then use bonus character points (p. B498) to improve or add psionic traits ("With that weight lifted off my shoulders, I now realize that I can do more with my TK than I thought!").

The group may travel all over the nation, or even around the world, as relevant opportunities pop up. To use the examples above, the group might track down a medium (if they don't have one) to discover that the grandfather's spirit is still bound to Earth, but is too restless to talk – what with that company building a factory on the site of his old home. Likewise, while no one can stamp out racism everywhere, a story arc about bringing together a bitterly divided town may be enough for the psi to feel closure.

HIDING

If psi is a secret, even someone with no enemies needs to keep a low profile. Blatant abilities have to be saved for witness-free situations. Even subtle ones have to be carefully guarded – a noninvasive esper can still be caught if he reveals more knowledge than he should have. Nonetheless, this kind of "hiding" is best served as part of another frame; keeping one's abilities out of the public eye is rarely enough to base an entire campaign on.

A game focused on hiding needs a well-defined antagonist to hide *from*. Even a small-scale adversary must be powerful enough that hiding is a better option than confrontation– a single scientist isn't enough, but an entire scientific corporation (with the requisite black vans and neutralizer rays) is. To be the focus of a campaign, the Enemy should thus have a base cost of at *least* -20 points. On a much larger scale, the entire government (-40 points) could be after the psis – perhaps psionics are illegal to use if you're not using them for your nation, or the party are the only known psis (or aliens hiding among humanity) and the patriotic thing to do is to lock them up for detailed analysis. In such a case, expect false arrest warrants to be quickly circulated, making *every* local authority a potential danger. The group must stay constantly on the move, either going from town to town or making contact with an underground group to use local safe houses and hiding places.

Other Powers

Most of the advice in this chapter assumes that psi is the only type of power in the setting. If not, the social effect on psi are interwoven with that of the other power(s). If only one other power exists (e.g., psi and chi), society may lump them together, but it is just as likely to treat them differently: Psi may be regarded as a dangerous, invasive ability, while chi is considered a natural faculty, honed by training, something to be proud of. Many classic fantasy settings feature both magic and psi, and themes run the gamut from "they're basically two ways to accomplish the same thing" to "one is a respected and learned tradition while the other is the devil's work and we'll kill any known practitioners."

If *several* powers coexist, the setting will start to look more like a supers game, where people abound with different abilities granted by different sources (perhaps all even from different origins). **GURPS Supers** is an invaluable source of campaign advice for the GM running such a game.

Power vs. Power

Psi is completely different from the other power sources found in **GURPS,** which means that an anti-psi cannot use Neutralize or **Cancellation** on a mage, psionic abilities are not affected by Resistant to Chi Powers, and so on. However, the *effects* of a power interact normally. A divine Mind Shield protects against a psionic **Mental Blow,** and a mage and teke can use Apportation and **TK Grab** (respectively) to wrestle for control of an object at a distance.

Sometimes the GM may need to convert one ability into the terms of another ability – e.g., figuring out what the BL of the Apportation spell is, to approximate its effective ST. When in doubt, estimate it or simplify the situation to a Quick Contest of skills or attributes – especially if the alternative is to spend 10 minutes holding up play time to do detailed calculations!

Survival

If the psis have a powerful Enemy on their tail, mere survival can be a goal in and of itself. A large part of the campaign will involve responding to the latest incursion, driving or slipping away from the attackers, and finding a safe place to regroup. This can get boring quickly, however, so it should be interwoven with other adventures. If the party is transient, one classic, "television-style" approach is to have a new adventure or two in each town before the group chooses (or is forced to) move on. If they're hunkered down as part of a local underground, their fellow outcasts can help with a variety of issues – but they also need to expand territory and keep the group stocked with supplies.

If the campaign antagonist is a single group – from a corporation to a "black budget" branch of the government – the overall campaign goal is likely about figuring out how to bring them down. As time goes on, proactive adventures aimed at sussing out and attacking the enemy's weak spots should become a more frequent part of the campaign. The game usually climaxes with the defeat of the adversary, after which the campaign either shifts to a new focus or simply ends. (The latter is especially appropriate if the common enemy was the only thing forcing a party of unrelated PCs to band together.)

If the enemy is the entire government, or if the group can't come out of hiding because society itself will never accept them, see below.

Changing the System

Viva la revolution! If the negative psi sentiment runs deep, either socially or legally, the party cannot hope to simply "beat the bad guy." In such a case, fundamental change becomes the long-term goal. A typical adventure works much like *Survival,* above, but as the game goes on, instead of finding weak spots, the group must aim to shift the beliefs of the masses. This can involve persuading people in high legal and/or social standing, typically by doing favors (read: adventures) for them that they cannot do themselves, along with actions that impress many people at once (e.g., saving a town from a group of terrorizing bikers). More corrupt adventurers may choose to threaten or otherwise intimidate those who speak out against psi. However, this is prone to backfiring, as is any attempt to make a lasting change by *forcibly* altering peoples' minds (which will eventually wear off or be discovered, and just proves the point that psis are dangerous).

Campaigns of this kind present the opportunity to use Control Ratings (p. B506). For example, the "overthrow of the system" may be a drop from CR5 (repressive) to CR2 (free), with respect to psi. The group's success during each adventure determines the degree to which the CR changes (if at all). One approach is to have success in each story arc lower the CR by 1, which means three arcs to fully change the system. Assuming that each story arc comprises three to six adventures (completed over several sessions each), this will produce results at a satisfying pace for most groups. For a much shorter and more cinematic game, each *adventure* may lower the CR by 1; this is thoroughly unbelievable, but can be a good way to "get past" this part if the campaign has an expiration date, or if changing the system is intended as a prelude to another campaign frame (such as *Politics,* below).

POWER

Realistically, as people develop strange, wonderful abilities, they tend to put them toward personal gain at first. This doesn't have to speak ill of a psi's morality – it's natural for people to use their talents, experience, and circumstances to support themselves. However, the question of right or wrong still hangs in the air, as many people will consider the use of superhuman abilities to be "cheating" at jobs or activities that they feel they accomplish via hard work. Even an activity completely free of negative connotations may still be seen as a serious waste of a miraculous ability ("You can see into the past and *all you do with it* is find buried treasure?"). Certainly, all of the examples in this section can be played as "good" (or, at least, as "no one was harmed").

Crime

Some psis decide that, since the laws of physics no longer apply to them, neither should other laws. This is abuse of power at its most flagrant. Even so, this can be a fun game, as long as the players get to pick the crimes. Psis work best with stealth and guile, which lends itself to acquiring and transporting high-value, well-guarded objects or information.

Organized criminals, from street gangs to large, well-connected mobs, will actively recruit psis if aware of their existence. This could influence the PCs' crimes and targets, as NPCs now have input into how things should go down. Allying with a group also means inheriting their enemies, however; gang wars and mob wars can be dangerous, even for those with paranormal powers! For Mafia and similar crime families, the advice under *Responsibility* (p. 23-24) and *Patronage* (p. 23) will prove useful, as the organization acts almost as an employer.

For a less morally gray approach, the group can limit their targets to those who truly deserve it. Thieves may go after a rich slumlord, inside traders may attempt to bankrupt companies who destroy the environment, and so on. Even gangs and mobs can be on the side of right – in reality, there are a small number of gangs who genuinely protect the streets without stealing from or extorting anything out of the locals.

Politics

For a slightly more respectable (if just as morally turbulent) take, the game can revolve around the world of politics – a campaign that overlaps somewhat with *Changing the System* (above). This could mean that some of the psis are running for (or currently in) public office; if so, the campaign will likely focus on either the acquisition of further political power or on the new upstarts trying to make a difference by fixing broken laws. The biggest issue will be the intense public scrutiny – even if psi is openly known, the government may have rules prohibiting psis (or at least telepaths) from holding public office, forcing psionic politicians to protect their Secret. This may be a blessing – unless psi use is very common *and* completely accepted, known psis in office will be under the eye of the microscope even more, with opponents constantly accusing them of illicitly using their abilities. (Remember that mudslinging doesn't require proof.)

It may be more viable to have the party *involved* in the world of politics without actually running for office. A group of psis might "sponsor" a candidate who could make the world a better place for them. This might mean merely uncovering the truth behind political conspiracies and finding evidence to counter the false slings and arrows flung at their candidate . . . or going so far as to dig up blackmail material, release forged information in the name of their enemies, and do whatever it takes to get people to vote for the "right" person.

While every campaign can benefit from the GM and players talking about what everyone is and isn't comfortable with (a "social contract"), a political game almost demands it. Everyone has hot-button issues, and it is important either to avoid them or to take the time to approach the issue in a way that *all* the players are comfortable with. One avenue to this is reworking today's issues into allegories. For example, a debate about the effects of prenatal testing for homosexuality could be turned into one about prenatal testing for psionic potential.

Fame

Mental gifts smooth the road to the spotlight. A teke or 'porter makes an amazing stage magician, a photokinetic is always well lit on stage, and most powers facilitate becoming a professional mentalist. The **Social Vampire** perk doesn't make fame easier to achieve, but it does make it more worthwhile! Telepaths with *Control* abilities (***Psionic Powers,*** pp. 60-64) can often *force* their way to fame by simply making enough people love them; moderate fame can quickly snowball into worldwide celebrity for the person who can get the media involved. In fact, if psi is acknowledged, being a powerful psionics user can be a form of fame in and of itself.

A party of celebrities (or one celebrity and his entourage) can be an interesting game, as the group deals with paparazzi, crowds, and the occasional stalker – but for long-term viability, the campaign may need to cross over with another concept. For example, mixing *Fame* with *Investigation* (below) might result in a rock band that's "working undercover for the Man" – moving from town to town, playing gigs and using their image to infiltrate the local drug scene and bust kingpins.

RESPONSIBILITY

Given power, many psis put it to good use, doing what they can to improve the world. Some set out on their own, while others get assistance from a patron (or even a Patron) – often the government, but sometimes a corporation or organization. The decision of who the psis are working for is an important one.

If self-employed, the GM and players should discuss how much financial detail the game will involve. While no sane person wants to play ***GURPS Accountants,*** some campaigns benefit from an idea of whether the group will be able to afford rent and gas next month. Doing so can add a sense of urgency to an adventure, along with a serious temptation to take a bribe or otherwise put money ahead of principle. Less morally gray games can ignore all that and just focus on doing the right thing – if the world is a little bit better at the end of the day, the bill collector must have better things to do than come a-knockin'.

Working for the government or a private organization requires the GM to flesh out details about the patron. The party likely has "handlers" who act as go-betweens – coordinating missions, listening to feedback, and so on – and become almost de facto members of the team. The handlers need personalities and motivations, as does anyone else the group comes in frequent contact with. In addition, the organization itself has its own goals; see *Patronage* (above) for more ideas.

Investigation

Psychic talent and investigation go together beautifully; the list of ESP and Telepathy abilities are a detective's greatest dream! Because of this, many psis turn their powers toward solving difficult and unusual cases. This tends to involve more than just investigation, however, with the party doing what it takes to *fix* the underlying problem as well.

Patronage

Some psis have a responsibility (below) to a company or organization – sometimes just because they feel that's where they can do the most good, but often there's another reason. The company's scientists may have created the psis (or helped them understand and actualize their abilities), the organization may have bailed the psis out of a bad situation, or the employees may just be the only people who've learned the psis' secret and this seems to be the best compromise to keep it that way.

If this is the case, it's important to add as many details to the patron as possible. An organization is almost a living thing; it has a goal, needs, etc. While these goals should rarely overlap perfectly with those of the party in order to infuse some level of tension into the campaign, the GM can still create many interesting adventures without resorting to the cliché of "the evil company manipulating the good psis."

Another common trope is the company that forces psis to work for it against their will. This generally happens either with hostages or because the psis need a substance to maintain their powers (or even to stay alive). This is a good background story for sympathetic NPC psis who are caught doing criminal things by the party; a story arc to free the evil corporation's grasp on them can be rewarding *and* provide the heroes with new allies.

Putting the PCs under the reign of an evil organization is rarely enjoyable – few players like to feel like puppets on strings. However, if the GM designs adventures so that the opportunity to turn the tables comes up quickly, this situation can become even more satisfying as the group brings down the big bad business.

("Looks like she's possessed – we'll be leaving now" isn't much of an adventure, after all.)

A self-employed investigative team often operates as a commercial business (the television show *Angel* features a good example), but a self-funded group of philanthropists may take on cases solely because it's the right thing to do. If psi is secret, clients may hear about them through word-of-mouth, or the heroes may do the legwork, finding interesting cases via strange news reports, contacts, or even ESP, and showing up with an offer to help. Open acknowledgment of psi offers more options, of course, up to and including commercials and websites.

A crew working for someone usually has a specific type of situation to investigate, or the patron might deal with the supernatural on a regular basis; a corporation or organization wouldn't hire a team of psionic detectives if they didn't have a need for them. For example, a police force may have a Special Investigations Division that looks into claims of psionic assault, telekinetic battery, etc. A corporation may rely the psis' special talents to better handle mundane issues, such as preventing (or committing!) corporate espionage or insider trading. For an interesting twist on this scenario, the organization may be unaware that there *is* a "psi division" in its ranks! If a person with some influence (a corporate VP, an army general, etc.) realizes the utility of having such a group, he might create one by recruiting and transferring psionic individuals without letting his supervisors know. This can work well in a secret-psi game, where the founder is one of the few people aware of its existence.

See ***GURPS Mysteries*** (pp. 97-99) for more on psionic investigations and crime scenes.

ESPionage

National defense takes many forms, and psi lends itself to most of them. Every common psionic power can be used to safeguard against national threats and to ferret secrets out of other countries or hostile groups. If the government (or even a small part of the government) is aware of psi, it will waste no time recruiting as many users as possible!

This frame works in any setting; the state of the world sets the tone of the game. If the world is actively at war, the campaign overlap somewhat with *Soldiering* (below) – missions may involve going behind enemy lines to secure crucial intel, using psychological warfare to foment revolution and disruption, or liaising with a normal squad to help secure or destroy a target. If the world is more or less at peace (especially in a "cold war" situation), the missions are more varied: stealing state secrets, smuggling out defectors, searching for spy rings at home, and so on. In a game set in the modern United States, the PCs could act as agents of the CIA, working to undermine dictatorial regimes; the FBI, breaking up powerful crime rings; the DHS, identifying and neutralizing terrorist cells; the DEA, going after major drug traffickers; or any of the other government organizations with agents in the field.

A "psecret agent" benefits from a wide range of traits, but Danger Sense, **Data Retrieval**, **Mind-Clouding**, Patron, **Photorefraction**, and Smooth Operator are especially useful. Most have Duty or Obsession, and are skilled in Computer Operation, Guns, Shadowing, Stealth, Melee Weapon skills for concealable weapons, and possibly a martial arts style (see **GURPS Martial Arts** for details on styles).

Soldiering

Every military branch has its elite units – but in some games, those units have a special "edge." A psionic soldiering campaign is structured like a typical military/commando game. The team is assigned objectives, usually to be accomplished in a "get in, get it done, get out" fashion with an emphasis on speed and stealth. This doesn't always mean fatigues and face paint – even realistic special-ops teams often blend in with the populace to accomplish the occasional goal, and psis are far better equipped to bluff their way past guards and accomplish a job with minimal equipment. While psionic soldiers most often work for a government, this campaign can be run as a mercenaries game with little to no changes required.

In a high-powered game, the psis may be so elite that each is as powerful as a squad (or platoon . . . or company!) of regular soldiers, leading to situations where sending in one or two psionic warriors may constitute a "show of force." The prime examples of this are the *Star Wars* Jedi (best exemplified in *The Phantom Menace*) and Doc Smith's Lensmen, but there's no reason to limit the trope to science fiction. The battlefields of a low-tech world may be ruled by psionic knights (especially if they have access to cinematic martial-arts skills and/or Imbuement Skills; see p. 12).

In a modern "pspecial forces" game, where the group is expected to get shot at on a regular basis, Combat Reflexes, **PK Shield**, Rapid Healing, **TK Bullet**, and **TK Crush** can help them fight back and stay alive. A Duty is ubiquitous, while post-traumatic stress can inflict many disadvantages, including Flashbacks, Nightmares, and Post-Combat Shakes. Skills depend on the setting, with a modern or near-future game likely requiring Battlesuit, Forward Observer, Guns, Hiking, Liquid Projector, Soldier, and Survival.

These were Krakovitch's thoughts as he entered what long ago had been a cobbled courtyard – now a large area of plastic-tiled floor, partitioned into airy conservatories, small apartments and laboratories – where E-Branch operatives had studied and practised their esoteric talents in comparative comfort, or whatever condition or environment best suited their work.

*– Brian Lumley, **Necroscope II: Vamphyri!***

CHAPTER THREE
UNIQUE CHALLENGES

One of the features that makes roleplaying so rewarding is its scope; in theory, the party can do *anything* . . . including things that (purposefully or accidentally) derail the adventure. This is normal, and – with experience – the GM can learn to plan for it. Adding psionics to the mix can create a whole *new* set of challenges.

Part of the issue is the unique abilities that psi tends to focus on – abilities that are primarily silent and subtle, allowing them to be used on a subject openly without anyone in the area (or even the subject, usually!) realizing it. In addition, some gaming groups have a view of psi that doesn't mesh perfectly with the *GURPS* approach, requiring some fine-tuning to the system.

This shouldn't be taken as a warning against bringing psi into a game, of course. If every potential complication were removed from roleplaying, there'd be no game left at all! Instead, what follows is a "heads up" for the GM, to make sure that he is not blindsided by these issues, and that he is ready in advance to deal with them when they do pop up.

EMULATING EXTREMES

GURPS takes a balanced approach when it comes to psi. A psi who wants to use an active ability must make a skill or attribute roll to do so. Any subject affected by the ability gets a resistance roll of some sort. Even the most skilled psi won't succeed 100% of the time, and even the most strong-willed subject won't resist 100% of the time.

This doesn't work for everyone. Most gamers have a favorite movie, show, or book that they think of when they think of psi, and this portrayal may paint psionics as either weaker or much more powerful than the *GURPS* approach. This can usually be simulated by adjusting how many points everyone may spend on psi (*Power Level*, p. 13), but the most extreme changes may require something different.

> *Heh, heh . . . what's happened to me? I must be dreaming. I feel like I can take out the world.*
> — Tetsuo, **Akira**

WIMPY PSI

Numerous ways exist to weaken psi. Any of the limitations suggested under *Starting Conditions* (pp. 13-14) could be made permanent. For example, if no psi can buy more than one level of a single ability and can't put more than 1 point into the skill, most players will think of psi as a weak add-on

to their adventurers, at best. Further suggestions for limiting options can be found throughout both *GURPS Powers* and *GURPS Psionic Powers.*

However, one take that's somewhat common in fiction is for psi to be potent and useful, but to require a disproportionate amount of skill or effort to affect another person. Sometimes this only refers to attempts to affect a person's mind, but it may also extend to physical effects (e.g., **Confuse, Exoteleport**). If so, the Easily Resisted limitation, below, can be applied to any psionic ability that allows a resistance roll.

Easily Resisted

-5% per level

This limitation can only be applied to an ability that affects another subject and offers a resistance roll to avoid the effects. If your target possesses an ability that would resist your use of psi (Obscure vs. ESP, Resistant to Psionics, etc.), multiply its resistance bonus or skill penalty by (1 + limitation level); if not, he still gets a bonus equal to your limitation level to any roll to resist your psi. Your roll to use the ability is unaffected. The GM must set the maximum number of levels; a cap of four to six levels is recommended.

Alternatively, the GM may decide that this limitation must be applied to the cost of Talent. Because it gives less of a point break, this is not quite as fair, but it is much *easier* to implement, especially if using a pre-made list of abilities (such as **Psionic Powers**). In such a case, it should be applied to every "weakened" power that has resisted abilities (e.g., all of the major powers except Astral Projection and ESP).

PROGRESSIVE PSI

Psis are often depicted as starting with only a minor ability or two in their formative years. Once a psi learns to tap into his powers, he begins to grow progressively stronger, unveiling new abilities and new levels of power every month (or week or *day*)! A similar concept is that of the psychic vampire who can use **Steal Power** and *keep* the psionic abilities even after the subject has gotten them back.

Easily represent this by starting the PCs at a low power level (p. 13) and awarding an unusually large number of bonus character points (p. B498) at the end of each session. The GM may allow these to be spent freely, or he may designate a certain amount as "psi only." For example, a game might start at 75 points (with a limit of no more than 25 spent on psi), but give out awards of 10-15 character points per session, with everything after the first 4 points earmarked exclusively for psi.

Another approach, usually reserved for NPCs, is for the psi who gets progressively stronger as he becomes progressively *crazier!* (This often comes wrapped in a moral about how power corrupts.) The simplest way to accomplish this is to award bonus character points *along with a new disadvantage* for which the psi receives full value! For example, adding four bonus points plus Fanaticism translates to 19 extra points in psi.

GODLIKE PSI

More commonly, gamers are influenced by the portrayal of psis as nearly omnipotent beings. This is often simply a matter of raising the power level (p. 13) for psionic-using PCs. If players are given a few thousand points to work with, their psis will be quite godlike – at least, with regard to the power groups they purchase.

Many fictional psis can go further, though. They can rewrite reality, manipulate subjects in an unlimited number of ways, and otherwise come up with new abilities as the plot demands. For such psis, the best solution is to buy several hundred levels of Cosmic Power (Limited Scope, Psi, -10%); see p. B71. This costs thousands of points, but such godlike power shouldn't be cheap – a psi like Akira (from the eponymous movie) would be at least a 3,000-point character.

Irresistible Psi

Aside from raw power, some fictional psis can overcome others with ease. These mental masters brush past any mental resistance with but a thought, never fail to affect a subject, and generally act as though the non-psis around them had no volition or capacity to resist whatsoever. This is at odds with **GURPS,** which has many rules in place to guarantee the victim a chance to overcome psionic attacks. The Rule of 16 (p. B349) makes "automatic victory over resistance" impossible – even against a 4,000-point psi with skill levels in the 30+ range. To get around this, the GM may allow the following *optional* enhancement.

Cosmic (No Rule of 16)

+50%

Your supernatural ability ignores the Rule of 16. When rolling a Quick Contest against a subject, you may always use your full (modified) skill. If you are highly skilled, this may make resistance nearly impossible!

The subject may always try to resist, even if his effective resistance is less than 3 (due to penalties from high levels of Affliction, previous attacks, etc.). In such a case, only a roll of 3-4 succeeds; treat this as success by 0, *not* as automatic resistance! If your margin of success is 1 or better, you still overcome his resistance.

Abilities with this enhancement allow a highly skilled psi to bowl right over all but the most extraordinary subjects. If this is allowed in the game, anyone who's intended to stand a chance against such "super-psis" must be built with either extremely high HT and Will or many levels of the Mental Strength skill.

Unlike the option for *Easily Resisted* (p. 25), this version of Cosmic can *never* be applied to Talent – always add it to the abilities it affects.

Infallible Psi

Psi is sometimes depicted as being no more difficult than walking. Psychics can read minds and teleport from place to place with no particular effort or chance of failure. While this can make psi seem mundane and commonplace, some campaigns may call for this change. The Cosmic (No die roll required) enhancement (**Powers,** p. 101) covers this; for simplicity, it can be bundled into the Psionic power modifier, raising it from -10% to +90%.

Even resisted abilities may have this version of Cosmic. However, when using them, the psi must still roll against the controlling attribute (or skill) to determine his margin of success for the Quick Contest. If he fails the roll, the ability still works, but treat his margin of success as 0.

ACHILLES' HEEL

Psis with godlike power can be – frankly – *boring*. When no one can stand in the psi's way, it becomes hard for the GM to come up with challenging and fun adventures. One way to mitigate this is by adding a weakness in the form of a disadvantage or limitation. This may be something with an in-game justification (e.g., something built into the psi by his creators), but it's more often just a meta-game concept added to keep the PC interesting.

Appropriate disadvantages are those that limit the psi's "targets" or provide others with a way to indirectly influence the person's actions and choices. This includes Code of Honor, Compulsive Behavior (e.g., psis raised via virtual training may have Compulsive Video-Game Playing limited to games that resemble their "childhood"), Dependency (commonly a rare psychotronic drug), Dependents, Dread (of something that emits detectable waves of energy), Fanaticism, Honesty, Maintenance, Obsession, Pacifism (one common variant is Total Nonviolence, but only for one large class, -60%, or small class, -80%, of people), Phobias, Secret (though blackmail is rarely fun!), Sense of Duty, Susceptible (often to a particular chemical or drug), or Vow.

For limitations, Accessibility is often the best choice. However, instead of putting the same Accessibility on everything, consider using it to *split up* the psi's choices. Adding "Not versus women" to half of the psi's offensive abilities and "Not versus men" to the other half can limit his options enough to keep things interesting without taking away his "godlike" status. Other appropriate limitations include Costs Fatigue or Limited Use (both of which force the psi to ration his abilities), Preparation Required or Takes Recharge (to force "downtime"), Trigger, and Unreliable.

Telepaths and Mental Screens

A more specific version of "irresistible psi" is that of the telepath living in a world where the average person broadcasts his thoughts (loudly) without being aware of it. The poor psi must keep his *own* mental screens up to avoid hearing everything and being overwhelmed by it.

This can be represented by taking Mind Reading or **Telereceive** with both the Reflexive (+40%) enhancement and the Uncontrollable (-10%) limitation. Reflexive turns the ability into a passive one. The GM should make a single roll against the telepath's skill (applying the Rule of 16) each time he encounters a new group of people. If he fails, he won't pick up any thoughts; otherwise, note the margin of success. As NPCs experience particularly intense thoughts, make a Will roll for them. If their margin of success is *less* than the telepath's, he picks up a mental snippet.

Normally, Uncontrollable wouldn't cause any particular embarrassment or inconvenience when applied to Mind Reading; unless someone detects the psi, it's a very unobtrusive ability. To make the limitation worth the point break, when the psi loses control, he starts reading *everyone* around him, experiencing the effects of Supersensitive (p. B158). If he already has Supersensitive, double the range *and* penalties.

Constant Projectors

If the setting demands telepaths who can pick up *everything* going on around them – in other words, the subjects shouldn't be able to resist – also apply the suggestions for *Irresistible Psi* (p. 26) and have the telepath buy a very high level of Talent or skill. An average margin of success of around 20 (which suggests a skill in the low 30s) is impossible for any normal person to match.

Alternatively, the campaign world could simply reflect the truth – that the average person cannot control his thoughts. To reflect this, the Easy to Read disadvantage, with the new Psychic Only enhancement (below), can be considered part of the "standard human template"; assume that every NPC has it unless he's specifically bought it off.

This shifts things from a particular talent on the psi's part to a general failing in humanity. Be aware of the implications when making this change; it "downgrades" the average person even further with respect to psis!

With this change, the GM must decide who can buy off Easy to Read; can anyone who makes the effort do so, only psis, or only telepaths? Do any of these groups require an Unusual Background? It's possible, for example, to have a campaign where telepaths can (and in fact *must*) buy it off, while nontelepathic psis can do so by paying a 5-point Unusual Background, and normal people are stuck with it.

Easy to Read

If everyone starts with this trait, it shouldn't count against any disadvantage limit; in essence, buying it off is like purchasing a 10- or 20-point advantage! Alternatively, this could be a racial trait genetically engineered into any species created by psis as servants or underlings.

Special Enhancements

Psychic: In addition to your physical "tells," you project your thoughts uncontrollably. Your resistance rolls against spells or abilities that read your thoughts or emotions are at -8. Moreover, if you are experiencing a high level of emotion or stress, you must make a Will roll (14 or higher always fails) to avoid projecting your thoughts and feelings so loudly that they're picked up automatically by all nearby mind readers! Assume that any telepath can "hear" such thoughts within skill×3 yards, or (IQ + Talent)×3 yards if not using psionic skills. You may not learn the Mental Strength or Mind Block skills, nor have the Mind Shield advantage. +100%.

Psychic Only: As for Psychic, but you only project your thoughts; your body language is no easier to read than a normal person's. +0%.

PSIONIC SHORT CIRCUITS

Something about psi makes it lend itself to abilities that can seriously affect the plot of an adventure. A GM who isn't prepared for this may be upset when a player decides to use his esper to discover clues to the mystery that was supposed to take the group a whole session to figure out. The important thing is that the GM *can* plan for it, however.

In addition to the specific issues addressed below, see *Deterrents and Fixes* (pp. 31-35) for more general ways to keep psi under control and **GURPS Powers** (pp. 194-198) for additional (not specifically psi-related) advice on plot-stopping abilities.

KNOWING TOO MUCH

Telepathy and ESP both include supernaturally effective abilities to gather information, whether from out of a person's mind or out of thin air. This can replace a long investigation with a quick application of psi. Sometimes this is a good thing! If a fast-paced action game would be better served by glossing over such details, the GM can use an esper as a mouthpiece to point the agents at the next target. If gathering information is supposed to be the main thrust of the adventure, this can short-circuit the entire game session.

In addition to the ability limits discussed below, see *Controlling Information* (pp. 33-34) for a different approach.

> *But there are experiments, sufficiently vouched for, which seem to indicate that the sense of touch can be extended, as it were, from the organs and be made to feel objects in the distance.*
>
> *– Henry Frank,*
> ***Psychic Phenomena,***
> ***Science and Immortality***

Invasions of Privacy

Telepaths can read thoughts and emotions using **Emotion Sense** and **Telereceive,** while psychic vampires can do the same (though in a weaker, more indirect manner) via **Drain Emotion** and **Steal Dreams.** In a game with custom abilities, anyone with Empathy, Mind Probe, or Mind Reading has a way to peek into the head of another person. This can take all of the uncertainty out of questioning NPCs, or even make it unnecessary; in particular, in a "whodunit" situation, it can easily lead to the bad guy being caught the first time the group speaks to him!

Catching a person lying or hiding something requires the psi to win a Quick Contest of Detect Lies versus the better of the target's IQ, Acting, or Fast-Talk skill. Empathy and **Emotion Sense** give a +3 bonus to Detect Lies and, even if the psi loses the Quick Contest, he still gets a flash of emotion from the subject. (**Drain Emotion** does not give a bonus to Detect Lies, but it can be used to experience the subject's feelings.) The GM should make a separate "mental control roll" against the better of the NPC's Will, Acting, or Mind Block skill to see how restrained his emotions are at the moment; if the NPC has recently succumbed to a disadvantage, that emotion *shows through* regardless of this roll. For Mind Reading and surface-level **Telereceive,** the Detect Lies bonus rises to +4, and if the subject fails at the "mental control roll," his surface thoughts are anywhere from suspicious to outright incriminating!

Because of this, if the adventure requires that information remains hidden from the party, or that an NPC is able to lie to them without being caught, it may be necessary to keep those in the know away from the psis. Communication over the phone, via writing, or through a third-party messenger can preserve this. If the group members are openly known to be psis, this may even be a normal protocol followed by *everyone* dealing with a telepath; after all, who doesn't value their mental privacy?

Mind Probe and deep **Telereceive** are more potent, but also more specific. *If* the psi knows what question to ask, he can be guaranteed a truthful answer by overcoming the subject's resistance. In addition to the advice above, note that the telepath using this approach must know which questions to ask! A bit of misdirection can work wonders here; if the telepath suspects that the Templars have a plot to assassinate the king, while they *really* plan to blackmail the queen, questions like "Who will the king's assassin be?" provide no useful answers.

Second Sight

Many ESP abilities (**Prognostication, Psychic Hunches, Retrocognition, Retrocognitive Flashbacks,** and **Visions**) and advantages (Blessed, Intuition, Oracle, Precognition, and Psychometry) give the psi access to a supernatural well of general information. These have the potential to bypass whole sections of the plot with even greater ease than *Invasions of Privacy* (above), as they require no subject – the esper simply asks the universe for answers.

Fortunately, this information comes from one source – the GM – who can balance utility to the psi with necessity of the plot. In fact, *because* the GM has so much control over this information, the real issue is making sure the balance doesn't tip the other way, making the esper feel that his ability is useless. Successful application of a paranormal ability should always give some clue or bit of information, even if it's not exactly what the psi was seeking.

Example: An esper is using **Retrocognition** at a murder scene. The GM doesn't want to give away the murderer's identity, so he plays out the vision through the eyes of the murderer. If the GM only describes the victim and method of death (things the police already know), the player will wonder why he bothered buying this psionic ability. However, if the vision includes new information that only ESP could provide – perhaps the murder weapon was a (very rare) autographed Ty Cobb baseball bat and the victim smiled warmly when he first saw the murderer – the clues make the use of **Retrocognition** worth the time and trouble, without spoiling the mystery completely.

Which Future?

Precognition and the ESP abilities **Prognostication** and **Visions** allow an esper to see into the future. But what does that mean? The GM must figure out how such visions work in the game. Even more important, he must let the players know, if they will (or might) be playing precogs!

Clarity is usually inversely proportional to how certain the future is. If visions are guaranteed to happen, they'll often be metaphorical or murky, while sharp visions are rarely the default unless they're only likely to happen. This is because visions that are both sharp *and* guaranteed to happen require an *incredible* amount of railroading, to the point where the players may feel like they're merely watching a story as opposed to participating in one.

Certainty

First, the GM decides how likely events are to happen in the future, once a vision has been seen. Here are three possibilities.

Guaranteed to happen: No matter what anyone does, this vision *will* come to pass. This requires active railroading on the GM's part, up to and including declaring that some actions succeed or fail by fiat (instead of rolling dice).

Guaranteed, barring interference: What's in the vision will happen . . . if nobody does anything to stop it. Heroes can "fight fate" by trying to prevent the events that have already been set in motion.

Likely to happen: There are many possible futures, and the vision is from the one that is currently the most likely. (If precogs are common, this is actually more probable than the above option, as every major event has people interfering with it.) Precognition is mainly a way for the GM to pass along hints and plot hooks.

Clarity

It is also important to determine how accurate and informative the visions are. This does not have to be fixed – it's reasonable to say that some visions will be clearer than others – but it's best to at least establish a rough baseline.

Metaphorical: The vision *represents* what's going to happen. For example, a presidential assassination might be shown as a chess king falling over with a thunderclap. This allows the GM to set up multiple possible meanings for each vision, and requires the players to puzzle out the intent; this will suit some gaming groups better than others!

Muddy: Random images and sensations – e.g., a blonde woman is stabbed, a leather satchel passes between hands, and then a baby cries. This may not be enough to act on, but the psi can recognize specific components as he comes across them, eventually figuring out how they're related. This gives the GM freedom to make the vision come true, though players may be frustrated with the lack of clear information.

Hazy: The esper gets a full scene, though the details aren't always clear. Important parts may be "off screen" or shadowed, and it may end without a clear conclusion. For example, if the psi sees a friend shot in an alleyway, he knows what's happening, but not where, when, or who did it. This is a reasonable compromise for most visions, but it can be tricky for the GM to ensure the event happens.

Sharp: The vision is clear and unambiguous, with visible faces and a recognizable location, and it lasts long enough to realize what's going on. The esper has a rough sense of "when" – or may see a clock, newspaper, etc. that gives more detail. Essentially, the esper knows *exactly* what's going on and only needs to decide what to do about it. The GM might not be able to bring the event to fruition without a large degree of railroading – at least, not without player cooperation.

If the GM allows psis to see the future (by allowing them to take Precognition, **Prognostication,** or **Visions**), he also needs to make some judgment calls (*before* the game starts) about how this works – see *Which Future?* (above). One interesting option is to set the defaults per the lists in the boxed text, but allow psis to *trade* certainty for clarity, or vice-versa, by taking a skill penalty. For example, in a campaign where visions are "guaranteed to happen," but "muddy," an esper may be able to roll at -5 to get a "hazy" vision that's only "guaranteed, barring interference."

TAKING OVER

One of the most common obstacles, put in the path of the heroes by the GM, is the hostile NPC. He represents something that the party must "get past" somehow, whether this means sneaking by, fighting, persuading, interrogating, or something else. While in most games, a variety of different skills is necessary to be prepared for all of these possibilities, in a psionic campaign, they can *all* be (potentially) overcome by just telepathically *taking over* the NPC.

The degree to which this can be done, and the effect it can have on the game, varies. *Subtle* takeovers are the work of **Drain Emotion, Emotion Control,** and low-level **Suggestion.** These abilities allow the telepath to influence the subject's actions without being able to issue precise orders; the results can be potent, but require subtlety and timing, along with additional skills to exploit the situation. *Blatant* takeovers demand a high level of **Suggestion** or the standard Mind Control advantage. A blatant approach requires no real finesse; subjects can be made to tie themselves up, give up their darkest secrets, or whatever else the telepath wishes. Always remember, however, that any self-destructive or truly repugnant (to the NPC) order allows another resistance roll!

Complete takeovers involve Possession (usually as **Mind Swap** or **Telecontrol**) and work by removing the NPC from the equation completely! This often works *less* well for interrogation (as the victim's mind is not present in most psionic possessions), but allows the psi to do *anything* he wishes with the victim's body.

The easiest way to prevent psis from simply mind-controlling their way through an encounter is to have more NPCs present than the party can take over. If the party has two telepaths but there are three guards in front of a door, the third guard is going to notice (and act) if his two friends suddenly move to unlock the door and step aside for a group of strangers. Of course, the two guards could probably overpower the third, which suggests that a truly challenging encounter requires at least *twice* the number of NPCs that the psis could take over.

These psis are often the most vulnerable to *Fear of Detection* (pp. 34-35), as mental control is often considered one of the most (if not *the* most) despicable acts that a psi can commit. If psionics use is known, "mind rape" laws probably exist. If not, the psi's victims (if they realize what happened) are likely to hunt him down with a vengeance; manipulating others' minds is a good way to make new Enemies.

SILENT KILLERS

Any ability that can cause damage (even fatigue damage), physically relocate others, or control minds can be used to kill without leaving a normal forensic trail. This includes direct attacks (e.g., **TK Squeeze, Mental Stab**), indirect attacks (e.g., **Steal Dreams, Exoteleport**), and *Taking Over* (pp. 29-30) by forcing the victim to commit suicide. In many games, the party may not even consider these actions, finding them too repugnant – but some campaigns are painted in shades of gray. Furthermore, this advice applies to the actions of psionic, bad-guy NPCs that heroic investigators may need to track down.

If psi is a known factor, this is essentially a complication. Police departments (or the equivalent) will have access to psychotronics that provide the equivalent of **Signature Sniffer;** this does not guarantee that the psionic criminal is caught, but does give the detectives a fair chance. If psi is a secret, though, this allows for some potentially unsolvable murders. A subtle psionic attack can be disguised as an aneurysm, stroke, or suicide – and even a blatant use of **Lightning** or **Pyrokinesis** will baffle an investigator who hasn't seen it happen before. In such a case, the importance of *other* evidence is magnified. If the psis had to break into the home to get close to the victim, detectives can use Forensics skill to find footprints, fingerprints, hair samples, etc. An unseen witness may not realize what was going on, but even if "I saw him staring at Dr. Jones for a minute, then Dr. Jones collapsed onto the floor" isn't likely to get a conviction in court, it'll certainly earn the psi a few Enemies (Watcher) on the police force. Furthermore, an investigator might be a **Signature Sniffer** himself, though that twist is best used sparingly.

NOW YOU SEE ME . . .

Some psis can get into (and out of) places in ways that no normal human can. This may be via an ability to violate physical laws of movement (e.g., **Autoteleport, Levitation**) or to walk past others without being detected (e.g., **Mind Clouding, Photorefraction**). Either way, this can cause the GM some headaches; an adventure centered on a certain bad guy can be cut rather short by the heroes zipping in, shooting him, and zipping out again! It also makes it very difficult to put those psis in physical danger – if they get caught in a firefight, they can simply walk away.

Fear of Detection (pp. 34-35) is a major issue with flight and teleportation, two of the most blatant abilities that psi has to offer. Even an openly psionic person may wish to hide these abilities to avoid being rounded up or otherwise accused every time an "impossible crime" has been committed. Teleporters are especially feared by most people; anyone known to be a 'porter may find that a large percentage of his foes have invested in psychotronics (pp. 32-33) to safeguard their homes or bases. Said foes may also hide themselves (or important things) in a secret "safe room"; if the 'porter doesn't know it exists, he won't think to jump there.

The opposite is true with stealth-based abilities, which work by *not* being blatant in any way. While this makes detection that much more difficult, the psi using them must be wary of other senses. Telepathic stealth cannot fool security cameras; the power-user may also wear a mask to avoid being caught on tape, but if a guard manages to resist, he'll immediately realize that the psi is up to something. Photokinetic stealth works on everything but only applies to vision – those nearby should get Hearing rolls to detect something, Smell rolls if the psi passed through any strong scents, etc. Likewise, simple pressure plates and tripwires can be even more effective than psychotronics in this situation!
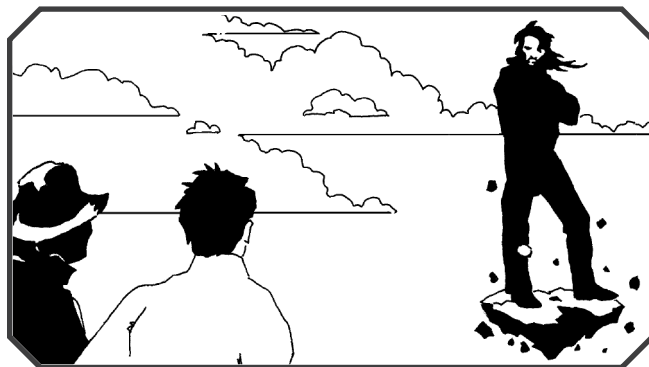
GOOD AS NEW

Healing abilities, specifically **Cure** (or the Healing advantage), can easily remove the fear of death from adventures. If the heroes can get patched up quickly and easily every time they're wounded, the campaign may take on a video-game feel. For cinematic games, this may be a plus! For other games, it can remove much of the "grit" and danger.

Fortunately, Healing/**Cure** has a built-in, cumulative penalty for repeated use. A psychic healer can easily patch up a friend once or twice per day, but if he has to do it five or six times, it becomes much harder. Notably, this has nothing to do with how much damage he heals, just how often he does it. Thus, a party with someone who has Psychic Healing is challenged more if the damage they take is *minor* but *frequent*. Instead of having one or two major firefights or sword fights per adventure, the GM can tone down the "combat set-pieces" while adding many small chances to be hurt (e.g., brawls, accidents, etc.). With the penalties for repeated healing, a hero will be tempted to hold off on fixing that 3-HP wound for now, just in case something serious happens later.

DETERRENTS AND FIXES

While *Psionic Short Circuits* (pp. 28-30) addresses some fixes for *specific* issues, many general methods exist for keeping a handle on psi – things that apply to almost any ability. The GM can use these, sparingly, to help keep adventures on track when psionic powers are threatening to derail it. Before doing so, however, he should always consider whether intervention is truly necessary – see *Let the Psychic Win* (p. 35) for more discussion.

KNOWN LIMITS

Many psionic abilities have range limits. Sometimes these are defined sharply, as for any ability that uses the *Psionic Range Table* (**Psionic Powers,** p. 22). Others are defined broadly (e.g., "-1 per yard to the subject") or vaguely (e.g., **Visions** works when you "encounter" the subject). If the GM does not want a specific psionic ability to be used on a specific person or object, he needs to make a note of the minimum distance to be kept between this subject and the psi with the ability. If the adventurer could use extra effort or a psi technique to boost this range, the GM may wish to consider this when figuring the "safe distance."

For broad ranges, a good guideline is to subtract 3 from the psi's skill; treat the result as a penalty, and look up the distance on the appropriate range table. For example, a psi with **Telereceive** 4 and the skill Telereceive-14 has an *effective* maximum range of about 150 yards (-11 on the *Size and Speed/Range Table*, p. B550). The range for **Astral Travel** 1-5 can be calculated as for vehicular travel – by multiplying the projector's top speed (considering any **Astral Celerity**) by the ability's duration.

When using range limits like this, one of two general approaches can be taken. If it is critical that a certain piece of the plot be protected (at least, for now), it should be kept *at least* twice the "safe" distance from the psis; an in-story reason for this should be in place. It also helps to have another part of the adventure that distracts the psis and that they *can* make progress toward. If this distance is being placed to challenge the psis, however, then it's best to place it outside of their normal range but where it is *theoretically* reachable – either through extra effort, psi techniques, a lucky roll, or a mini-adventure to penetrate into the heart of enemy territory.

Other abilities may have limits that should be kept in mind when planning adventures. For example, if a plot is supposed to kick off with a bomb being dropped onto an island, the GM can prevent telekinetic interference by ensuring the bomb weighs more than any nearby psychokinetic can lift. Similarly, if **Adjustment** is becoming an issue due to overuse, the GM can plan ahead of time to ensure that a bit of chaos is introduced to the situation.

At the highest levels, many psionic abilities (especially telepathic ones and **Astral Travel**) have *unlimited* range, which means that none of the advice here applies. Because of this, the GM may wish to cap such abilities at the penultimate level (or charge an Unusual Background for hitting the maximum).

COUNTERMEASURES

At its most basic, the Psionic power modifier is considered a limitation because of the inherent countermeasures that affect all psionic powers. "Intuition" cannot be taken away by Neutralize, but "Intuition (ESP, -10%)" can. While some campaigns may modify the specific drawbacks involved (*Old-Time Psi,* p. 5), the default assumption is that psi is vulnerable to the Anti-Psi power and to the special electronic equipment and drugs collectively known as psychotronics.

Anti-Psi

The Anti-Psi power can play many roles in a game. Maybe anti-psis are the black-hat-wearing bad guys opposing the plucky group of psionic heroes. Alternatively, a significant percentage of the population has developed Anti-Psi, as a metaphor for the public's resistance to accept psionic citizens. In a game focused on psi-versus-psi conflicts (e.g., psionic factions at war), each side may actively recruit anti-psis, considering them elite weapons against the enemy. The details and theme can vary from campaign to campaign, but what's important is that Anti-Psi exists in *some* form.

The most common assumption is that Anti-Psi is an inborn power found in a small (but significant) percentage of the population; having one anti-psi for every 10 psis is reasonable (see *Frequency,* pp. 15-16, for more ideas). For someone to discover his Anti-Psi abilities generally requires interacting with a psi in some way; if psionic use is especially rare or unknown, most anti-psis may not even realize they have the capability. In such a case, an anti-psi can still buy abilities and Talent (and even skills, if applicable), all representing an inherent *subconscious* faculty in using his power. When encountering a psi, assume that an unaware anti-psi unknowingly relies on his abilities to defend himself (taking Attack or Concentrate maneuvers as necessary) – if he realizes what's going on, this may be the breakthrough that unlocks the awareness of his true abilities. As a countermeasure, the existence of these "unconscious anti-psis" allows the GM to drop one into any situation as needed (but see *Overusing Countermeasures,* p. 32, for advice on this).

The assumptions above can be altered for any given game – or any given *world,* if multiple worlds exist (*Psi Across Worlds,* p. 24). Anti-psis might be very rare (one for every 100 psis) but incredibly powerful; even a *group* of psis might panic at the thought of facing *one.* Alternatively, there may be many anti-psis (perhaps even more anti-psis than psis), but with weaker power levels overall. For example, if there are two million psis in the world, there might be 10 million anti-psis – but of these, only 10% are about as powerful as the PCs; the rest are limited to a few levels of **Psionic Shield** or one level of **Screaming**, plus a perk or two.

This "spreading out" of anti-psi capability can be taken to the extreme, in a world where hardly any anti-psis are as powerful as the PCs (maybe one for every 10,000 psis), but where around 10-35% of the population possesses some sort of Anti-Psi perk (***Psionic Powers,*** p. 24). This turns anti-psi from a serious threat into a frequent source of annoyance (e.g., **Gaze Into the Abyss**, **Simple Defense**) and of extra resistance to overcome (e.g., **Personal Awareness, Tolerance**). The **Skeptic** perk deserves special mention; assuming that it is spread evenly throughout the population, the penalties for being watched by a certain number of "skeptics" can be generalized to penalties for being watched by a certain number of *people,* depending on how common the perk is.

Overusing Countermeasures

Of all the ways to keep psi in line, countermeasures are arguably the simplest. Want to keep espers out of a room? Wrap it in psychotronic "tin foil" that blocks remote viewing! Want to make bad guys more dangerous in a fight against psis? Give them all Anti-Psi power! The players can't complain *that* much, since this kind of stuff is the whole reason they got that -10% point break.

However, this ease of use is precisely what can lead to *overusing* them. If every challenging encounter involves mooks with neutralization guns and every important NPC has a mind-shielding headband, it will start to strain the players' suspension of disbelief. Psionic countermeasures should always exist, but the moment they become *commonplace,* they also become *boring.* To balance this, the GM may establish a few weak-but-ubiquitous countermeasures to keep the psis challenged on a day-to-day basis, while saving "the good stuff" for special moments, enemies, etc.

Example: A game world has mature psychotronic technology, most of which is very expensive. However, inventors have discovered that a certain suspension of easily crafted molecules seriously impairs a psi's ability to concentrate (-5 on all psionic rolls) if inhaled. As this can be cheaply made, it was quickly introduced into many perfumes as an added value: "Keep your life fun *and* your thoughts safe!" While not everyone wears these perfumes, the GM can use them as a common, expected foil when he needs to make an adventure a bit more challenging. This way, he can keep the high-end tech in reserve; when he *does* break it out, the players will take notice!

This turns *all* psi into something that must be done in private – or, at least, out of the sight of crowds – to avoid incurring a significant penalty!

Example: In a certain setting, 20% of the population has one of the Anti-Psi perks, with **Skeptic** showing up about 1/10 of the time. This means that, statistically speaking, one person in 50 is a "skeptic." Therefore, in this world, a psi is at -1 to *all* psi skills when being watched by 250 normal people, at -2 when watched by 500 people, at -3 when watched by 1,000 people, and so on!

Psychotronics

All psychotronics are superscience (p. B513) by definition, as the field of study only comes into existence when people start to understand how psionic powers work. The "TL^" designation should never deter the GM from adding psi-tech to the game world, however – if psi is real, psychotronics becomes a realistic science! Even low-tech worlds may have an analogue to psi-tech; see *Psychobotanics* (p. 5) for one take on this.

Psychotronics is only openly available for purchase if psi is known to exist. However, even a secret-psi world can still have psi-tech. Those who *are* aware of psi and who have the opportunity to study it a little are quick to protect themselves – thus, the foes faced by a party of psis often has psychotronics even if the world does not.

In addition to this, *existing* technology may disrupt psi! What if every microwave gave off psi static while in use? Or a popular brand of MP3 player acted as a mental shield when active? It's possible to fill the world with psionic countermeasures without adding a single piece of technology, by adding a feature that blocks or disrupts psi to common items. This may be a complete coincidence, or it may reflect the actions of a cabal of engineers trying desperately to protect the world from a psionic takeover . . .

Unlike the other countermeasures discussed in this section, psychotronics are a double-edged sword, with tech capable of enhancing psi as well as working against it (e.g., the psi amplifiers from *GURPS Ultra-Tech,* p. 94). This can add flavor to the game, especially if psis have (or can get) access to experimental new devices and drugs that boost their abilities at the cost of a few "minor" side effects. Note that the presence of beneficial psychotronics does not affect the Psionic power modifier; the boosts given are not *free* – the adventurer must buy, barter, or deal for each piece of gear, which comes with additional encumbrance and/or side effects. In *GURPS,* expensive gear is *supposed* to give adventurers a bonus.

A full treatment of psionic technology, with lists of equipment and detailed statistics, is outside the focus of this supplement. The advice that follows thus focuses primarily on psychotronics as countermeasures.

Psi Gear

Psychotronic engineering allows special electronic devices to replicate or counter the effects of psi. The effects are limited to the GM's imagination, but they generally fall into two categories: offense and defense.

Offensive psi-tech includes weaponized uses for psionic energy, like the mind disruptors and psi-bombs from *Ultra-Tech* (pp. 132 and 158), and weapons specifically designed to be used against psis, like the psionic neutralizer (*Ultra-Tech,* p. 132). Unless the game is focused on war and fighting (*Soldiering,* p. 24), these weapons only show up in the hands of specific, elite enemies, and only when they know they'll be facing psis in a hostile situation.

Defensive gear is far more common. Anyone familiar with psi will want to take reasonable measures to protect his mind, body, and property from those who play fast and loose with the laws of physics. Electronic mind shields (*Ultra-Tech,* p. 188) are a key invention; depending on the game world, they may be an acceptable fashion accessory or the "tinfoil hat" that identifies the paranoid. Other common psi-tech may include briefcase-sized static generators that offer a certain radius of **Screaming,** and expensive organic paint that, when used to cover a room, gives a flat penalty to any psi trying to "penetrate" the walls in any way (with senses, teleportation, etc.). In game terms, if the GM notices that a certain psionic ability is easy to exploit in an unfair way, it's likely that someone in the game world has figured out the same thing, and is working on a way to counter it.

Psi Drugs

Biological psychotronics are (arguably) more realistic than electronic gear – anything that affects the brain is going to affect abilities that derive from the mind, after all. In fact, instead of inventing a custom drug with a certain effect on psi, the GM may decide that an existing psychiatric drug can serve the same purpose. Treatments for ADHD may enhance skill at the cost of power (or vice-versa), antipsychotics may make psi techniques impossible to use, serotonin/MAO inhibitors may add a 1 FP cost to every use of psi, and so on.

Psychotronic drugs range from psi blockers to psi enhancers, with a lot of strange effects in between. The GM can justify almost *any* effect on a psi – including (mundane) physical effects limited to psis. For example, if a chemical exists that acts as knockout gas *only for psis*, foes can be cavalier about throwing gas grenades, flooding the ventilation system of a mall, and so on.

Psi drugs can also be used defensively by those concerned (justly or not) about telepaths and psychic vampires influencing their mind. A dose of "psi blocker" (which may even be the same drug that, when injected into a psi, blocks all of his abilities) will provide a subject with some level of Resistant to Mental Psionics for the duration. In a cinematic game, it may even protect against physical effects, like **TK Grab** and **Exoteleport!**

Don't Drink the Water

Contaminating a country's water supply with drugs is a classic fictional plot. In a dystopia (or false utopia), it's usually done by the government; otherwise, it is the work of a powerful and well-networked cabal. (Size and power are necessary if an entire nation is to be affected – a small group would have to work full-time to affect even a large city.) In a psionic campaign, these are likely to be psychotronic drugs (above) to suppress the psionic abilities of anyone who drinks or bathes in the water. This way, latent psis never manifest and actual psis have difficulty using their abilities (in the form of penalties to skill and/or power).

One approach this is to assume that the standard psionics rules take into account that the psi *has* been drinking and bathing in contaminated water. By avoiding this for at least a month, his psi becomes more potent (+2 to extra effort rolls; +1 to every other success roll). This is harder than it sounds, however, especially when it comes to bathing! Nearly every drink except alcohol, milk, and *fresh* juice is made with concentrates that are reconstituted with local water. If standard filters can't detect or remove the psi drugs, even bottled water is unsafe. Imported water can get around this (at great expense), but only if other countries don't dose their citizens as well! The psi may end up trading that +1 to skill for an Odious Personal Habit (Doesn't bathe unless it's raining) [-10].

CONTROLLING INFORMATION

Many psionic abilities have ways to get information out of people. Telepathy is the most notable, but other powers can be used in indirect ways: astral projectors and clairvoyants can eavesdrop, psychokinetics can threaten, teleporters can steal correspondence, and so on. While the GM can use the *occasional* deterrent or countermeasure to simply stop this action from succeeding, players will get frustrated and upset if it happens frequently. After all, why play a telepath if every important NPC has a nearly unreadable mind?

To avoid this, the GM needs to *control the information* that every NPC has, whether he's designing them for an adventure in advance or just making them up on the spot. When no NPC has the sort of knowledge that can short-circuit the entire plot, the GM can comfortably *encourage* psis to use their gifts for information gathering. The result will be players happily using their capabilities to good effect while still enjoying the unfolding plot of the story.

Rationing and Distributing

If an investigation is supposed to take up a significant chunk of an adventure, then no NPC who is accessible to the PCs should possess enough information to end the plot with one interrogation. The GM has to assume that the party will pry information from every single NPC that they encounter. The "big picture" must be broken into pieces, with no single person holding all of them.

The simplest approach is to write down all of the major facts and pieces of information that the heroes can eventually discover. Ask, "Which combination of facts is the minimum needed to end the investigation?" Move these over to a *Key Facts* list, then flesh out the remaining *Other Facts* with other useful (but minor) bits of information.

Every NPC who "knows something" should have one or more of these key facts, but not all; a good guideline is about one-third to one-half of the key facts, plus one or two other facts. This doesn't mean that one person should have half of the picture while a second one has the *other* half, though! The NPCs' knowledge can (and should) overlap significantly – when interrogating a new person, the group should learn a lot of the same stuff they already knew (which reinforces that it's probably true) plus one or two new facts (key or not).

Example: The GM has crafted a modern plot involving a string of celebrity assassinations. He narrows the *Key Facts* down to (A) "Contracts were placed via code on a do-it-yourself website," (B) "The details were spread to the underworld by John Casale, a local fixer," (C) "The local bottling plant was the dead drop for instructions," (D) "The Martoni syndicate was paid to keep a few of the hits clear of authorities," and (E) "Payment was made via FedEx, as loose cash." Ironically, the names of the six hit men are part of the *Other Facts*, as knowing who did it is only a step toward figuring out who arranged it.

The group of psis canvasses all six crime scenes; clues there point them toward a bar. The bartender knows (B), a hit man's name, and some other facts. The hit man knows (C) and (D). A local Martoni boss knows (B), (D), and another hit man's name. On the way, they stop and read a local informer's mind; the GM wasn't expecting this, and decides that he knows (C) and (D), but also a new (minor) fact. So far, the group has gotten new information out of everyone, but is only halfway to getting all of what they need.

At times, this requires some thought as to why a certain NPC *doesn't* know a certain fact. For example, why would the hit man not know about the code on the website? Perhaps he was, himself, hired by a middleman who is taking a cut off the top. This can add depth and options, as the psis may decide to question this middleman, instead. Any NPC who must *necessarily* know the whole picture needs other forms of protection – being kept far from sight (p. 28), given a mind shield (p. 32), etc.

Misunderstanding and Misdirection

Sometimes, people are simply *wrong*. It is completely realistic for an NPC to possess (and wholeheartedly believe) false information. If psis get in the habit of believing everything they **Telereceive,** this sloppiness may lead them down the wrong alley. A smart investigator expects a story to check out, with multiple people and evidence corroborating it. Some wrong data will obviously contradict existing facts, leading to a clear choice between the two. When the false information is *compatible* with the truth, that's known as a *red herring,* which often requires further investigation before it can be dismissed.

Another classic red herring is misdirection. Adventurers often become so focused on unraveling the details of their story that they assume *every* fact is germane to it. For example, if the group is trying to find out who's been shaking down the waterfront, and a ship captain's thoughts revolve around a frantic "Can't talk to them about Gaston . . . Gaston will kill me . . . threatened to eat my lips," they're likely to assume that Gaston is behind the extortion, even if the ship captain is only scared because he had been sleeping with Gaston's sister. Obvious red herrings like this shouldn't be used too often, lest the party become paranoid and overly analytical, but they can be fun as an occasional diversion. See **GURPS Mysteries** for more on NPC knowledge and red herrings.

If people are aware of psi, they may *intentionally* use misdirection to confuse psis. A CEO with an expensive psionic shield may hold staged conversations within the earshot of his bodyguards, expecting telepaths to attack their unprotected minds instead of his. Alternatively, he could order a bodyguard to stand around, thinking about how the bomb he planted is about to go off, just to see who in the crowd reacts.

Proving It

If the adventure is constructed so that the party must not only figure out what happened, but also obtain *proof* (in the form of hard evidence), their information-gathering abilities can be put to good use without steamrollering over the plot. This is especially common if the party is part of the justice system (e.g., police detectives or judiciary investigators) or if they are unable to reveal their abilities because psi is unknown or socially unacceptable. If the above advice on controlling information is followed, this can provide a second "layer" of the adventure – as the group first figures out what's going on, and then tries to find a way to prove it. If not – that is, the psis are able to figure things out quickly, but the evidence gathering is the tricky part – it transforms a mystery adventure into more of a tense thriller . . . which may be a desired outcome in an action-oriented game! The trick is to come up with evidence that is straightforward but isn't immediately recoverable.

Example: Sue is under suspicion of killing her business rival, Cynthia, for financial gain. After a visit with Sue, the telepath knows that Sue broke into Cynthia's home, accessed her computer (to read memos, patents, and profit/loss statements), and shot Cynthia when she came home unexpectedly early. Sue panicked and sold her (unregistered) gun to the first street tough she saw, and she has used the data she learned to stay two steps ahead of the other business. The party knows she's guilty, but they will have to track down the weapon (based solely on the mental image Sue had of the thug) and/or find a way to show that Sue's business actions since the incident could have only been taken with illicit knowledge of what Cynthia's company was planning.

PERSONAL RESTRAINT

In a way, the only thing that can truly stop a psi from crossing certain lines is the psi himself; certain disadvantages can prevent psionic adventure short circuits (pp. 28-30) better than *any* outside influence. Someone with Honesty must make a self-control roll before attempting to invade another person's privacy (whether reading minds, eavesdropping on conversations, or 'porting into homes) or physically affecting other people in a negative way. Many psis have a power-related Vow, such as "never use my psi to harm another," or "never read a mind without the subject's knowledge." Even a Vow unrelated to psionic use can act to restrain it – e.g., Vow (Always fight fair) would forbid relying on **Pyrokinesis** to cook off a foe's bullets in a gunfight. In addition, the following Code of Honor may appear in any psionic game:

Code of Honor (Psychic's): Never use your psi solely for personal gain. Never harm another person with your psi except in self-defense. Never psionically invade another person's privacy (including eavesdropping) without his knowledge. Obviously, this cannot be taken by a psi whose abilities can only affect him! *-10 points.*

If the campaign calls for the PCs to be the good guys, it's reasonable to expect their disadvantages to reflect this. The GM can accomplish this with either a fixed, mandatory package (e.g., "Everyone must take Honesty (15) and Code of Honor (Psychic's)") or a character creation rule (e.g., "Every PC must take at least -15 points from the following list").

> *Smart psis stay subtle.*
> *– Tongue-Twisters for*
> *the Psychic Child*

FEAR OF DETECTION

Psis benefit *greatly* from keeping their capabilities secret. Even if psi is common knowledge, someone who can hide his abilities has a "secret weapon"; when fingers are pointed at the psi who did something, they'll be pointed away from him. Moreover, if the public isn't aware of psionics, he can get away with feats that others consider flatly impossible!

However, once his secret is revealed, he may start to be blamed not only for his own deeds, but also for the actions of other psis who have similar abilities! When everyone knows that a person is a pyro, it can be very hard to convince them that it must have been some *other* pyro who spontaneously combusted one of his coworkers.

Some psis are open about their powers and abilities; even then, most adventurers have to do things that are rude, sneaky, and possibly illegal. While a person might not mind if the world knows about his telepathy, he still won't want to get caught poking around in someone's mind without permission. Likewise, someone openly psionic may wish to keep a few abilities hidden from public knowledge, just to have something "in reserve."

It's possible for a psi to avoid hiding anything about his abilities *and* to always use them in a manner that is both courteous and legal – rare, but possible; see *Personal Restraint* (p. 34). If the GM needs to counter his abilities (for plot purposes), he'll need to refer to the other deterrents in this section; such a noble psi has nothing to fear from detection.

Other Psis

Psis with the right abilities are the undisputed masters of detecting nearby supernatural activity. Espers (and anti-psis, in some settings) with **Psi Sense** automatically get a roll to detect any nearby use of psi; telepaths and teleporters (if using **Telepathy Sense** or **Portersense,** respectively) get the same roll to detect the use of their particular powers. When building abilities from scratch, note that adding the Reflexive enhancement to Detect (Psionic Activity) turns it into a passive sense, allowing a similar roll.

Even if no psi is within range when an ability is used, espers who come by later may be able to pick up traces of what happened, using **Signature Sniffer, Retrocognition, Retrocognitive Flashbacks,** or the Psychometry advantage.

If psi techniques are being used in the game, note that a psionics user can reduce or avoid this chance of detection with Hide Signature (***Psionic Powers,*** p. 41); this technique can be used with *any* psionic ability. The skill penalty and FP cost required should keep this in line, however, and the GM may raise either (by fiat) if this technique seems to be unbalancing the game.

Psi-Tech

Psychotronics (pp. 32-33) can stand in for ESP when it comes to detecting psi. The paranormal equivalent of a radiation detector may go off when it picks up psionic activity nearby. Electronic mind shields (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 188) are not perfect, but if they successfully *resist* an incoming attack, a built-in alarm alerts the user. If psi is known, the boardrooms of top companies have both psi static generators and psionic wave detectors, to protect *and* alert.

For game purposes, psi-tech allows the GM to make fear of detection an issue even with no other psis around. For simplicity, each device can just be given an appropriate psionic ability and skill level. The suggestion about mundane devices is applicable here, as well – even if intentional psychotronics are not common, normal electronics may fill the gap. For example, the use of psi may set up a resonance in fluorescent light fixtures, allowing a trained observer to make a Perception roll to pick out the distinctive "hum."

Let the Psychic Win

This chapter goes into detail on various ways to counter psi, to prevent psi from ruining plots, to make psi riskier to use, and so on. This is sometimes necessary to keep the plot of an adventure moving. However, the following advice may be the most important in this book:

Psis should be able to use their powers successfully, to obtain results that normal actions could not.

Mind readers *should* be able to steal passwords and dark secrets from the minds of those around them. Teleporters *should* be able to pop into a locked vault to grab a well-guarded item. Espers *should* be able to second-guess their opponents and avoid oncoming danger. Cyberpsis *should* be able to turn advanced, powerful computer systems into pets.

Players buy psionic abilities for this reason – to do cool, impossible things that no mundane person can (or, at least, to do things *better* than a non-psi could). If the GM allows the players to purchase these abilities, it is simply unfair to make them impossible to use, and frustrating to make them less effective than "plain, honest legwork." Deterrents and countermeasures should exist to *challenge* the psis, not to make their abilities useless or inconsequential.

Some campaigns may intentionally play against this rule, treating psi as a minor advantage or even an outright curse. This is fine, as long as the GM is very clear about this to the players *before* the game starts. Otherwise, most players expect psi to be useful, reliable, and (most of all) *fun.*

Mundane Detection

In most games, "normals" outnumber the psis by quite a bit. Thus, even if the average person is less likely to detect psi, they make up much more of a threat. Detailed rules for detecting the use of psi can be found in ***Psionic Powers*** (pp. 11-12). For those without that book, the following simplified rules may prove useful.

A subject may make a Per roll to realize that he is being affected by something. Extreme physical effects (e.g., HP damage) are noticed automatically; other effects require a roll with a modifier set by the GM. Noninvasive psi (e.g., ESP) and failed psi (that is, the user failed at his skill or attribute roll) cannot be detected.

Even if the detection roll succeeds, someone unfamiliar with psi may chalk it up to some other strange cause. Roll against his IQ-4 or an appropriate skill. On a critical failure or failure, he blames divine intervention, sickness, etc. On a success, he realizes that an outside source is responsible (or, if he is familiar with psi, recognizes its effects). On a critical success, he gets another immediate resistance roll!

INSPIRATIONAL FICTION

The following books, films, and television shows are excellent sources for psionic campaign ideas and adventure seeds. While much of this fiction is good in its own right, note that some of these were chosen for gaming compatibility over literary excellence.

BOOKS

Bester, Alfred. *The Demolished Man* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1953). Award-winning novel that explores how telepathy "sounds," among other things. Also see his *The Stars My Destination* (1956) for a setting with ubiquitous teleportation.

Blish, James. *Jack of Eagles* (Avon, 1982). An up-and-coming esper becomes involved in the conflict between two underground psionic factions. Ties psi to both science and mathematics.

King, Stephen. *The Dead Zone* and *Firestarter* (Viking, 1979 and 1980). The former depicts precognition as powerful and horrifying, while the latter features a psionic family trying to escape government agents; both film adaptations are worth watching.

Lumley, Brian. *Necroscope* (Tor, 1986) and sequels. Weakly written, but the setting (ESPionage agents fight Cold War enemies and the occasional monster) makes for a wonderful campaign.

May, Julian. *The Many Coloured Land* (Collins, 1985), *Intervention* (Collins, 1987), and sequels. Two interweaving series featuring psionic abilities grouped by power, psychic bloodlines, psychotronic amplifiers, and gestalts.

McCaffrey, Anne. *To Ride Pegasus* (Del Rey, 1973), *The Rowan* (Ace, 1990), and sequels. Two series set in a world in which psi is accepted, understood, and keeps society going.

Niven, Larry. *Flatlander* (Del Rey, 1995). A collection of short stories about Gil "The Arm" Hamilton, a sci-fi/noir detective with modest (but very useful) ESP and telekinetic abilities.

Smith, E. E. "Doc." *Triplanetary* (Fantasy Press, 1948) and sequels. The *Lensman* series combines space opera with incredibly high-powered psis, and was adapted to **GURPS Third Edition** as **GURPS Lensman.**

COMIC BOOKS

Claremont, Chris; Byrne, John; and others. *Uncanny X-Men* (Marvel, 1963-present). *The Dark Phoenix Saga* (1980) makes a good starting point, due to its focus on the psionic Jean Grey and the introduction of the Hellfire Club.

Ellis, Warren and Duffield, Paul. *FreakAngels* (Avatar Press, 2008-present). Inspired by John Wyndham's novel *The Midwich Cuckoos* (Penguin, 2000). A dozen powerful psis accidentally ended the world; now they work to rebuild it. Free to read at **www.freakangels.com.**

MOVIES

Akira (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988). A must-see anime that demonstrates out-of-control psi, secret government labs, and *several* of the themes on pp. 6-8.

Fury, The (Brian De Palma, 1978). Thriller about cultivating psis as weapons, with a healthy dose of *Your Head Asplode* (p. 7).

Men Who Stare at Goats, The (Grant Heslov, 2009). A dark comedy poking fun at Project Stargate (p. 5) and the "warrior-monks" who emerged from it. Based on the Jon Ronson nonfiction book of the same name (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

Push (Paul McGuigan, 2009). Psychics on the run fight against an evil psionic conspiracy. Shamelessly low-brow, but arguably the purest "psionic action" film yet.

Serenity (Joss Whedon, 2005). A black-ops agent hunts a psychic and the secret she accidentally learned. Good depiction of a psi-enhanced warrior and of psi as a sanity-blasting curse.

Scanners (David Cronenberg, 1981). Iconic depiction of psi as horror (see p. 7); it also features the intentional creation of psychics, psychotronic drugs, and psi-versus-psi battles.

Star Wars (George Lucas, 1977) and sequels. Heavy use of psi ("the Force") in a space-opera context, including training sequences and telekinetic swordsmanship.

X-Men and *X2* (Bryan Singer, 2000 and 2003). Excellent portrayal of society's fear of the unknown and of how powerful a telepath can be.

TELEVISION

Charmed (Constance M. Burge, 1998-2006). Three sisters use their psychic powers to fight demons and warlocks in this intentionally cheesy series that happily conflates psi and magic.

Roswell (Jason Katims, 1999-2002). Four human-like aliens with extremely versatile psionics hide from the authorities while making friends with humans.

Tomorrow People, The (Roger Price, 1973-1979 and 1992-1995). This look at the next stage of evolution helped popularize the term *Homo superior* for psis; the two series take different approaches to the same theme.

INDEX

Abilities, *anti-psi,* 31-32; *defining,* 11-12; *for detecting other psis,* 35; *potential problems with,* 28-31, 34, 35; *starting number of,* 13-14; *starting selection,* 11-12; *see also Powers.*
Acceptance (public reaction), 18.
Achilles' heel, 27.
Acknowledged psi, 18.
Adolescence (campaign frame), 19-20.
Adrenaline shock as psi source, 9.
Advantages, *see Abilities.*
Aliens and psi, 7-10; *intervention,* 9; *theme,* 7-8.
Allowing psi to be useful, 35.
Altered consciousness as psi source, 10.
Alternate worlds and psi, 24.
Ancient beliefs about psi, 4.
Anti-psi, 7, 31-32; *debunkers and,* 16; *in settings,* 17, 24; *latent,* 7; *other powers and,* 21; *see also Countermeasures.*
Apocalypse, foreseeing, 20.
Astral plane, 19.
Autoteleport ability, potential problems with, 30.
Average people with powers, 20.
Beliefs about psionics, 4-8.
Blatant takeovers, 29.
Blessed advantage, potential problems with, 28.
Books, inspirational, 36.
Brain, *damage,* 9; *grafts as psi source,* 9; *psi and,* 8-9.
Campaigns, *frames,* 19-24; *overcoming difficulties in,* 28-35; *psionics in settings,* 15-19, 25-27; *powers and ability selection,* 11-12; *starting conditions,* 13-14; *themes,* 6-8.
Certainty about future, 29.
Changing society, 22.
Character trait suggestions, 6-8, 24-27, 34; *anti-psi,* 31.
Charisma advantage, 5.
Charlatans, 16, 17.
Chemicals to gain psi, 10; *see also Drugs.*
Cinematic martial-arts skills as psi, 12.
Clarity about the future, 29.
Closed list of abilities (character creation method), 11.
Code of Honor (Psychic's) disadvantage, 34.
Comic books, inspirational, 36.
Common (frequency of psi), 16.
Complete takeovers, potential problems with, 30.
Constant projectors, 27.
Contacting spirits, 6.
Contaminating water, 33.
Controlling information in campaigns, 28-29, 33-34.
Cosmic enhancement, *No die roll required,* 26; *No Rule of 16,* 26.
Cosmic Power advantage, 26.

Countermeasures to psi, 5, 31-33; *overusing,* 32, 35; *see also Anti-Psi.*
Crime (campaign frame), 22.
Cure ability, potential problems with, 30.
Debunkers, 16.
Detectives with psi, 23.
Deference (public reaction), 18-19.
Defining parameters of psi, 5-6.
Degree of skill, 14.
Denied psi, 17.
Detecting psi, 34-35.
Detect Lies skill, 28.
Deterrents to psi, 31-33; *see also Countermeasures to Psi, Problem Abilities and Advantages.*
Disadvantages, new, 18, 27, 34; *psionics and,* 27.
Discovery (campaign frame), 19-20.
Distributing information, 33-34.
Divisions in organizations, special, 23.
Drain Emotion ability, potential problems with, 28, 29.
Drugs, psi, 33; *examples,* 9, 10, 16, 19.
Easily Resisted limitation, 25.
Easy to Read disadvantage, 27.
EEG, 7.
Emotion Control ability, potential problems with, 29.
Emotion Sense ability, potential problems with, 28.
Empathy advantage, potential problems with, 28.
Empowering the powerless (campaign frame), 6-7.
Emulating psi extremes, 25-27.
Enemy disadvantage, 17, 18, 21-22.
Enhancements, new, 26, 27.
Esoteric, *options to gain psi,* 10; *skills as psi,* 12.
ESP abilities, potential problems with, 28, 29.
ESPionage (campaign frame), 24.
Exoteleport ability, potential problems with, 30.
Experience requirement for psi, 9-10.
Expert Skill (Psionics), 5, 7, 17.
External sources of powers, 6.
Fame (campaign frame), 23.
Fear (public reaction), 18.
Fear of detection, 30, 34-35.
Focused mind as psi source, 9-10.
Foreseeing an apocalypse, 20.
Frames, campaign, 19-24.
Frequency, *in modern settings,* 15-16; *in nonmodern settings,* 15.
Function of brain, 8-9.
Future, seeing into, 29.
Fuzzy abilities (character creation method), 11.
Gainsayers, 16.
Gear, psi, 32, 35; *see also Psychobotanics, Psychotronics.*

Genetics as psi source, 8-9.
Glossary, 4.
Godlike psi, 26.
Going through changes (theme), 6.
GURPS, 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 13, 14, 21, 23, 25, 26, 32; ***Basic Set,*** 3, 11; ***Bio-Tech,*** 9; ***Infinite Worlds,*** 19, 24; ***Lensman,*** 36; ***Martial Arts,*** 10, 24; ***Mysteries,*** 23, 34; ***Powers,*** 3, 6, 9, 11, 12, 25, 26, 28; ***Power-Ups 1: Imbuements,*** 12; ***Psionic Powers,*** 3, 8, 11, 12, 19, 23, 25, 31, 35; ***Psionics,*** 3; ***Space,*** 8, 10; ***Supers,*** 3, 16, 21; ***Thaumatology,*** 5; ***Traveller: Psionic Institutes,*** 10; ***Ultra-Tech,*** 3, 32, 35; ***Y2K,*** 20.
GURPS Psionic Powers, using, 3, 11.
Healing advantage, potential problems with, 30.
Hiding (campaign frame), 21-22.
History and psi, 4-5.
Homo superior (theme), 7.
Imbuement Skills as psi, 12.
Improvement (campaign frame), 20-21.
Infallible psi, 26.
Infinity Unlimited and psi, 24.
Information, controlling in campaigns, 28-29, 33-34.
Inhuman psi ability, 10; *see also Aliens and Psi.*
Inspirational fiction, 36.
Institutes, psionic, 10, 17.
Internal origins of psi powers, 6.
Intervention to gain psi, 9.
Intuition advantage, potential problems with, 28.
Invasions of privacy, 28.
Investigation (campaign frame), 23.
Irresistible psi, 26.
Knowing too much, 28-29, 33-34.
Known limits of psi, 31.
Latency, 4, 14; *determining,* 7; *powers,* 14; *suppressing,* 33; *triggering abilities,* 9, 10; *universal,* 8, 17.
Let the psychic win, 35.
Levitation ability, potential problems with, 30.
Lightning ability, potential problems with, 30.
Limitations, *new,* 25; *psi abilities and,* 27.
Magnetism, personal, 4-5.
Martial-arts skills as psi, 12.
Medical, *equipment to determine psi,* 7; *intervention to gain psi,* 9.
Mental screens, 27.
Mental Stab ability, potential problems with, 30.
Mental trait, psi as, 6, 9.
Mesmerism, 4-5.
Mind Clouding ability, potential problems with, 30.
Mind control of NPCs, 29-30.
Mind Probe advantage, potential problems with, 28.

In the eighties, I was trained at Fort Bragg in a secret initiative code-named Project Jedi. The objective of the project was to create Super Soldiers.

– Lyn Cassady,
The Men Who Stare at Goats