

# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/29 March '11

## PSIONICS

### EXPANDED PSYCHOKINESIS

by Christopher R. Rice

MAGIC AS PSI

by David L. Pulver

AVERTING PSYCHIC DISASTERS!

by Rev. Jason "PK" Levine

THE EDGE OF PSIENCE

by Kenneth Peters

RANDOM PSIONIC TABLES

by Antoni Ten Monrós

THOUGHTJUSTICE

by Andy Vetromile

TOKYO PSIENCE POLICE

by David L. Pulver

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## Article Colors

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

*Pale Blue:* In This Issue

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

*Dark Blue:* GURPS Features

*Purple:* Systemless Features

*Green:* Distinguished Columnists

# IN THIS ISSUE

Here at *Pyramid*, we think anything is possible if you put your mind to it! What better way to prove it than with an issue devoted to mental mastery – psionics?

For those harnessing the awesome might of **GURPS Psionic Powers**, *Expanded Psychokinesis* provides new things to think about. Get six brand-new abilities: Manipulate sound! Survive impossible falls! Each ability has techniques, and the article is rounded out with new perks and psionic-power packages.

Want to create a new mentalist or determine the effects of that odd brew your hero just quaffed? *Random Psionic Tables* lets you roll on lists featuring all 108 packages from **GURPS Psis**, plus five new ones. Get mental with a handful of dice!

This month marks the dynamic debut of David L. Pulver's column, *Eidetic Memory*. In this installment, David considers what would happen if you used the **GURPS Magic** system to represent psionic abilities. This variant is especially useful for fantasy campaigns!

Get to *The Edge of Psience*, and find some new **GURPS** tools for your psychic superstar. Do you envy wizards and their familiars? No more! This article describes "familiars" for psis, including a few examples. This article also includes four psionic artifacts that might come in handy – or spell your doom.

Forget 1984's notion of "thoughtcrimes" when your powers of thought truly make you dangerous. *Thoughtjustice* examines various possibilities for enforcing laws when dealing with cranial criminals – suitable for any system with psis.

Jason "PK" Levine – **GURPS** Assistant Line Editor, author of **GURPS Psionic Powers**, and our resident expert when it comes to blasting each other with mental energy – offers his thoughts on *Averting Psychic Disasters!* Now you can keep your critical failures at bay while tapping the power of psi.

When first contact with aliens doesn't quite go as planned, Earth has to establish all kinds of new policies, especially in light of psionic uplift. Who better to deal with these new problems in the galactic spaceport of Cosmo-Tokyo than the *Tokyo Psience Police*? This generic campaign framework is David L. Pulver's second mind-blowing contribution to this issue!

Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor, uses this month's *Random Thought Table* to think about how our minds work . . . and builds on that to add paranormal powers in a campaign.

We predict you'll get a chuckle out of this issue's *Murphy's Rules*, and maybe something more to think about with the rest of *Odds and Ends*. This issue has more brain-busting benefits than you can bend a spoon at!

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## A PSI IS NOT JUST A PSI

This month's *Random Thought Table* goes into detail about why psi is cool (see pp. 33-34), so we won't dwell too much on that. Suffice it to say, it is.

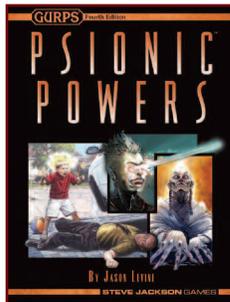
So, instead, I'll talk a bit about how versatile psionics are. At one end of the psi spectrum, you can have a campaign that revolves entirely around psychics and mental masters. At the other end, you can have a campaign that *may* feature psionics. (One of my earliest writings in the game industry took a riff from the classic *Mage: The Ascension* RPG and wondered what it would be like if the Force in *Star Wars* only worked when you couldn't prove it worked.)

Admittedly, having an adjustable dial doesn't make psi powers any different from (say) magic or super powers. However, what makes psionics particularly interesting – especially as seen in serial entertainment (comics, TV shows, etc.) – is that psi powers can be *ignored* . . . at least, at a low enough power level. And that “low power level” can actually be pretty high.

For example, let's say that you've established a fairly hard science-fiction campaign. A wizened old man in a long white beard shows up and starts throwing fireballs; it's proof positive that there's magic in the world. That's hard to sweep under the rug. However, if someone claiming to be a telepath showed up for an adventure (despite psionic powers not being part of the campaign before) and started making mayhem, it'd be easy to revert back to “business as usual” if psi isn't brought full time into the campaign.

This is because the veneer of science attached to psi means it can be ignored, in the way that all manner of wonder is ignored in our day-to-day lives. Sure, we humans are able to smash atoms or clone animals, but unless it interacts with us directly, we can forget about it. And, really, until the point where technology becomes ubiquitous, it's easy to ignore.

It's the same way with psis; unless they're everywhere, you can ignore 'em, if you want to . . . they fade into the same high-tech background that atom smashers and cloners do.



## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of clones and atom smashers . . . Were there any articles so excellent that we should make sure we clone them in the future? Or any so questionable we should stick 'em in an atom smasher? You can beam your innermost secrets privately to [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or broadcast your thoughts publicly online at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).

## An Intro to Eidetic Memory

*This month, we welcome a new featured columnist: David Pulver, co-author of the GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition and too many other cool projects to mention. We asked him for a few words to introduce his column (which appears on pp. 16-18). Take it away, David!*

I love being a GM, and *GURPS* is one of my two favorite systems. My first *GURPS* campaign began as a variant *Traveller* game, but I converted it to *GURPS Space* in 1987. Not wanting to waste any later worldbooks, things quickly got stranger, as the heroes (and eventually, their children) left their starships to visit other dimensions, fight dragons, sail as pirates, travel back in time, develop super powers, pilot mecha, and even hunt the Loch Ness monster!

Each month in *Eidetic Memory*, I'll share some of the crunchier bits from this and other *GURPS* games I've run over the last few decades: my favorite house rules, new gadgets, NPCs, situations, and memorable screw-ups. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent . . .

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The inflicted pain (and the power of the psychic barrier) can be adjusted by the user with a Ready maneuver. A failsafe will deactivate the device if the user falls unconscious.

This artifact uses the *Optional Rule: Alternative Abilities* from **GURPS Powers** (p. 11). All of the abilities include the gadget limitations below (-40%), the Anti-Psi (-0%) power modifier, and some form of Backlash (**GURPS Powers**, p. 104); the latter causes constant pain while using the Excruciator. This pain persists even after it is turned off, but the user may roll against HT once per minute to recover.

*Agonizer Setting:* This protects as Mind Shield 10, but with Backlash, Severe Pain (-40%). 8 points.

*Lamenter Setting:* The user is Resistant to Psionics (+8), but suffers Backlash, Severe Pain (-40%). 3 points, or 1 point as an alternative ability.

*Tormenter Setting:* This provides Immunity to Psionics [30], but the user is incapacitated with Backlash, Agony (-100%) until it can be deactivated with an IQ-3 roll. 6 points, or 2 points as an alternative ability.

### Gadget Limitations

The excruciator Can Be Stolen (Requires Quick Contest of DX, Cannot be immediately used), -15% and is Unique, -25%.

## Psi-Blade

114 points

This spectral blade exists slightly out of phase with the material world, allowing it to harm insubstantial creatures in the outer astral plane (**GURPS Psionic Powers**, p. 27) and phase through normal matter. It is harmless against unliving items, but hungers for the energy of living creatures, draining their aura to power its own abilities. It is purchased as Fatigue Attack with a Leech follow-up, which fills the blade's Energy Reserve (Psi) and allows it to use special abilities. In desperation the user could turn it on himself to fill its reserve. Its inert form is that of a rough black crystal, cold to the touch.

*Energy Reserve (Psi):* This is bought with the Special Recharge, Only on successful hits (-70%) and the standard gadget limitations (see below). Ten levels are typical of most swords, which comes to 6 points.

*Fatigue Attack:* This is the main ability of the sword. It is purchased with Affects Insubstantial (+20%); Cosmic (+300%); Melee Attack, React C, 1, Cannot Parry (-25%); and the standard gadget limitations. This adds to +240%. Fatigue Attack 3d then ends up costing 102 points.

*Leech:* The ability of the sword to siphon away some of its victims spiritual energy for its own use is purchased as Leech with Contact Agent (-30%); Cosmic, Drains instantly on successful hit (+50%); Follow-Up, Melee Attack (-25%); Only Heals Energy Reserve (-20%); Steals Fatigue (-25%); and the usual gadget limitations. This adds to -80%. Leech 2 then ends up costing 6 points.

*Awakened Power – Psychic Blast:* The first awakened power is triggered when its user reduces a foe to 0 FP using the sword. This manifests as a psychokinetic blast that emanates from the blade. This is an alternate Crushing Attack with Explosion 1 (+50%); Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, Must come from Energy Reserve (-10%); and the standard gadget limitations. A 6d+3 blast costs 30 points; as an alternative attack, it adds 6 points to total cost (for a net 120 points).

### Gadget Limitations

All abilities are purchased with the gadget limitations of Can Be Stolen (Requires stealth or trickery), -20% and Unique, -25%. As creations of psychotronic artifice, they also have the Psionic power modifier, -10%.

## The Truth

Varies

Sealed in a forgotten vault, abandoned by its creators, is a terrible answer. Scratched out on an old blackboard is an elegant logic problem that can be read by anyone with a basic grasp of Mathematics (Applied). The solution is deceptively simple, but counterintuitive. The Truth is persistent; soon it's all the reader can think about. The world begins to make more sense, in all its madness and complexity. The Truth bores into the reader's consciousness, cascading into a series of inevitable emotional reactions and insights. Over time, it reworks the brain, allowing access to incredible mental power . . . at the price of temporary (and, later, permanent) madness.

The Truth tends to be subtle at first. Rarely do its carriers even realize that they have been subverted; they may not even be able to exactly remember what the original logic problem even depicted. They certainly will not be able to directly replicate it, even with Eidetic Memory. The result is psi power, but with a temporary mental disadvantage (see *Temporary Disadvantage*, p. B115) that is triggered by uncomfortable insight into the workings of the world. Common drawbacks include a curious detachment from other people (*Low Empathy*, p. B142), a volatile emotional state (*Manic-Depressive*, p. B143), and shock at how causality really works (*Phantom Voices*, p. B148, or *Stress Atavism*, p. B156). As the Truth becomes clearer these will develop into full-blown Disadvantages even as psionic power increases. A possible progression is:

*Infection:* Exposure to the Truth instills Illuminated (ESP, -10%) [14] with Required Disadvantage (Confused). Possible psi abilities include Awareness, Prognostication, and Psi Sense.

*Insight:* Knowing the Truth allows reality to be "tweaked" in subtle ways. This is Coincidence (**GURPS Psionic Powers**, p. 44) with Temporary Disadvantage (Indecisive, -10%) [26]. This may be associated with psi abilities that replicate Common Sense, Oracle, and Racial Memory, or any Probability Alteration ability.

*Dissonance:* The Truth eventually results in the carrier's corporeal form becoming unstuck in reality, creating disruptions in the local astral environment. This is Insubstantiality (Substantial Communication, +40%; Usually On, -40%) with Temporary Disadvantage (Lifebane, -10%) [72]. Astral Projection abilities may also manifest.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth Peters can neither confirm nor deny his involvement with cyberpsychotronic research programs while working with David Pulver on **GURPS Ultra-Tech**. Allegations that he has written for **GURPS** and *Shadowrun* with the express purpose of monitoring their audience for evidence of exposure to The Truth are groundless, and those with such claims should immediately report themselves to the nearest FBI office. As outlined in National Security Directive 52 (Revision 2c), all references to his current position as a graduate student in Moscow, Idaho, are to be omitted from all publications. Obey.