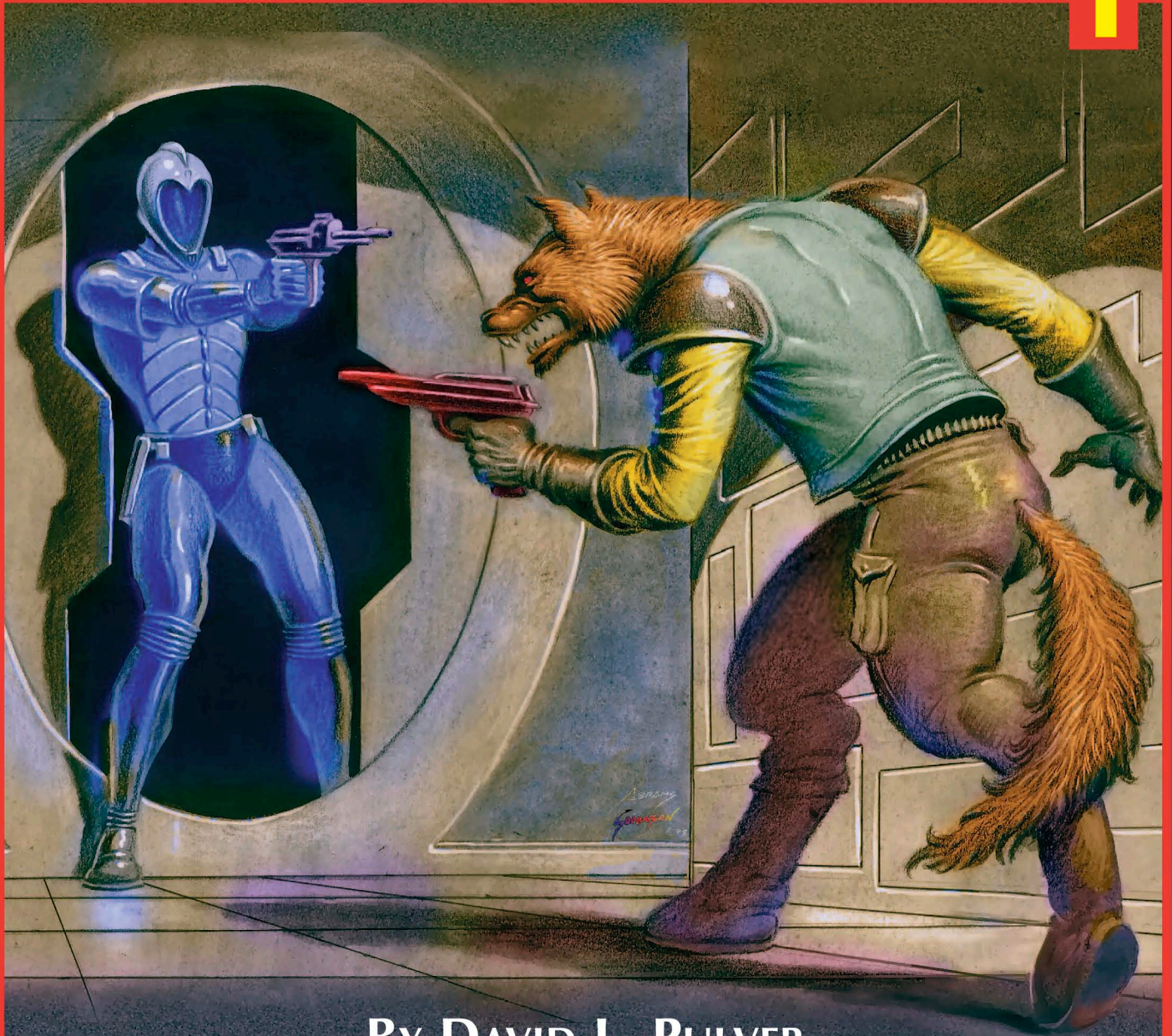


GURPS<sup>®</sup> *Traveller*<sup>®</sup>

# ALIEN RACES

*Zhodani, Vargr, and Other Races of the Spinward Marches*

1



BY DAVID L. PULVER

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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In contrast to the Imperium, the human-descended **Zhodani** have long embraced psi powers. Within their vast interstellar empire, crime is almost unknown, workers are uniformly happy in their jobs, and mental illness is as easy to cure as a paper cut, thanks to advanced powers of the mind . . . and periodic visits from the Thought Police.

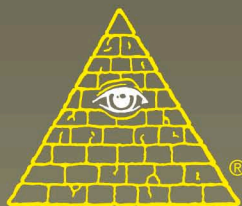
**The Vargr** are a race of aliens descended from transplanted Terran canines. Removed from Earth hundreds of millennia ago, the Vargr have continued to develop on worlds millions of miles away from their planet of origin, and now control hundreds of worlds, under almost as many separate governments.

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### THE XENOPHILES:

Written by

**DAVID L. PULVER**

Based on the award-winning *Traveller* science-fiction universe by

**MARC MILLER**

Edited by

**LOREN K. WISEMAN**

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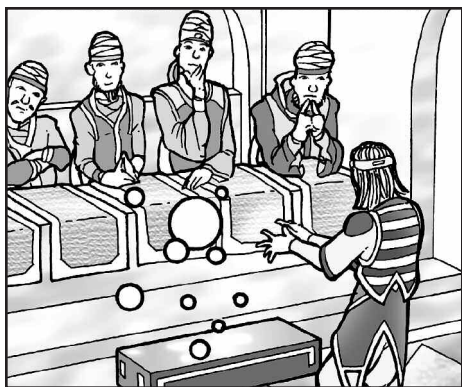
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## About GURPS

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The *GURPS Traveller Alien Races 1* Web page is at [www.sjgames.com/gurps/traveller/alienraces/](http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/traveller/alienraces/).

### Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*. Page references that begin with CI indicate *GURPS Compendium I*. Other references are GT for *GURPS Traveller*, T:BC for *Behind the Claw*, CII for *Compendium II*, S for *Space*, UT for *Ultra-Tech*, and VE for *Vehicles*. For a full list of abbreviations, see p. CI181 or the updated Web list at [www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html](http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html).

# INTRODUCTION

In these pages you'll find detailed descriptions of five alien races existing within the *GURPS Traveller* milieu.

The *Zhodani* are enemies of the Third Imperium, but are far from being simple villains. The most alien of the three major races of Humans, their unusual psionic-based society lacks freedoms we take for granted but has many admirable traits. Since *Zhodani* society is based around psionics, we've also included a chapter of additional guidelines for psionics in *Traveller*.

The wolflike *Vargr* are the other major race described in this book. Although their mindset is quite different than that of Humaniti, their adventurous nature and extensive contact with the Imperium makes them eminently suitable as player characters.

The three new “minor races” described in this book share two traits: all dwell in or near the *Zhodani* and *Vargr*, and all are just beginning to make their influence felt on the Spinward sectors of the Imperium. The enigmatic six-limbed *Clotho* are long-term allies of the *Zhodani*, while the discovery of the dinosaurlike *Drakarans* has ignited war and piracy among the small *Vargr* states on the *Zhodani* border. The most recently encountered of these races are the exotic gas-giant dwelling *Sheol*, whose highly unusual first contact has led to an uncommon degree of cooperation between the Imperium and *Zhodani* Consulate.

All of these races are intended to be useful both as NPCs and PCs; campaigns set mainly in the *Zhodani* Consulate, *Vargr* Extents and among the *Drak* worlds are all possible as well. Of course, there are many more aliens yet to come: *GURPS Alien Races 1* is planned as the first of a four-part series, and later books will cover the *Aslan*, *K'kree*, *Hivers* and *Droyne*, as well as many minor races, both old and new.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David L. Pulver is a game designer and author based in Kingston, Ontario. Born in Canada, he grew up in England and New Zealand before returning to the Great White North. *Traveller* was the second roleplaying game David ever refereed (starting in 1979). His own *Traveller* campaign lasted 10 years, eventually mutating into a hybrid of *GURPS Space* and *Traveller*. He is glad this eminently logical evolution has now been officially recognized as a Good Thing. David's published work includes over two dozen RPG sourcebooks including *GURPS Bio-Tech*, *GURPS Vehicles*, *Bubblegum Crisis: Before and After* (R. Talsorian), *Glory of Rome* (TSR) and *Aliens and Artifacts* (ICE).

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## JOURNAL OF THE TRAVELLERS' AID SOCIETY

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# The Zhodani

Humans evolved on Earth – Terra – over the past several million years. It was a great shock to the explorers from Earth to travel to the stars only to find other Humans already there, and ruling vast empires such as the First Imperium. It took many centuries before it could be established that all the races of Humanity had indeed originated on Terra, having been settled on other worlds some 300,000 years ago by the mysterious Ancients.

Of all these far-flung races of mankind, only three had succeeded in developing jump drive on their own: the Vilani of the First Imperium, the Solomani of Earth, and the Zhodani. By Terran standards, the Zhodani are the most alien.

The Zhodani have the longest unbroken stretch of civilization of any Human major race. Unlike the Solomani and Vilani, they did not experience a Long Night (see p. GT48). But in the past, the Zhodani people suffered their own tragedies, having faced near-extinction in their pre-history, achieved space flight, and then been thrown back to another dark age, only to rise again with a unique civilization based around the powers of the mind.

Even before they reached into space, the Zhodani began to develop the science of psionics and integrated it into their society. The result was a culture in which people not only act, but also think, in a different way than any other spacefaring Human race – and one which possessed radically different values than those of the Terran- and Vilani-dominated Third Imperium.

## PHYSIOLOGY

Though Human in all respects, the Zhodani differ slightly in appearance from Humans of Solomani or Vilani ancestry. They tend to be tall and lithe, averaging close to seven feet tall and roughly 200 pounds. Complexions are predominantly swarthy and hair color is usually black or brown. Blond hair is uncommon, but a mutation that occurred on Zhdant in the last 10,000 years made prematurely gray hair twice as common as red hair.

Zhodani have 28 teeth (as opposed to Solomani and Vilani with 32) and the teeth tend to average a tiny bit larger. This is not especially noticeable, but it does mean a brief dental examination can identify a Zhodani who has not been surgically altered.

All the physiological characteristics of Zhodani are the result of two factors: the original gene pool of the Humans who first inhabited Zhdant and minor mutations or developments which have taken place during the 300,000 years they have lived on their planet. Their height and physical build are both consequences of Zhdant's 0.85 G surface gravity. Basic complexion was shaped by environmental factors which selected specific traits during evolution on Zhdant.

The original Zhodani came from a rather limited stock: under 5,000 persons were brought by the Ancients to Zhdant, all from the same small area. Coupled with a lower rate of environmental mutation (less solar radiation from Zhdant's K0 star) and a social reluctance to intermarry with other Humanity, modern Zhodani do not have the wide range of racial characteristics (coloring, height, etc.) that Imperial citizens possess.

## *The Zhodani and the Ancients*

The story of the Zhodani people begins with the arrival of a fleet of Ancients starships in the Zhdant system, around the year -302,000. They spent a year or two constructing a pair of colonies, then jumped out-system, vanishing from history. The first Ancient settlement was a series of bases along the western coast of Qiknavra (the smaller of Zhdant's two continents): towering skyscrapers in the western mountain ranges and undersea domed cities off the shore, all linked by an extensive grav-levitation railway network. The second settlement was not on the planet Zhdant, but rather on Viepchlakl, its tide-locked moon, located on a wind-swept desert plain.

Over the next century, the two bases grew into cities, eventually having a population of perhaps 100,000 Droyne and a few of the super-Droyne called Ancients. Each was the center of a vibrant economy. They traded goods and services between one another, and constructed other bases. They sent ships out into the asteroid belt, captured planetoids, and brought them back to serve as space stations and sources of mineral wealth.

"Zhdant City," the name present-day archaeologists have given to the planetary metropolis on the Qiknavra coast, was the center for extensive agricultural and industrial activities. Vast acreages were cultivated, megatons of minerals were mined, and heavy industries were established. Many of the Ancients' activities left marks that remain today: a great open-pit copper mine scars the western edge of the Qiknavra mountain range, and toxic waste dumps dating back to this period have also been found.

Not all Ancient activities were explicable – without context, some seem strange, or even senseless. The Ancients dug curving trenches in the sea bed, and then filled them up with material quarried from elsewhere on the planet. They sliced off mountain tops, lifted them 20 yards into the air, and then filled in the gaps with artificial stone. They built reinforced steel buildings and left them empty and sealed against entry.

*Continued on next page . . .*

## The Zhodani and the Ancients

[Continued]

Instead of using robots as servants, as they were known to have done on other worlds, the Ancients brought with them Terran Humans. It is unknown whether they were physically removed from Earth itself, or were grown from ova and sperm banks taken from a prior sampling of Earth populations; either were well within the Ancients' capabilities. In any case, the Humans were bred until their population was nearly half a million strong. The exact role Humans played in Zhdant City's society remains obscure, but evidence suggests they were both pet and servant.

Viepchakl City also experienced extensive developments. The city's foundations burrowed miles beneath the lunar crust. Its towers climbed six miles into the sky. The denizens of the city constructed numerous identical buildings, perhaps residential in nature, and a vast tunnel network that carried services to them. As with Zhdant City, the Ancients also performed activities whose exact purpose remains unknown. Caches of desert sands were carefully stored, sorted into stockpiles based on color or grain size. They bored mile-long roads right through solid rock faces with the precision of a laser, only to stop after encountering chasms a few yards across. Stones massing hundreds of tons were quarried, shaped into spheres, and transported half-way across the moon, only to be then left standing forlorn in barren steppes. There is no evidence, however, that Viepchakl City ever housed or bred Humans, or imported them from Zhdant City.

On other worlds, individual Ancient sites are always different. The two cities reflected this feature in almost every aspect, ranging from architectural styles and materials to mining techniques (shaped nuclear charges and X-ray lasers on the moon, while disintegrators and plasma bores were used on Zhdant). They did have one single feature in common: in both cities, road intersections were marked by a stone stanchion topped with a polished crystal octahedron. Archeologists differ in their interpretation of this feature's significance – some believe them a decoration, others see them as having served a practical purpose, e.g., as signposts or for traffic direction.

## Diet

Zhodani can also digest certain proteins native to Zhdant which are indigestible by off-world Humans. This is likely an evolutionary adaptation, though it may also result from Ancient engineering. A minority of popular Zhodani foodstuffs and meat animals are *not* digestible by other Human races; eating them may result in digestive problems, allergic reactions or food poisoning.

Restaurants and food shops in regions frequented by non-Zhodani Humans (e.g., in startowns on the Zhodani-Imperial border) will have menus or labels that mark what foods are or aren't appropriate for non-Zhodani. Likewise, caterers at official diplomatic receptions will be aware of the problem. Travelers eating elsewhere in the Consulate should exercise caution.

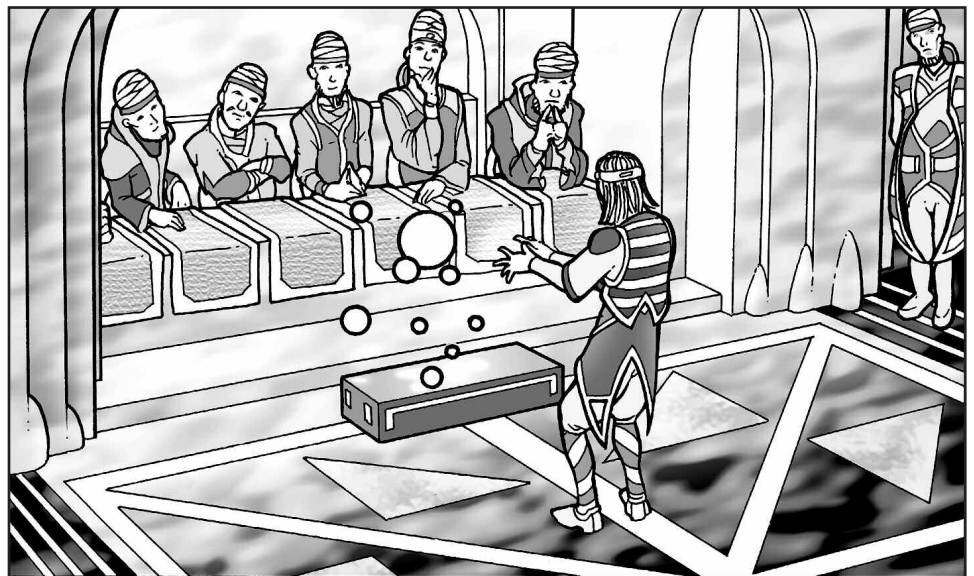
## ZHODANI PHILOSOPHY

The Zhodani cannot be said to have a "religion," for they do not acknowledge, let alone worship, any sort of Supreme Being, nor do they believe in an afterlife in the conventional sense. The ancient Zhodani worship of the moon god Viapchakl had fallen by the wayside as early as the industrial revolution, and had disappeared entirely by the "Second Dark Age" that saw the rise of the psionic nobility. Around -6623 on Zhdant there appeared what some Solomani academics have termed a vaguely Buddhist, vaguely "green" philosophy, *Tavrziانش* ("morality's path"), which is taught in the schools as a matter of fact and endorsed by the state as a component of "proper thought." It is governed by a small organization, academic and secular, the *Fevranzhtavrchedl'* ("guardians of the book"), which every 50 years or so releases a slightly modified version of the "holy book," the *Fevranzhtavr* ("the book of morality").

Tavrziانش holds that life is a matter of duty. Duty arose with life; even the humblest creatures have and perform their duty, in an unconscious "state of grace." Nevertheless, even unintelligent life can fail in its duty. A plague of rodents would be seen, philosophically, as an indication that the rodents had forgotten their place, and corrective measures would be justified.

With intelligence comes the ability to understand one's duty to all life and most especially to one's race. Duty to the race takes priority over all other duties, but it is most praiseworthy to keep one's duties from coming into conflict . . . thus, the delicacy with which the Zhodani contacted, befriended and incorporated the Clotho. The Zhodani can contemplate war, and even genocide, to protect their race, but they follow Tavrziانش better if they protect other life, especially intelligent life, as well.

Duty is also the watchword of the individual. It is understood that everyone has a duty to the race; proles do their duty in one way, intendants and nobles in another.





# The Vargr

## Problems in Vargr Historiography

No completely accurate and trustworthy account exists of Vargr history from their original transplantation to the point where they first made their presence known to other starfaring cultures. As with many other elements of Vargr society and background, truth is frequently obscured by a welter of contradictory claims and interpretations among Vargr writers; few human scholars have been able to sift through the contradictory material of rival Vargr historians to arrive at any consensus of what actually happened.

The same problems have hampered first-hand scholarship by Vargr themselves; few ancient Vargr historians wrote with any eye to a goal other than pleasing those who held power at the time, and many rewrote the past to support current regimes. That such occurred in human society is not the point; among the Vargr it's not even seen as dishonest. Much of history is political literature, and Vargr racial pride tends to discourage too much probing by alien outsiders into the cherished myths of this or that group.



The Vargr are a major race of intelligent humanoid beings who resemble anthropomorphic wolves. They are unique among major races, and indeed most sapient species, in that they were not the product of natural selection, but are rather the culmination of an experiment in artificial evolution by the Ancients.

Vargr were initially a puzzle for xenologists. The Vargr did not seem to “fit,” having a biochemistry and genetic makeup distinct from most other native flora and fauna indigenous to Lair, their purported homeworld. This was not a new puzzle: similar problems had confronted scientists studying the origins of the Vilani, Zhodani and many human minor races collectively known as Humaniti. All of these enigmas were solved after contact with the Solomani, the humans from Earth. It was eventually discovered that the Vargr, like all the races of Humaniti, had a Terrestrial genetic origin.

Unlike Humaniti, however, the Vargr were not simply transplanted. During the early years of the Third Imperium, researchers concluded that they were the result of genetic manipulation of Terran carnivores, probably wolves. Archaeological data and other evidence (such their presence on the Droyne caste symbols known as Coyns) suggest the Ancients were responsible.

The Vargr are descended from carnivore stock transplanted from Terra to Lair/Grnouv in the Provence Sector 300,000 years ago, during the heyday of the Ancients. These transplanted carnivores were of the family *Canidae* and almost certainly the genus *Canis*, most likely *Canis lupus* (wolves). However, DNA from other canids including jackal (*C. mesomelas*), coyote (*C. latrans*) and fox (genus *Vulpes*) also seems to have been used to a lesser extent. Extensive genetic engineering was performed to give the Vargr intelligence and manipulative ability, and transform them from quadrupeds to bipeds.

The Vargr retain many of the characteristics of their canine ancestors, to a greater degree than humans do with primates. Also, some 300,000 years of natural adaptation took place. It appears the Vargr were not fully fitted to the environment of Lair, and this produced rigorous conditions which made natural selection essential to the survival of the race. This seems to have resulted in further adaptations and development not introduced by Ancient experimentation, which may have been the Ancients' intent. Thus, the Vargr are, in effect, products of both genetic engineering and some degree of evolution.

## PHYSIOLOGY

Vargr are upright bipeds who resemble a humanoid wolf with a bipedal posture and arms ending in hands instead of paws. Vargr legs are digitigrade – that is, they walk on their toes, their heel not touching the ground. Their bodies are covered with short fur, generally gray, brown, black or rust colored, though a wider variety of patterns appear in Vargr than in Terrestrial wolves. Their fairly long tails end in a flaring brush. Their muzzle is shorter and less pronounced than a Terran canine, but still quite evident with strong jaws and sharp teeth. They have other characteristics consistent with their terrestrial mammalian origin.

A typical adult male Vargr stands five feet, four inches tall (1.6 meters) and weighs approximately 135 pounds (60 kilograms), while Vargr females are an inch or two shorter and 5-10 pounds lighter. On average, Vargr aren't as strong as

# Psionics

## Psionic Powers

This section expands on the rules for creating psionic characters found on p. GT84.

A starting character may be created with any power level in Telepathy, ESP, Psychokinesis, Healing or Teleportation. This does not require an Unusual Background – only starting with psionic skills requires one! (The only exception to this is if their race is specifically lacking in psionic power.)

Limitations may be taken on these powers. In particular, individuals with Healing *must* take the limitation “the psi can only use the power on himself” (2/3 cost). Individuals with Teleportation must take “objects retain vector and speed” (1/2 cost).

A character may take Unusual Background (Special Powers) [10 points]. This enables him to, with GM permission, buy psi powers *not* listed on p. GT84, or lacking the mandatory limitations described above. However, the GM may veto powers that seem inappropriate or unbalancing, or require different limitations in the place of the more standard examples.

**Deterioration:** Characters who buy powers but who lack formal psionic training (see below) will find their powers deteriorate with time. If they are 18 or over, *one level of power* will be lost from *each* power every four years until they receive psionic training at a psi institute (p. 138).

Note that a character who lacks training is unlikely to have been tested – as such, a player character would not actually know what powers he has, or indeed, whether he has any. This can be roleplayed, or the GM may require the player simply put aside a pool of points, and leave it up to the GM to choose the powers.

*Psionics:* The criminal use of mental powers for the manipulation of matter and energy and for communication. It has been demonstrated that minds (Human or non-Human, conscious or unconscious, intelligent or unintelligent) contain some capacity to operate without apparent use of physical facilities. For an individual to seek such training is a criminal act.

– Imperial Encyclopedia library data entry

*Psionics:* The ability of living things to remotely manipulate matter, energy and space/time through mental techniques. The responsible use of psionic techniques is vital to the establishment and functioning of a mature society.

– Zhodani Consulate library data entry

## Who Is Psionic?

Studies conducted by the Zhodani and by Imperial psionic institutes prior to the PsionicSuppressions suggest most Humans have measurable psionic strength in one or more powers (such as telepathy, ESP, healing, psychokinesis or teleportation). This strength, known as *power level*, can be measured and tested. Both power possessed and power level vary widely from individual to individual.

The majority of Humaniti and most alien races are born with very modest power levels in a single power. Powers vary in frequency: telepathy (the most common) psychokinesis and ESP (nearly as common), healing (uncommon), teleportation (rare). Various very rare “special” abilities are also documented.

## How Do Psionics Work?

Where do psis get the power to do what they do? There are many popular theories, ranging from near-mystical extra-dimensional energy fields to so-far-undiscovered psionic particles (“psions”) generated by psi-active brains. Some people even theorize that human psis are somehow tapping the powers of hidden “god machines” left by the Ancients.



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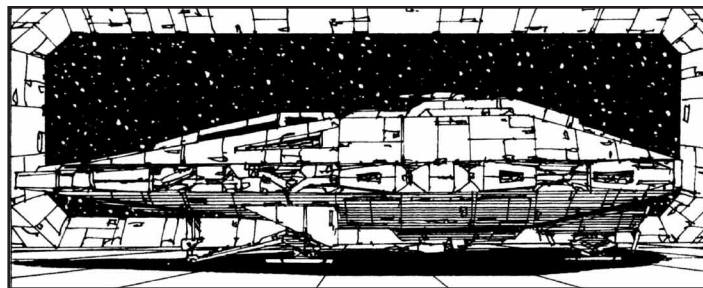
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