

PYRAMID[®]

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STRANGE POWERS

**ANTHROPOMORPHIZED
HIGH-TECH WEAPONS**
by David L. Pulver

MASK OF HUMANITY
by Christopher R. Rice

HIGH PSI
by Kelly Pedersen

SNAKES WHO WALK
by W.A. Frick

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ARTICLE COLORS

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features

Purple: Systemless Features

COVER ART

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

– Victoria Forester, *The Girl Who Could Fly*

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FROM THE EDITOR

THE SECRET ORIGINS OF STRANGENESS

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

And the answer is, “Sure! We can do whatever we want! We’re *mad with power!!!*” And then I started thinking about “mad” and “power,” and – long story short – that’s why you’re holding the *Strange Powers* issue here.

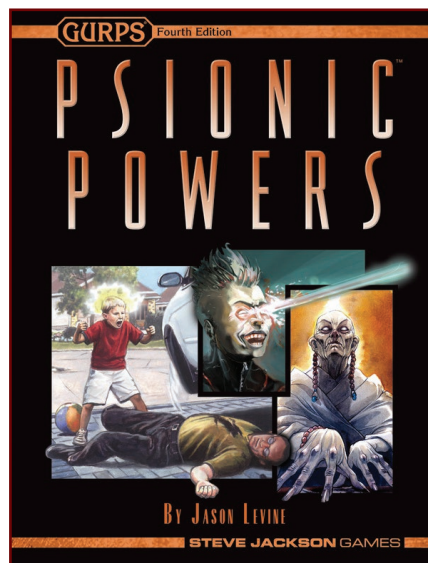
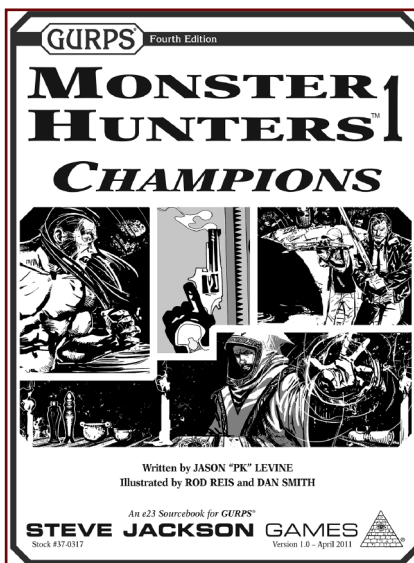
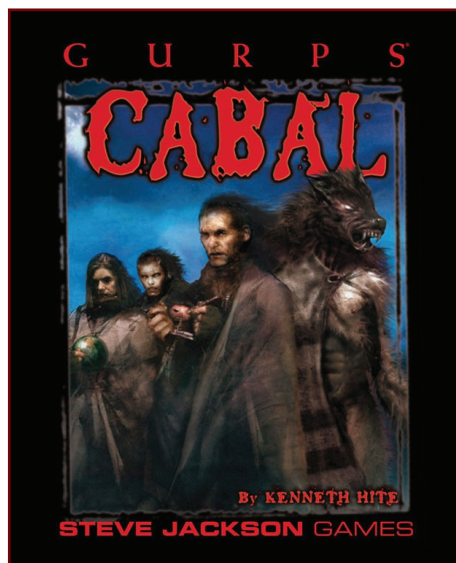
Of course, this issue isn’t *all* about non-magical goodness. I think those creepy snake-people on pp. 27-34 sneaked something magical in . . . but they’re hewing pretty close to the *weirdness* I’m striving for with this issue.

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

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

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

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



Additional Material: Christopher R. Rice

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

Besides the psionic skills they cover, wildcards may provide additional benefits. Each can substitute for Electronics Operation (Psychotronic) and Expert Skill (Psionics) with

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

EPIC TECHNIQUES

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

ANTI-PSI

Screaming Sanctuary

Hard

Default: Screaming-15; cannot exceed Screaming.

Prerequisite: Screaming level 2 or higher.

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

Ultimate Negator

Hard

Default: Cancellation-30; cannot exceed Cancellation.

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

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

ASTRAL PROJECTION

Ectoplasmic Materialization

Hard

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

While in astral form, you can reach into the material plane, using ectoplasm to give temporary substance to any part of

your body you want. This allows you to touch, manipulate, or even attack a material target. The body part used is equally vulnerable to physical attack!

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

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

... and there are even rumors, Miss Grey, of mutants so powerful that they can enter our minds and control our thoughts, taking away our God-given free will.

– Senator Kelly, in X-Men (2000)

ERGOKINESIS

Hyper-Compression

Hard

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

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

Façade Examples

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

HOW DOES THE FAÇADE FUNCTION?

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

If a mundane witnesses supernatural forces or beings, then he must make two rolls. The first is a Quick Contest of Will vs. the Façade Rating (see *The Façade’s Current Strength*, p. 15). This determines a mundane’s initial reaction (see the table, below). The second is a Will roll, modified by the “Long-Term

Modifier” column from the *Initial Response Table*. For example, assuming the first roll failed by 5, the second roll would be at -2. This determines any long-term consequences (see the table, p. 15). Both rolls are adjusted by relevant circumstances from *Affected Subject Will Modifiers* (p. 15), equipment (p. 16), advantages, etc.

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

Initial Response Table

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

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

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

– Shawn, in *The Secret World of Arrietty*

LORD CARSON OF SETH (KAAS'STH'RAA)

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

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

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

Fright Check: -4.

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

Claws (16): 1d+1 cutting. Reach C.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Energy Reserve 20 (Magic); Intolerance (Total; Non-Reptiles); Magery 6; Patron

(House of Seth; 12 or less); Serpent-Lord (p. 33); Wealth (Multimillionaire 3).

Skills: Acting-16; Administration-16; Brawling-16; Detect Lies-16; Finance-16; Intimidation-20; Mind Block-16; Thaumatology-20; plus an assortment of spells of the Animal (specialized in snakes and reptiles), Body Control, Communication/Empathy, Food, Healing, Illusion/Creation, Knowledge, Meta-Spell, Mind Control, and Protection/Warning Colleges, all at level 20.

Notes: All of Lord Carson's spells have -2 to FP cost due to high skill. These stats assume default *GURPS* magic. For a campaign using *Ritual Path magic*, reduce Thaumatology to 18, and replace spells with the Paths of Body, Energy, Magic, Mind, and Spirit (all at level 18). If using *Path/Book magic*, replace Thaumatology with Ritual Magic (Serpent-Lord)-18, and spells with the Paths of Cunning, Form, Health, Knowledge, Protection, and Spirit (all at level 18). In the latter two cases, it's up to the GM whether or not he has Path/Book Adept (*GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 123) or Ritual Adept (*GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*, p. 25); either of these would increase the reptoid's power even more. In any setting that has them, Lord Carson will have an abundance of useful magical items, charms (*GURPS Monster Hunters 1*, p. 38), powerstones (*GURPS Magic*, p. 20), or even technological gadgets for every contingency.

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

APOPHIS AND THE QLIPPOTH

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

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

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

Light-Drinker (Spawn of Apophis)

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

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

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

Fright Check: -6.

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