

GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

POWERS

The Weird



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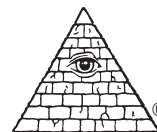
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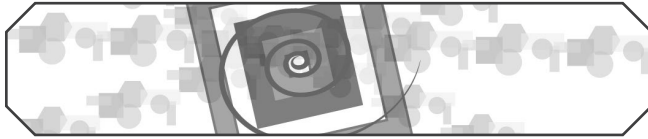
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ABOUT GURPS

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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.

INTRODUCTION

I had worked long into the night; I did not at once realize that the sound that woke me was my doorknocker. It stopped as I was rising, but began once more as I hastened to the door, pulling a coat over my rumpled clothing.

I was not expecting to face a fashionably dressed woman. "Victor? May I come in?"

As she spoke my memory recalled her, despite her being older and in very different garb. "Clélie!", I said. "Of course, be welcome!"

She offered her hand, as of old, but now I bowed over it.

Her brow rose, and she asked, "You are answering your own door?"

I explained that I had no manservant at present; in fact I had given Heinrich his letter of recommendation when I began my researches, but I did not hasten to say so. Instead I put the kettle to boil, and we spoke of medicine and natural philosophy. She was more fully informed than I, for my own work had pre-occupied me. Not merely in the anatomical sciences, her own favored field, but also in the physiology that I emphasized, she had discoveries of which to tell me.

At last she set down her cup, and said, "But in fact, Victor, I have taken a renewed interest in that subject. In fact, I have in mind some experimental work with living animals, rather than mere dissection. But it's not easy for me to make all the arrangements. I wondered if you could act on my behalf, or introduce me to someone who can?"

In roleplaying games, as in fiction, there's the fantastic and then there's the *weird*. Many tales have fantastic elements, taken from myths and legends, or from scientific or historical speculation; many heroes have special abilities gained from magic or technology or intensive training. And then there are classic writers like H.P. Lovecraft and contemporary ones like China Miéville who imagine things stranger than we're used to – things that shake our sense of what's possible: the *weird*. There's a current literary movement devoted to such imaginings, the New Weird; there have been dramatic series such as *The X-Files* and *Fringe*, and graphic novels such as *Planetary* (or, earlier, Grant Morrison's *Doom Patrol*); and now RPGs have started to explore this genre as well.

GURPS Powers: The Weird is a sourcebook for that exploration. As its title implies, it's largely about weird powers: the capabilities of exotic and mysterious supers, of cosmic entities, of alien beings who have slipped in through the cracks in reality . . . and of human explorers who have gone there and come back changed. Many of these powers are Cosmic, and so this work is partly an exploration of what can be done with the Cosmic enhancement – but it's also an examination of the *kinds* of superhuman feats that fit the weird genres. And it explores the exotic realms that are the sources of these powers and the homelands of these really alien aliens.

In addition, **The Weird** looks at the human ability to understand and create the extraordinary. Its collection of weird-science styles – largely based on the Weird Science skill and the Gadgeteer advantage – do for cinematic science what martial-arts styles do for combat. These styles can produce

empowered beings and psionic or superscience gadgets of the familiar sorts, but they can also confer stranger powers, create weird devices, and open the way into unaccountable realms.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

To get the most from the weird-science styles in this supplement, you'll need **GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks**. Some of those styles can provide frameworks for ideas presented in **GURPS Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality**, **GURPS Psionic Powers**, and *Pyramid* #3/46: *Weird Science*. The statistics for weird powers make use of many options from **GURPS Powers**, **GURPS Power-Ups 4: Enhancements**, and **GURPS Power-Ups 8: Limitations**.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of **GURPS Powers: The Weird**. All but a few passages are original.

*On the fringes of science
there have always existed
odd pockets of knowledge,
which nobody quite knows
what to do with, until
suddenly a use is found and
they take off like rockets.*

– Ian Johnston,
**Measured Tones:
The Interplay of
Physics and Music**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William H. Stoddard began playing roleplaying games in 1975, and published his first book, **GURPS Steampunk**, in 2000. He's an active roleplayer and Game Master in the San Diego area; many of his games have been pulp, supers, or cosmic horror, and have featured strange inventions or exotic powers. They called him mad at the university.

STYLES

Cinematic science can be portrayed as a set of styles, in the same way as martial arts or magic. Like martial-arts styles, cinematic science styles grow out of the history of the field. Each one permits a different set of discoveries, inventions, or procedures.

HOW STYLES WORK

Weird-science styles allow cinematic scientific feats, often in the form of gadgeteering. They include the following traits:

Style Cost: The minimum total point cost for the style components, found as follows:

Style cost = 1 point for Style Familiarity + 1 point in the limiting skill + 1 point in each other required skill.

Style Prerequisite: An advantage that enables or aids cinematic feats and permits learning the style – often Gadgeteer (or Quick Gadgeteer, if the GM allows it). Its point cost is *not* counted in style cost.

Tech Levels: A range of TLs at which the style is pursued. These include the ^ modifier for superscience.

Style Familiarity: A cinematic perk that represents knowledge of a particular field of weird science. It gives these benefits:

- You have the equivalent of a Claim to Hospitality (p. B41) with other practitioners of your science, giving you a place to stay while working on your projects.
- You're familiar with the style's culture. When you deal with another scientist who has this perk, neither of you suffers -3 for lack of Cultural Familiarity when rolling vs. skills such as Savoir-Faire and Teaching.
- You can spend earned points to improve the style's techniques, even if these are normally off-limits to PCs.

Limiting Skill: A skill central to the style. When you perform cinematic feats, *your effective skill cannot exceed your level with the limiting skill.* Weird Science is often a limiting

skill for weird-science styles, just as Ritual Magic limits magical Path/Book skills (see *GURPS Thaumatology*).

Other Required Skills: Skills that all practitioners of the style must learn.

Techniques: Some of a style's cinematic feats are subject to skill modifiers; notably, styles with Gadgeteer as a prerequisite have complexity penalties for inventions. Techniques can compensate for such penalties. Other techniques grant bonuses to skills for specific feats. You must invest at least one point in the skill to which a technique defaults before improving the technique. (If you have less than four points in the skill, buying up the skill is usually more efficient!)

Perks: Perks available to style practitioners. You can buy one such perk per 10 points you have in the style's required skills. You can buy one additional perk from that list or from generally available perks related to science, technology, work, or learning ability per 20 points in scientific or technological skills.

The GM may further define *optional* traits for a style, including advantages, perks, disadvantages, skills, or techniques.

WEIRD-SCIENCE STYLES

The following styles are a sample of past and present speculations about scientific wonders. Some include techniques that can grant advantages or remove disadvantages; see in particular *Mind Modification* (p. 11) and *Ontogenetics* (pp. 11-12). In general, such enhancements should be paid for with character points (see *Transformations*, pp. B294-296). If the recipient lacks sufficient points, the technique either fails or grants only short-term benefits. The GM may waive this for procedures that remove disabilities gained in play.

Contrivance

Proposals for fantastic mechanisms go back to the beginnings of machine technology in the ancient world; see *GURPS Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality* for examples. A variety of weird-science styles represent these technological "what ifs." Those given here are a small sample.

Automata

7 points

Style Prerequisite: Gadgeteer.

Tech Levels: (1+1)^, or 2^ to 5^.

Historically, self-moving mechanisms go back to the Roman Empire, and stories of them were told even earlier. Such a device requires a power source. Hydraulic power is Simple; overcoming the technical difficulties of pneumatic or steam power is Average. Clockwork automata become available at TL4 as Simple devices; add Clockwork to the Engineer and Mechanic specialties permitted. Automata with significant physical strength – and, prior to clockwork, those with purely internal power sources (such as Talos' single vein filled with ichor) – are Complex.

WILDCARDS

Another option for weird science is to replace styles with Style! skills. These are bought as standard wildcard skills (p. B175). They still require the style prerequisite, but they automatically include the Style Familiarity perk, the limiting skill, and all other required skills. Other perks still cost a point apiece, but an unlimited number can be bought – and any perk that's normally specialized to one particular skill applies to every skill the Style! includes.

Techniques specific to the style – including inventions with gadgeteering penalties – can be attempted without penalty. Techniques available through Technology Secret still have that prerequisite, but can be attempted without penalty if it's met. Other techniques that default to the skills the Style! encompasses have the normal penalties.

Superhuman intellectual ability might have access to almost *any* of the powers in Chapter 3. Logos (p. 27) is perhaps the single most appropriate choice.

WEIRD SCIENCE AND SUPERSCIENCE

The TLs assigned to weird-science styles in Chapter 1 bear the “^” symbol for superscience. It’s hard to avoid this – if you can do things that go beyond what real science is capable of, you must be relying on unknown scientific principles! Yet not all superscience is *weird* science.

The styles in this work are cinematic; they’re designed to fit the scientists of movies and pulp fiction. Weird science is about astonishing new theories that fit perfectly into this approach. Superscience includes scientific principles that we haven’t discovered yet and may never discover, but that could inspire structured, reproducible research and invention if they were true. Weird science is often irreproducible, or reproducible only through special personal insights and at the risk of one’s sanity.

RELICS AND REALITY SHARDS

Fiction portrays relics of vanished human civilizations, nonhuman civilizations, and alien visits. Some stories depict entire relic civilizations; Atlantis is especially popular, whether as sunken ruins or as a living city of mer-people. Civilizations such as these are often conceived as having technology based on principles unknown today.

Some relics might survive from an entirely different reality. Physicists have seriously speculated, for example, that magnetic monopoles are relics of the first instants after the Big Bang – and puzzled over why we haven’t found any! What if, with the tiny scale and high energy density of that epoch, entire civilizations arose and perished in less than a microsecond, leaving artifacts of their technology, or even inhabited refuges smaller than a molecule, shielded against the lethal new universe around them?

Metaphysical changes in reality can also be imagined, as in Tolkien’s account of the fall of Numenor, when the flat Earth was remade as a globe; the Rings of Power and the elves themselves are metaphysical relics. S.M. Stirling’s *Emberverse* series envisions a *reversal* of such an event that brings magic back into the world – including weird magical threats to humanity. This is also the premise of the classic roleplaying game *Shadowrun*.

If time travel is possible, it may enable changing the past, replacing one history with another – a process known as a *reality quake* (p. B534 and *GURPS Infinite Worlds*, pp. 76-77) in the *Infinite Worlds* setting. Mary Gentle’s *Ash* envisions archaeologists and historians perplexed by traces of a vanished

history. See *GURPS Horror: The Madness Dossier* for an entire campaign framework based on such a replacement – and on the threat of its being undone and the original history restored! Relics from replaced histories, or *reality shards*, might have the potential to transform the universe into the likeness of the one they came from. A classic treatment is Jorge Luis Borges’ “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*,” in which an encyclopedia article about a country in an invented world opens the way for an invasion by that world’s reality.

Any of the powers in Chapter 3 can come from – or be – a reality shard.

EXPERIMENTAL WEIRDNESS

Even if weird realms are inaccessible and weird objects aren’t scattered around, it may be possible to manifest or create weirdness experimentally. The history of science furnishes models for this; for example, when Becquerel discovered that uranium salts would blacken a photographic plate, the resulting investigation of radioactivity overturned firmly established natural laws such as conservation of mass. Researchers may concentrate traces of weirdness, develop sensitive detectors for it, or generate it artificially.

Weird experiments are a big part of cinematic science. Their discoveries can be the basis for applied techniques such as those discussed in Chapter 1. They might grant strange powers like those in Chapter 3. They may also produce the same kinds of lab accidents as weird technology (see the *Random Side Effects Table*, p. B479).

A potential threat of experimental weirdness is that it might spread beyond the laboratory, altering the nature of reality (see *Gadgeteer*, p. 4). This could create a doomsday device – one that would make human survival impossible. Or it may infect the world with survivable weirdness, turning people into supers or zombies, or leading to a post-apocalyptic setting or a return of magic.



Your ability works through air, water, and more exotic gases and liquids. You get +3 to locate concealed weapons and suchlike, and may ignore penalties for spotting objects hidden behind light brush. You have +2 to Observation rolls to spot things in an outdoor environment. Anything you detect, you can target with an attack.

Statistics: Para-Radar (Weird, -10%) [36].

Para-Radiation

Beams of intense para-energy can inflict damage in almost any form the GM cares to imagine. Below are some illustrative examples; all of these attacks have RoF 1 and Rcl 1. Roll vs. Innate Attack (Beam or Gaze), aided by Talent, to hit. Divide the Protection Factor (PF) of anti-radiation gear or Radiation Tolerance by 10 against para-radiation, but never reduce it below 1.

Blasting Radiation

15 points/level

This attack has 1/2D 100, Max 100, and Acc 4. It inflicts 1d(10) tight-beam burning damage per level. You can target the eyes or the vitals (wounding modifier for the vitals is $\times 2$), but there's no incendiary effect. You can Power Parry blasts of normal radiation or para-radiation.

Statistics: Burning Attack (Accurate 1, +5%; Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Increased 1/2D, $\times 10$, +15%; No Incendiary Effect, -10%; Weird, -10%) [15/level].

Lethal Radiation

13 points/level

This attack has 1/2D 50, Max 100, and Acc 3. It inflicts 1d(10) rads per level on living targets (see pp. B435-436 for effects). You can Power Parry blasts of normal radiation or para-radiation.

Statistics: Toxic Attack (Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Increased 1/2D, $\times 5$, +10%; Radiation, +25%; Weird, -10%) [13/level].

Mutagenic Radiation

21 points/level

This attack has 1/2D 10, Max 100, and Acc 3. It inflicts 2d corrosion damage *and* 1d(10) rads of weird radiation per level. The corrosion effect isn't localized injury but dispersed cellular mutation. Every 5 points of corrosion damage rolled subtracts 1 from your target's Damage Resistance. Rather than killing people, your radiation causes exotic changes (see *Weird Radiation*, below). You can Power Parry blasts of normal radiation or para-radiation.

Statistics: Corrosion Attack 2d (Accessibility, Only vs. organic tissue, -10%; Link, Toxic Attack, +10%; No Wounding, -50%; Weird, -10%) [8/level] + Toxic Attack (Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Link, Corrosion Attack, +10%; Radiation, +25%; Weird, -10%) [13/level].

Spy-Ray

58 points

You can emit a narrow beam of nearly undetectable energy that can pass through air or water, or up to one foot of solid material. Base range is 2,000 yards. You must make a Sense roll to find a target; once you do, you can both see and hear events taking place there, with another Sense roll to pick up details accurately.

Statistics: Para-Radar (Increased Range, $\times 10$, +30%; Penetrating, +50%; Restricted Arc, 60°, -75%; Stethoscopic, +50%; Weird, -10%) [58].

WEIRD RADIATION

Realistically, radiation inflicts burns, illness, and sometimes death; survivors risk blindness, sterility, or cancer. For the grim details, see pp. B435-436. But in cinematic, pulp, and comic-book treatments, radiation has *other* effects!

On exposure to weird radiation, roll vs. HT at the penalty for rads given by the *Radiation Effects Table* (p. B436). Critical success lets you escape unscathed; otherwise, there are bizarre consequences. Use *Duration of Crippling Injuries* (pp. B422-423) to determine how long these last: success indicates *temporary* effects; failure, *lasting* ones; and critical failure, *permanent* ones. Treatment by a physician has no effect unless the caregiver succeeds at a Weird Science roll. Weird radiation dosage accumulates, and partially diminishes over time, in the same way as realistic radiation.

Roll 3d for the effects of weird radiation:

- 3-4 – Evolutionary advance or regression. You acquire a new racial template for a suitable species, as described for Controlled Evolution (pp. 10-11). It's up to the GM whether you progress or regress!
- 5 – Gain one novel ability of an appropriate power *and* a disadvantage of equal point value.
- 6 – Gain one exotic perk (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, pp. 9-12). This must suit a living organism.
- 7 – Gross size change: +1 or -1 to SM.
- 8 – Skin turns bright green.*
- 9 – Altered metabolic rate: Shift one step up or down the scale of builds running from Skinny to Very Fat (p. B18).
- 10 – Abnormal hirsuteness: Either dense hair (treat as Fur, p. B101) or loss of all hair except eyelashes.*
- 11 – Acquire Unusual Biochemistry (p. B160).
- 12 – Polydactyly: One or more extra digits per hand and foot.*
- 13 – Prolonged loss of consciousness: Effects as for Coma (p. B429), but duration determined by HT roll for weird radiation.
- 14 – Chronic Pain (p. B426): Any combination of features that comes out to -5 points.
- 15 – Acquire Talent for a power, but no abilities.
- 16-17 – Partial advance or regression; see 3-4 and acquire *one* trait.
- 18 – Roll *twice* on this table, disregarding rolls of 18.

* May count as Distinctive Features (p. B165) or Unnatural Features (p. B22), at the GM's option. For nonhumans, substitute comparable changes; e.g., a creature that's already green may turn a different color, while one without fingers or toes might experience duplication of some other minor body part.

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