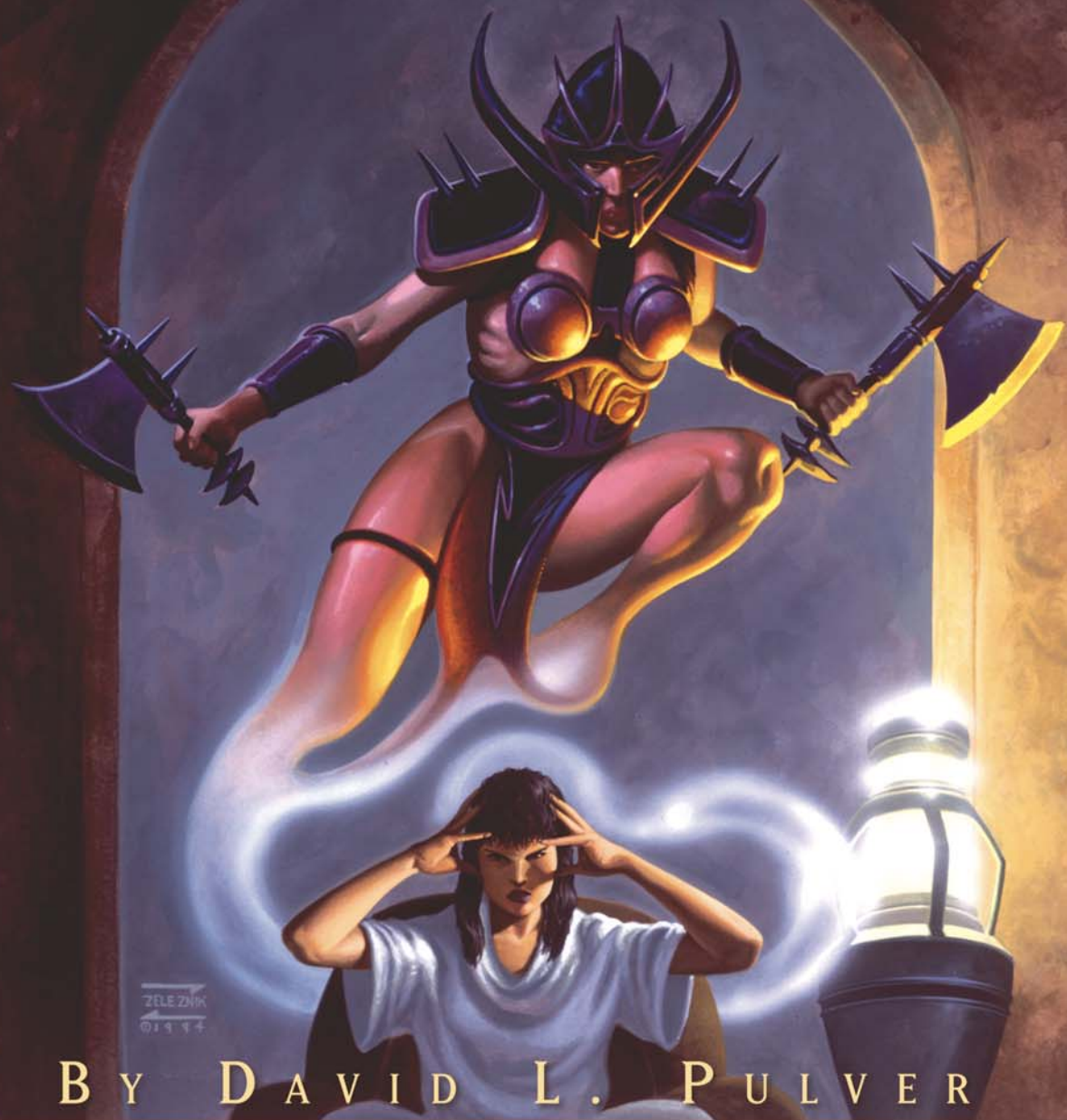


G U R P S®

# PSIONICS

FANTASTIC POWERS OF MIND OVER MATTER



BY DAVID L. PULVER

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

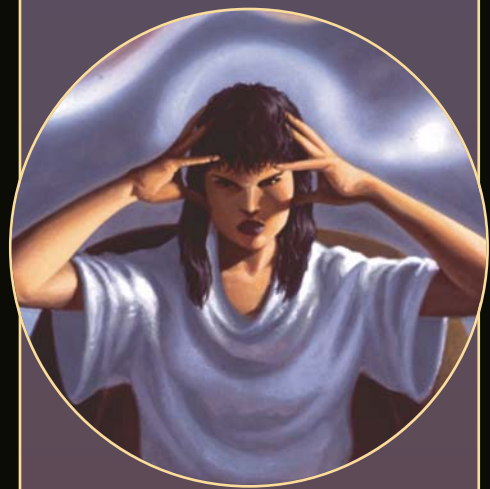
# MIND OVER MATTER

Spies and police who can read your thoughts. New Age mysticism merged with ultra-technology. Psychic vampires. Mass minds of terrible power. Telepathic computers. Gifted children killed or kidnapped by a power-mad government. This is the world of *GURPS Psionics*.

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- ◆ New Rules – featuring gestalts, group minds, latent psis, ghosts, psionic combat, and poltergeists.
- ◆ Psionic Technology – two chapters of psionic equipment, including psychotronic weaponry, dreamscanners, and psionic computers – even psionic starship drives!
- ◆ Campaign Advice – on smoothly integrating psi into other *GURPS* worldbooks, or designing your own psi campaign.
- ◆ Complete Campaign Background – in which powerful psis struggle with secret government agencies and globe-spanning conspiracies in a world eerily like our own . . .

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*GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition* and *Compendium I: Character Creation* are required to use this supplement in a *GURPS* campaign. *GURPS Psionics* is the ultimate sourcebook for psi powers. It includes a complete world background – and the GM can use it as a resource for campaigns in *any* background.

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# PSIONICS

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# INTRODUCTION

**T**elepathy. Teleportation. ESP. The powers of the mind . . . Once the stuff of superstition, these abilities are now a recognized part of science fiction, and many serious researchers are working to prove that they are *real*.

This book owes a great debt to the scores of science fiction writers who developed and codified the concept of *psionics*, John Campbell's name for the mighty science of mind that would come into being when these powers were understood as thoroughly as electronics or nuclear physics.

*GURPS Psionics* is designed for flexibility – it lets you create anything from the superminds of science fiction to psis with the more fickle powers of the “real world.” It will let you add psionic powers to a multitude of possible worlds, from four-color comics to the depths of space and the dark fantasies of modern horror.

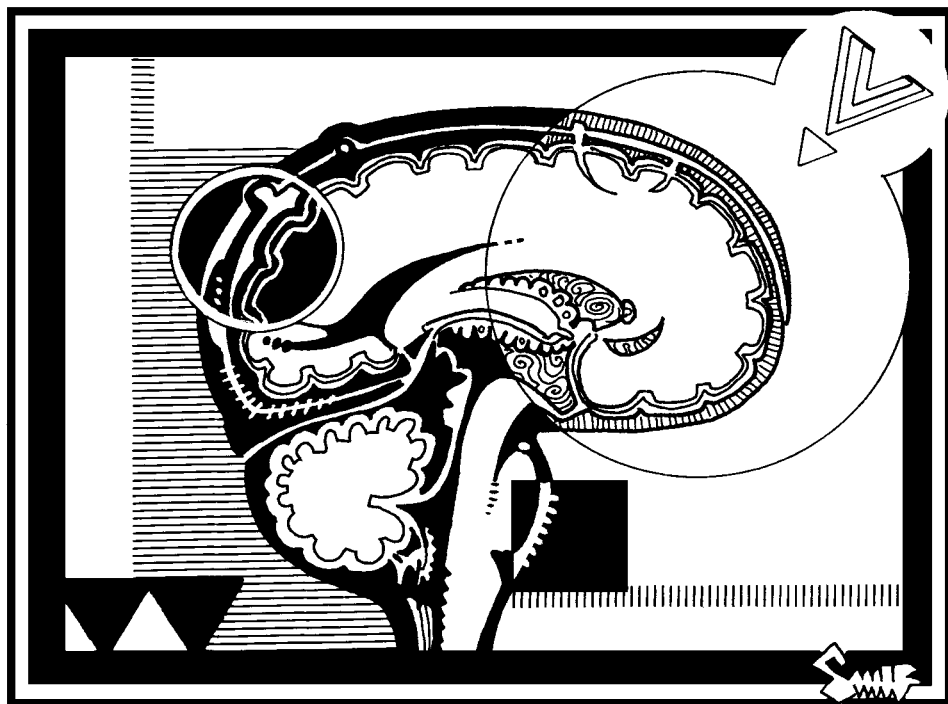
As well as making this a useful sourcebook for existing campaigns, I've also tried to show that psi can be the focus of an adventure, rather than just another superpower. Why not explore the mysteries of the human mind, the enigmatic astral plane, or the depths of a sleeper's dreams? The world of the *Phoenix Project* described in Chapter 8 presents some of these possibilities.

Welcome to the realms of the mind!

– David L. Pulver

## About the Author

David L. Pulver grew up in Canada, England, and New Zealand. He has been a science fan for most of his life, and an avid gamer since 1978. He began writing in 1988, and is the author of over 50 RPG books, including *Transhuman Space* and *GURPS Ultra-Tech*. David presently lives in Victoria, British Columbia. He has yet to manifest any major psionic abilities.



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The *GURPS Psionics* web page is [www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/psionics/](http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/psionics/).

## 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.

(Telepathy Power + Mind Shield skill) or (Will+10), whichever is better, vs. his (attacking Power + attacking Skill). Even if you lack a Mind Shield, you can try to evict an intruder in this way – roll vs. Will+10; if so the attempt counts as your action for the turn.

If you win, you drive the intruder out of your mind, and he will suffer the normal repeated-attempt penalties if he tries to return.

But if you lose, the enemy psi is in your mind for as long as he maintains his attacking skill. If you want to keep your thoughts a secret, you must make an IQ+4 (or Mind Block+4) roll to control your own thoughts, or you will immediately think of whatever it is you fear he is trying to learn – which can give your secrets away even to an unskilled attacker. If the enemy stays in your mind for long, your chance of keeping your secrets will decrease: see the Mind Block skill (p. 100) for details.

### **Mindswitch ★n/a Prerequisite: Telereceive-14+ and Telesend-14**

This ability enables you to switch your mind with a subject's, and vice versa. It may only be used after you have already made contact with the subject's mind using Telereceive. If successful, Mindswitch always costs *both bodies* 3 fatigue!

To use Mindswitch, take the Concentrate maneuver. At the beginning of your next turn, roll a Quick Contest of your Mindswitch skill vs. the subject's Will+5. A Mind Shield does not protect, since it has already been penetrated. If you win the contest, your mind enters the subject's body, and the subject's mind enters yours. If you make the skill roll but lose the contest, the subject will be aware of a "presence" in his mind.

Mindswitch is permanent – the only way to return to your body is to Mindswitch back. However, a *critical failure* on any Mindswitch attempt prevents you *ever* trying to switch into that body again – which may lock you out of your original form.

A person in a new body has that body's ST, DX, HT and all its physical advantages and disadvantages. He does *not* get the body's IQ, mental advantages and disadvantages, skills, or psi powers – he retains his own. (Exception: Combat Reflexes will be retained if *either* the mind or the body had the advantage!)

All mental and psi skills remain unchanged, but all physical skills are based on the new body's DX or HT. Thus, if someone with DX 11 and Broadsword-13 switched into a body with DX 15, he would now have Broadsword-17, since the new body has a DX 4 points higher.

Until the switcher becomes used to his new body, DX-and HT-based skills are temporarily reduced: -3 for the first hour, -2 until a day has passed, and -1 until a week has passed.

You can Mindswitch into an animal's body, providing it has IQ 5 or better. If a person switches into a body with a lower *starting* IQ, the GM may reduce the higher IQ by *half* the difference between the *average* intelligence of the races, and vice versa. Example: human starting IQ is 10; an average wolf has IQ 6, so the difference is IQ 4. If an IQ 13 man's mind is transferred into a wolf's body, his intelligence will drop by half of that normal difference, to IQ 11. Similarly, the wolf-mind now has the potential to gain 2 points of intelligence from the human brain. Any increase in IQ should be gradual (one IQ per week). A decrease in IQ will be instant.

If a character's point total increases as the result of a Mindswitch and he decides to remain in his new body, any points earned must first go to paying off the difference.

*Special Limitation:* The psi can *only* transfer to *one specific* body (e.g., a pair of telepathic twins who can shift their minds around, or a person who can swap minds with his animal companion). -50%.

### **Mindsword ★n/a**

### **Prerequisite: Mental Blow 12+**

You can create a visible blade of concentrated mental energy. To do so, take the Concentrate maneuver. At the beginning of your next turn, roll against Mindsword skill (the only modifiers that apply are those for Multiple Feats, p. 7). If you succeed, the Mindsword appears in your hand. It vanishes immediately if dropped; otherwise no concentration is required to maintain the Mindsword, but a new skill roll is required each minute. If the roll fails, the user can try again with the usual penalty and fatigue cost for Repeated Attempts.

The Mindsword is used exactly like a melee weapon – use Force Sword skill to wield it. Determine damage from the *Weapon Damage Table* in the *Basic Set*, basing damage on the wielder's Telepathy Power in place of ST. The user can thrust or swing: it does thrusting damage as actual impaling injury, or swinging damage to fatigue, like a Mental Blow.

A Mindsword's blow can be Dodged, but not Blocked. Only another Mindsword can parry it. Normal weapons (even energy blades like Force Swords) are useless. However, a Mindsword cannot parry a normal weapon either, only another Mindsword. Similarly, normal PD and DR (or Toughness) give no protection against a Mindsword. A Mind Shield has DR equal to half its Power. Psionic Resistance has DR equal to half its level.

A Mindsword can reach into or out of the astral plane, at -5 to hit. An astral entity uses its astral PD and DR against the blade.

The wielder of a Mindsword may aim at specific hit locations, at the usual penalties: blows to the vitals do double damage after DR, and strikes at the brain do triple damage, while blows to the limbs may numb (if fatigue damage is over half ST) or cripple (from HT damage), but limb damage in excess of half HT (or half ST) is lost.

*Note to GMs:* This power is definitely cinematic, if not actually "comic book." It's out of place in a hard-science campaign, and may be dropped.

### **Mindwipe ★n/a Prerequisite: Telesend and Telereceive at 12+**

This is the ability to edit or remove a subject's memories. To try it, the telepath must have *already* entered the subject's mind using Telereceive. Most attempts take at least an hour of solid concentration; if you are interrupted and fail a Will-3 roll, you must start again. Mindwipe is always resolved as a Quick Contest between your Mindwipe skill and the subject's Will (once per hour for long processes). If the user fails, the subject will be aware that someone is trying to tamper with his mind. If the user succeeds several times but then fails, the subject's memory will reappear in 3d days.

Since it takes so long, Mindwipe is best performed on a subject who is sleeping or restrained. The time required to do (or undo) a memory change, or to find traces of a change in the subject's mind, varies with the complexity of the change. The more subtle the change, the harder it is to make, repair or find:

Delete all the subject's memories *permanently* (leaving a babbling idiot): 1 hour.

Delete all the subject's memories, but in such a way that they could be restored: 2 hours.

Delete all the subject's memories but retain skills and ability to function day-to-day (a classic amnesia victim): 4 hours.

Delete a group of memories (e.g., several weeks of time): 3 hours.

Replace a group of memories with a false memory: 5 hours.

Some possibilities:

A buried trauma or psychosis is calling attention to itself through psi.

A frightened or intimidated person is subconsciously reaching out for help by trying to attract attention.

The psi is going through hormonal changes at puberty, or is sexually repressed.

The psi has a difficult personal life, and is unconsciously “striking back” through psi.

The psi is *dead*, and died in the grip of some strong emotion – see *Ghosts*, p. 49.

For example, Eric is a teenage pyrokinetic who has burned down three orphanages in as many months. The PCs investigate the mysterious fires and trace the cause to Eric. Probing his origins, they discover he lost his parents in a fiery auto crash. He was pulled unharmed from the burning wreckage, but was only an infant and does not consciously remember the accident or his parents. But Eric has been having nightmares about the accident, and with his psi powers triggered by the onset of puberty, the buried trauma has manifested as pyrokinetic activity. The investigators could use *Telereceive*, *Dreamshaping* (p. 65), or conventional detective work to discover his condition, then provide counselling and teach him to control his abilities, enabling him to buy off his limitations.

### **Poltergeists**

Poltergeist means “noisy ghost,” but few parapsychologists believe there is anything supernatural about them.

Poltergeist effects are random psychokinetic manifestations brought on by disturbed psis who are (usually) unaware of what they do, or at least how they are doing it. Psychic researchers often refer to poltergeist phenomena as “RSPK,” or *recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis*.

Poltergeist effects typically manifest out of sight of observers, with only their results (loud noises, or the residue of damage) visible. Poltergeist manifestations have the normal Power of the source character, and are thus limited in range and effect. This usually means either that the source can be found in close proximity to the point of manifestation . . . or that he’s *extremely* powerful. Manifestations are usually cryokinetic, photokinetic, pyrokinetic or telekinetic.

*Cryokinesis* might cause someone’s soft drink to freeze solid, or turn a plate of hot food suddenly cold, or cool down a pocket of air to send a chill down someone’s back.

*Photokinetic* manifestations are rarely recognized as the work of poltergeists. The floating images or lights usually are mistaken for ghosts.

*Pyrokinesis* might bring a glass of milk or a pot to a boil, set fire to paper or cause a moth to burst into flame. Some poltergeists are far more violent, and are responsible for cases of spontaneous combustion in humans (or, more commonly, their clothing). A pyrokinetic poltergeist is especially dangerous, since even non-malevolent manifestations have the potential to start a fire.

*Telekinesis* is the most common skill used by poltergeists. A powerful poltergeist can lift up objects and move or throw them around with great violence. But even a weak poltergeist can manifest in numerous ways with telekinesis. TK can make tapping sounds or stack objects like match boxes, books or dishes. Toy cars and trains are easy to move, since they are on wheels. Dolls and stuffed animals can be made to march about. Lights can be switched on or off, and controls on electronic devices like radios, televisions and dishwashers can be manipulated. Doors (and drawers) might slowly open or close on their own, or the pages could turn in a magazine. A bystander may find his shoelaces inexplicably tied together.

### **Triggering Events**

Uncontrollable psi can be triggered by any of the following stressful events:

A psi suffers an emotional shock. In game terms, this includes failure of a Fright Check, the death of a Dependent, being exposed to a phobia and similar situations. However, a *happy* shock, such as a roomful of people yelling “Surprise!” on the psi’s birthday, could also be a trigger.

The psi fails a Will roll to control a disadvantage like *Bad Temper* or *Berserk*.

The psi is in danger, or someone he cares about is threatened.

The psi has a nightmare.

The psi is engaged in sexual activity.

The psi is intoxicated or drugged, especially if hallucinating.

Under any of these circumstances, a psi with an uncontrollable ability should make a Will roll to avoid triggering it.

### **Out of Body Experiences**

An out of body experience is a spontaneous case of astral projection. The character finds himself outside his body, often looking down on it. “OOBEs” are related to crisis apparitions. Although they sometimes occur in dream or trance-states, they most often take place during death or near-death experiences (sidebar, p. 48). Dying seems to serve as a catalyst for psi abilities!

A dying person will sometimes find himself drawn upwards into a “tunnel,” toward a “white light.” He may even hear voices or see images associated with dead relatives or friends, or may simply hover over his body while doctors struggle to repair it, snapping back into it when they are successful.

In game terms, most OOBEs are an example of spontaneous astral projection. A character with latent ESP abilities has them activated in a crisis point (see *Latent Powers*, p. 86). The “tunnel” experience associated with a narrow escape from death may simply be a physiological reaction to death or a flashback to the birth canal unrelated to astral projection, or could represent the character finding his way into the inner astral plane.

On the other hand, it could be something more . . .

psis, and the careful categorization of the different Powers and their associated psi skills. An effective means of testing for psi is developed, along with a full understanding of the genetic basis (if any) of the powers. If orthodox physics and psionics are reconciled, technology designed to duplicate or amplify psi abilities may be also be invented.

This premise can be used to explain the development of standard psionic abilities in a campaign set in the future, providing a simple rationale for the development of psi in any *GURPS Space* campaign at any TL. By assuming that successful research has remained secret, GMs can also use it to explain powerful psi abilities within a contemporary or historical setting. An example of this is the world background in the next chapter.

## Mutant Powers

If *no* normal humans have the potential for psionic abilities, then psis might be mutants born with a genetic “x-factor” not found among the rest of humanity. But a successful mutation could spread through the gene pool; if the psis survive and have children, mankind could eventually evolve into a psionic species. In fact, a campaign could be set at that “critical point,” where psi-mutants exist in numbers large enough to threaten *Homo sapiens*’ dominance (as in A. E. Van Vogt’s *Slan*).

Psionic mutations could be freaks of natural evolution, as in Olaf Stapleton’s classic novel *Odd John*, or might be triggered by man-made catastrophes. This may be radiation from a nuclear war, as in John Wyndham’s *The Chrysalids*, but there are many other possible mutagenic agents. These include a genetic virus, supernova radiation, the decline of the ozone layer resulting in increased exposure to solar flares, or even the unforeseen mutagenic properties of food additives, drugs or chemical waste.

The concept of psi powers as mutations is very appropriate for *Supers* and post-holocaust *Survivors* campaigns, especially if the “new humans” are opposed by the jealous remnants of “normal” humanity.

## Alien Intervention

In this campaign, extraterrestrials teach us how to properly use our psi abilities. If some humans have psionic potential, the aliens may want us to join them in mental fellowship as part of a “galactic mind.” Or there might be more pragmatic motives behind their actions. Perhaps they want us for allies in an interstellar war, or need human brains as living engines for their FTL drives!

Alien visitors may even find that humanity has powerful dormant abilities, perhaps greater than their own: maybe *all* of humanity has an innate potential for psi, whereas only a few special talents exist among the aliens.

If aliens can mate with humans (possible if both races sprang from common ancestors eons ago) then the half-breed children may inherit some or all of the alien psi potential.

Another kind of alien intervention is *symbiosis*. An alien life form joins (mentally, physically or both) with a human host or partner. This may be a catalyst creature (p. 54) which telepathically bonds with its companion. Perhaps people with psi power are hosts for invisible energy beings that give them their abilities while deriving mental sustenance from human emotions,



## Gender, Sex and Psi

Science fiction has often entertained the idea that gender or sexual activity may be related to psi. Some possibilities of this sort are described below, but remember: each is *optional*, and some are mutually exclusive.

*No Psionic Children:* All psi powers manifest during puberty. As a result, pre-adolescent psis are rare or nonexistent, and most people discover their psychic abilities while still teenagers. This is a stock feature of many “mutant” stories involving psis, and works well with what is known of poltergeist phenomena.

*No Psionic Adults:* Psi powers *disappear* at puberty – only preadolescent children have psi powers! See Timothy Zahn’s *A Coming of Age* as an example of how this might affect a society.

*Gender-Based Abilities:* Some or all powers could be made gender-specific – perhaps only males can be espers and only females may have Teleportation, or some such combination. This division could apply instead to psi skills within a Power Group – see Christopher Stasheff’s *The Warlock In Spite of Himself* and sequels. Or perhaps psi power itself is sex-linked, so that (for instance) all psis with significant Power are female.

*Sex and Psi:* Maybe sexual activity interferes with psi powers. For instance, 12 hours of abstinence are required to use psi without penalty; any sexual activity results in a -4 penalty to all psi skills, a result of increased hormonal levels interfering with the centers of the brain governing psi. This may explain the vows of certain mystic orders, and the legend that witches who lose their virginity also lose their powers! See Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *Darkover* series for an example of a society with this sort of psi.



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Hundreds of books and dozens of movies and television shows have dealt with psi powers. This list concentrates on the treatment of psi in science fiction, along with related topics like mind transfer and dream-shaping machines.

Only a few nonfiction books are mentioned – those which the author found most helpful in researching *Psionics*. Any good library should have a parapsychology section for those interested in delving into the subject.

\* Highly recommended.

\*\* Not directly concerned with psionics, but deals with a related subject like dream-scanner technology.

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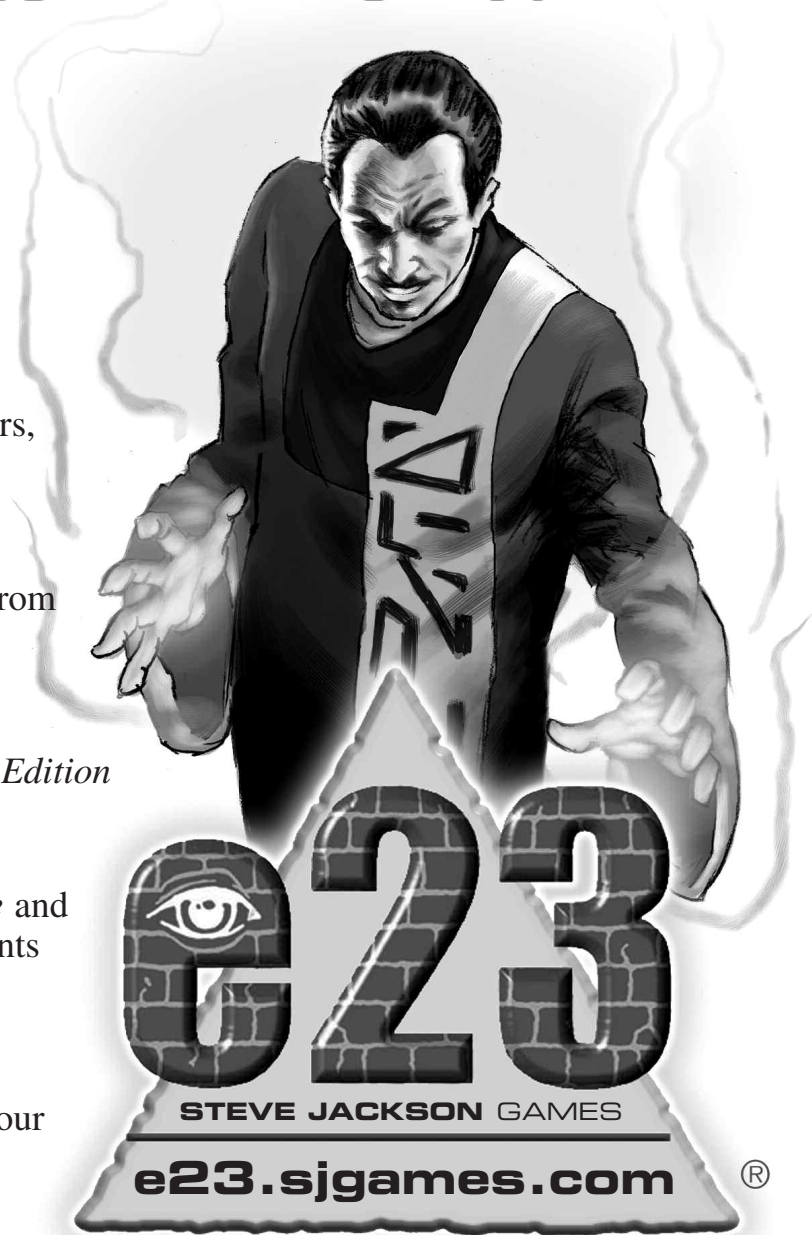
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