GURPS® Fourth Edition

STeaMPunK 1
Settings and Style™

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CONTENTS

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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

Steampunk is a literary genre – a subgenre of science fiction and fantasy – which appeared in the tail end of the 20th century, with a lot of references to earlier material. It quickly became a commonly recognized form for novels, short stories, and roleplaying games. The original **GURPS** *Third Edition* treatment of the subject was William H. Stoddard's award-winning **GURPS Steampunk** (2000), which was followed by supporting material such as Jo Ramsay's **GURPS Screampunk** and Stoddard's **GURPS Steam-Tech** (both 2001), as well as by the related **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** (2000).

These books are still available, in electronic PDF format, from Steve Jackson Games' Warehouse 23 online store. However, since those supplements appeared, not only has **GURPS** moved on to a new edition, but "steampunk" also has evolved. Steampunk novels and movies are still being created, but alongside them, steampunk has become a *style* – a street fashion movement and focus for costume creators, with a number of steampunk artists, sculptors, and rock bands.

This series reflects all these developments. It does not replace the **GURPS** *Third Edition* books, which are still highly recommended. Neither does it simply update their numbers and game mechanics to Fourth Edition, though there is some of that. Rather, this new **Steampunk** series updates and extends the **GURPS** treatment of the topic to fit the new century.

WHAT IS PRESENT

This first volume in the new series takes a new look at steampunk settings and games through a 21st-century lens. The first chapter is a brief overview and history of steampunk, suggesting sources that anyone interested could seek out for further reading along the way. The second chapter is a brief history of the "Steam Age" – the era which inspires both stories and the aesthetic, and which provides the settings for many steampunk campaigns. This chapter provides details to ensure that protagonists and adventures stay true to the genre.

The third chapter concentrates on general game concerns, first defining some game-relevant terms and concepts and then looking at steampunk gameplay and how to use **GURPS** for this purpose. This chapter gives the players and GM a mutual starting point for understanding the parameters of a new campaign. The fourth and last chapter shifts the focus to the heroes, discussing the mindset, behavior, and costumes that make a steampunk protagonist. The supplement then wraps up with a brief glossary and bibliography/filmography.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This volume draws on and references earlier **GURPS** treatments of steampunk, repeating some of their contents where this is convenient, but reordering and revising that material. Specifically, it adapts material from **GURPS Steampunk** and **GURPS Screampunk,** and non-setting-related material from **GURPS Castle Falkenstein.** Other than those couple of thousand words, this is a new supplement.

> *The real 19th century was an age of amazing inventions and discoveries – but these accomplishments inspired visions of even greater achievements. Jules Verne's fictional odysseys and H.G. Wells' scientific romances took contemporary readers on a journey into the realms of possibility. At the same time, inventors such as Charles Babbage and Nikola Tesla proposed new technologies as radical as those in fiction, from steam-powered mechanical computers to wireless electric power.*
>
> – *GURPS Steampunk*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Masters is a **GURPS** author of long standing, who claims partial responsibility for the adaptation of **Castle Falkenstein** to its **GURPS** manifestation, and for writing the steampunk-related **GURPS Castle Falkenstein: The Ottoman Empire** and **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6.** He was the author of both editions of the **Discworld Roleplaying Game, GURPS Thaumatology,** and many other **GURPS** books. He collaborated on yet more, including the **Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game** and **GURPS Banestorm.** He is the **Transhuman Space** line editor.

Phil has worked on several other companies' game lines, including **Ars Magica, Eclipse Phase,** and **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade.** He also wrote and self-published **The Small Folk,** an urban fantasy roleplaying game (available in digital form from Warehouse 23). He still lives in Britain with a wife and a small array of computers, none of them powered by steam.

Roleplaying Options

A roleplaying campaign in the style of the Blaylock/Jeter/Powers trio would tend to be whimsical but gritty in tone. It should be set, or at least based, in a cinematic version of Victorian London and feature Mayhew-style street life (see p. 6) along with some very weird science (perhaps just as a thin justification for paranormal powers). The heroes should mostly be dedicated scientist-adventurers or their servants and sidekicks, frequently opposing the wild schemes of deranged masterminds. Sometimes, this may lead to fights, but few or none of the heroes should be purely combat-oriented. Rather, they should be clever and versatile, and employ experimental technology or connections in high society or low as ways to accomplish their goals. Despite some moments of flippant whimsy, players should accept that death, mutilation, or serious psychological or emotional damage are real dangers for their characters.

Games inspired more by second-generation steampunk can involve more plausible-looking technology rather than downright weird science, and may be set in alternate histories. They should feature images such as steam power, mechanical computers, or maybe more radical technologies such as space flight. Plots might be political/espionage stories or personal quests, whether limited to one city (London remains popular) or expanding across the solar system. Heroes can come from a range of backgrounds and may well be capable but not superhuman. Death or defeat should feel like real possibilities.

The Fallow '90s

Steampunk didn't really become a mass-movement or as widespread an influence as cyberpunk had been despite some early novels and stories being quite successful, new works such as the one-shot comic *Gotham by Gaslight* (1989) and Kim Newman's alternate history/horror novel *Anno Dracula* (1992) playing with Victorian-Gothic imagery, and readers and critics throwing the word around. Few authors were described as "steampunk writers," as opposed to being writers who occasionally produced some steampunk, and the definition of the term never entirely hardened up.

Writers such as Colin Greenland (with *Harm's Way*) and Paul J. McAuley (with *Pasquale's Angel*) did play with variations on steampunk themes, but only in one-off novels. In 1995, Paul Di Filippo put the keyword in the title of *The Steampunk Trilogy,* a compendium of three stories, only connected in that they are set in versions of the 19th century and feature a lot of period-style weird science. The tales are as eccentric and bizarre as anything by the original steampunk trio, full of sex and strangeness, with little Steam Age technology. But again, this was a one-off. Likewise, the early volumes of Alan Moore's comics series *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999-2000) reintroduced readers to a whole range of fictional 19th-century characters and notions, helping keep steampunk alive but without inspiring many direct imitators.

In fact, the idea of steampunk was perhaps most enthusiastically preserved in roleplaying games, whose creators spotted its potential for old-fashioned adventuring, cool and weird gear, fancy titles, and eye-catching artwork. **Space: 1889,** by Frank Chadwick, appeared as early as 1988, before there was really a recognized movement to join. The game featured an alternate history in which late Victorian imperialism spread across the solar system thanks to the invention of functional space drives; the quality of the world building and period feel made this a cult favorite despite awkward game mechanics.

In 1993, British writer Marcus Rowland began publication of **Forgotten Futures** in digital shareware format. Each release of this game includes a collection of source material (generally period scientific romances or other early science fiction) for use as a basis for adventures. These collections make that material, which is often out of print as well as out of copyright, publicly available.

In 1994, R. Talsorian released Mike Pondsmith's **Castle Falkenstein,** which is set in an alternate Victorian era and which, essentially, mashes together every fantastic and steampunk element that the period setting can permit. Other games followed, including **GURPS Steampunk** in 2000.

"MAKER" CULTURE

Modern popular steampunk is somewhat linked to another movement of the day: "maker culture." This is a reaction to the sense that most things that people own or consume today are made elsewhere, and few people know how to modify or repair what they use, let alone how to manufacture things from scratch. "Makers" set out to master craft skills and create for themselves, using both traditional methods and modern technologies such as 3D printing. They share knowledge and ideas online and in communal "hackerspaces" where they can also share tools. Modern steampunks often share such idealism; they enjoy creating unique costumes and accoutrements, sometimes using authentic Steam Age tools and techniques, sometimes adding modern touches or using anachronistic materials so long as the look is right.

One way that maker culture can influence roleplaying games (and not just in the steampunk genre) is with the idea that adventurers should be able to maintain and repair their own equipment, and if necessary build some of it for themselves. After all, when a party is out in the wilderness, repair shops aren't close to hand. **GURPS** has a full set of technological skills (see *Skills for Design, Repair, and Use,* p. B190), and the GM can encourage players to take some of these by applying rules for wear and tear whenever reasonable; the **Basic Set** has some notes on pp. B484-485. Perhaps more interestingly, the maker philosophy can be reflected by encouraging heroes who acquire and use distinctive, personalized equipment. Signature Gear (p. B85) is important here, and **GURPS High-Tech** has some useful rules for equipment maintenance and modification, including styling, on pp. 9-10. The similar rules in **GURPS Low-Tech** are more versatile, even at higher TLs, as they cover not only custom-made equipment and maintenance (**Low-Tech,** pp. 14-15), but also the intricacies of decorated equipment (**Low-Tech,** pp. 37-38).

The Belgian Congo

Some European imperialists doubtless had good intentions, but some imperial adventures were downright horrific – and the Belgian Congo tops the list.

Until the 1870s, Belgium had no colonial holdings. King Leopold II decided to do something about that, and he settled on the Congo, an unclaimed area of Central Africa with economic promise. He commissioned the Welsh-American explorer Henry Morton Stanley to survey it, and pulled some political sleight of hand to acquire a vast expanse of Africa, the "Congo Free State," as his *personal* property. Then he started leasing parts of his new holdings to private companies to exploit, mostly for ivory and rubber.

Over the next few years, reports began emerging from the Congo of harsh exploitation, but Leopold mostly managed to have them suppressed. Around the end of the century, a senior clerk in the shipping line serving the Congo, Edmund Dene Morel, noticed an oddity in the books. Not only were the goods being shipped back from Africa worth vastly more than the official figures claimed, but nothing was being shipped the other way to pay for them – except for guns and ammunition.

The simple explanation for this turned out to be correct. Leopold's agents were transforming the entire area into a gigantic slave encampment, with native laborers required to work or die – or very often both.

It took until 1908 for Morel and an alliance of missionaries, diplomats, and politicians to close down the Congo Free State. Morel fought on for reform until 1913, by which time Leopold was dead. How many million people died in the "Free State" is impossible to estimate precisely.

Propaganda Wars

The history of the Congo Free State might make too dark and horrible a background for a roleplaying campaign, but the struggle to expose and stop the abuses illustrates how important noncombat skills can be in life-and-death conflicts. Both Leopold and his opponents used Administration, Politics, and a *lot* of Propaganda to sometimes lethal effect. Leopold had the benefits of Contacts, Status, and Wealth; his opponents had some of the best writers of the time (including Arthur Conan Doyle and Mark Twain) on their side, and supporters who shifted from a Sense of Duty to outright Fanaticism as they learned what was going on. See Chapter 5 of **GURPS Social Engineering** for guidelines on playing out such a conflict.

For more on all of this, see "Across Africa with Iron and Steam" in *Pyramid #3/39: Steampunk.*

EDWARDIAN TWILIGHT

Queen Victoria died in 1901 and was succeeded by her son, Edward VII. Although he had earned his reputation as a womanizing playboy, Edward's love of society and travel actually represented an asset to British diplomacy, though he didn't get on well with the Kaiser. His funeral in 1910 was the greatest assembly of European royalty in history.

Although it was a time of peace and prosperity, at least in England, the Edwardian era and the period immediately before WWI really saw the decline of Steam Age style. Electricity and automobiles replaced gas and steam as leading-edge technologies, and art nouveau and the first stirrings of modernism succeeded Victorian Gothic and classicism. In the sciences, the failure of old models of the universe raised questions which would be answered in the mind-bending strangeness of relativity and quantum mechanics. The Boer War at the start of the century showed that the army needed serious reforms, and the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912 is the great symbol of the failure of Steam Age confidence in old-style technologies.

Steampunk games can still draw inspiration from this period, but the style should be more "raygun Gothic" (pp. 26-27) than "superior steam" (p. 26), and there may well be a sense of impending apocalypse (see *The Looming War,* p. 19). Still, this is *the* age of sticks-and-string flying machines and adventurers in goggles.

NON-WESTERN STEAMPUNK

Steampunk often seems like a very European/American genre, being tied to Europe's great Industrial Revolution and age of imperialism, and focusing on Victorian London and the Wild West as locations. However, nothing makes this focus mandatory.

Formal manners and intricate costumes aren't purely Western inventions. Steampunk-style technologies, suited to interested crafters with home workshops, are actually open to almost anyone, from any culture. Steampunk has found fans in non-English-speaking countries such as Brazil, who bring different attitudes to the mix. Artists can enjoy blending the visual styles of different cultures with an iron-and-rivets aesthetic.

Historically, the European empires were largely defined by their interactions with the non-European people who they ruled. In particular, British India was a vast and ancient non-Western society with a thin layer of white rulers trying to control it. Nor were colonial peoples technologically incompetent; Brazilians were actually pioneers in Steam Age technologies such as radio voice transmission (Landell de Moura) and working aircraft (Santos-Dumont), which may help explain their modern interest in steampunk. Then there is Japan, which went from an essentially medieval system to a war-winning industrial society in 30 years flat – an experience which may explain why modern anime sometimes shows a fondness for steampunk imagery within non-Victorian settings (see p. 11).

In an *alternate* history, steam power and the Industrial Revolution might have come to other cultures at other points in history – the ancient Greeks certainly dabbled with (to be truthful, rather low-powered) steam motors; high medieval Islamic culture created highly ingenious mechanical devices which might have become the basis for clockpunk technology; and Chinese artificers have been no less inventive at times. Alternatively, drawing on the example of Japan, a China, India, or Ottoman Empire which acquired ideas from industrializing Europe early enough, and adopted them with determination and efficiency, could have entered the Steam Age more nearly on a par with Europe, creating a "bipolar" steampunk world.

WILD TECHNOLOGICAL MALFUNCTION TABLE

In the more cinematic and melodramatic sorts of steampunk campaign, when devices malfunction, they don't do it in a *small* way – they either keep working or fail catastrophically. In such games, whenever an exotic or experimental vehicle fails a HT roll, the attack roll for an invented weapon equals or exceeds its malfunction number (p. B407), or an operator gets a critical failure on some kind of operation roll, the GM can roll 3d on the following table for inspiration as to the consequences. (Ordinary off-the-shelf devices still use standard critical failure or malfunction rules.) Some of these effects are quite harsh; a kind GM can allow Luck or hasty use of repair skills to avoid problems or reduce them to manageable levels.

3, 4 – A spectacular blast! This inflicts twice the weapon's damage, or 10d for other devices, as a crushing explosion centered on the firing chamber or the power source. *Diving for Cover* (p. B377) may be indicated.

5, 6 – Reverse function. A vehicle starts running in reverse, a device does the opposite of its normal function, or a weapon backfires, doing its normal damage to the user.

7, 8 – The item catches fire (pp. B433-434). A gun on fire does crushing incendiary damage equal to the normal damage from one shot each second to the user until he can toss it away; beam weapons or other devices do 1d burning damage per second to anyone at the controls or inside the device. Users inside burning vehicles or machines may suffer *Suffocation* effects (pp. B436-437) while getting out, due to smoke.

9, 10 – The weapon or device makes a weird noise and belches out a cloud of smoke, but then works normally again.

11, 12 – Failure is imminent! From now on, the user must make an appropriate skill roll once per second of operation, with failure meaning the device fails immediately. At that point, it must be rebuilt completely before it will work again.

13, 14 – The machine works normally for one use (a shot or burst of weapon fire, a minute or so of vehicle travel, etc.), but in the process, destroys itself rather dramatically. It can never be used again.

15, 16 – The item starts shaking and giving off smoke as it tears itself apart inside. Weapon users or passengers in a vehicle are blackened but unhurt, but the machine is a total loss.

17, 18 – Out of control! Weapons or other devices begin firing wildly until all ammunition or power is expended; vehicles take off at top speed in a random direction. The operator can attempt a skill roll at -3 each second to bring it back under control.

For another way to limit weird-science tech, see "Out Standing in My Field, All Alone" in *Pyramid #3/46: Weird Science*.

Free Inventions

Some steampunk or proto-steampunk stories are designed around a hero or a party owning one big, unique, amazing machine that facilitates the plot. This is usually a vehicle of some kind, which gets them to the scene of the adventure and home again, although they might conceivably possess, say, the only weapon that can defeat certain world-threatening villains, or an analytical engine which grants them unique insight into criminal activity in their city.

This could be represented by Unusual Background (Invention) (p. B477) at the 30- or 50-point level. However, if the *only* function of the machine is to get the heroes into the action, it doesn't help the owner significantly in any other way, and the campaign just can't function without it, then that means that one member of the party is being charged 30 or more points for the campaign to exist, which is hardly fair. Hence, if the concept of the campaign is based around such an invention, the GM could simply give it to the PCs *for free*. It's a MacGuffin, not a character feature. In that case, the machine's nominal owner or inventor can spend however many points he chooses on operation and maintenance skills (and maybe a Reputation for being the fellow with the amazing machine), and have fun in play with those. Of course, the PCs shouldn't be permitted to sell their free machine for cash.

MAGIC AND PSYCHIC POWERS

Some steampunk stories feature paranormal powers, even outright magic. This can take almost any form, but the most common and atmospherically appropriate versions make at least some reference to historical ideas about such things – which may have passed as respectable science for a while.

CLOCKPUNK ALCHEMY

Immediately before the Steam Age, when science was still evolving into its modern form, many "natural philosophers" were concerned with the ancient mystical study of alchemy. This field had, after all, made a number of useful observations and discoveries which contributed to modern chemistry. Alchemy can thus make an interesting and appropriate element in early-period, clockpunk-flavored games, providing an array of cool effects and character abilities in the absence of big machines or modern science. It might even *be* the true science which gives useful insights into the nature of reality, leading into a very different, more magically flavored alternate Steam Age.

The fact that there is a drop of just two levels from the majority position to the worst is not lost on Status 0 folk.

Despite the growth of the middle class, the majority were still poor. Nonetheless, industrialization improved their lives, especially in Britain. Although wages were about the same at the end of the century as at the start in currency terms, many products grew cheaper, thanks to more efficient production. Workers could afford canned food, railway tickets, and telegrams. Working-class heroes at the start of the era would have toured the world only if they were soldiers, sailors, or servants to adventurous masters. By the end, they might have got around and seen more independently, although foreign travel was still expensive.

For a more detailed (and slightly different) treatment of Status and Rank in historical Victorian British society, using optional rules from *GURPS Social Engineering,* see "Order of Precedence" in *Pyramid #3/39: Steampunk.*

Status and Titles

Status 8 is reserved for emperors and empresses, of which there were a (small) number in the Steam Age. Exactly who qualified, and when some of them rose from Status 7 to 8 (or in one or two cases slipped back from 8 to 7), may be debatable, but isn't likely to be important for game purposes. The point is that this was literally an age of empires.

Status 7, a reigning monarch with the title to match – king, queen, or some exotic non-European title such as "rajah" – was more widespread, with plenty of monarchies around the world. Indeed, some "pocket kingdoms" had rulers who only really claimed such titles by courtesy. A prince or archduke who rules a country in his own right might be on the same level.

Status 6 is the norm for other members of royal families and for dukes and duchesses. In Britain, dukes are either members of the royal family or are aristocrats at the top of the hierarchy, with great estates or historic family backgrounds. On the continent, some "grand duchies" are actually small independent nations, making the duke a ruler in his own right.

Status 5 is a marquess, marchioness, earl, or countess. Status 4 is a viscount or viscountess, and is also the effective level for the barons or baronesses of some standing or wealth. Status 3 covers barons and baronesses who don't get out much, along with baronets (the lowest level of nobility, not actually peers) and anyone with *both* a knighthood *and* high Rank of some kind; a bishop will be treated with *at least* this much respect. Status 2 is below any aristocratic level, but some quiet-living knights belong there.

When it comes to *formal* precedence – who sits where at dinner – title is everything. A teenage orphan baron from an impoverished family outranks a mere knight with a lifetime of distinguished government service! Likewise, the offspring of high-ranking aristocrats often use lesser titles which happen to belong to the family. They are addressed accordingly, but this is purely a courtesy; they don't get the political power that goes with the title. The title is a fair measure of their likely Status, though.

Foreign aristocrats may use titles from their own languages, of course; these generally convert directly to English-language titles. See the *Summary Status Table,* below, for some equivalents.

In a relatively meritocratic nation such as the United States, high Status comes from Rank, bolstered by Wealth and a good family background. For example, the president is Administrative Rank 7, which gives +2 Status. Because his background makes him, at the very least, equivalent to a successful lawyer or merchant (Status 2), and he is likely at least Wealthy (Status +1), he easily functions as Status 5 so long as he's in the White House. If he visits Europe, local aristocrats theoretically take precedence, but sensible hosts find ways around that, to avoid offence.

See *Titles and Forms of Address,* p. 48, for the basic rules on how aristocrats should be addressed.

Summary Status Table

Status	Typical Social Position or Title
8	Emperor, empress, czar, sultan
7	King, queen, rajah, shah
6	Prince, princess, duke, duchess, herzog
5	Marquess, marchioness, marquis, margrave, earl, countess, count, comte, graf, burgrave, president of the United States
4	Viscount, viscountess, vicomte, powerful baron or freiherr, archbishop, state governor, field marshal
3	Ordinary baron or freiherr, baronet, powerful knight or dame, bishop, high-ranking military officers
2	Ordinary knight or dame, wealthy merchant, barrister, important clergyman, town mayor, many commissioned military officers
1	Parish priest, successful shopkeeper, senior clerk, small-town doctor, senior NCO
0	Junior clerk, smallholder, factory foreman, successful market trader, corporal
-1	"Urban poor," navvy, hired farmhand, infantry private
-2	Beggars, "street people"

MASTERS AND SERVANTS

Servants are extremely important to the wealthy in the Steam Age. In the absence of many domestic appliances, they are *necessary* for a home of any size to function, from one live-in maid and a part-time boot-boy in some clerk's terraced house, through four or five individuals in a country parsonage, to hundreds in a great stately home with its estate. Indeed, the availability of domestic servants helps explain the ornate intricacy of many Steam Age items; you need a full-time servant to keep a house full of such things dusted. Once servants became harder to find after WWI, people suddenly discovered the pleasures of modernist minimalism and wipe-clean elegance.

This raises the possibility that an adequately automated TL(5+n) world would have fewer domestic servants – or that the servants would be other than human (e.g. clockwork "dolls" or modified animals). However, that would remove much of the period feel for some people; what is a Steam Age tale of power, politics, and social climbing without the looming butler, nervous maids, or omni-competent manservant? Even in the army, officers would have soldier-servants to look after their personal requirements.

Scientific and Technological Jargon

aeronef: An aircraft that has a stall speed; that is, a heavier-than-air craft.

aerostat: An aircraft that has a zero stall speed; that is, a lighter-than-air craft such as a balloon or airship.

analytical engine: A proposed design for a general-purpose computing engine working purely mechanically, with steam power, gears, and punched-card programming.

animal magnetism: Sometimes just "magnetism." Hypnotism; also called *mesmerism,* after Anton Mesmer.

apergy: A hypothetical repulsive gravitational force.

bertillonage: A technique for criminal identification based on exact measurement of 11 parts of the body.

catastrophism: The theory that certain great geological or biological changes were caused by sudden, dramatic catastrophes, rather than by gradual processes.

condenser: (1) Part of a steam engine where steam is turned back into liquid water than can be reused, reducing the need to take on new water regularly. (2) The 19th-century name for what is now called an electrical capacitor.

difference engine: The precursor to the analytical engine (q.v.), a dedicated mechanical computer designed to calculate and typeset mathematical tables.

dirigible: Any lighter-than-air craft that can be steered, implying the use of engines.

***élan vital*:** A "vital force" or "fluid" believed to pervade living matter. Sometimes known as *vitality* in English; scientific theories involving the existence of this force (eventually discarded) are *vitalism.*

ether, luminiferous: A hypothetical (and eventually disproven) invisible and intangible substance filling all of space that carries light waves and other electromagnetic waves.

eugenics: Proposals to supervise human breeding scientifically, to enhance desirable characteristics or eliminate undesirable ones.

heliograph: A device for sending messages in Morse code, using mirrors to reflect flashes of sunlight.

montgolfier: A hot-air balloon (named for the brothers who were the first to build such, in 1783).

N-rays: A supposed new form of radiation reported by René Blondlot in 1903 but subsequently shown not to exist.

natural philosophy: A traditional term for the physical sciences – primarily Physics in *GURPS* terms, but also covering Astronomy, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics (Applied), and other fields.

phrenology: A proposed science of human character, based on assigning functions to sections of the brain and measuring their relative sizes.

psychical research: The scientific study of what would later be called psionic powers and the afterlife.

telodynamics: A system of power transmission using wire ropes stretched between large pulleys, effective over several miles.

wireless: Radio communication; shortened from "wireless telegraphy" (and later "wireless telephony").

zeppelin: A rigid-bodied airship. Named for Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin, who developed the idea in the 1890s.

INDEX

I sell here, sir, what all the world desires to have – POWER.

– Matthew Boulton (to James Boswell)