

# INTRODUCTION

Not all games feature superhuman gifts – but most do! Fantasy wouldn't be the same without mages and priests pitting their magic and miracles against monsters with exotic attacks. Space opera practically requires telepaths, not to mention godlike aliens. Horror features everything from children with uncontrollable psychokinesis to space-warping, madness-inducing Things. And the entire supers genre is *defined* by unusual abilities.

Even in less “over-the-top” backgrounds, heroes – and their foes – may have special capabilities that set them apart. The kung fu master who can kill with a touch, the psychic detective, the faith healer, the feral child who speaks with beasts . . . characters like these abound in adventure fiction.

Superhuman doesn't have to mean *supernatural*, either. Nature is full of

creatures that can do things like inject venom, spin webs, and walk on walls – and in a “hard” science-fiction setting, advances in biotechnology might let humans do all of these things without invoking the impossible. Even shooting devastating energy beams and deflecting bullets might be realistic . . . for a robot.

The common theme here is gifts that no ordinary human can possess. When designing such abilities, the *GURPS Basic Set* – with its hundreds of advantages – is an excellent starting point. But all that variety can be daunting: to get the ability you want, you might have to choose between several similar advantages, and apply many modifiers. The top priority of *GURPS Powers* is to provide advice, examples, and new options that make this process easier and more *fun*.

In particular, *Powers* gives significant thought to a matter that the *Basic Set* only touches upon, which is that a character gifted with special abilities might produce some or all of them by manipulating a single superhuman force: divine will, inner strength, life energy, mana, psychic potential, spirits, etc. Someone with the capacity to direct such energies is said to possess a *power*. *Powers* includes full rules for creating powers and using them in play – hence the title.

*Powers* also looks at how to integrate superhuman capabilities into a campaign with due respect for its genre and dramatic mode – and without blowing game balance out of the water. It's a toolkit, and the GM is responsible for choosing the right tools for the job. Before allowing the players to use the rules in this book, the GM should read it all – especially the last two chapters – to discover which options best suit *his* campaign.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of *GURPS Powers*. The *GURPS Third Edition* books *GURPS Psionics* and *GURPS Supers* were inspirational – and a few modifiers for Shapeshifting (p. 74) first appeared in *GURPS Shapeshifters* – but it's otherwise a completely new product.

### Note to Third Edition Players

If you've been playing *GURPS* since the Third Edition (or earlier!), you might ask, “What does *GURPS Powers* replace?” The answer is simple . . . and not so simple.

*Powers* covers a lot of the same ground as *GURPS Psionics* and *GURPS Supers*. By following the advice in this book, you'll be able to recreate the *effects* of psi and super abilities from those supplements. The implementation isn't the same,



however, so old hands definitely have some learning to do.

For psi powers, there's no overall "level" that rates every one of the power's abilities. Instead, the player crafts each ability separately by buying it as an advantage, choosing the level (where possible) and modifiers that fit his vision of his character's aptitude with *that one ability*. Many of the special rules and "stunts" from *Psionics* appear in *Powers*, but they're generalized to all powers and *optional*, so that the GM can better tailor them to his campaign.

For supers, the emphasis is on *active* abilities, such as flying and shooting rays. Some passive abilities – e.g., tough skin – appear, but they aren't a priority. This is because the

*GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* covers more territory than did the *Basic Set, Third Edition*. High ST, DR, extra limbs, and gadgets are all common in supers games, but the *Basic Set* has them covered. The same goes for rules for super-speed collisions, picking up and throwing huge objects, and so on. This leaves more space for other things.

The biggest change for both psi and super abilities is that they don't require skills. We present skill use as an option (see *Skills for Everyone*, p. 162), but the GM doesn't have to use it. Talents (p. 8) fill this role, and a new enhancement (see *Reliable*, p. 109) permits fine-tuning.

*Powers* covers much more than just psis and supers, though. It's equally

capable of handling high-powered fantasy "spellcasters," *wuxia* fighters, shamans who command spirits . . . even gods. Thus, it represents a truly generic and universal advantage-based alternative to the skill-based abilities of Third Edition books such as *GURPS Martial Arts*, *GURPS Religion*, and *GURPS Spirits*. This makes it easy to mix characters with radically different powers in the same campaign.

In other words, *Powers* by itself isn't *quite* the complete book of supers or psi – it's something more. It's a "how to" guide to the *Basic Set* for these things and nearly every other kind of wondrous ability; think of it as a *Basic Set: Powers*. Combined with the *Basic Set*, it gives you the tools to create almost *any* powered character you can dream up – a claim that no Third Edition book could make.

## About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: [info@sjgames.com](mailto:info@sjgames.com). Resources include:

*Pyramid* ([www.sjgames.com/pyramid/](http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/)). Our online magazine includes new *GURPS* rules and articles. It also covers the *d20* system, *Ars Magica*, *BESM*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and many more top games – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *Illuminati*, *Car Wars*, *Transhuman Space*, and more. *Pyramid* subscribers also get opportunities to playtest new *GURPS* books!

*New supplements and adventures*. *GURPS* continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. For a current catalog, send us a legal-sized or 9"×12" SASE or just visit [www.warehouse23.com](http://www.warehouse23.com).

e23. Our e-publishing division offers *GURPS* adventures, play aids, and support not available anywhere else! Head over to [e23.sjgames.com](http://e23.sjgames.com).

*Errata*. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see below.

*Internet*. Visit us on the World Wide Web at [www.sjgames.com](http://www.sjgames.com) for errata, updates, and much more. The *GURPS Powers* web page is [www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/powers/](http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/powers/).

*Bibliographies*. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to where you can buy the books if they interest you! Go to the book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

*GURPSnet*. This e-mail list hosts much of the online discussion of *GURPS*. To join, point your web browser to [www.sjgames.com/mailman/listinfo/gurpsnet-l/](http://www.sjgames.com/mailman/listinfo/gurpsnet-l/).

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.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist and ended up as the *GURPS* Line Editor. Since 1995, he has compiled the two *GURPS Compendium* volumes, written *GURPS Wizards* and *Undead*, edited or revised over 20 other *GURPS* books, and masterminded the rules behind dozens more. Most recently, he and co-author David Pulver created the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*.

Sean has been a fanatical gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, computers, and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec, with his wife, Bonnie. They have two cats and a noisy parrot.

Phil Masters has been playing RPGs since 1978; his first professional writing appeared in 1980, his first RPG book in 1990, and his first work for Steve Jackson Games (*GURPS Arabian Nights*) in 1993. Since then, he's worked on many more *GURPS* books, including the *Discworld* and *Hellboy* RPGs (the latter also with Jonathan Woodward). He's also written for White Wolf, Guardians of Order, and Eden Studios, among others. He lives in the U.K., runs a biweekly game, and sometimes helps organize RPG conventions.