

The Psychology of the Psi-Judge

by Carl Sargent

(Published in White Dwarf 79. Translated to electronic format by the Sector 142 Reclamation Society)

In the Judge Dredd RPG, specialist Psi-Judges are arguably the most intriguing and enjoyable characters you can play. In this article, Carl Sargent looks at the psychology of these mavericks, at aspects of game balance as they affect Psi-Judges, and at their Special Abilities.

First and foremost, Psi-Judges are rarities, freaks, mavericks. Psi talents are rare in Mega-City One, and the attitude of judicial authority to people with psi talents is ambivalent. More than one psyker has been subjected to neurosurgery to eradicate his abilities and Psi-Judges will not be unaware of this. On the other hand, Psi-Judges are greatly valued by authority, as they can be of unequalled use in the very toughest cases Judges ever have to face (notably, in facing the Dark Judges). Still, Psi-Judges know the highest authorities - and their fellow Judges - are unsure of them, and this must affect the way they feel about their role.

As Psi-Judges are rare, they are in some sense outsiders; yet they pry into the minds of others continually. And what they find there is usually evil, depraved or corrupt. All this, plus their fellows' ambivalent attitudes, could easily lead to them becoming severely alienated people, and this is reflected in their unconventional personalities. To stave off the depression and despair which could be produced by these pressures, most Psi-Judges are flippant, wisecracking, irreverent (who but Judge Anderson could get away with saying goodbye to Dredd with the line "See you later, adjudicator"?), even hypomaniac. These traits are necessary survival mechanisms, and even the SJS recognises this. It is very rare for a Psi-Judge to be hassled by the SJS over lax law-keeping, for example. Psi-Judges are under pressures other Judges cannot understand and due allowances are made. It is even rumoured that Psi-Judges have a dark secret known only to them, the Chief Justice and head of the SJS, and the few Med-Judges involved in a supervisory role. Every so often the pressures on a Psi-Judge build up to such a level of tension that therapeutic psi-storming sessions are needed, where Psi-Judges liberate dammed-up psychic energy and tensions in an uncontrolled manner, through telekinetic actions, illusion

generation and similar release mechanisms. If this rumour has any basis of truth, it is one of Mega-City One's best-kept secrets.

Psi-Judges have one other outstanding feature: they are physically weak. In the JD game, if the dice have been honestly rolled, over 90% of player character Psi-Judges will have a Strength of 1. This means they are extremely vulnerable. One Wound means automatic exclusion from many adventures and, while the chance of death from one Wound may be small, the cumulative chances of getting croaked by a successful hit get depressingly high after a while. This has ramifications for game balance, as we'll see, but it must affect the psychology of the Psi-Judge too. Psi-Judges should be defensive, cautious, concerned more with their physical safety than most other Judges. Although the Judge's Book notes GMs should award EPs for "being a good, brave Judge", Psi-Judges should not be brave. They won't be cowards, but going in with Lawgiver blazing is, frankly, a dumb way for Psi-Judges to behave. They are too valuable to be wasted like this! Note also Psi-Judges' awareness of their physical vulnerability will, if anything, only add to their darkly-humorous wisecracking.

Role-playing of Psi-Judges should reflect the tensions, the concerns for physical safety, and the outsider status of these people. In the 22nd Century world of Mega-City One, Psi-Judges really are strangers in a strange land.

Game Balance with Psi-Judges

Here, I'll look at the problem of the physical vulnerability of Psi-Judges as it affects game balance. In my experience, at least, the viability of Judges with a Strength of 1 is rather weak, if they get involved in shootouts or have to make many dice rolls to avoid falling off moving Lawmasters and the like. With a Strength of 1, as noted, one Wound means exclusion from many adventures due to a need for hospitalization. Such Judges are all too easily taken out by the one single bad dice roll. Now, for players this is a shame - a character shouldn't be so vulnerable to such effects arising from one piece of bad luck - and players will get frustrated if their Psi-Judges are

sidelined too much. Within the world of Mega-City One, such extreme physical vulnerability might well lead Justice Central to be very wary of ever letting Psi-Judges out on regular street patrolling duties. They are too rare to expose to the danger of getting blown away by some two-bit punk with a stub gun. But, of course, the players want their Psi-Judges out there, earning EPs!

This is quite a problem, but there are three ways around this that occur on first reflection. One is to revise the determination of S rolls for Judges so no Judges have a Strength of 1. This is too drastic an option for me to feel happy with; it would alter the game's whole balance quite dramatically. A second option would be to make Judges harder to hit at all by plugging an odd gap in the JD rules. Judges wear head and limb armour, although we are told in the Judge's Book (p257) that "perps may wear it over other areas too." Psi-Judges could go around at least with the extra additional protection of chest armour (the futuristic equivalent of the contemporaneous bullet-proof vest). This, again would have to be an option open to all Judges, thus affecting game balance rather dramatically unless a compensating penalty could be found which ordinary Judges would find limiting, but which Psi-Judges could live with. So these first two options may not be advisable courses of action for the GM.

The third option is to build some protection into the game against the pitfalls of having a Strength of 1 which is only available to Psi-Judges. It becomes obvious the only way of doing this is by designing some additional Special Ability related to PS, so that it is only available to Psi-Judges. One such ability, *Metabolic Control*, is described at the end of the next section, which fills in some details for Special Abilities for Psi-Judges that GMs might wish to consider as optional rule modifications.

There remains one important aspect to be the case, within the rules, that Psi-Judges can be psi-immune, since initial PS score, and the 10% immunity chance, are rolled separately. If the GM has already increased the physical resilience of Psi-Judges with some extra rules, then a psi-immune Psi-Judge is going to be too powerful. Indeed, the very possibility of Psi-Judges being psi-immune seems distinctly dodgy on theoretical grounds. I would suggest GMs consider seriously that any Judge with a PS-related Special Ability cannot also be psi-immune. Make the 10% roll for immunity only after all other stats have been

rolled, and dispense with it if the character qualifies for specialist Psi-Judge or a PS-based Special Ability and the player takes this option.

Special Abilities for Psi-Judges

GMs might wish to consider the following suggested guidelines for use of Special Abilities by Psi-Judges; these are only suggestions, of course, and GMs will be aware that extra details about these abilities can be found in the GM's Book which supplement those in the Judge's Book. My aim is to sharpen up certain aspects of how these abilities might be used in actual play, so that GMs and players have a clearer idea of exactly what they can, and can't do with them.

Animate Corpse

I think it is implicit in the rules, but the GM might make this an explicit rule, that only one corpse can be controlled by a Psi-Judge at any one time. The corpse should not be permitted to use any Special Abilities it possessed in its former life, since it no longer has the intelligence to deploy them. Likewise, the GM may care to rule that while the corpse can rely on matter-of-fact queries, any query calling for a judgment to be made or viewpoint to be expressed (such as "What do you think Norbert the Gink is doing right now?") will simply confuse the zombie-like intelligence remaining and the corpse will be unable to reply.

Detect Intent

As noted in the rulebooks, this is a vaguely defined ability and its application calls for much thought on the GM's part. It might be ruled to operate differently in interrogation situations on the one hand and on the streets on the other.

If the ability is being used in an interrogation exercise, then the Psi-Judge rolls against PS to exercise the ability as usual. However, the target receives a roll against its PS to resist. The Psi-Judge can try again, after a 10 Turn delay, but the second attempt will be made with a -10% modifier (or +10% to the target's resistance chances). Likewise, after another 10-Turn delay, if the Psi-Judge has had no luck so far, a third attempt with a -20% modifier can be made. After this time, however, the Psi-Judge cannot succeed in overcoming the target's resistance no matter how many more attempts are made (the target has

learned how to defend itself successfully against the Psi-Judge; but a different Psi-Judge could try with normal chances). Without such a system, the Psi-Judge is certain to succeed eventually; with such a system the odds are in the Psi-Judge's favour, but there's a chance the target won't crack.

There's also the matter of what the Psi-Judge learns - and the issue of timing. Although the ability can only be used once per 10 Turns there seems to be no reason why the link cannot persist indefinitely once it has been established, within the rules as they stand. These issues can potentially be dealt with at one stroke. It may be ruled that the Psi-Judge will automatically detect general aspects of the target's mind, and predominant thoughts (the GM will have to decide what these are). However, if the Psi-Judge is searching for something specific in the target's mind which isn't predominant (e.g., the numeric code for deactivating a bomb or some such) then the Psi-Judge has to roll against PS to detect this successfully. If any such PS roll is failed, the link between the Psi-Judge's mind and that of the target is broken. However, once the link has been successfully established, the Psi-Judge may re-establish it after a 10 Turn delay if a roll against his PS is successful (this time, the target cannot resist).

These suggestions call for interpretation by the GM as to what might be 'predominant' in the target's mind and soon, but this nebulous ability can't be played without some such decisions being made.

Again, while this ability is usually used for this kind of interrogation, where truth drugs and the like haven't worked, such scenarios don't exhaust the possible uses of the ability. It can also be used on the streets; e.g., in surveillance of perps holed up in a deserted block, or something similar. I suggest that in such situations the ability should be active; is, the player must state his Psi-Judge is using the ability (making it unlike *Sense Perps* or *Sense Hidden Weapon*, for example). For game balance, I suggest that the target does not get a chance to resist unless a Psyker (since the probe is not in any way an attack and the target won't be expecting it), but the GM might consider giving the target a roll against its PS to understand that someone, or something, is probing its mind. Likewise, all the Psi-Judge will detect is the general personality and predominant thoughts of the target (this is not as precise as an interrogation situation). If there are potential

multiple targets within range and the Psi-Judge cannot specifically nominate one, the GM may wish to rule that the Psi-Judge detects the nearest perp (although the Psi-Judge may be able to say, "I'm trying to get whoever's in that warehouse/apartment/etc" which will narrow the field down a bit). This PS-related Special Ability is the one which gives GMs and players most problems; hopefully GMs will find the suggestions here useful in designing their own supplementary rules for its use.

Detect Psyker

Since Psyker perps are fairly rare, the restriction on this ability that a Psi-Judge may only detect a Psyker actively using his powers on the same Combat Round seems rather mean. It might be worth extending. GMs might rule for example, that a Psi-Judge can detect the Psyker up to one Turn after the Psyker has been using some psi power, but with a -20% modifier; the Psyker leaves some 'psychic trace' which the Psi-Judge can pick up on. Thus a Psi-Judge arriving just after some psi ability has been in use can detect that fact; but if picking up a trace, the Psi-Judge will need a second roll against PS (again with a -20% modifier) to detect the strength of the Psyker source.

Also, if more than one Psyker has been active, the Psyker with the strongest Ps might be ruled to be the one detected specifically, although the GM might rule that Psi-Judge may also detect that more than one Psyker has recently been active (or is active) within the Sector range for the ability.

Hold Door

As I understand this, the door will remain held in perpetuity if the Psi-Judge remains within the Sector and doesn't use one of the range of Special Abilities listed in the Judge's Book. This doesn't seem too likely. The GM may care to rule that, even if no other circumstances negate this effect, the holding effect will begin to dissipate after 20 Turns, with the maximum duration of the effect in Game Turns being (20+ PS score of the Psyker). Thus a Psi-Judge with a PS of 80 could maintain the holding effect for 100 turns, maximum duration. Sometimes such time limits could be important!

Illusions

The GM should take care to advise players that not only illusions which paralyze targets for two rounds can be created; illusory objects can also be created. If an illusory walkway across a gap of some kind (with a steep drop below) was created, then there is no reason why anyone viewing it would be transfixed for two rounds unable to do anything (of course no Psi-Judge would create an illusion like this but some nasty little Psyker might). Such Illusions should also be subject to 'decay' effect like that suggested for *Hold Door* above.

Jinx Vehicle

There's a problem here. It may be that the Psi-Judge will have to make a roll for Control Loss if he can't see the vehicle, and normally such rolls are made against DS. In this case, however, the Psi-Judge's control of the vehicle is psi-based, so the kind of skills (eye-hand co-ordination, balancing, etc) which comprise DS don't seem relevant. Perhaps a roll against PS should be made when a Control Loss is required; or against the average of DS and PS, since the GM might consider that even with psi control some knowledge of how to drive things remain relevant.

Psychic Attack

There is a slight glitch in the rules here. The description states that if the attack is successful "damage is scored as from a hand-to-hand hit" and the following example illustrates a successful attack for which damage is rolled on a D6. However, damage is normal hand-to-hand combat is not rolled on a D6, it is rolled on a D4 (with additional damage equal to the Judge's Strength score). However the D6 determination of damage should be retained, since the Psi-Judge's physical strength can hardly be relevant with a psychic attack.

Players of Psi-Judges should also be aware that (as mentioned in the GM's Book but not, oddly, in the Judge's Book) all successful hits with a *Psychic Attack* are head hits!

Super-Telekinesis/Telekinesis

There appears to be something of an oversight in the rulebooks; while the weight of objects you can move, how far they can be moved, and where

they go is described, no range for the operation of the abilities is specified. I suggest that the range should be 1 metre per PS point for *Telekinesis* and 2 metres per PS point for *Super-Telekinesis*. Note that at the extreme limits of the applicable ranges, both the directions in which objects can move and how far they can go may be affected by the range limit for operation of the ability.

GMs should feel free to test these optional rules additions and modifications for play balance and devise their own changes to suit their own campaigns. So, now for the suggested additional Special Ability, a blessing to all those Psi-Judges worrying over that feeble Strength score.

Metabolic Control

This new Special Ability involves paranormal control over internal physical forces in the body, just as telekinesis involves control over external forces. A Psyker with this ability can minimise such effects as bleeding, hydrostatic shock, etc., contingent upon successful hits made upon him in combat. The ability is not exercised by voluntary effort; it operates as a mental reflex whenever a successful hit is made upon the Psyker. When the ability is operational, the effects of hits may be avoided; this chance is equal to one-half the Psyker's PS. All such effects (Wounds, Stuns, Initiative Loss) may be so affected. If the hit is severe enough to cause multiple effects (e.g., a Stub gun hit causing a Wound, Stuns and Initiative Loss), then more than one roll against PS will need to be made, starting with the most serious effect (i.e. Wounds). Any PS failure along the line means the less serious effects will automatically affect the Psi-Judge. If two Wounds might be sustained from the hit, a roll against PS must be made for each. Further, chest and abdomen wounds - if sustained - can produce further wounds, but where such a second wound would normally develop, a roll against PS may be allowed to prevent the formation of that additional wound. However, since this ability influences immediate reflexes and the like, a Psi-Judge possessing it will not recover from sustained wounds and soon more rapidly than any other Judge when appropriate medical treatment is given.

Note that this Special Ability is a deeply engrained defensive reflex and it will operate even if the Psi-Judge has used some other Special Ability during that combat round.

However, no PS-based Special Ability can be exercised for the remainder of the Combat Round during which the ability of *Metabolic Control* was used. Further, if *Metabolic Control* was required to avoid a Wound affecting the Psyker, then the psi power utilised is so great that no PS-based Special Ability (other than *Metabolic Control* itself) can be used for further 3 Combat Rounds, and the Psyker's PS will drop by 20 points during that time, recovering to its normal limit at the rate of 2 points per round thereafter.

Note for GMs: To maintain game balance, it is advisable that two further rulings be introduced. First, this Special Ability is only available to Psi-Judges with a PS of 60 or above. Thus, only Psi-Judges can ever possess this Special Ability, never an ordinary Judge who has boosted his PS to the 40 limit. This ability is specifically designed for weak, vulnerable Psi-Judges. Second, *Metabolic control* does not protect the Psi-Judge against the effects of *Psychic Attack*, since this is a mental attack and *Metabolic Control* is designed as a reflex protection against direct physical damage attacks.