

POWERS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

When designing a character and powers, try to get into the mindset of someone from the 19th century. What would the ability to fly look like to someone in 1861? Would a flying man zoom along arms stretched in front of him like Superman, emulating the aerodynamic shape of 20th century aircraft? Or would he develop the gossamer wings of an angel?

Think of a power's effect in terms of 19th century culture, literature, and technology. The era was thick with industry, technology, and science, but it was clumsy technology. Transportation was based around steam engines, big, clunky, noisy, dirty, and prone to explode. Firearms belched gray smoke. Diseases were blamed on "vapors." Newspapers were four or five columns of text printed on broad sheets, and rarely included pictures. Photographs were captured on glass plates, and required long exposure times (which is why portraits of the era look so stiff and lifeless). What would a super power look like in this context?

Let's look at the Puppet miracle. This miracle allows a character to take control of another person by touch. Sure, you can buy it like this and have a functioning character, but there's nothing to distinguish this Civil War character from a 21st century superhero.

Let's make it a little more authentic to the period. Purchase the miracle with the On Sight Extra so you can control a target from a distance. Add the Focus Flaw. Round the miracle out with the Obvious Flaw. The focus is a pocket watch, though anything that can swing will do. To use Puppet you must walk up to the target and swing the watch in front of them. Your character is now a mesmerist with the ability to take control of a target's mind. How very 19th century!

What does this power say about his background? Was he a mesmerist before he received The Gift? What other powers would he have? Perhaps a mesmerism power theme is in order. While you are considering your options, you might want to do a little reading on Franz Anton Mesmer, James Braid, and the development of hypnosis in 1842. Regardless of where you go with it, you've taken a generic miracle and given it a 19th century feel.



Chapter 3: Circumscribed in Rule

The Gift manifests in Native Americans, slaves, and ethnic minorities in the same way it manifests within whites. The mechanism is no different. What is different is the interpretation. Native American legends tell of anthropomorphic beings capable of shapeshifting between human and animal form. This fits the Alternate Form miracle, but that miracle is on the unavailable list. Since The Gift is driven by Willpower, the GM can make an unavailable miracle available if it makes sense within the context of a character's culture.

A character will couch the manifestation and form of his miracles in terms specific to his culture. An office clerk in New York might see the Puppet miracle as a form of mesmerism. A Louisiana voodoo practitioner sees it as possession by a loa (voodoo spirit). Each loa has its own dances and rituals, just as the mesmerist has his own rituals of hypnotism. It's the same miracle, in terms of game mechanics, but the application, and the way it is roleplayed, is different.

Ultimately, it is up to the GM to encourage period authenticity. As a GM ask yourself, "Does the power feel like it belongs in the 19th century?" Get your

players to describe their powers in terms that would be understandable to a Civil War era American.

Example: Here's one way to simulate a mesmerism power in *This Favored Land*.

Mesmerism (3)

Qualities: U

Useful Extras and Flaws: Endless +3, Focus -1, Obvious -1, On Sight: +1, Willpower Bid -1.

Capacities: Range

Effect: By overcoming another character's Stability roll you can put the target into a trance and control their mind and body. The target remains under your control until you choose to break the link. The Obvious flaw is due to waving the focus in front of the target. This is an accepted part of hypnotism, so the power does not require Direct Feed.

