



modern dispatch #66

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12 to Midnight

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Superheroic Adventure Generator

By Gareth-Michael Skarka

Introduction

This issue of Modern Dispatch follows the same theme we provided with the *Modern Adventure Generator* (issue #29), and the *Pulp Adventure Generator* (issue #42), detailing a system for Modern d20 Game Masters to generate adventure ideas on the fly, giving enough of a core seed idea to proceed.

This generator is specifically for Superheroic campaigns. There are a number of D20-based super hero games out there, and this system is useable with any of them. Specifically, this Adventure Generator is a preview of Adamant Entertainment's new line of superheroic support products, which will be coming in 2006.

The tables provided in this issue of Modern Dispatch will give a Modern d20 GM the bare outline of an adventure. That outline will have to be tailored for your specific campaign style. For example, a four-color Silver Age style campaign will have very specific needs, and differ greatly from a campaign which is run with a more "grim-and-gritty" street-level vigilante style.

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About the Author

Gareth-Michael Skarka has been working in the adventure games industry since 1988. He is the designer of several role-playing games, including *Hong Kong Action Theatre!*, *UnderWorld* and *Skull & Bones*. He is the owner and director of **Adamant Entertainment**, one of the top PDF publishers in the business, which produces support for *Skull & Bones*, *Northern Crown*, the pulp d20 line *Thrilling Tales*, and more.

Learning from Screenwriting

The basic format for the random adventure seed is the dramatic core taken from screenwriting: all plots can be boiled down the following sentence:

“The main characters must [DO SOMETHING], but have to contend with [COMPLICATIONS] while being confronted by [OPPOSITION].”

This is the basic structure of any story, whether it is filmed, written, presented in a comic book, or roleplayed. The variables change, providing a wide array of possibilities. For the Superheroic Adventure Generator, however, we’ll expand that basic structure even further, allowing for a wider variation. So, the basic dramatic structure of our Modern d20 adventures will read more like this:

“The main characters must [DO] [SOMETHING], at [LOCATION], but have to contend with [COMPLICATIONS] while being confronted by [OPPOSITION].”

The main difference between the standard format and the one presented above is that the location of the adventure has been added as a variable, and, more importantly, [DO SOMETHING] has been split into [DO] [SOMETHING].

Let’s explain that a little bit further.

The “do something” is the focus of the adventure -- it’s what drives the action. Making it a single category under this system will only result in 64 possibilities (by cross referencing two d8 rolls). However, after splitting the “do” (the verb) and the “something” (the subject) into two categories, that means that each have 64 possibilities, and can combine for a total of 4096 different results.

For example, take these: “Rescue the Scientist”, “Find the Murderer,” and “Defeat the Monster.” Under this new system, these three focii can be split, giving you those same results, but also additional ones such as “Find the Scientist,” “Rescue the Monster,” etc.

This can, admittedly, lead to some odd results, such as “Rescue the Murderer”....but comic books are filled with strange stories and bizarre plots. As a GM, that phrase, which on its surface seems odd, begins to generate all sorts of ideas for me. Why would heroes have to rescue a murderer? Could it be that the murderer is another hero, or perhaps simply a criminal who possesses some vital clue that could save hundreds of other people?

How to Use the Generator

This type of system provides the Game Master with a framework...a springboard for the development of the Game Master’s own ideas. The adventure concepts generated by this system will still need to be fully fleshed out, populated with stat’d NPCs, etc...but this system will give you a starting point from which to work.

To use the Superheroic Adventure Generator, the Game Master rolls two eight-sided dice, and cross-referencing the results on each of 5 category tables: **Do, Something, Location, Complications and Opposition.**

As stated before, **Do** provides you with the verb, **Something** provides you with the subject. Together, they form the focus of the adventure. **Location** gives you where the adventure takes place, **Complications** are those things that arise during the adventure

to hinder the player-character’s progress, and **Opposition** is the force or individual that is actively going against the PC’s efforts.

Each category has 64 possibilities, so this system allows for 1,073,741,824 different combinations... more than enough to give any superhero campaign ideas to last for its entire run.



Do

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Fight	Meet	Find	Retrieve	Race	Seize	Trade with	Battle
2	Combat	Talk with	Protect	Attack	Serve	Defend	Take	Negotiate with
3	Guide	Avenge	Deliver	Combat	Guard	Join	Watch	Create
4	Chase	Confuse	Escort	Rescue	Ally	Resist	Repel	Safeguard
5	Entreat	Travel with	Rally against	Defeat	Investigate	Support	Destroy	Change
6	Move	Track	Aid	Assist	Dispel	Fight	Protect	Comfort
7	Conceal	Obliterate	Trap	Oppose	Testify against	Observe	Shut down	Locate
8	Strike	Reveal	Beset	Shield	Contend with	Invade	Kill	Save

Something

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Ruler	Murderer	Treasure	Scientist	Mutant	Creature	Assassins	Gods
2	Worker	Royalty	Citizens	Freak	Energy	Alien	Police	Country
3	Terrorist	Organization	Supervillain	Stranger	Artifact	Magician	Invention	Disaster
4	Friend	Gang	Secret	Woman	Celebrity	Artifact	Vehicle	Criminal
5	Company	Enemy	Criminal	Item	Man	Child	Insect	Building
6	Aircraft	City	Recurring Villain	Spirit	Technician	Government	Outcast	Soldiers
7	Love Interest	Monster	Thief	Object	Bystanders	Spy	Team	Building
8	Superhero	Victims	Accident	Animal	Book	Technology	Nature	People

Location

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Docks	Ghetto	River	Subway	Another Dimension	Military Base	Deep Space	Underground
2	TV Station	Skyscraper	Villain's base	Foreign Country	Airport	Prison	Business District	Island
3	In Orbit	Lake	Research Facility	Arctic	Mansion	War Zone	Hideout	Government Installation
4	Landmark	Residence	Hidden Location	Secret Location	Plains	Distant Land	Nightclub	Jungle
5	Corporate Headquarters	Bank	Entertainment District	Farm	Shopping Center	The Moon	Bar	Highway
6	Garage	Fortress	Library	Slums	Market	Border	Church	The Future
7	Sporting Event	Lab	On a Starship	Restaurant	Warehouse	Museum	Hero's Base	The Past
8	University	Another Planet	Boat	Under the Sea	Haunted House	Apartment	Ruin	Arena

Complications

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	None	Betrayal	Rivalry	Trap	Government influence	Monster	Trickery	Unexplained
2	Travel	Squabbling	Distractions	Abduction	Barriers	Weather	Diplomacy	Ambush
3	Strange occurrence	Riots	Physical feat	Politics	Theft	Mystery	Vendetta	Fear
4	Mistaken Identity	Power Struggle	Enemy	Transport problem	Gangs	Mental feat	Drugs	Security
5	Getting Lost	War	Allies	Side-tracked	Misdirection	Bureaucracy	Insanity	Enemies
6	Interference	Attention	Bizarre circumstance	Equipment failure	Military influence	Crime	Invasion	Money
7	Psychological	Dimensional Rift	Red Herring	Disaster	The Unknown	Distraction	Recurring NPC	Differing PC motivations
8	Media Attention	Legal Trouble	Lack of trust	Desperation	Love Interest	Incompetence	Random attack	Bystanders

Opposition

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Government official	Terrorists	Gang	Villain Group	Spy	Tycoon	Country	Company
2	Recurring Villain	Enemy	Supervillain	Criminals	Extra-Dimensional	Creature	Assassin	Technology gone Amok
3	Ruler	Shadowy Figure	Mobster	Rebel	Organization	Mastermind	Unknown	Demon(s)
4	Former Ally	Stranger	Police	Military	Veteran	None	Corporation	Outlaw
5	Robot	Cartel	Thief	Disaster	Team	Roll Twice	Lawyer	Traitor
6	Agency	War	Driver	Technician	Alien(s)	Threat to World	Hired Killer(s)	The Mob
7	Femme Fatale	Conspiracy	Nature	Mad Doctor	Celebrity	Enemy	PC drawbacks	Time
8	Friend	Madman	Occultist	God(s)	Cult	Other Heroes	New Villain	Themselves

Examples

I break out my d8s, and give a few rolls on the tables above. I will give an example of how it might be used to generate adventures for a standard Modern-age superhero campaign, featuring a group of heroes in a large American city

My first roll is: 8-5, 8-2, 1-4, 7-1, 3-6. This yields a result of :

“The main characters must [Contend With] [Victims], at [the Subway], but have to contend with [Psychological complications] while being confronted by [a Mastermind].”

A little bit of thought put into this result gives me an idea of an adventure where the heroes must

rescue people from a Subway car that is being held hostage by the meglomaniacal Doctor Sin, whose sole purpose in seizing the Subway was to draw the heroes in, so that he could enact a trap that will play upon the psychological quirks or one or more of the group.

My next roll is: 4-4, 3-6, 7-5, 1-6, 6-6. This yields a result of :

“The main characters must [Rescue] [a Magician], at [a Warehouse], but have to contend with [A Monster] while being confronted by [A Threat to the World].”

This one almost writes itself! An occultist, dabbling in things Man Was Not Meant To Know (as usual), accidentally opens a rift to Hell in the Warehouse he

was using for his ritual space. Now, the PCs have to rescue the occultist from the clutches of a particularly nasty Hellbeast, to help them figure out some way to seal the rift before Hell spills out and engulfs the Earth.

My last roll is: 1-8, 6-3, 2-2, 8-1, 2-8 . This yields a result of :

“The main characters must [Battle] [a Recurring Villain], at [a Skyscraper], but have to contend with [Media Attention] while being confronted by [Technology Gone Amok].”

Pretty straightforward...you can probably figure out how that one would work out.

So, grab your dice and get rolling!

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