



ICONS
SUPERPOWERED ROLEPLAYING
COMPATIBLE

THE SUPER VILLAIN HANDBOOK



DELUXE EDITION



THE SUPER VILLAIN HANDBOOK *DELUXE EDITION*

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Super Villain Handbook Deluxe Edition*. If you've been following us since the Basic Edition, welcome back; this book would never have happened without you.

I have been thinking about archetypes in superhero comics for a long, long time. The first draft of the material you are looking at was written while I was taking courses at UNLV twenty years ago. I started with heroic archetypes and got invaluable early help from Darren Miguez, whose reading tastes far outsized mine and whose sense of humor made a project this big surprisingly funny, and therefore not impossible. It seemed logical to start with heroes, but even then I had a list of villain archetypes too. It wasn't authoritative; I knew I'd never be able to cover all the different archetypes that were out there. But it was a long list and it was a beginning.

The heroic archetypes got further refined and playtested in a large and very active MUSH called Crucible City, and when RPGs began to open up their systems for independent publishers, I realized that my work with archetypes might have a larger audience. A lot of companies were publishing archetype products, but my take was different than theirs. In most superhero games, an archetype is defined by his powers. *Champions*, with its Bricks, Energy Projectors, Speedsters and Martial Artists, established most of the early vocabulary for archetypes like this. My approach was different. Sure, sometimes it was about powers — I still had a "Master of the Martial Arts" archetype, after all — but more often it was about the stories that a character told. After all, a character like the original Human Torch was a "fire-guy," sure. But he was also an android, an artificial person. That seemed much more important to his character than his powers which, honestly, are almost beside the point.

All of this led to the *Field Guide to Super Heroes*, published by Vigilance Press in four volumes under James Dawsey and Chuck Rice, with wonderful art by Dan Houser, whose work

has so defined the *ICONS* line. There, I finished up my list of forty superhero archetypes and fleshed them out with sample characters and a world for them to live in. It was a lot of fun to make, and I think it's a useful book for players in superhero games regardless of system. But I had to be honest, it wasn't as useful as it could be. After all, players probably weren't going to use those sample heroes, not when *ICONS* has a fun, fast system for random character generation. And while Game Masters could certainly put those heroes into their game world as NPCs, they weren't the kind of NPCs every GM most needs. Because what Game Masters most need are bad guys.

And so: the *Super Villain Handbook*.

The *SVHDE* describes forty-four different kinds of antagonists for your super hero RPG. (I started with forty, but generous Kickstarter backers added the Blue Collar Criminal, Evil CEO, Pirate, and Terrorist archetypes.) What kind of story does each villain tell? If super hero stories are basically about symbols, what do these villains represent? My first question was always, "What does the character mean?" Only then did I move on to powers and other ways to make game mechanics implement that meaning.

Each archetype begins with an example taken from the source material; you should recognize them. Then the archetype gets broken down by Abilities (which includes attributes, powers, and specialties), Qualities, and Stories. You won't agree with everything you're about to read; maybe you think one archetype should be split into two, or you disagree with the way a particular villain has been sorted. The simple truth is that everyone would write this book differently. There are many ways to organize archetypes and I don't claim to have the only one. It's also important to remember that characters slide back and forth between archetypes, often filling multiple archetypes at the same time. Magneto has been an Ultimate Villain, a Supremacist, a Force of Nature, and a

Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, and that's not even counting the heroic archetypes he's qualified for, like the Ex-Con. Archetypes aren't boxes in which characters are placed; they're more like tags, and the best characters all have more than one.

The Basic Edition of this book stopped there, with advice on each archetype, but the book you have before you has gone much, much farther. First and most important, each of the archetypes has been illustrated with a super villain ready to be used in **ICONS** games. That super villain has a detailed background and some suggestions on how he or she might be used in your **ICONS** game, whether it's a pick-up session or an ongoing campaign. Just adding these villains doubled the size of the book.

But some of these sample villains come from archetypes which don't make sense in isolation. For example, the Dark Mirror is an evil reflection of a hero. I could have given you a generic "Dark Mirror" bad guy, perhaps an evil Superman or Batman, but that seemed less interesting or useful than giving you the hero *and* the Dark Mirror, both at once. So with the help of Kickstarter backers, this book also includes the Heroes of the YOUNiverse, eight heroes you can use as player characters or NPCs. And when you read the Villain With All Your Powers archetype, you'll know where all his powers came from.

Speaking of the YOUNiverse, you're probably wondering what that is. The heroes and villains of this book fit easily into most superhero settings. But there are also some connections between them, because that creates stories and a feeling of verisimilitude. So as the book was coming together, it also became an exercise in world creation. That world is called the YOUNiverse, and it's called that for a simple reason: every character in it is in the public domain. Some of them you may recognize: the Black Terror, the Woman in Red, Stardust the Super-Wizard, the Green Turtle, and so on. These heroes and others have been in the public domain for decades, along with literary

figures like Sherlock Holmes or Dracula. But Fainting Goat has also put every character in *this* book in the public domain, from the moment of publication. You can do anything you want with them. You might start by dropping a bad guy into your ongoing **ICONS** game, but if you want to use that villain in a gaming product of your own, write a story about her, draw her comic, or film her movie, you don't need to ask permission or pay anyone a cent. All these characters, including their art, already belong to you.

Finally, during the Kickstarter process we heard a lot of players and backers asking for game support aimed at campaigns in which super villains were the player characters. This has been a popular sub-genre for a long time, with standout examples in comics, film, and gaming. Because you asked for it, you will find advice and suggestions for eight different models of the super villain campaign, from the World Without Heroes to the Jailbreak.

I want to give a special shout-out to two people: Walt Robillard, whose unflagging enthusiasm for this project helped me to believe in it when the months dragged on; and Jim Seals, who never fails to answer the emergency call, and who should really be writing Star Trek. "Anything else is a waste of material."

Every archetype in this book went through extensive crowd-sourcing for ideas and revision; many of you participated in that process through RPG.net, Kickstarter, or Facebook. I'd like to especially thank Graydon Schlichter, Graham Scott, Marc Singer, Warren Belfield, Diane Spencer, Michael Kucharski, Rick Jones, Kane Anderson, James Gillen, Dan Davenport, Michael Mendoza, Keith Mullen, and the amazing artists who made this project live and breathe: Jacob Blackmon, Molly Alice Hoy, Joe Singleton, and Dionysia Jones. Kristen Perkins edited and proofread the manuscript with a grace and excellence I will never take for granted. Ade Smith took on the Herculean task of layout for a book that added 10,000 words every time he looked at it. Mike Lafferty not only graciously agreed to publish the SVH, but

agreed to see it through to this monumental conclusion. He has been so wonderfully supportive the whole way through, that I cannot imagine how it would ever have been done without him. Thank you, Mike. Steve Kenson created not only **ICONS**, but also **M&M**, where so much of my work with archetypes was field-tested and made ready for battle

The characters in this book include game statistics constructed according to **ICONS Assembled Edition**. Each archetype also includes advice on the powers, attributes, specialties, and qualities common to that archetype. But some additional products and rules have been used.

RESOURCES

Great Power expands on the rules for powers in **ICONS** and describes many new powers, extras, and limits. If you see a power or extra in this book and don't recognize it from **ICONS Assembled Edition**, it's probably in *Great Power*.

Icons A-Z is a toolkit for **ICONS** originally published as 26 separate releases over the course of a year. Some of these options and suggestions have been especially useful in the SVH. In particular:

- **Knacks:** Knacks are described in "K is for Knacks," and they can be briefly summarized as stunts which don't require the activation of a quality or a point of Determination. A character with a knack can use it as often as he wants and in any situation where it would be helpful. Knacks are extraordinarily useful in creating mechanical differences between **ICONS** characters whose powers might otherwise be similar, and they help characterize a villain for game masters and players. Virtually all the characters in this book have knacks, usually three. Some knacks are especially powerful, so to keep them from being overused, the knack can only be used once per scene or once per session. If you aren't using knacks, then tuse the knacks listed as suggestions for the kind of stunts the villain might use in play.

USING THE HANDBOOK IN OTHER GAME SYSTEMS

We have used **ICONS** for the **SVHDE** but, just as with the *Field Guide to Super Heroes*, there's a lot in here which is system-neutral. Our real topic is the villains themselves: in comics, film, and television. If **ICONS** isn't your preferred system, you're still covered: conversion books for the **SVHDE**, funded as Kickstarter stretch goals, are already in the pipeline and address **Savage Worlds**, **Mutants & Masterminds**, **Fate**, **SUPERS**, and more. Each of those books includes game statistics and system-specific advice adding to the book you have here without duplicating or reprinting anything in this book.

- **Interaction Specialties:** **ICONS Assembled Edition** has no specialties describing social interaction; even Leadership offers only a mechanical benefit for teams. "I is for Influence" significantly expands social specialties in **ICONS**, adding Persuasion, Deception, Insight, Intimidation, and more. Many characters in this book use one or more of these specialties.

- **Cosmic Power Levels:** Some villain archetypes (like the Cosmic Menace, Imp, Power Corrupted, or Force of Nature) are so powerful that they are "off the chart" in traditional **ICONS** games. "C is for Cosmic" adds power levels to describe these characters, including Vast (12), Cosmic (15) and Godlike (20). Those rules have been used in this book when necessary.

Other chapters of *Icons A-Z*, such as the chapters on Demons and Magic, have been cited when appropriate.

VILLAINOUS ARCHETYPES

The *Super Villain Handbook* attempts to categorize and illustrate the most common and recognizable villain archetypes in comics. It does not try to be exhaustive, nor is it authoritative. You may see villains listed here that you feel belong to a different archetype. That's probably because all the best villains have more than one archetype, and may have drifted from one to another over their long career. Additional archetypes, usually identified with heroes but equally applicable to villains, are discussed at the end of this list.

ASSASSIN

"Your friend is dead, Mr. Urich. Move or speak — and you will JOIN him. In several weeks, the people of New York City will elect a new mayor. It will be Randolph Winston Cherryh, and as mayor, he will serve the interests of my employer. You will do nothing to stop this. You will cease your investigation of Cherryh and his commitments to organized crime. You will sit now and watch the movie. And you will think about how very VULNERABLE you are."

~ Elektra

The Assassin is a killer for hire.

EXAMPLES: Arcade, Bullseye, Elektra (Marvel); Deadshot, Deathstroke (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Servitor, Faceless Minion, Theme Villain, Gladiator

ABILITIES: The classic Assassin has no powers (though Fast Attack sneaks in on a technicality). She is, instead, a peak physical specimen. Her Coordination and Prowess are her only attributes over 6; high enough that she can kill with the most innocuous of objects, such as a playing card or a lemon seed. But she is even more dangerous when armed with actual weapons; in these situations her Martial Arts and Weapons specialties raise her fighting ability high enough to threaten even

superhumans. Her other specialties include Athletics and Stealth.

Some Assassins are walking arsenals, carrying swords, assault weapons, sniper rifles, grenades, and more. Other Assassins carry only a signature weapon, perhaps with built-in Gadgets or supernatural powers. If trained in the martial arts, she may wield powers of occult mysticism that include Phasing, Invisibility, Teleportation, or Transformation, all of which enable her to infiltrate secure places and kill without being detected.

QUALITIES: Assassins are distinguished by their reputation and their personal code. An Assassin with a reputation for failure becomes a laughing stock, so she works very hard to maintain her professional credentials. This may involve leaving a calling card, so that the police and the heroes know who has been doing the killing, and give her proper credit.

The Assassin's code includes a promise to fulfill the contract, remain loyal even when given a better offer, and keep the nature of the hit confidential. The contract gives the Assassin some degree of sympathy; after all, she's just doing a job. It's not personal. Indeed, some Assassins aren't even considered villains, and they are among the most popular of comic characters.

The Assassin succeeds through meticulous planning. She has observed the mark for many days, learning his schedule, his friends, and habits. She carries weapons designed specifically to kill the mark and whoever might be guarding him. She stages her attack on ground of her own choosing, first rigging it with traps then casting it into impenetrable darkness. If she needs to distract super-heroes while finishing the job, she is accompanied by an entire clan of Faceless Ninja Minions.

STORIES: Assassins pose an interesting challenge in super-hero gaming, because despite their fearsome reputation, they only

very rarely succeed. They can kill civilians and minor heroes in the supporting cast, but in many ways the least interesting scenario is one in which the hero is the target of an Assassin. There's surprisingly little tension in this story, though the player can still have a good time beating the snot out of the Assassin. If you don't want to make the Assassin a recurring character, this scenario is still very workable. The Assassin comes out a complete loser, but that's all right. Not every villain is a long-time recurring role.

The archetypal Assassin story is, instead, one in which a public figure, or perhaps the hero's loved one, is targeted. This creates tension on many levels, especially if the hero needs to preserve his secret identity while simultaneously protecting the mark from harm. The mark can even be warned about the Assassin, but stubbornly continues his routine. There may be an important public event which he simply cannot avoid, and this of course is precisely when the Assassin will strike. In the face of a particularly stubborn mark, the hero might even be tempted to kidnap the mark himself and impersonate him, thereby drawing the Assassin out.

Killing a hero's significant other or friend is no laughing matter, and it can take a hero a long time to recover from it. GMs should also be wary of "refrigerating" female characters; this is a term coined by Gail Simone on her famous website "Women in Refrigerators," and it refers to a trope in which a villain performs some terrible act upon a woman; this motivates the male hero and intensifies his struggle. It makes women into victims who exist solely for male protagonists, and is generally to be avoided. The list of female characters in comics who have been "refrigerated" is embarrassingly long.

Sometimes the Assassin takes jobs not for the money, but out of a desire to test herself against super-heroes and thereby improve her own fighting skill. This is the textbook definition of the Gladiator archetype.

Other Assassins differ from the stereotype by killing their victims from afar. The Remote Assassin combines the hoary tradition of the deathtrap with modern anxiety over computers, wireless communications, and the increasing presence of military drones. Many of us feel powerless in the face of technology, and a technologically savvy individual like the Remote Assassin is an IT professional of death, a sub-par physical specimen related to the Twisted Genius. He hacks computer networks to trap you in an elevator, or deploys an army of killer toys or bomb-laden drones to end your life. For the Remote Assassin, killing is a game, or perhaps a distant clinical art in which he kills with the touch of a button. Extreme versions of the Remote Assassin are Theme Villains who kill via virtual reality games and murderous theme parks where the world itself is turned against the heroes.

Assassins tend to work for Crime Bosses and Masterminds, and these other villains don't have the same code of honor as the Assassin. That means they occasionally lie to the Assassin, failing to inform her that her target is protected by (or actually is) a superhero. The Assassin would still have taken the job had she known this, but she would have charged more money for it, and now she feels cheated. That's usually enough to get her to drop the hit and squeal on her employer. She may even desire revenge, which puts the heroes in the unenviable position of saving the Crime Lord's life!

.50-.50

Assassin, Servitor, Blue Collar Criminal

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4+2
Intellect	<i>Average</i>	3
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Fair</i>	4
Stamina	8+2	

Specialties

Athletics
Stealth
Technology
Weapons Expert (Guns)

Powers

Combat Armor: Resistance Device
Great 6
Extra: Ability Increase (Strength)
Arm-Mounted .50s: Blast Device
Great 6
Extras: Burst

Qualities

Trained Killer
A Lifetime of Resentment
"You're the guy who killed Airman!"

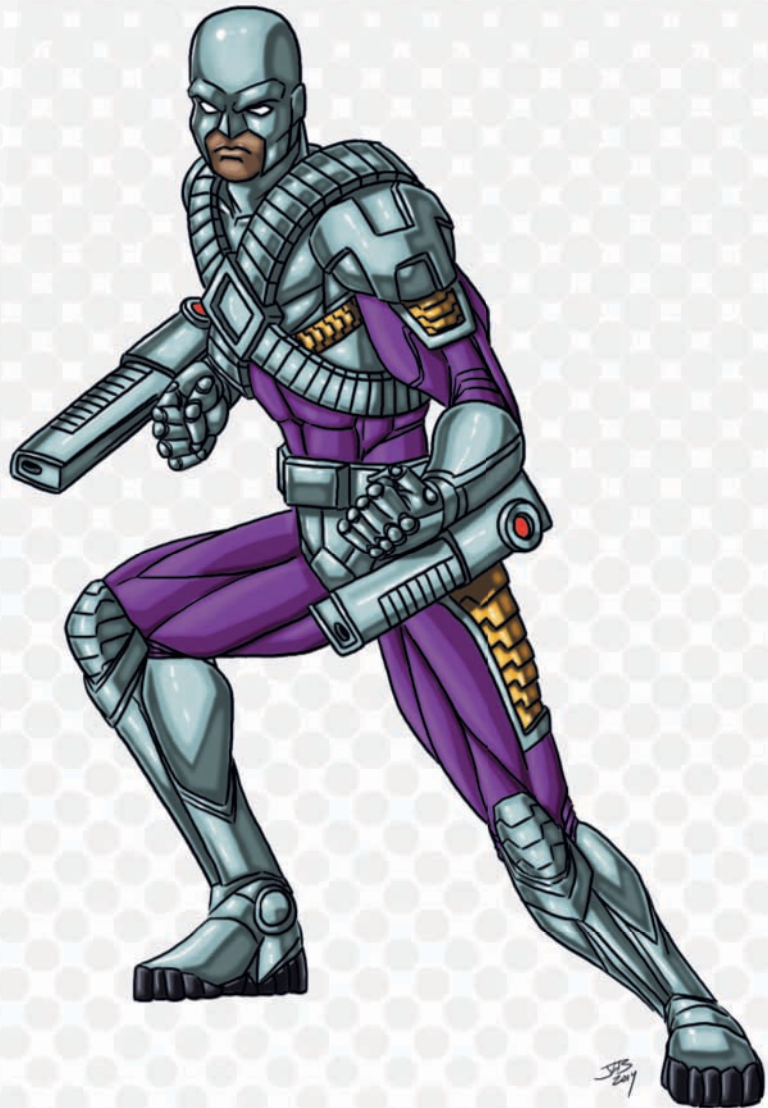
Knacks

Armor-Piercing Shells
.50-.50s Blast ignores 2 points of Resistance.

Autofire

If .50-.50s Blast penetrates Resistance, he gets +2 to damage.

Background: Danny Miles has had it with the damn super-people. All of them. When he was little, other children idolized super-heroes, but Danny never did. His grand-dad made sure of that. One day, when Danny was little, his grand-dad walked right up to one of those cosmic types, a guy who thought he was so great on account of saving aliens on other planets, and asked him, hey, what have you ever done for us? And the answer was: nothing. Danny must



have heard that story a thousand times. With his father in prison, Danny was raised by his mom and his grand-dad, and life wasn't easy. What's changed in the last forty years? Not much. A lot of the people Danny grew up with are in prison now. He's done some time himself. The super-heroes, they look out for their own kind, and that's not Danny's kind. People like him are on their own in America.

So Danny learned to fight. He learned to keep his head when guns were drawn and he learned to kill. There was a guy offering good money for a job, and when Danny found out later that guy was a NEST recruiter, he didn't much care. He had bills to pay, man. But the job was interrupted by Airman, basically a guy in a bird outfit. There were a lot of bullets. One too many for Airman. Danny got the credit.

From that point forward, Danny Miles was a criminal super-star. NEST ran a bunch of tests on him and determined that he was a prime candidate for “training and exploitation.” He took their training and refused to be exploited, stole the guns and armor he had been trained in, and became a free agent. Most of his contracts are for super-heroes out of uniform. He’s smart enough not to get in a straight-up fight with some irradiated freak or demigod. Instead, his clients hire him when they have found out who these heroes are in their secret identity. That’s when Danny comes in. Armed with twin .50 machine guns, he’s not a subtle killer. He’s killed half a dozen superheroes, but many more girlfriend reporters, aging aunts, and little brothers. He takes contracts on individuals unrelated to the hero business, but he charges the same price, figuring that although those cases are easier, he’s got a reputation to maintain. It can take months for him to finish a job; in between, he takes short vacations, which usually involve a lot of partying, drugs, and sex.

It’s not the life his grand-dad would have imagined for him, but it’s also one that wouldn’t have surprised him.

.50-.50 IN PLAY

.50-.50 is not a complex character; a superhero universe needs bad guys and Danny Miles is an example of the sort of bad guys which will crowd the shelves of such a place. Mechanically, he is straight-forward: he carries two .50 machine guns on his arms. As written, he is an assassin, which means he is usually operating alone. Alone, he will be pummeled by heroes and quickly thrown in prison. If you don’t want to re-use .50-.50, or you want to do a story set in prison, this is an excellent way to use him. However, if you want .50-.50 to be a recurring threat whom the heroes actually fear, then he must operate from a distance. When a hero discovers him, that hero is alone, in his civilian identity, and unable to compromise his secret identity. .50-.50 escapes, and his mark might also survive.

Danny’s grandfather is the man who chided Hal Jordan for not doing anything for “the black skins” in a famous scene written by Denny O’Neil and drawn by Neal Adams (Green Lantern #76). Airman is a hero in the public domain who has been used by other writers and publishers, including Malibu; he is a bit too much like Hawkman for my taste, hence his choice as victim. A 21st century re-imagining of Airman might take up the mantle but leave the bird-motif behind.

Use .50-.50 to shake up the status quo in your game and take care of loose plots. It sounds heartless to kill a PC’s romantic interest, but this happened in superhero comics all the time and was a time-tested way to clear the deck for new characters and stories. Likewise, shooting the mayor or police chief who has been pro-hero allows you to replace that character with a suspicious anti-hero NPC, changing the tone of your story and forcing the PCs to negotiate new challenges and relationships.

BLUE COLLAR CRIMINAL

"I learned a long time ago. When life hits you hard, you gotta shrug it off... and move on to the next job."

~ Captain Cold

The Blue Collar Criminal is a low-rent, street-level villain with a costume and an advantage; his primary motivation is the score itself.

EXAMPLES: Captain Cold and the Flash's Rogues Gallery, Boomerang and the Superior Foes of Spider-Man, Batroc the Leaper, the Wrecking Crew

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Crime Boss, Nemesis, Theme Villain, Thief

ABILITIES: Like many other villain archetypes, a Blue Collar Criminal can have almost any power, and she is easy to create using the system for Hero Creation in *ICONS Assembled Edition*. Use the Trained, Transformed, or Gimmick origins. She tends to rely on a single power augmented with extras and knacks, so that her freeze gun can hurl chunks of ice at a foe but can also be used to negate the powers of a fire hero. Her powers often come in the form of specialized weaponry that can be easily (and theatrically) taken away by the hero, rendering the Blue Collar Worker powerless.

Blue Collar Criminals with gadgets have almost certainly invented these devices themselves, and she can be very intelligent. This creates a cognitive dissonance, since surely anyone smart enough to make an arsenal out of boomerangs, tops, or mirrors could find a more lucrative career than robbing banks. Nevertheless, this is the career the Criminal has chosen, suggesting that she may have a high Intelligence but low Willpower or Awareness. If you are using a Wealth attribute, the Blue Collar Criminal's should be low!

QUALITIES: What separates a Blue Collar Criminal is the approach to her craft. She has the profit motive of a Thief and the moniker and trappings of a Theme Villain, but to the Blue Collar Criminal, crime is a job. It's how she pays the bills. She may have qualities like *Working Stiff* or *It's Not Personal*.

For a Blue Collar Criminal, you come in to work, you wear the required uniform, and you put in your time. At the end of a good day, you collect a check, toss back a couple of cold ones to ease the swelling, and go back the next morning. At the end of a bad day, you might end up in the slammer, but that's all right. That's what you signed up for. Her motivation is that check. All the rest — the gaudy clothes, outlandish monikers and even the ornate gimmicks themselves — are the means to that singular end. That end does not involve taking over the world or even killing the hero; in fact, heroes get lured into cat-and-mouse games with the Blue Collar Criminal and are ashamed to discover they are enjoying themselves. Criminals are differentiated from Assassins because, while the Blue Collar Criminal will kill to finish the job, he seldom takes jobs in which killing is the point. A body count attracts attention from the cops and the FBI; a smart Criminal avoids drawing that kind of attention.

Because the Blue Collar Criminal isn't evil or insane, a marked contrast to the hero's other enemies, the Criminal is sympathetic and easy for the hero, the audience, and the reader to identify with. America likes the underdog and the Blue Collar Criminal is nothing if not an underdog. The Criminal often laments that, sure, what he's doing is against the law, but this is all he knows and it's what he's good at. A hero who can provide the Blue Collar Criminal with a lucrative — or even modest — regular paycheck in a more constructive career can often turn an enemy into a friend. Marvel's Gladiator was converted in just this way, and Batman has bribed criminals like Mirror Master to inform on other super villains.

What makes Blue Collar Criminals really dangerous is their willingness to organize and

work together en masse, usually against a single hero. When this happens, one of them will have a leadership-related quality that can be used to keep the other Criminals on task, something like *The Job Is All That Matters* or *Stay Professional*. When the more wild members of the Blue Collar Team forget the mission and let their obsession for the hero get in the way of the score, the leader can bring them back in line. The best Blue Collar Workers do not allow ego to enter the equation. When that happens, mistakes are made and people suffer.

STORIES: Blue Collar Criminals make great PCs. In fact, if you are running a super villain campaign based on the Mob (see the chapter on *Super Villain Gaming* in this book), the Blue Collar Criminal is the default character type. This is because they're not evil or insane and they want the same things heroes want: food on the table, a roof over the head, and someone to spend time with. The only real difference is that they're willing to rob, kidnap and (when necessary) murder to get it.

When introducing a Criminal, consider giving her a clear motivation that the audience understands, even if the hero doesn't. Maybe she needs the money to pay for her mother's hospice care, or her husband is about to lose the house. These motivations aren't much different from those of a super hero. When a Blue Collar Criminal loses this essential sympathy, when his desire to fight the hero overwhelms his humble beginnings, he becomes a Nemesis and his whole story changes.

That sympathy which is the hallmark of the Blue Collar Criminal creates the potential for a long term relationship with the hero. A hero and the Criminal may not exactly be friends, but they understand and respect each other. They realize they're not so different. Again, this can lead to stories in which the Criminal flips sides or fights alongside the hero for something they both believe in, like saving the city or the life of a common friend.

Over time, the Criminal will need to expand or switch her gimmick around, just to stay interesting. Alternately, he may pass his name and gear on to a new generation and retire.

THE FOREMAN

Blue Collar Criminal, Servitor

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Good</i>	5
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Average</i>	3
Willpower	<i>Fair</i>	4

Stamina 9

Specialties

Stealth
Wrestling

Powers

Absorption (Impact)

Fantastic 9

Absorbed energy goes to Ability Boost (Strength) or Healing

Qualities

Boss (But Not The Big Boss)

School of Hard Knocks

Trustworthy

Knacks

Go Ahead, Hit Me!

The Foreman absorbs physical impact. That means any attack which results in a potential Slam (that is, a Bashing or Blasting attack that gets a Major success or better) is subject to his Absorption power and fuels his Ability Boost.

Slam Resistant

When testing for a Slam against the Foreman, subtract his Absorption from the level of the attack before comparing it to the Foreman's Strength.

Surprising Speed

If the Foreman has absorbed energy and his

Strength is above 5, he can use his Strength instead of Prowess to make hand to hand attacks.

Background: Dan van Sant was factory floor manager at an industrial processing plant when a pair of super humans crashed through the roof. Their brawl threatened everyone and everything, and Dan took the lead in getting his fellow employees to safety. But he wasn't quite fast enough; an attack from the super villain blew open a tank of liquid waste and Dan was smothered in the toxic sludge. When the battle ended, he was the only casualty, and he spent months in a hospital. In that time, he went completely broke trying to pay his hospital bill. His wife left him and took the kids. By the time Dan was finally discharged, his life was ruined.

But he had kept the secret of his powers from the doctors, and they hadn't discovered it. Dan was nearly invulnerable. Even more, when he was hit or hurt, he became stronger and faster. It was easy for Dan to imagine how he could use these powers to make a new life, and his imagination didn't involve becoming a super hero. After all, no one paid super heroes a dime. A man can't live on charity.

So Dan became a super criminal. He named himself the Foreman and adopted a uniform which wasn't much different from the overalls he wore on the factory most days. He had a string of early successes because, unlike many super criminals, he wasn't in it for the ego or revenge. He took targets of opportunity and was satisfied with a modest take. When cops appeared, or worse a super hero, he fled. By the time heroes figured out how to hurt him, Dan was gone.

But that was fifteen years ago, and life hasn't always broken Dan's way. He did four years before earning release as part of a Suicide Mission Team (see ***Super Villain Gaming***). He tried to stay straight but it proved impossible for him to find legitimate work. Now he's put the word out that the Foreman may be back in the game for the right boss. When he gets an offer that's not too crazy, he'll probably take it.

The Foreman and the Blue Collar Criminal archetype are sponsored by the generous Kickstarter support of Jim Seals.

THE FOREMAN IN PLAY

The Foreman makes for a good lieutenant employed by a Mastermind, Crime Boss, or Evil CEO. He can work alone or with a gang of criminal minions if your heroes are of low power level, or he can be in charge of a team of mercenary super villains. His powers make him a challenge, but once the players figure out what's happening they will figure out ways to nullify his advantage. For example, they'll attack him with powers that don't include kinetic energy, such as psychic energy, radiation, or a sleep spell. Attacks like that can easily defeat the Foreman, and if you want him to last longer than a page or two he may need to rely on allies to run interference for him or perform the occasional rescue.

Because the Foreman isn't a young man anymore, he makes a good parent or relative to a PC. He's not seen his kids for years, and they may not even know where he is or what he's doing, so it is easy to insert him into a hero's background. If you use this option, Dan might reach out to his kids and try to form a friendship, perhaps passing on useful information about criminal activities while, simultaneously, taking advantage of what he knows about the hero's activities to ensure he can get away with jobs while the heroes are busy elsewhere.

The Foreman also makes a good prison contact. Perhaps the heroes are tracking down a Mastermind or Crime Boss and Foreman is a known associate. He would be willing to pass on useful information if they could put a good word in with his parole officer.

CONQUEROR

“Gee, Brain, what do you want to do tonight?”

“The same thing we do every night, Pinky — Try to take over the world!”

The Conqueror wants to rule the world (but he may be satisfied with just the city).

EXAMPLES: Doctor Doom, Kang (Marvel); Mongul (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Mastermind, Ultimate Villain

ABILITIES: The Conqueror is bound to find himself in a grand melee fighting all the heroes at once, so like the Ultimate Villain, he requires some special considerations when it comes to his powers.

First, he needs defensive powers strong enough that he can survive even combined effort by the entire team of player characters, especially because this is precisely the first thing seasoned **ICONS** players will try. A force field, no matter how highly ranked, will not be enough; pump up the Conqueror's Stamina by raising his Strength and Willpower. If the heroes do threaten to defeat the Conqueror so quickly that the fight is anticlimactic, well, that's exactly what qualities and Determination are for. Keep the villain on his feet for another page and give the heroes points they can use in subsequent rounds.

The Conqueror also needs a way to attack multiple heroes at once; without this, it's easy for one hero to “tank him,” keeping the villain occupied and removing all threat of harm to the other heroes. The solution may be as simple as the Burst extra, but you may need to give the villain additional actions in combat. See the Ultimate Villain for more discussion of this tactic.

Besides his powers, the Conqueror has either high Intellect and Willpower (if he is an

Enlightened Tyrant) or high Prowess and Strength (if he is a Warlord). See below for more on these subtypes of the Conqueror. Outnumbered by the heroes, he can't really afford to miss when he does get the chance to attack, so his Prowess and Coordination are buttressed by the Power or Weapons specialties. He will have additional specialties that reflect the source of his power: Technology, Occult, Military, and so on.

QUALITIES: One of the oldest of the supervillain archetypes, the Conqueror comes in many variations. He crosses over with many other archetypes. For example, if the Conqueror wears a swastika, he's a Nazi. If he isn't white, he may be a Foreigner. Especially in the early Marvel Age, many Conquerors were Communist champions out to destroy America. Some of the most well-established villains in comics began as Conquerors before moving on to become Ultimate Villains, Supremacists, or even Cosmic Menaces. Two of the most common variations are the Enlightened Tyrant and the Warlord.

The Enlightened Tyrant thinks he would do a better job running the world than all those messy governments would, and by some measure he might even be right. The Tyrant may very well be able to end poverty, disease, and war, but this comes at the cost of free will and legal justice. He resembles the Supremacist, but not all Conquerors demand the execution of their enemies as the Supremacist does. In fact, some Conquerors proudly allow their enemies and rivals (that is, the player characters) to live, confident that the poor fools can do no harm and are still better off under the Conqueror's enlightened tyranny. The Conqueror may even keep the heroes alive simply to keep things from getting boring.

The Warlord is a low-brow villain who simply wants to rule. He has none of the moral ambiguity of the Enlightened Tyrant, and no one would seriously consider volunteering for his cause. He may have a love of battle for its own sake, and could be a former Gladiator.

Regardless of his background, the Conqueror is a planner. He has anticipated the interference of the heroes and developed weapons and tactics specifically to counter them. Activate his *Master Plan* quality to give him devices, spells, or Servitors which exploit the hero's weakness and which protect the Conqueror against the hero's unique attacks.

Conquerors can seldom conquer alone; they need an army or a doomsday weapon. The mind-control satellite, earthquake machine, and android duplicate of the President are all so Old School that any Conqueror who uses them becomes a Dr. Evil of self-parody. Besides, today's audiences are so jaded and cynical when it comes to government that it doesn't seem plausible to them a Conqueror would *want* to be made President. Modern Conquerors are more likely to destroy the nation or the world with the intent of rebuilding a new civilization on its ashes. Their doomsday weapons are actual doomsday weapons, used for mass extinction, not extortion.

STORIES: It's challenging to tell the Conqueror's story in an interesting and new way, but it is also one of the most hallowed of super-hero traditions, so your players will really respond to it. Even a cliched and hackneyed Conqueror can be enormous fun, precisely because the players recognize it and they know exactly what to do. There is no moral ambiguity in the Conqueror's tale; even Enlightened Tyrants, who appear to challenge the heroes with a moral quandary, are doomed to failure.

Yes, the Tyrant will have a scene in which he offers the heroes a place in his organization, and where he outlines all the benefits of his rule. But the mark of his villainy is so obvious and clear that no player character would actually agree to this offer, with a couple of notable exceptions. First, every table has a player (or two) who does crazy things just to be crazy. Sometimes a player will agree to the Tyrant's offer simply to derail the adventure or because he is bored. Another likely recruit is the infiltrator: a hero who has decided to accept the villain's offer so that he can gather

information on it and destroy it from within. Both of these tactics tend to split the party, which is fine in a comic but problematic at the gaming table. Be prepared with a task which the Conqueror can assign his erstwhile recruits, keeping them busy off stage while the rest of the heroes stage their breakout from prison. If you have a hero who makes a likely infiltrator, figure out ahead of time what secrets he might learn, and make them key to thwarting the villain's master plan.

If you do want to build sympathy for the Conqueror, consider giving him a personal connection to one or more of the heroes. He may be a former hero himself, disillusioned with the compromises he had to make and the reactive nature of super-heroics. Why should he devote his life to cleaning up other people's messes? Everything would work so much better if the heroes were in charge! A Conqueror like this is a Supremacist who values super-people — including the heroes — over mundane humanity, and he won't want to hurt the player characters. This can permit some verbal exchanges and roleplaying which you won't find in more traditional Conqueror stories, where everyone is busy fighting through Faceless Minions and Servitors to reach the big boss.

Conquerors often begin as powerless men and women; their ability to climb to super-villain status is representative of their will to conquer. Along the way, they master magic, acquire alien power sources, build themselves a suit of armor, and refine their body to physical perfection. The Conqueror is an opportunist; if he learns of a weapon which will help him in his ultimate goal, he will take it. If there is a MacGuffin in your campaign world and you don't know where it is or what anyone is doing with it, assume a Conqueror is sitting on his throne, holding it in one hand, and brooding. When the heroes find his fingerprints on all sorts of mysterious doings, you foreshadow the Conqueror's final invasion.

Only a Conqueror possessed of ultimate hubris or great foolishness fails to plan for his own defeat. This may be covered by his *Master Plan*

quality, but as you develop a Conqueror story, give some thought to how it will end. Has he left a Servitor behind who can rescue him from imprisonment? Is he fighting with a virtual projection from a secret lair on the Moon? Or perhaps that was only a Doombot all along.

JUPITER QUEEN

Conqueror, Cosmic Menace, Supremacist

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Incredible</i>	7 (9)
Intellect	<i>Great</i>	6
Awareness	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Willpower	<i>Fantastic</i>	9

Stamina 16 (18)

Specialties

Martial Arts (Jove-Jutsu)

Military Expert

Power Master (Weather Control)

Powers

Weather Control

Vast 12

Extras: Air Control, Blast (lightning), Darkness Control (clouds), Flight

Limit: Unstable

Battle Frame Juno: Ability Increase Device

Fantastic 9

Strength

Extra: Resistance

Sustainocircuits: Life Support Device

Supreme 10

Extra: Regeneration

Quarkcommunicator: Super-Senses Device

Poor 2

FTL voice communication within the solar system

Qualities

Mistress of a Hundred Moons

Mine is the Sanguinality

"Your Power Will Restore Me!"

Kirby Crackle



Knacks

Red Tornado

Jupiter Queen calls upon the endless extraplanetary cyclone we know as the Great Red Spot; use her *Vast* Weather Control (12) for an Intimidation maneuver on everyone that can see her.

Omni-Defense Network

Jupiter Queen's battle armor is wired with defenses specially designed for her most dangerous opponent. Each issue, she has Adaptation 10 against a single hero.

Background: In 1610, after making improvements to his telescope that allowed for greater resolution, Galileo confirmed his two greatest discoveries: first, that there were indeed four planetary bodies circling Jupiter, finally disproving the Ptolomaic view of Earth as

the center of the universe. Second, that those four moons were inhabited, and that mankind was not alone in the universe. Galileo's discoveries were mocked by his fellow scientists; declared a heretic, he was eventually brought before the Inquisition, where he was forced to renounce his own observations. He remained under house arrest for the rest of his life, and while his proof of heliocentrism would survive him, his observations of extraterrestrial life remained suppressed for centuries, known only to secret societies whose members, when they went public, were ridiculed.

But that was our first knowledge of the existence of the beings known now as the Galileans, an extra-terrestrial society dwelling on the moons of Jupiter. The Galileans are, apparently, not native to our solar system, but their true origins remain shrouded in mystery. Their lifespans are measured in centuries, and since the time of Galileo they have been ruled by Her Majesty Tanith III, the Queen of Jupiter, a brilliant, manipulative, and vivacious tyrant who commands the loyalty of millions of sentients as well as the cosmic power of the Great Red Spot. An endless cyclone two and half times the size of the entire planet Earth, the Sanguinality (as it is known to the Galileans) is the symbol of Tanith's royal authority and her greatest personal weapon. Its power infuses her body, and with it she has slain countless rebels and rivals.

Earth rediscovered the Galileans in 1979, thanks to the Voyager space probe. At the time, Tanith was suppressing a violent rebellion on Ganymede, and heroes from Earth crossed the gulf of space to intervene. Their efforts seemed to tip the balance in the struggle and Tanith agreed to a peace treaty, promising to give the Ganymede colony independence. But when the heroes returned to Earth, the Queen instead deployed atomics which razed the surface of Ganymede and utterly destroyed the rebellion. This established a precedent for Human-Jovian relations; Earth heroes deplore Tanith's merciless tyranny but, across such a great distance, have proven unable to dislodge her or even affect significant political change.

GALILEANS

Galileans are a race of space gods along the lines of Kirby's Eternals. Super-powers aren't universal amongst them, but they are common. Just about anything, including physical mutation, is possible; roll Galileans randomly using the regular **ICONS** rules. Their society is an aristocracy with each moon governed by a noble ruler whose title indicates the wealth and influence of his or her domain. The top of the heap are the four Grand Dukes of Callisto, Io, Europa and Ganymede, with dukes, counts, barons and other petty lords ruling over the rest of the hundred moons.

Jupiter Queen's front line combat troops are Faceless Galilean Minions wearing a rocket armor-harness which provides Flight 6 and Resistance 5; they are armed with destructo-lances which inflict shooting damage 6 or slashing damage 5. They have the qualities *My Life for the Queen* and *Veterans of the Ganymede Campaign*.

Pro	<i>Good</i>	5
Coo	<i>Good</i>	5
Str	<i>Fair</i>	4
Int	<i>Average</i>	3
Awa	<i>Average</i>	3
Wil	<i>Average</i>	3
Stam		7

Tanith III was born to rule and the power of the Sanguinality courses through her blood. She considers mankind to be a species of backwards primitives who are protected from the cruelty of interstellar politics by sheer good fortune (which is to say, super heroes). She would prefer to ignore humanity completely, but the Jupiter Queen has a problem. Over the last century, the Great Red Spot has been steadily shrinking. It remains the largest storm in the solar system, colossal in its scale, but it is smaller than it was, and no amount of bravado allows Tanith to ignore that fact. As the storm has shrunk — for reasons no one can explain — rebels and rivals have grown increasingly bold on the hundred moons of Tanith's empire.

The Queen has settled on a strategy, one intended to restore her power to its former majesty. With the help of Galilean scientists, she has developed machines which can permanently transfer the superhuman abilities of Earthlings into the Sanguinality. Only the most powerful heroes have enough power to move the dial significantly, but Tanith will take every iota of power she can get, funneling all of it into the eternal cyclone. Her fleets are massing for invasion but, until that time, her agents and champions spy on Earth and work to ambush its champions, for the greater glory of their immortal Queen.

JUPITER QUEEN IN PLAY

Jupiter Queen's power-stealing plot can be as big or as tightly-focused as your table requires. If you are starting a new **Icons** campaign, or just want a big brawl for a night of pick-up play, Tanith can land in Central Square with a Servitor bodyguard and a platoon of Faceless Galilean Minions. If you want more drama and intrigue, she can stage a full scale invasion over many issues, including a fleet of spaceships, a cadre of Royal Guard, and armies of Minions. Her super-powered Servitors can be generated randomly, or they can be reskinned heroes and villains from any other **ICONS** product you happen to own. Make each the champion of one Jovian moon, and you're set. For additional resources, see Steve Kenson's "A is for Aliens" which includes a 5-stage template for alien invasions, or *The Great Game: Cosmic Roleplay in the Stark City Universe*, where you'll find game statistics for spaceships and many alien champions.

In battle against heroes, Jupiter Queen uses large-scale weather effects to create qualities and intimidate her foes. Then she activates these qualities while attacking with lightning or her super-strong battle armor. Her armor makes her nigh-invulnerable and also regenerates her Stamina, but a team of heroes working together through combined effort or activating multiple qualities can overwhelm her. The Omni-Defense Network and her natural overconfidence means that Jupiter Queen tends to underestimate low-powered heroes;

encounters with her are a great time for your team's weapon master, dark avenger, or super-patriot to shine while the heavy hitters are helpless. Tanith is unlikely to linger if a battle is not going in her favor; teleportation beams from orbiting starships can whisk her to safety, perhaps leaving a bomb in her place, just to make it clear how much she hates Earthlings.

COSMIC MENACE

"You speak of me as though I am a MONSTER! Do not the humans THEMSELVES slay the lesser beasts for food... for sustenance? GALACTUS does no less!"

The Cosmic Menace represents an existential threat to the entire planet Earth.

EXAMPLES: Galactus, Ego the Living Planet, Immortus (Marvel); Krona, Mageddon (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Ultimate Villain, Force of Nature

ABILITIES: The Cosmic Menace can destroy a planet, cause a star to explode, and restructure the space/time continuum. To describe such beings, use the rules provided in "C is for Cosmic," which includes levels beyond 10 (Supreme). Such rules give you a way to define the character in game terms, but that doesn't mean you're obliged to roll dice every time someone throws a boomerang (or even a magic hammer) at God. When heroes attack a Cosmic Menace and their powers prove completely ineffectual, give them a point of Determination and move on. (Other villains, like the Force of Nature, will also work like this.)

There often comes a point, however, at which heroes can physically challenge the Cosmic Menace. Either the Cosmic Menace has been drained of vitality and cut off from the source of his power, rendering him vulnerable, or heroes from around the world gather together and make a concerted attack. (This may be an army of heroes, but it can also take the form of a single hero who holds the combined energy of all humanity.) If this is the direction your story is going, simply using Blast 12 or 15 may do the trick. Again, however, you are not obliged to use dice at all. Coming at the end of a long and difficult series of challenges, the final battle with the Cosmic Menace may be something best dealt with in narrative, activating qualities rather than rolling dice.

QUALITIES: Precisely because a battle with the Cosmic Menace is one of qualities rather than abilities, it is important to have a clear sense of the villain's priorities. These beings do not compromise or dither; they have concrete rules which govern their behavior, and the heroes are successful when they figure out those rules and use them against the Menace. That is exactly what qualities are for. So use qualities to clarify what the Cosmic Menace must do, no matter what.

You will also need to assign the Menace a quality that describes its colossal scale and immunity to the trivial powers of Earth heroes. This is the quality you will activate when the Cosmic Menace doesn't even notice the entire team of heroes making a coordinated attack on him.

Cosmic Menaces are too remote to make good first impressions on heroes. Instead, the heroes first discover them by fighting legions of alien soldiers, time-lost troopers, superheroes from an alternate universe, or powerful Servitors. When the right-hand man of the Cosmic Menace has multiple powers above rank 10, that's the GM trying to tell the players they're not going to solve this problem by fighting. Qualities may also be used to represent the Menace's home in a pocket dimension, far-off nebula, or moon-sized starship.

If the Cosmic Menace is something more than a primal force of cosmic nature (and some aren't), it is privy to secrets of the universe, Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. It may have a museum or zoo made up of trophies from worlds long gone, or library data that records the origin of the universe. Masterminds, Conquerors, and the occasional Twisted Genius consumed with hubris seek out this knowledge, only to be transformed or destroyed by it. But if the heroes exhibit proper respect for the Cosmic Menace and his role in the universe, they can sometimes persuade him to solve mysteries no one else can answer.

STORIES: The Cosmic Menace can be a source of frustration for heroes, especially players who have been trained to look at their character sheet for the answer to all problems. When the heroes are unable to attract the attention of the Cosmic Menace, let alone hurt it, you will hear someone at your table say, "There's nothing I can do." That's because, when your only tool is a +5 Sword of Awesomeness, every problem looks like an Orc.

Address player frustration in positive, fun ways. First, make sure your Cosmic Menace is amazing. This is meant in a very literal sense. The Cosmic Menace represents the eye-popping grandeur of the infinite universe. He is not limited to the terrestrial concerns of human super-villains. He should be far out, and the crazier, the more fantastic he is, the less your players will mind when they discover they can't beat him up.

Second, use supporting cast members and other NPCs to voice the concerns the players have and encourage new strategy. Sometimes all it takes is a loved one, aging parent, or child to say, "There must be a way, right?" for the players to realize that you are not a complete jerk, and you would not be telling a story that ends with the destruction of the Earth.

At the same time, be wary of stories that can end in only one way. If you have decided the Cosmic Menace can only be beaten if the heroes go back in time and recover the twelve diamonds of Merlin the Magician, then the game will drag on and on until the players think to do this.

Chances are, they never will, and you will have to tell them to do it. This is not fun for anyone. Instead, empower the players — with or without their knowledge — to write the end of the story. Let them come up with a way to outwit, weaken, or bargain with the Cosmic Menace, and then play it out. That is much more fun for them than trying to guess the secret code behind which you have locked a successful game session.

What is the objective of the Menace? It is probably not the destruction of Earth for its own sake; the Cosmic Menace is too grand and eternal to be much concerned about a few billion over-evolved primates on an undistinguished water-rich planet in a backwater solar system. Sometimes the Menace can be sated by finding the one thing it's really here to destroy, and providing it (or a reasonable facsimile). But just as often, there's no way to turn the Menace aside and it must be defeated ... somehow.

The mythical, even divine, nature of the Cosmic Menace makes it the object of prophecy and cult worship. It may be served by Cult Leaders and opposed by heroes who have been trained from birth for this very day. Heroes who wield Ultimate Weapons may learn that this is the enemy which their weapons were meant to destroy. The Cosmic Menace can even be responsible for super-powers in the first place; perhaps super-powers are the Earth's defense mechanism against the Menace and his ilk, or the Cosmic Menace is returning to Earth to collect (consume?) the super-powered individuals he seeded here a hundred thousand years ago.

The Cosmic Caretaker is a variation on the Cosmic Menace; Caretakers are cosmic entities with no particular animosity towards Earth. Their days are spent managing the secret operation of universal principles like time and life, chaos and order. There are many such Caretakers and they all know one another; between them they govern all the universe's moving parts. They may not have created the intricate watch that is the cosmos — that is left to a mysterious watchmaker greater even than the Caretakers — but they do maintain it and put it back together when it is broken by careless heroes or overweening villains. Player characters attract the attention of the Cosmic Caretaker when they upset the cosmic apple cart, or when their powers are uniquely suited to address a problem of universal scale.

MAW, THE OMNIVORACIOUS

Cosmic Menace, Force of Nature, Ultimate Villain

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Average</i>	3
Strength	<i>Godlike</i>	20
Intellect	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Awareness	<i>Vast</i>	12
Willpower	<i>Cosmic</i>	15

Stamina 35

Specialties

None

Powers

Flight

Cosmic 15

Extra: Space Flight

Immortality

Supreme 10

Life Support

Supreme 10

Phasing

Cosmic 15

Extra: Affect Physical (Strength)

Resistance (Damage)

Godlike 20

Telepathy

Cosmic 15

Extra: Rangeless

Qualities

Embodiment of Cosmic Hunger

Can't Stop Moving

Subconscious Terror

Knacks

None

Background: Astronomers discovered the Carcharodon Nebula in 1975, and for decades it has been simply one more astronomical phenomenon in the catalog. Recently, scientists began to theorize that the Nebula may have a large black hole at its center; this was the only

way to model the peculiar way in which stars moved in and around it. But the truth is far more horrifying: an amateur astronomer is about to discover that the Carcharodon Nebula is moving, and it's coming this way.

The universe is home to certain elemental concepts, entities which embody ideas so essential, ancient, and ever-present that they can reasonably claim to be older than thought itself. One of these elemental concepts is Hunger, the need to consume, and the name for this being is the Omnivoracious Maw. The Maw exists for one purpose and one purpose only: to eat. It is a cosmic force of nature vast in its scale; indeed, it is larger than most stars, and it travels through the universe in an incorporeal state, scooping whatever is in front of it into its immense gullet, where all matter is reduced to component atoms. The energy given off by this cosmic digestive cycle fuels the Maw in its travels.

The Maw is not precisely a god, though many cultures and civilizations in the universe have worshipped it as such. Though most human beings perceive it as vaguely shark-like in form, in fact its true shape cannot be processed by minds as primitive as ours, and sentient beings merely project the hungriest living thing they can think of onto its nebulous bulk. Its mind is vast and inscrutable, detectable by sensitive psychics throughout the universe, and it gives off a psychic wake of hunger as it moves. When the Maw approaches a world, that planet's population feels an increasing craving for food of any kind. This impulse sharpens and then crosses over into destructive psychopathy as the Maw draws near. Civilizations fortunate enough to be narrowly missed by the Maw nevertheless suffer incredible damage as waves of hunger-madness overwhelm most of the population, resulting in planet-wide apocalyptic horror.

The existence of the Omnivoracious Maw, and its true nature, is relatively well known to interstellar civilizations with science and history in advance of Earth's own. Various strategies have been attempted to control, distract, or



even destroy the Maw, but the only recourse that works is relocation. When an interstellar civilization discovers the Maw coming its way, they have to move or die. It's really that simple.

THE OMNIVORACIOUS MAW IN PLAY

The Maw is an inhuman, but not entirely alien, cosmic menace. In all but the most remarkable and unusual situations, it cannot be defeated by force. First, it is insubstantial as it flies through the void of space, and second, if anyone is able to physically interact with it, it's bigger than a star and impervious to anything smaller than an exploding sun. The Maw is theoretically vulnerable to Mental assault, though its Cosmic Willpower makes psychic attacks on it problematic at best.

One use for the Maw is as a kind of foreboding threat, a long-term menace which slowly builds over the course of your campaign. Heroes might be brought together to stop it, they may have been made into heroes for this express purpose, and your alien refugee hero might be

the last survivor of a species consumed by the Maw. As the Maw nears, all kinds of havoc ensues on Earth, from street level murder and psychopathic cannibals to super villains driven to steal the powers of heroes. A complete zombie apocalypse is not out of the question, if that's the sort of campaign you'd like to run. This is actually the second use of the Maw: to either end, or radically transform, your game. If your **ICONS** campaign has gotten stale and you want to end it, what better way than to have the entire planet Earth go careening down the throat of a cosmic Great White? Or, perhaps humanity flees Earth to escape the Maw, and your game moves permanently into space. If you want to have fun with this without destroying Earth, simply put a different alien species in the Maw's way instead. A team of cosmic heroes might need to save a benevolent species from consumption by the Maw. How would the heroes respond when the evil star empire they've been fighting with suddenly begs for their help?

CRIME BOSS

"Look around you: you'll see two councilmen, a union official, a couple off-duty cops, and a judge. Now, I wouldn't have a second's hesitation of blowing your head off right here and right now in front of 'em. Now, that's power you can't buy!"

~ Carmine Falcone

The Crime Boss sits at the head of an organized criminal network.

EXAMPLES: Kingpin, Count Nefaria (Marvel); Penguin, Carmine Falcone (DC); Top Dollar (The Crow)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Evil CEO, Mastermind

ABILITIES: The Crime Boss is an antagonist for Dark Avengers and other superheroes of modest power level. If he has a super-power — and many don't — it serves as his trademark and distinguishes him from the common criminals that surround him. It does not have to be of high rank to be unusual, and almost certainly has a score of 6 or less. Willpower is his highest attribute, though all the rest can range from 4-6.

A good Crime Boss is able to defend himself from the Dark Avenger in single combat, so in lieu of powers he arms himself with a signature handgun or other weapon. Besides Martial Arts (especially likely if the Crime Boss is Asian), Weaponry, and Business are his specialties.

QUALITIES: Use qualities to characterize the Boss's criminal network and his relationship with his underlings. Is he *Boss of All Bosses*, *Head of the Mexican Drug Cartel*, or *President of the Wang Family Association*? Is he the sort of guy who will *Make You a Deal You Can't Refuse* and *Puts Family Over Everything*, or does he just *Shoot the Messenger*? The Crime Boss uses this quality to summon gangs of Thugs or Faceless Minions, and heroes use this quality against the Crime Boss when they infiltrate his organization.

As some of these stereotypical qualities illustrate, America has a long history of associating crime with immigrants and the Crime Boss often displays some kind of ethnicity. This is less common in 21st century stories as writers and directors have become more sensitive to the portrayal of minorities, but comics have a long memory and villains who were born in the wake of *The Godfather*, Blaxploitation films, the Kung Fu craze, or *Scarface* continue to appear, sometimes benefiting from a well-intentioned retcon or reboot. Indeed, modern writers may be oversensitive to the connection between race and crime, so that the only acceptable Crime Boss is a white, healthy, heterosexual man.

Crime Bosses are traditionally wealthy and powerful, and they enjoy their life. That means they have connections and personal interests which heroes can use against them; spouses turn informant, a regular golf game with the mayor allows audio surveillance, and a love of opera can create an opening for the hero to break in and search the Boss's home. See "W is for Wealth" for rules options and story ideas relating to money; in particular, if you are using a Wealth attribute, it may be the Crime Boss's highest stat!

STORIES: A Crime Boss doesn't have the ambition of a true Mastermind. Instead, he is occupied with kidnapping, theft, extortion, the drug trade and, of course, murder for hire. He may even hold Masterminds and other supervillains in contempt, sneering at their garish costumes and grandiose plots. The Crime Boss's goals are practical — money and power — and his success demonstrates that you don't have to conquer the world to be feared and respected. His route to fame and personal comfort is an old one, a path well-worn and proven time and again. Super villains are Johnny-come-latelys, but sometimes the Crime Boss considers the arrival of super-heroes as initiating an arms race. This prompts the Boss to adopt a super-villain persona, codename, costume, signature weapon and calling card, all in an effort to keep up with the times.

The Crime Boss is well served by Assassins and Servitors, possibly even including a Monstrosity, a grotesque freak of nature who carries out the Boss's deadly will. These lieutenants, along with a gang of Faceless Minions, are dispatched from the Boss's expansive and comfortable lair to warn, harass, and ultimately try to kill the hero. They reappear in the final scenes when they attempt to defend the Boss in his home against an invading hero. Sometimes these lieutenants are the Boss's friends and family, leading to a personal vendetta against the hero when the lieutenant dies in battle.

Because the Crime Boss's network is so pervasive throughout the city, the hero discovers that his friends, family, coworkers and loved ones are part of that network. That cop who funnels tips to the hero is also on the take; the military commander who loans the hero a vehicle is also being blackmailed by the Boss; the mayor's daughter is dating the Boss's son. All of this serves to increase tension and make it harder for the hero to operate without drawing attention or causing unintended harm to those he holds dear. In some superhero stories — especially serial television — the web of the Crime Boss is so pervasive and personal to the hero that he is effectively paralyzed, unable to actually attack the Boss in his lair for fear of the ramifications. Instead, he can only attack the Boss's facilities and henchmen elsewhere in the city, fighting the symptoms instead of the disease.

A Crime Boss who “goes legit” or otherwise conceals his criminal activities behind a law-abiding facade may be an Evil CEO. This is an especially common story for Crime Bosses who have been around a while. Having been defeated by the heroes on a few occasions, the Boss returns with a new strategy and a public face. The heroes still know he's dirty, but they can't prove it.

Crime Boss stories do not need to be limited to Dark Avengers and other street-level heroes, though high-flying supers may feel they are slumming when they're forced to handle mere

crime. This itself creates drama, as the heroes underestimate the Crime Boss and forget his ruthlessness, while the Crime Boss uses Servitors, high tech weapons, and perhaps a suit of battle armor to punch above his weight class.

It's not uncommon for a Crime Boss to be challenged from below. Heroes can use this against the Boss, manipulating lieutenants into an attempted coup (or tricking the Boss into seeing such a coup when none exists). It can also happen as a natural consequence of the hero's victory over the Boss. After all, if the Boss goes to prison, this creates a power vacuum into which other criminal gangs and organizations can grow. Now the new, more energetic and younger, criminal gang is more ruthless and brutal than the Crime Boss's old one, and the hero is forced to ask if putting the Crime Boss in jail was a win or not. A canny Crime Boss can use this to his advantage, pitting the hero against the new gang in such a way that the Boss is able to regain his old position after the dust has settled.

Crime Boss stories are lethal, far more lethal than traditional super-hero comics. Bosses live by intimidation, and the fact that they are willing to kill makes up for their lack of superhuman power. They try to kill the hero, and this places the hero in a position to choose his own response. Will he also respond with lethal force? If he does, he's becoming a Vigilante. If he does not, the Crime Boss survives and vows to return. Sometimes the plot conveniently comes to the hero's rescue in these situations, ensuring an ironic death for the Crime Boss and relieving the hero of responsibility. Think twice before you provide the hero such an easy escape from a tough decision. Instead, force him to choose life or death. And remember: when a hero has the power to save an enemy's life but chooses not to use it, that too is murder, no matter what clever dialog is used to conceal it.

PROFESSOR PERIL

Crime Boss, Mastermind, Psychic Villain

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Great</i>	6
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 8

Specialties

Business
Insight
Intimidation
Investigation
Power Master (Telekinesis)
Psychology

Powers

Telekinesis
Supreme 10
Extras: Blast (telekinetic crush), Flight, Force Field, Life Support, Mental Blast, Mind Control, Mind Shield

Qualities

Master of the PITT
Super-Villain Contact List
Long-Range Planner

Knacks

Principal's Office
Peril has a +2 on all social interaction tests which take place in his office.

Background: Born in 1946, Plato Prescott became the villainous Professor Peril when his psychic powers surfaced in the early 1970s. At first, Peril was too busy fighting super-heroes and demonstrating his mental might to really make much of a profit at his schemes. By the end of the decade, however, he had smartened up and, after a few beatings, started to plan jobs which allowed him to avoid heroes rather than confront them. Slowly his criminal profile rose, until the FBI rated him among the Most Wanted. Finally, in 1979, he was tracked to



New Orleans and apprehended in a vicious struggle that saw the complete destruction of a downtown hotel.

Prescott's lawyers were able to trade down some of his substantial charges in exchange for information on other superhuman criminals. But even after the bargaining was done, Plato still went to prison for twenty years. He kept his head down and his ears open, slowly working out what he would do with his life once the bars were gone. Released in 1999, he was assigned a probation officer but immediately slipped off the radar. To the public at large, he has not been seen since.

Eighteen months later, Peril opened the Prescott Institute for Troubled Teens, known to its many students as "the PITT." The PITT is the world's first school for aspiring super-criminals. Almost all of the attending students are sons, daughters, or other close relatives of super-

villains, though not all have superhuman powers. The PITT is thought to be located deep underground, and this is a ruse which even the staff and faculty participate in, but in fact the school is inside Earth's moon. A false PITT, complete with booby-trapped nuclear devices, has been planted in the San Andreas fault, however, should heroes ever close in on the school's trail.

Funding for the PITT is provided by a number of gifts from organized crime networks, wealthy (and usually retired) super-criminals, and a few terrorist organizations. These gifts go into the school's endowment fund, kept in private off-shore accounts and neutral countries. Admission to the school is open to any student whose connection to criminality can be verified. In this way, it provides a service to criminal families who are often reluctant to send their children to normal school. The PITT provides an excellent education to teenagers who are at risk because of their family history, who may have unusual or deadly powers, and who often have trouble socializing with other people their own age. They are taught not only all the skills expected in a prestigious private high school, but also how to use their powers and navigate a successful criminal life. A typical graduating class is about 100 students and the PITT is a six year program. Attendance is free, and includes room and board in the school's dormitories, but most students return home via teleporter for holidays and summer recess. A job placement program was put in place with the first graduating class. Most graduates who have no superhuman powers join the Minion program, which secures them positions with established super-criminals around the world.

Prescott, or "Principal Peril" as he is known to the students, is the ultimate authority at PITT, and every student dreads a visit to his office. He enforces calm through the use of three particularly sadistic Deans. His Vice-Principal takes on the role of "good cop," pretending to lend a compassionate ear to the complaints of students, while always turning such whispers to her own advantage. Considering that all the faculty at PITT are (or were) super-villains,

politics at the school can get pretty messy. Peril does his best to stay above the fray, working on the assumption that the occasional fatality is good for the school's reputation. A student death every once in a while assures parents that their children are not being raised with kid gloves. Peril is always careful to watch out for those students whose parents are particularly influential, especially when it comes to donors.

Now nearing seventy, Plato Prescott considers himself a class above most super-people, hero and criminal alike. He's smart enough to avoid the silly games that have come to dominate superhuman culture: the fistfights, the monologues, the endless plans for world domination. He just wants to use his powers to live in luxury and security, and the PITT allows him to do that. He doesn't have to work very hard, and he has six hundred insurance policies on campus in case things go wrong. He intends to continue running the school for another ten years or so, then retire with a hefty pension.

PROFESSOR PERIL IN PLAY

Peril wields powerful telekinetic and psychic abilities. He's levitated a nuclear submarine out of the water, maintained telepathic contact to planets in the outer solar system, and usurped the will of some of the most determined heroes alive. He can use his psychokinetic gifts to fly at incredible speeds, or create an impervious force field around his body. However, Peril has left most of the flamboyance of super-human life behind him. Now, he only uses his powers to intimidate troublesome students or protect the school. He often comes off as surprisingly quiet and low-key, at least until his temper is roused, and he maintains an air of formality with students, referring to them as "Mister" and "Miss." Instead of using his superhuman powers, Peril is far more likely to rely on information: to talk to any super-criminal in the world, all he has to do is look their name up in his parent-contact list.

One obvious long-term use of Peril is for players to take on the role of students at the PITT. See the essay on "The Evil Genius School" in *Super Villain Gaming* for more on

this campaign concept. Alternately, Prescott's formidable telepathy makes him an excellent early warning system for global threats — threats he personally has no intention to confront. If the idea of heroes confronting an invading alien fleet or Lovecraftian menace, for example, sounds good, Peril might alert the heroes to the danger or be driven mad by what he has seen. If you want to bring Peril out of retirement, he could be forced back into action by an old rival or colleague who is blackmailing him; personally, Prescott has no desire to re-enter the costumed arena, but his powers make him an asset which enemies might seek to exploit.

CULT LEADER

"Brothers and sisters, we are soldiers of divinity. We are children of blood. We have planned this for far too long... we will not fail."

~ Brother Blood

The Cult Leader is a super villain with religious trappings and a following.

EXAMPLES: Brother Blood, Kobra, Libra (DC); the Triune Understanding (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Dominator, Heir to Lovecraft, Mastermind, Tempter, Terrorist

ABILITIES: As a relatively cerebral villain, the Cult Leader has less need for powers than many of his rivals. Indeed, he may have become a Cult Leader specifically because he doesn't have powers. The cult itself is his power, and he uses it both to accomplish his nefarious ends and to provide himself with various creature comforts.

However, the Cult Leader often ends up in eventual fisticuffs with the heroes, and when that happens he is going to benefit from some means of defending himself. His powers may be artificial in nature, derived from devices. He may wield magic, power granted to him by the mysterious forces he claims to serve. Occasionally, the Cult Leader derives power in direct proportion to the number of his followers; the larger his cult, the more dangerous he personally becomes. He may use his powers to cause or feed on fear (such as Emotion Control or Fear Absorption). Some buttress their command of the cult using Mind Control, making them Dominators; others rely on simple Willpower and are more like Tempters. This kind of Cult Leader makes extensive use of the rules given in "I is for Influence," including the Deception, Persuasion, and Intimidation specialties. Intellect is required to hatch and manage the cult's long-term plans. Occult is a common specialty.

QUALITIES: The most important quality for the Cult Leader is the cult itself; he will activate this to call upon the resources of his cultists, to motivate them into suicidal attacks on the heroes, and to throw themselves in the way when he is in personal peril. One of the most effective tactics available to the Cult Leader is for him to reveal that civilian NPCs are secretly members of the cult. When this happens to an important supporting character, it is almost always temporary and the result of mind control, but when it happens to bystanders in the street, the revealed cultist is a fanatical sleeper agent who was just waiting to get close to the heroes before striking.

If the cult isn't a sham — and most are, especially if they mimic an actual organized religion — the beings the cult worships may be invoked through a quality. If the Cult Leader is trying to pave the way for incarnations of madness from another dimension, he is an Heir to Lovecraft, but he is just as likely to be devoted to the Devil, Kirby space-gods, or other aliens who are using the cult as a smokescreen for their secret invasion of Earth. See "D is for Demons" for antagonists large and small that can answer the call of a Cult Leader.

STORIES: Stories of the Cult Leader, like so many superhero stories, reflect contemporary American concerns. For decades, the Comics Code prevented the negative depiction of any religion; this almost entirely benched the Cult Leader, though gutsy creators like Jack Kirby could still create Glorious Godfrey, a New God who used the tactics of an evangelist to lure a mob into becoming fascist Justifiers.

By the early '80s, the Code had weakened enough to permit the appearance of Cult Leaders with overt Christian trappings: Brother Blood and Deacon Blackfire, antagonist of Starlin & Wrightson's memorable Batman book, *The Cult*. In these stories, influenced by the Jonestown massacre and Patricia Hearst's induction into the Symbionese Liberation Army, the fear is that a loved one will be seduced into a messianic cult led by a murderous psychopath. Heroes must intervene, breaking

into the cult's compound to rescue individuals who don't especially want to leave. This representation of the Cult Leader persisted through the Branch Davidian standoff and the death of David Koresh, only now superheroes risked over-reacting (as federal agents were accused of doing) and had to proceed with more caution, infiltrating the group. New Age cultism led to the development of Busiek's Triune Understanding, an organization apparently dedicated to self-help and personal empowerment, but really a front for one man's attempt at ascending to godhood.

Pseudo-Christian cults still appear in comics, the most innovative example probably being DC's cult of the Crime Bible, a variation of that holy book bound with the stones which Cain used to slay his brother Abel. Crime Bible stories are distinguished by rival interpretations and uncertainty within the cult; the cult itself splinters into factions, some of which support the hero's activities while others oppose her. In this way, the cult becomes a metaphor for faith in the US at large, with a contrast being made between fanaticism (which is bad) and devotion (which is good).

The fanatical nature of cult worship has, in a post-9/11 America, bled into depictions of radical Islam. This results in cults like the Ten Rings organization of the cinematic Marvel Universe, a hodge-podge of ethnic groups, languages, and vaguely Islamic faith which seems to have no singular purpose besides the propagation of chaos and evil. But in many senses the Cult Leader remains non-denominational; there are still plenty of stories being told about cults dedicated to space gods, Lovecraftian horrors, or the devil.

Cults initially appear innocuous while acting as a front for criminal or other unsavory activities. Loved ones are drawn into what appears to be a philanthropic group, while a hero who knows the truth in her heroic identity is unable to warn her boyfriend, aunt, or brother without giving away her secret life. When the Cult Leader discovers these members of his cult and their potential use as a lever against the hero, it can

lead to the creation of a Girlfriend Gone Bad.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Cult Leader is the cult's willingness to die for the cause, at the merest suggestion of their leader. This is a real problem for heroes, and can create some shock value in a genre where civilian casualties are comparatively rare. The Cult Leader can prevent heroes from acting by placing misguided followers in their way — followers willing to detonate bombs, make surprise attacks with hidden pistols, or carry secretly implanted viral or chemical weapons into a crowd. Since cultists are to some extent misguided victims, killing them is usually not an option for heroes.

CARDINAL SIN

Cult Leader, Crime Boss, Evil CEO

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Amazing</i>	8

Stamina 11

Specialties

Business Master
Occult
Persuasion
Stealth

Powers

Hellfire Control
Amazing 8
Extras: Aura, Emotion Control (greed),
Servant (summoned demons)

Qualities

Greed is Good
Lord of the Plutocracy
Pope Francis is My Nemesis



Knacks

Take the Bullet

Once per turn, one of the Cardinal Sin's followers takes an injury meant for him. Roll the attack against the follower instead.

Everyone Has A Price

The Cardinal Sin has a +2 bonus on Persuasion checks when he can give the target money.

Background: "Cardinal Sin" is a title which has been held by three men over the last forty years. The first Cardinal Sin crept onto the world stage in 1978 when he personally assassinated Pope John Paul I in his bed, arranging the murder to look like a heart attack. For the next two decades, the Cardinal Sin

reveled in a criminal empire and global cult dedicated to self-indulgence and evil, though lechery was his greatest pleasure. His baroque schemes for the spread of wickedness (which began with a simple network of sex clubs catering to the wealthy and powerful, thus securing the Cardinal influence over world events, but which grew to eventually include inhibition-eliminating chemicals added to the world's water supply and a select brand of hypnotically seductive androids) earned him the attention of intelligence agencies throughout the western world. He counted super-spies from Britain and the US as his personal nemeses, but when death finally came for him in 2005 the hand wrapped around the knife was from his own successor, a serial murderer and cannibal.

The Second Cardinal Sin abandoned the showy infrastructure of his predecessor, with its sexy nuns and its altar boys, in favor of a "dark and gritty" approach. At the heart of evil is self-centeredness, and there is no simpler metaphor for selfishness than the act of eating: the taking of something outside and making it inside. In eating, the Cardinal Sin embodied his sociopathy, his absolute certitude that he and only he was what mattered; what was in him was good, and what was external to him was threatening — until, of course, it moved into him. The Second Cardinal Sin drew disturbed people to him with an almost supernatural ease and inspired multiple copycat killers; he himself was responsible for the death of hundreds, and he personally devoured three super-humans. But in 2013 he was captured and placed in federal prison, where he remains to this day; his arrest was only possible with the assistance of a shadowy informer who would go on to become His Eminence Gregory, the Third Cardinal Sin.

While Gregory is happy to indulge all the worldly pleasures, including sex and food, what he's really interested in is money and lots of it. He is one of the richest men alive, generating more money in a day than most human beings will make in their lifetime. Gregory is an excellent pitchman and he knows how to work a crowd; he portrays himself as a success, yes,

but one whom anyone can emulate. Most of his followers are filled with constant anxiety simply trying to break even in their everyday struggles, but they live in tremulous hope that somehow, this time, they'll flip that house and make a fortune, they'll make a trade that lifts them to the next bracket, or that lotto ticket will be the lucky one. Everyone wants to be the 1%, dreams of being the 1%, and imagines themselves as the 1%, so no one dares do anything against the 1%. Life is good for the Cardinal Sin.

Gregory's power structure is organized as the Plutocracy; it incorporates demonic cult worship into 21st century finance, self-help, and media practices. His infernal patrons are represented by logos and buzzwords, glyphs willingly revered by ignorant millions. While he is always under various criminal investigations, he has never even been seriously threatened with prison. Desperate men and women will do anything to ingratiate themselves with him, so a single casual phrase at a party, in the back of his limo, or aboard his jet has his followers scrambling to carry out his desires no matter how cruel, wicked or lethal. He travels constantly and simply moves into whatever home happens to please him that day, no matter where it is or who it belongs to. The Cardinal's global criminal cult has not gone unnoticed, but his byzantine power structure confounds ordinary police and he simply doesn't command the attention of super-heroes who are busy saving the world from alien conquerors and mutated monsters. As a consequence, a humble pontiff has decided to take matters into his own hands. Donning a white trench coat and assisted in his nocturnal investigations by a pair of doves, Francis has taken it upon himself to learn the true identity of this "Cardinal Sin," and shed light upon his crimes for all the world to see.

CARDINAL SIN IN PLAY

The Cardinal Sin makes extensive use of the rules in "I is for Interaction," specifically the deception, insight, persuasion and seduction maneuvers. His Persuasion specialty is also detailed there. He is usually armed with a pistol

(shooting damage 4) and a hidden knife (slashing damage 4). His legions of followers are easily represented with the stock characters in **ICONS Assembled Edition** p. 190-191; use bystanders, cultists, henchmen and thugs with the occasional police officer or soldier. Most have the Business specialty, a concealed firearm, and the quality *Money is All That Matters*.

As presented, the Cardinal Sin is mostly served by ordinary people who are simply desperate for money and who will do anything to get it. This is in sympathy with his role as a Cult Leader. His Hellfire Control power, detailed in “D is for Demons” along with game statistics for a wide range of demonic servitors, makes him a real threat to super-heroes. This power should be kept in reserve; when heroes reach Gregory, they should think him simply an ordinary man in an expensive suit.

Gregory’s nemesis is no less a figure than the Pope himself; comics have a long history of cameos by famous historical figures, and Francis can briefly appear in your story in this way, revealing himself as the voice of the anonymous tip that led the heroes to Gregory’s lair, or even as an investigating detective who arrives after the battle is over with a squad of Swiss Guard in tow. If one of your characters is actively religious, Francis might conscript him to pursue the investigation on the Vatican’s behalf.

DARK MIRROR

“You and I are very much alike. Archeology is our religion, yet we have both fallen from the pure faith. Our methods have not differed as much as you pretend. I am but a shadowy reflection of you. It would take only a nudge to make you like me. To push you out of the light.”

“Now you’re getting nasty.”

~ Rene Belloq and Indiana Jones

The Dark Mirror is very similar to a particular hero, but uses his powers for evil.

EXAMPLES: Venom, Abomination, Cassandra Nova (Marvel); General Zod, Bizarro, Sinestro, Professor Zoom (DC); Black Adam (Fawcett, now DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Evil Twin, Nemesis

ABILITIES: Dark Mirrors have the same powers as the heroes they mirror, though like many “evil hero” archetypes (Fallen Hero, Evil Twin, Power Corrupted, Vigilante), they use these powers in a more brutal and merciless way. **ICONS Assembled Edition** refers to these kinds of villains as “Reflections” (on p.186). If the Dark Mirror has powers which are opposite to the hero — a fire villain opposing a hero with ice powers — he is actually a Nemesis.

Many of the differences between a hero and his Dark Mirror are simply trappings; when a villain replaces the repulsor rays in his armor with a machine gun, that changes his damage type from blasting to shooting, but it doesn’t change the Blast score on his character sheet. A new extra or alternate power (such as adding the Burst extra to that Blast) can, however, help differentiate the Dark Mirror and illustrate tactics which the hero would not use. (Perhaps the targeting mechanism on the Burst is not entirely reliable, so that the villain occasionally hits civilians. The hero would never use such a weapon, but the Dark Mirror isn’t concerned over a little collateral damage.)

If the Dark Mirror has an edge, it is in the field which the hero is best at. That is, a hero known for his incredible strength will have a Dark Mirror who is just a little bit stronger; a super-genius hero has a Dark Mirror who is a supra-genius. Conversely, the Dark Mirror may actually be a little bit inferior in areas where the hero does not excel. That villain with incredible strength won't be as smart as the hero, and if the super-genius can get close enough, he can punch his rival right in the face. All of this reinforces the basic strategic truth in fights with the Dark Mirror: don't fight fire with fire. The Dark Mirror is designed to force a stalemate; that's the whole reason he exists. Heroes triumph over them by moving the conflict to an arena in which the Mirror is powerless, and that means creativity and a reliance on skills and abilities the hero normally ignores, or doesn't even realize he has.

QUALITIES: The Dark Mirror usually had a connection to the hero before his powers were acquired. He may have been a relative, coworker, or lab assistant. This connection is the source of both personal angst and interpersonal rivalry, and the two rivals have a shared experience which is alluded to in conversation without ever being fully detailed.

And their methods differ, not just in the superhuman arena but in their personal lives as well; Rene Belloc, for example, is a "Champagne Villain" in vivid contrast to Indy, the "Beer Hero." If the hero is educated and rich, the Mirror went instead to the School of Hard Knocks. If the hero is respected and admired, surrounded by romantic suitors, the villain is reviled and hated, shunned by all those he most desires. Because there is a trend towards "dark" heroes in current fiction, this can result in Dark Mirrors who are actually brighter, happier, and more well-adjusted people than the heroes they battle!

STORIES: Hollywood's obsession with poetic justice has led to a linkage between the origin of a superhero and the origin of his archenemy ("You made me first!"); this has made Dark Mirrors like Abomination, Iron Monger, and

General Zod more prominent on film than they are in comics. It sometimes seems that every cinematic superhero has to debut with a Dark Mirror, and for players new to superhero roleplaying, the Dark Mirror is something of a default super villain. This can be useful for the GM; consider creating a hero's Dark Mirror in play during your first session, at the same time as the hero himself gains his powers. When you need to teach a new player how the game works, few things are as educational as beating up on someone with the same powers you have. Just be sure to have a quick finish prepared, because fights with a Dark Mirror are perfectly matched and can go on far too long. Perhaps a nearby scientist has developed a weapon to strip the Dark Mirror of his powers, at least temporarily. The new player can then use this to end the fight after he has learned both how to deal and take damage, and he even got an archenemy out of the deal.

There is also an opportunity for fun and excitement when a new player confronts a villain which he *expects* to be a Dark Mirror, but who actually has surprising and unusual powers from an entirely different source.

And, to be fair, it may *be* inevitable for a hero to develop a Dark Mirror, should his career last long enough. Many heroes, in fact, have more than one. Tony Stark had so many he had to devote an entire year to chasing them all down (the Armor Wars). But there is a good reason for this: the story of the Dark Mirror is a good one, rooted in the superhero's obsession with the control and responsible use of power. The Dark Mirror is ultimately a way to demonstrate that powers don't make the man. A hero is more than the sum of his laser vision, nuclear-powered heart, and extensive training. When these same abilities are given to someone else, that new individual does not become a hero. Instead, he uses his newfound powers for selfish reasons, personal gain, and — when the hero arrives — vengeance.

THE WOMAN IN RED

Dark Mirror, Vigilante

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Great</i>	6
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 9

Specialties

Athletics
Intimidation
Investigation Master
Martial Arts
Stealth
Weapons Expert (Guns)

Powers

Revolvers: Blast Device
Fair 4
Trench Coat: Resistance Device
Fair 3

Qualities

One Woman War On Crime
Famous Lineage
Undercover Specialist

Knacks

Hot Lead
The Woman in Red can make a Blast attack using Weapons (Guns) on everyone within Close range. She can choose which targets she attacks and which she does not. When she uses this Knack, she cannot also use Double Barreled.

Double Barreled
If the Woman in Red's Blast penetrates Resistance, it inflicts +2 damage for her second pistol.

Background: The original Woman in Red was an undercover policewoman who solved crimes in the 1940s, and the current, heroic, Woman in Red is a young black woman named Tina



McDuffie. But between them was Barbara Allen, who continues to claim the name of the Woman in Red even as she has gone rogue and become a merciless vigilante.

Barbara was tall, strong, and agile, with a keen mind but no sense of purpose, when she graduated from high school in the mid 1980s. Her great aunt Peggy suffered a broken leg and Barbara was forced to move into her home to help out, presumably only for the summer. But what she learned was that her great aunt was the costumed super hero known as the Woman in Red, and she was hot on the trail of a mysterious killer known only as the Black Death. Barbara filled in for the injured Peggy; she learned the secrets of Baritsu and the skills

of the Great Detective. By the end of the summer, she'd captured the Black Death, enrolled in the academy, and agreed to take on the role of the Woman in Red full time.

For a decade, Barbara's prowess and reputation as a crime-solver grew. Peggy remained her mentor, patching her up when she was hurt and providing guidance from afar. But in the mid-90s, Peggy Allen finally passed, after a long fight with Parkinson's. Barbara carried on without her, more violent and prone to gunplay than ever. (And that was saying something, as Peggy had, with grim enthusiasm, trained her niece to rely on guns and the threat of violence.) But a year after Peggy's death, Barbara finally crossed the line. Refusing to abandon a case when ordered to by her superiors, she tracked a child killer to his lair and executed him without mercy, a bullet to the brain.

Barbara Allen did not attempt to hide what she had done. By morning, she was a fugitive from justice. But her vigilante war had only begun. For almost twenty years, she would remain perpetually on the move, mostly in the US but sometimes abroad, hunting down and killing criminals who had thus far escaped justice. While she is now in her mid-40s, Barbara Allen shows no signs of slowing down. She remains strong, healthy, and a deadly shot. Although her heart has hardened to that of a stone cold killer, she has somehow grown even more beautiful.

A new Woman in Red has recently claimed the title; Tina McDuffie refuses to use guns and Peggy considered her completely irrelevant... until McDuffie started to get close. They have faced each other more than once now, and Peggy has been forced to admit that Tina is smarter than she and possessed of a dogged determination. But as long as Tina refuses to back up her pursuit with violence, Peggy has always been able to slip the trap and continue her vigilante murder spree.

THE WOMAN IN RED IN PLAY

Details of the Woman in Red's history and status as a public domain character are explained in the Heroes of the YOUiverse section. This version of the Woman in Red embodies all the violent excess of superhero comics in the post-*Watchmen* era of the late '80s and '90s. She is a Dark Mirror of the heroic Woman in Red, Tina McDuffie. While it is confusing for a hero and villain to share the same name, superhero comics are filled with characters who share a title in this way, and there is even precedent for a hero and a villain competing over a name (for example, Power Man).

Barbara Allen is a vigilante, and because many players and their characters will sympathize with vigilantes, she may be perceived as a more effective and "practical" hero than the unarmed Tina. This version of the Woman in Red will appeal to fans of the Punisher, Deadpool, Rorschach, and all their kin. Some player groups will enjoy the tension that results from a vigilante killer; some heroes will support her while others try to capture her, and your group may split down the middle. Peggy is not especially powerful as super-people go, so she won't be hard to capture unless you, as GM, allow her to slip away. The decision to allow her escape or her capture should be governed by the social dynamics of your table. If her appearance in your story made for good role-playing and character interaction, let her escape so you can use her again. But if the result was an argument, hard feelings, or even a resounding "meh," then allow her to be captured and sent to jail in favor of other recurring villains.

DEVIL

“How touching is the love of a son for his mother! You could fight me for a THOUSAND ETERNITIES, Doom... You could grow old and feeble, and NEVER win her release! Or... you could barter with me for her freedom!”

~ Mephisto

While super heroes seldom face The Devil himself, they often confront characters which are the Devil in all but name.

EXAMPLES: Mephisto, Belasco (Marvel); Trigon, Neron (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Tempter, Force of Nature, Supernatural Horror

ABILITIES: Power ranks and specialties are for mere demons; the Devil is usually so powerful that he transcends them, though you can always assign him Vast, Cosmic, or Godlike power if necessary (see “C is for Cosmic”). He cannot be punched into unconsciousness, even by a hero with Strength 10. Those held in his traps cannot escape, even with Blast 10. In this, he resembles the Force of Nature. Some Devils, however, only have cosmic power level when they are in Hell (or a close facsimile thereof). If they can be separated from the infernal realm, they become corporeal ... and thus punchable. When it is necessary for the Devil to have powers on his character sheet, start with Hellfire Control (“D is for Demons”), Teleport, and Magic. When the Devil uses his Magic, it does not require Performance or additional time; he simply wishes it, and it is so. While the Devil is traditionally a shape-changer, this isn’t quite as common in comics as it is in folklore.

All of the Devil’s attributes are high, but physical combat is not really his style, so he has little need for extreme Strength or Prowess. He is very intelligent, but he can be outwitted by clever heroes; while he has keen perceptions and knows much that he should not, he is not omniscient and it is possible to sneak up on him

if he is distracted. His Willpower may be so high that he doesn’t need to bother with the Deception, Persuasion, Seduction, or Intimidation specialties.

QUALITIES: The Devil’s status in Hell is described with a quality which he activates to command legions of Faceless Demon Minions and, often, the physical reality of his home. That is, the Hell he inhabits is simply an extension of his will, and if he wishes the heroes to become lost in a swirling mist or caught in a furious firestorm, that’s what happens. This may be the source of his invulnerability and apparent omnipotence, and the heroes will get Determination when their powers are made useless, though it may not always be clear what that Determination should be spent on.

The Devil has goals and a motivation like everyone else, and this motivation will determine what the heroes need to do to beat him. Is he a collector of souls? Is he a Tempter, out to corrupt people, and make them wicked? Or is he more of a Conqueror, with the goal of making the Earth into a kind of Hell?

The Devil may have other weaknesses which the heroes can exploit. If he *Cannot Harm the Innocent*, for example, that may not apply to the heroes (who have done questionable things in the name of the greater good, or simply in moments of weakness) but it could certainly apply to particular NPCs the heroes can identify and rally to their cause. These stories usually spell the end of the NPC’s innocence, however, adding to the burden of guilt the heroes already carry.

And finally, you may need the Devil to have a magical power which is not easily quantifiable. For example, perhaps he can grant people superhuman powers, or increase the power they already have. (Of course, there is a cost.) Magic like this doesn’t fit into the kind of powers **ICONS** heroes possess, but it can be represented with a quality that clarifies the Devil’s role in a particular story. While this may go without saying, because it’s true of all NPCs in general, qualities on a villain’s sheet can

always be changed. For one session, the Devil may have the power *I Know All Your Secrets*, but in the next he is instead *The Perfect Liar*. The Devil has too many qualities to list them all, and sometimes they conflict. So pick the ones you need him to have right now.

STORIES: The Devil has some very old stories that can be adapted to the superhero genre. Among them are the Deal with the Devil and the Devil's Contest.

Deals with the Devil are more likely to be found among other villains than heroes. It is a rare player character who will agree to any exchange with the Devil. Instead, new villains appear or old ones return with increased power, and the heroes discover that all these villains have made bargains with a mysterious individual. This can be a useful twist in a long ongoing campaign because, while superheroes in the comics tend to stay at about the same power level for years, characters in RPGs have a tendency to grow in power more quickly. (It's also very rare for them to decrease in power, while this regularly happens to comic book heroes.) This renders old villains irrelevant, since they no longer pose a challenge to the heroes. That's when the Devil appears, giving those has-been criminals a power boost in exchange for ... something. Often the villain gains some disability or crippling weakness in trade for his new power, a new quality which more or less ruins what passed for his normal life.

But the Deal with the Devil can star a hero if the hero doesn't realize he's dealing with the actual Devil. In other words, if a player believes his character is just making a difficult choice — one in which, for example, he must permit a small evil in order to prevent a larger one — this is the sort of deal heroes are much more likely to agree to, on the grounds of doing what is practical, pragmatic, or efficient. The hero finds out later that his decision had more serious, long-term ramifications, and suddenly it doesn't look like such a good compromise after all. The other situation in which a player character is much more likely to knowingly make a deal with

the Devil is if it allows the hero to martyr himself for a larger cause, probably saving the life of another person or even the whole team. When confronted with the chance to take one for the team, superheroes generally fall over each other in the effort to get there first. This is doubly true if you are GMing a one-shot or limited run campaign, where the players don't have a lot of emotional connection to their characters in the first place.

The Devil's Contest is a story in which the Devil challenges a hero, or more than one of them, to a contest of some sort. The stakes are very high, usually their lives or the lives of someone dear to them. A deal with the Devil can become a contest story if the deal revolves around a signed contract; in these stories, the challenge is legal, to find a loophole in the contract and weasel out of it. Other Contests are more traditionally superheroic: recovering items from around the world or across time, or defeating champions set loose on an unsuspecting populace.

In addition to his Faceless Demon Minions, the Devil is assisted by one or more named Servitors, usually antagonists much more eager to enter into hand-to-hand battle. ("D is for Demons" presents you with demons of various power level and degree of violence.) And, at the same time, these Servitors are more of a fair fight for the heroes, so they have something to battle when they are frustrated over the Devil's seeming omnipotence. These Servitors may, in fact, be former heroes themselves who have become corrupted by the Devil's power. This places the heroes in a moral quandary, because the Servitor is the weak link in the Devil's plan, but the heroes don't really want to hurt him. Oh, the angst.

METAPHISTO

(aka the Demon Prince of Super-Villains, Animositus, Count Urizen)

Devil, Cult Leader, Tempter

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Coordination	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Strength	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Intellect	<i>Fantastic</i>	9
Awareness	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Willpower	<i>Cosmic</i>	15

Stamina 23

Specialties

Occult Master

Powers

Cosmic Power (Hellfire Control)

Cosmic 15

Extras: Dimensional Travel, Empowerment (Extended), Illusion, Power Boost (Extended), Power Nullification, Resistance (Damage), Spirit Control, Summon, Teleport, Transformation (Humanoids and Animals)

Limits: Ability-Linked

Environmental Awareness

Amazing 8

Limit: Location Specific (the Perpetual Prisons)

Life Support

Supreme 10

Extra: Immortality

Qualities

Demon Prince of Super-Villains

Jailor of the Perpetual Prisons

"Count Urizen"

Knacks

Master Liar

Moloch has a +2 on tests to maintain his Count Urizen disguise.

What One Hand Giveth...

Moloch can make permanent any power he has granted by Empowerment.

... the Other Hand Taketh Away

Moloch can remove any power he has bestowed; give the target a point of Determination.

Background: If occult experts are correct, Hell is surprisingly well organized. Within its "Lowerarchy," every version of evil, wickedness, and selfish behavior has a demon in charge of promoting it. The more important the sin, the more numerous and important the demons, and they all compete against each other to increase their influence on Earth. After all, the more suffering a demon creates on Earth, the more souls come to Hell and the more power that demon has over his rivals. Cardinal sins like Pride and Greed are administered by ancient archfiends with vast legions of followers, but



recent decades have seen the rise of a particular Demon Prince who, a century ago, was nothing but an ambitious imp, a nobody demon named Animositus. But now he is the Demon Prince of Super Villains and, like any self-respecting super villain, he has a new name. His is Metaphisto.

Metaphisto (or Animositus, he answers to both) does not claim to have invented super-villainy, so much as he assembled it out of its component parts. Back then, there were mad scientists aplenty, inscrutable Asian sorcerers, and criminal Napoleons, some of whom had grand ambitions of global conquest or a flare for the dramatic, but until Metaphisto's first followers on Earth there were none who put all these things together. Metaphisto's genius was to cultivate cultural trends which resulted in the sudden appearance of not one but hundreds of super villains all at the same time in the late 1930s. Some of Metaphisto's mortal foes have observed that super heroes actually appeared first and that true super villains arrived later; Moloch laughs at this and agrees that, yes, that was the entire point of super-heroes, which were just his means to an end. As a Demon Prince, Metaphisto is now mystically connected to the very idea of super villains. As they flourish, he gains in power. If the idea of super villainy were to be erased from the Earth, he would die. This relationship is not unlike that of gods to their sphere of influence (like Thor to storms).

Super villains lose; everyone knows this, leading heroes to underestimate Metaphisto or outright dismiss him. But it is important to understand the Demon Prince's goals and methods. Like most demons, Animositus lives by consuming the souls of the selfish: those who place their own desires above other human beings. Suffering is useful as a tool, but that's only because humans who are suffering are more likely to be selfish; they also abandon key virtues like hope, love, and charity. Super villains, as Metaphisto has fashioned them, are intensely selfish individuals whose out-sized personalities dominate culture, creating fear and anxiety around the world. Each is

convinced of his own righteousness, rationalizing his self-centered behavior. Their own followers are simultaneously terrified and envious of them. Their effect on Western urban society in particular is almost immeasurable: every time a family falls apart because the house was destroyed in a super-brawl, whenever mom worries that she won't be able to make rent because her super-insurance premium keeps going up, when a child is traumatized by super-violence, each time a desperate man inflicts harm on himself or others in an attempt to gain superhuman powers, whenever someone insists that these mass murderers aren't evil, just misunderstood, Animositus scores a victory.

The last thirty years in particular have seen Metaphisto's career on the upswing, as super villains have become more sympathetic and harder to distinguish from heroes. There are of course exceptions, and Animositus hates the truly selfless with an almost inarticulate rage, but in general heroes have gradually become more willing to compromise even as villains have become more popular. Many super villains have fan clubs and groupies. Indeed the whole idea of "good" and "evil" has come to be seen as an outdated and unfashionable concept in favor of cool moral relativism. This is great news for the Demon Prince, who has never had so many distinguished clients. Often, when a super hero dies, he wakes up to find himself in Metaphisto's realm, and boy is that funny.

His infernal domain is made up of the Perpetual Prisons, more than forty distinct pits, caverns, chambers and dungeons, each dedicated to one of the super villain archetypes represented in this book. There, the souls of dead super-villains — and a few of the living who have been lost or imprisoned — suffer eternal and ironic torment based on their particular flavor of wickedness. Metaphisto's power is strongest when he is in his domain, and he has almost unlimited power to manipulate, control, or alter the Prisons or anything in them; elsewhere in Hell, his Willpower (and thus his Cosmic Power) is merely *Vast* (12), dropping to *Supreme* (10) when on Earth. Whenever Animositus does visit

Earth, he is in disguise, and his public face is that of Count Urizen.

Count Urizen was an armored conqueror from Eastern Europe, a master of both science and magic, who swore an oath as a young man to rescue his mother's soul from Hell. In the name of this oath, he performed legendary acts of super-villainy, always rationalizing his acts as the means to a noble end. When he at last fought his way to the center of Hell and challenged Animositus for his mother's soul, he discovered that she had never been there at all. The Demon Prince had planted this idea in Urizen's mind when he was a child and Urizen had done the rest, foolishly damning himself for all eternity. Urizen never escaped, and Animositus now uses his identity as a mortal cover whenever his duties take him to Earth. In this disguise, he appears to wear red, gold, and black battle armor, the helm of which is surmounted by a small gold crown. Beneath the armor, he is a well-muscled but elderly bearded man.

METAPHISTO IN PLAY

The Demon Prince of Super Villains is an unkillable entity and cosmic force, not an adversary in the traditional sense. Heroes are not going to beat him physically. But like many devils, he can be tricked, outwitted, or forced to back down. Also, because he is playing a very long game, he is willing to concede defeat in the short term.

It's not an exaggeration to think of super villainy as a kind of cult with Metaphisto as its secret head. After all, super villains have a particular code of behavior and set of values, and their distinctive way of life separates them from ordinary society. Naturally they would not think of themselves as being in a cult (well, unless they are in a different cult!), and most have no time for religion except as a tool to manipulate others. But if Metaphisto is imagined as the secret leader of a cult which isn't even aware of its own existence, his daily activities make a lot of sense.

Much of the Demon Prince's time is spent maintaining and furthering his sphere of influence: super villains. He spends a lot of time on Earth assisting promising super villains and encouraging societal trends which make super villains more common and more popular. Metaphisto is the kind of devil who will finance a biopic about a great super villain, ensuring that the script follow the recipe for a summer blockbuster and that the character be played by a highly respected method actor. All of this turns a man previously understood as a self-centered tyrant into a sympathetic anti-hero, erasing the documented history and encouraging a new generation of fans and imitators. Naturally, super heroes can be invited into this film to play themselves.

Perhaps the simplest way to use Metaphisto is as a source for new villains. In his identity as Count Urizen, these powers will always have a different explanation. Perhaps the Count is using experimental nanites on the subject, or an occult ritual to channel the power of the Four Zoas. Any mouthful of gobbledygook will do, because it's all false. Such villains may actually think of themselves as heroes; Metaphisto has many such followers, and he finds all of them delicious.

Finally, whenever you have a place in Hell where the soul of a dead super villain might be hiding, it's inevitable that at some point, someone is going to try to rescue him. Perhaps a mystery can only be answered by a dead villain, so the heroes must travel to the Prisons to speak with him. Perhaps the newest threat to the planet is so grave that heroes can only stop it with the help of a villain who died years ago. Or, maybe you just have enough dead bad guys that you can spring a "Legion of the Unliving" on the heroes, attacking them with a whole team made up of dead super villains.

DOMINATOR

“You hear that, drones?! I NEED A SHOW! Everyone beat up the person to your left until that person is dead!”

~ The Purple Man

The Dominator makes you do things you don't want to do.

EXAMPLES: Maxwell Lord, Starro (DC); Mister Mind (Fawcett, then DC); Purple Man (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Mastermind, Temptress

ABILITIES: A traditional Dominator has the Mind Control power, but this isn't universally true. As a GM, decide how victims emerge from domination. This will determine much about the game mechanics of your villain.

The Mind Control power is best in situations where the victims — sure to include at least one player character — can break out of the domination through force of will or through the encouragement of allies, friends, and loved ones. If you anticipate a hero breaking free from mind control when his teammate spends a point of Determination to activate the thrall's *Always Tries to do the Right Thing* quality, the standard Mind Control power will work fine for you.

However, mind control doesn't always work like this in the comics. It often has a physical component, such as brainwashing drugs, a mind-control collar, or a purple starfish on your face. As long as this physical element is present, the domination is effectively irresistible. This kind of effect isn't replicated by the Mind Control power; it is more like a permanent quality which only vanishes when the heroes concoct an antidote for the drug, break the collar, or tear off the alien starfish. While heroic PCs don't have access to this kind of power, as a GM, you can grant it to villains, and it's far more likely to be used on NPC heroes than on player characters.

And finally, Dominators don't always need powers at all. While it's only common in street-level stories, a villain who blackmails and manipulates his victims into participation in criminal acts is still a Dominator; he's just using old school methods. The kidnapping of a loved one or pictures of an adulterous affair do the same work as a mind-control satellite at a fraction of the overhead.

Aside from the actual method of control, the Dominator usually has good Intellect and Willpower. He has the Persuasion specialty, but it's dusty for lack of use. He is probably a Mastermind, but blackmailers and extortionists may be mere Crime Lords. There are memorable exceptions: Dominators who have more or less fallen into their powers and who aren't especially smart, ambitious, or determined. And because a Dominator can get whatever he wants simply by asking for it, he has no other powers or noteworthy skills. If the heroes can reach him, it takes no more than a size 9 shoe to end his story.

QUALITIES: Villains with the power to control minds and compel others to do their bidding tend to be pretty self-centered; their actions are awful violations of personal dignity and the Dominator is responsible for all kinds of crimes carried out by his thralls, from murder to petty theft, but the overall scale of his activity depends on the villain's personal ambition. A Mastermind Dominator will set out to control the world, while a lazy and short-sighted Dominator will be satisfied with attractive company, nice clothes, and good food. This is no consolation, of course, to the unfortunate individual chosen to be the companion.

Many Dominators are quite blatant; their domination leaves a visible marker on the victim which everyone can see and which gives away the presence of the Dominator. This visible marker (*Eclipsed!*) replaces the traditional *Controlled* quality which victims of Mind Control usually acquire.

Unless the Dominator is so small-minded as to be essentially harmless, a mind-control variant

of the Lunatic, he will have made many enemies: former thralls who take righteous umbrage against him for his crimes. These nemeses might take the form of a quality which the PCs can activate when they need reinforcements, or just an expert who can tell them how to avoid being dominated. Similarly, law enforcement agencies have to take special precautions when handling the Dominator, and if the heroes can contact these organizations, they may be able to shield themselves from the Dominator's powers.

STORIES: One of the oldest rules of superhero gaming is that there are two things players hate more than anything else: they hate having their powers taken away, and they hate being mind controlled. There are, of course, exceptions, but it's a good idea to tread carefully with Dominators and avoid their over-use. Dominators work best when the heroes are the only people not mind-controlled, and they have to figure out how to stop friends and loved ones who are. If a Dominator does use his powers on a hero, it should be brief and limited to combat. Some players even enjoy the occasional excuse to pit themselves against another hero in battle, but few enjoy being a villain's servant.

A blatant Dominator like Starro hopes to gain control of key superhumans too powerful to be stopped; he then uses these superbeings as living weapons who carry out the villain's plan. These kinds of Dominators use tactics similar to the Cult Leader, placing dominated innocents in harm's way to stonewall or distract heroes. Their plan may start small, but it gets big fast as the villain targets the most powerful heroes he can find. Entire populations may come under his sway, and the PCs are confronted with enormous mobs of powerless civilians enslaved to the Dominator's will.

Insidious Dominators like Maxwell Lord, however, are more suited to stories involving intrigue, mystery, betrayals and secret plots. By taking control of the right people, this Dominator causes havoc that cannot quickly or easily be traced back to him. Take over the police chief, and the heroes are declared a public menace.

Take over the President, and now the US Army is hunting the heroes down. Long-term, subtle plans are perfect for the insidious Dominator, but eventually there will come a time when his influence and true identity is revealed. Unless he is in a safe location surrounded by thralls when the heroes find out what he's been doing, the heroes will immediately thrash him. This can turn into a morality test; few things challenge a hero's rules against killing bad guys more effectively than a Dominator who just made the hero — or one of his friends and loved ones — do a bad thing.

Dominators have another extremely useful role in superhero stories: they implement the retcon. Whenever a hero or villain has been acting in a way which, in retrospect, seems like a bad idea, you can explain it as the influence of an insidious Dominator who has been manipulating the hero from afar. Nearly anything, from alcoholism to murder sprees, can be retconned in this way, but it works best when the Dominator has already been introduced into the setting and is a known factor. If you have to invent a mind-controlling villain just for the retcon, your seams start to show.

THE SPINSTER

Dominator, Crime Boss, Theme Villain

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Poor</i>	2
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Poor</i>	2
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Fair</i>	4

Stamina 6

Specialties

Insight Expert
Intimidation Expert
Investigation
Weaponry (guns)

Powers

None

Qualities

Web of Influence
 Never Suspected
 Vanishing Trail of Evidence

Knacks

Blackmail

The Spinster has a +2 on tests to Intimidate when she does it through the medium of a letter.

You Don't Know What I Know

The Spinster has a +2 on tests to learn a target's Qualities using Investigation.

Background: There is an urban legend about a criminal mastermind so secretive that no one even knows her organization exists. Working from a hidden location, never meeting with anyone in person, she communicates her orders by letter. Each envelope, and the handwritten document inside, is composed of a unique paper that disintegrates soon after it is exposed to air. No one works for this mysterious woman by choice, but they obey her orders because she knows all about you. She has learned your secrets and, by threatening to expose them to certain individuals, she can persuade anyone to do as she commands. This woman, whom no one has ever seen or even spoken to, sits in the center of a complex web of influence, profit, and blackmail. They call her the Spinster.

Charlotte Evans is the Spinster, and she fell into her career as a criminal mastermind rather by accident. A professional nanny, she quite accidentally stumbled over her employer's illegal drug habit while seeing to his two neglected children. Rather than confront him directly (she needed the job), she instead arranged for him to find letters which outlined her knowledge and threatened him with exposure if he didn't part with a large sum of money. When he did, she felt not at all guilty, and she even remained his employee for a few months to maintain her alibi.

That job led to another, and Charlotte began to investigate her clients and their extended social



circles. Each time, she turned up dirt; it wasn't always big, but Charlotte found that by using multiple people to perform discreet tasks, she could sew them together into a very profitable outcome. A bank teller here, a security guard there, an alarm company dispatcher, and she scored her first million. Blackmail has become an intellectual challenge, one Charlotte is very good at.

Now, the Spinster collects a steady stream of money and information from unwilling agents across the state. Other crime bosses surreptitiously send her information, never realizing that half their rivals are also on her contact list. Given a couple of days for the mail to arrive, Charlotte can call upon police officers, soccer moms, construction workers, gang

members, lawyers, doctors, and politicians. Her only real limitations are the requirements of time and anonymity. But she's a good planner, patient, and she doesn't crave the spotlight. Indeed, she knows by now that's the only reason she's still alive.

THE SPINSTER IN PLAY

The Spinster is an old school Dominator in a superhero world. As such, she is something of a Theme Villain who relies on letters instead of tops, mirrors, or umbrellas. She makes a good adversary for detectives and heroes with dependent relatives and friends whom she can blackmail into participation in her criminal schemes. Note that, of all the secrets she discovers, a super hero's secret identity is in many ways the least useful, since by threatening a super hero she would only make herself an implacable and resourceful enemy. She has a large file of these names, and never uses any of them, not even to trade.

Because of her secretive nature and unexpected identity, the Spinster makes a great replacement mastermind. That is, when a hero first arrives in town, there's usually already a crime boss who has the city under his thumb and the hero sets his sights on this boss. Several adventures later, the crime boss is at last met in personal combat and defeated, off to prison. But what happens next? The hero is keeping his eyes out for any other criminal to fill the power vacuum, and from a GM's point of view it's usually time to give the player something new to do. Enter the Spinster. While the heroes are distracted by alien invasions, world conquerors, and mad scientists, Charlotte is quietly taking over the city's criminal network. By the time the players are ready for another urban crime story, the Spinster is effectively running everything from the center of her web.

DOPPELGANGER

"They say you can imitate anybody, even their voice."

"Even their voice."

~ Nightcrawler and Mystique

The Doppelganger could be anyone, including (and especially) the hero.

EXAMPLES: Mystique, Chameleon, Skrulls (Marvel); Clayface (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPE: Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, Villain with All Your Powers

ABILITIES: The Doppelganger comes in a couple of varieties, differentiated largely by his powers. The first sort is able to duplicate the appearance and powers of his victims through a super-power of his own. He has Transformation and Power Mimicry. If he can do this easily and at-will, shifting from one set of powers to another, he may actually be a Villain with All Your Powers.

The other sort of Doppelganger is a Master of Disguise and more of a planner. He prepares elaborate disguises and uses devices to mimic the powers of a particular hero. He probably has no superhuman powers of his own, but has a high Intellect and Willpower. His specialties include Deception, Investigation, and Stealth, and in addition to devices which grant him Transformation, he also carries Gadgets.

These categories aren't mutually exclusive, however. Characters like Mystique and the Skrulls can change their appearance, and this allows them to copy some powers naturally while still requiring devices for others.

QUALITIES: The Doppelganger often has a disturbing or unnatural physical appearance, which he conceals through his disguises. This is a very old trope with roots in the Pulp era; both the Shadow and the Avenger were masters of disguise whose false faces concealed bizarre disfigurement. In fact, their disfigurement

actually makes their disguises more convincing. Modern heroes like Mystique, whose unusual appearance is linked to her mutant powers, continue this motif.

Masters of Disguise see their impersonation of a hero as an intellectual challenge, and they may be in it just for the money, making them Thieves. There is something of the Gladiator about them, except that their need to prove themselves smarter than the hero (instead of stronger) aligns them more with villains like the Twisted Genius or Puzzle Master. This kind of Doppelganger should have a quality that represents exhaustive research into the hero's private life, research that enables the villain to fool even friends, teammates, and loved ones.

Most Doppelgangers are infiltrators; they use their disguises to sneak to an objective and, in theory, sneak out. But when the heroes discover the Doppelganger, he is forced to defend himself, and in physical battle he usually comes up short. Natural shapeshifters are more capable in hand to hand combat, because their powers allow them to do things other than imitate heroes. A quality that represents skill at ambush helps to ensure the Doppelganger gets at least one good scene before the heroes overwhelm him.

STORIES: One of the challenges to Doppelganger stories is that the player characters don't know they are in it until the final few pages. That is, if the Doppelganger is pretending to be the team secretary, the helpful butler, or the guy that repairs their super-jet, the heroes probably don't notice. Instead, they go on about their other business, stopping crimes and saving the world, while the Doppelganger sneaks in and gets what he came for. If the Doppelganger isn't specifically targeting the heroes, and is instead robbing a bank or stealing some high-tech device, the PCs may never see him in disguise at all! They arrive only after things have gone bad, and the Doppelganger has been revealed. (These plots can, of course, be combined, so that the heroes stop a mundane crime at which the Doppelganger is present, not as a criminal, but

as one of the civilian witness/hostages! This gives him a way to infiltrate the hero group.)

Another well-established story is the Doppelganger's crusade to "steal the hero's life." The villain has learned everything there is to know about the hero, who is then captured or believed to be dead. The villain then slides into the hero's identity, even going so far as to fight crime and help save the city or the world, all in the name of proving that he can do it at least as well as the hero did, if not better. This story usually requires the assistance of a player, who agrees to play his own Doppelganger. If your players are easy-going enough and trust your game, but you are worried about the player's ability to keep a good poker face, you can still use this plot without player knowledge. In this variation, the GM reveals at the end of the session that one of the PCs has been an imposter even though the player himself didn't know it. The disguise is uncovered, the villain is thwarted or flees, and then the real PC is found and returns to duty ... But everything that happened that session happened to the Doppelganger, not the hero. Tricks like this work only once per campaign.

Player absences at your gaming table also create a window of opportunity for the Doppelganger (or an Evil Twin). Because other players expect their teammates to be played as NPCs when a player doesn't show, no one's suspicion is aroused when the Doppelganger is seen at the base, engages the heroes in prying conversation, or even participates in missions.

Doppelgangers make great mercenaries and Blue Collar Criminals. With their specialized abilities, they are sought out by Masterminds or Conquerors who hire them to retrieve a MacGuffin or sneak into a secure facility as a Trojan Horse. In the early stages of the Mastermind plot, the Doppelganger does his job off stage and the heroes learn about it only after the fact. But because the Doppelganger knows the plot, the Mastermind must keep him close even after his abilities are no longer required. The Doppelganger doesn't reappear in the story until the heroes invade the Mastermind's lair

and get separated, at which point the Doppelganger can impersonate one of them and either flee or make a last ditch attempt to save the plan, depending on his level of personal loyalty to the Mastermind.

Two-faced by nature, the Doppelganger is a potential turncoat or ally to heroes who are willing to work with morally ambiguous criminals. Dark Avengers and other detectives are the first to deduce the Doppelganger's true identity and, if they can find a way to contact the villain privately, can sometimes renegotiate the terms of the contract in such a way that the Mastermind still gets arrested while the Doppelganger avoids getting punched in the face.

RAKSHASA

Doppelgänger, Psycho, Supernatural Horror

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Coordination	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Strength	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 12

Specialties

Occult
Power (Transformation)
Stealth Expert

Powers

Regeneration
Average 3
Strike
Fair 4
Slashing
Super-Senses
Average 3
Tracking by scent, see in the dark, hear ultrasonic frequencies
Transformation (Humanoids)
Amazing 8
Limit: Must have the victim's skin

Qualities

I'm A Demon
Man-Eating Tiger
Waiting for a Nemesis

Knacks

Master of Shapes
Rakshasa has a +2 on rolls to convince someone of his current disguise.

OMG!

Rakshasa gets a free chance to Intimidate anyone who, for the first time, sees him crawl out of a stolen skin.

Until Next Time

At the end of an issue in which he has appeared, Rakshasa can escape by slipping away into the darkness. When he next appears, the heroes each gain a point of Determination.

Background: Martin Lincoln was a young electrician on vacation when he was swept up in a NEST raid and used as fodder for radical biological experimentation. NEST's science division was attempting to create covert assassins who could infiltrate super-hero teams and destroy them from within. His genes were mixed with those of a tiger, so that he gained phenomenal strength, speed, and agility. But, horrifyingly, the research agenda also enabled him to contract his musculature and organs. His fur now secreted a slime which preserved organic tissue, and his voice could be modulated to impersonate almost anyone. In other words, it was now possible for Martin to kill a man, carefully remove the victim's skin, and then wear it for extended periods. The cruelty with which Martin was treated was more than his mind could bear and, although the experiments had proved fruitful in their way, he was driven mad. Constructing a new identity for himself, he imagined himself as a demon. He had vague memories of a mythological monster, a man-eater which could change its shape, and this became his new self.

It was pretty easy for Rakshasa to escape from the research lab, though he waited until he was sent out on a test assignment to do so. Now he

moves through the world with no motivation more complex than satisfying his psychotic cravings for human flesh; his insanity is fed when he deceives others into thinking he is their friend and loved one, but eventually the rush of this deception fades and he reveals himself, shedding the old skin before claiming a new one. The FBI has been tracking a super-human serial killer, but they have few leads and he is way ahead of them.

RAKSHASA IN PLAY

Rakshasa believes he is an example of the Supernatural Horror archetype but, in fact, he is a Psycho. One thing these two archetypes have in common is a large body count. If your campaign is the sort in which it is possible for a hero to be carved up and eaten, then Rakshasa could potentially provide you with stories in which he “steals a hero’s life” or otherwise pretends to be a hero, infiltrating the team. In most **ICONS** games, however, Rakshasa’s only prey will be innocent civilians.

As a compromise, you can use him to get rid of NPC heroes who no longer interest you, including former player characters whose players have left the game.

With his stunted and inaccurate knowledge of Indian mythology, Rakshasa makes a good nemesis for a hero who actually is Indian, Hindu, or Buddhist. He is also a good rival for heroes in the Wolverine-mold: dangerous hand to hand fighters who need an enemy tough enough to take punishment and get back up again.



EVIL CEO

"Life is short. I could have become like my parents, had I chose to wallow in cheap emotion and self loathing, as did they. Instead, I chose to become a God. I control human lives, instead of being controlled. I can destroy someone with a phone call. Which is why I cannot abide Superman! There is only room for one God on this planet! I'm determined to bring him down at any cost!"

~ Lex Luthor

Money is the root of all evil.

EXAMPLES: Obadiah Stane, Justin Hammer, Aldrich Killian, Lex Luthor, Maxwell Lord

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Mastermind, Nemesis, Twisted Genius, Crime Boss

ABILITIES: The Evil CEO often has no powers at all. Or, rather, he has the one power which everyone understands: money. (If you are using the optional Wealth attribute described in "W is for Wealth," that is the Evil CEO's highest stat.) With that money, he can buy battle armor that grants him powers to rival the hero's own, or even modify his own body through genetic engineering or cybernetic replacement. The fact that the CEO has no powers is no accident; for heroes with no real powers, who rely on armor, weapons, or incredible training, he is a rival and equal. For heroes with great power, he actually becomes an underdog, a mere human who dares to wrestle with a super hero even though he is "only a man." In the process, he becomes a twisted commentary on humanity itself, and a critique of the super-man. In both cases, he can slide into the role of Nemesis.

The best attribute of the CEO is traditionally Intellect, but some CEO's hire an army of scientists to do the engineering while the CEO provides charisma and leadership (Willpower) or a keen sense for what makes other people tick (Awareness). An Evil CEO with high Intellect may actually be a Twisted Genius.

His specialties begin with Business, but influence-oriented specialties like Insight, Deception, Persuasion, and Intimidation are also likely. CEO's use their knowledge of Law to keep themselves from being arrested, usually by setting up an employee as a fall guy who uses "stolen" equipment to harass the hero.

QUALITIES: The CEO needs a quality that represents his corporation, and he activates it for money, scientists, connections, mundane equipment and vehicles, and security forces. He is often protected by a powerful bodyguard who could be a quality but might be a full-fledged Servitor. The CEO also has a steady supply of Faceless Corporate Minions in suits, often desperate to break out of middle management and into a sweet VP position. They will do anything, including murder, for promotion. If they refuse the CEO's commands, he will not just fire them, he will ruin their lives. Sometimes the CEO's minions can be turned against him.

If the Evil CEO does have powers, those powers need to be kept secret. If they were known, the world would no longer perceive the CEO as a success story. He would, instead, be a super villain, which the CEO sees as beneath him. Other villains seek to kill the hero or conquer the world, but the CEO knows that while conquering the world is impossible, buying the world is eminently feasible and a hero who is sidelined or distracted is just as irrelevant as a hero who is dead.

The Evil CEO plays into our fear of uncontrolled capitalism and corporate culture, a world in which "corporations are people" and you're never entirely sure who runs things any more. The archetype has a long history in American culture, and by the 21st century the Evil CEO had become the default villain in cinema action thrillers, but the definitive example in comics is probably John Byrne's Lex Luthor, a corpulent embodiment of 1980s greed culture. As the decades passed, the Evil CEO became more trendy, hitting the gym and shedding his 80's trappings for a Steve Jobs black turtleneck.

Crime Bosses who switch to legitimate business, or who conceal their criminal activities behind such a business, can also be Evil CEOs. The key to victory over Crime Bosses of this sort is proving their criminal ties.

STORIES: How did the Evil CEO get rich? Traditionally, he worked his way to the top. That makes him more admirable as a character. But he may have stolen his money or inherited it, and now he will do anything to keep it. This version of the Evil CEO is less sympathetic and easier to hate; see, for example, the alternate Biff of *Back to the Future II*, modeled on Donald Trump. Usually, however, the CEO has something to prove: that an ordinary man without powers can still triumph over a super hero, or that he is indeed the capitalist giant that his press releases make him out to be.

The CEO can be very frustrating for heroes, because his whole story depends on avoiding capture or jail. The heroes know the CEO is evil, but they have no proof and he has cleverly arranged for others to take the fall. This can lead to confrontations in the corporate office during which the hero vows to bring the CEO to justice and the CEO laughs in the hero's face. Be sure to give the players plenty of more traditional antagonists to beat up and send to jail, so that the CEO remains a rare exception and not the rule.

Alternately, because the CEO hides in plain sight, he can approach the heroes as an ally or resource. When a hero's powers begin to backfire, or he recovers a strange probe from space, or his girlfriend falls into a mysterious coma, the CEO appears to help. An army of scientists and doctors are at his disposal, and he promises the very best in care. But in fact the CEO is either trying to develop powers of his own (because he has a huge inferiority complex regarding the hero) or he is using his hidden powers in secret to turn the hero's misfortune to his own advantage.

TIMESHARE

Evil CEO, Thief

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Average</i>	3
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	3
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Poor</i>	2

Stamina 5

Specialties

Business
Power (Time Control)

Powers

Time Control (Super-Speed)
Amazing 8
Extras: Defending, Invisibility, Regeneration

Qualities

Big Fish In A Small Pond
Jekyll and Hyde
Ready Cash

Knacks

Good Samaritan
Any turn on which Timeshare uses his Time Control, he can perform one additional action that benefits someone nearby in a minor way.

Invisible Friend

By using his Time Control powers, Timeshare can use the Combined Effort rules to give a +1 bonus to any single individual of whom he is aware. The individual he is helping does not need to know Timeshare is assisting.

Background: Some people achieve superpowers, and some have superpowers thrust upon them. Julian Knox was born with superpowers, though he didn't discover them until recently, after he was already a Junior Vice President of marketing. Julian can slow time or, more accurately, he can accelerate time around himself, making it appear to him that everyone else is frozen. To most, such power would be an incredible gift, something to be used for

great good or great evil. For Julian, it's mostly a way to sleep in and still make it to the office on time.

Julian makes plenty of money, but he gets no pleasure from it because he is not especially well liked. He doesn't understand why people don't like him, and blames it on a perceived resentment of his money, good looks, and good fortune. In fact, people dislike Julian because he's clueless and self-absorbed, unaware of how good he has it. A person with Julian's many blessings could do a lot of good in the world, but he can't really muster any interest in doing so.

Instead, Julian uses his incredible control of time to rob banks and jewelry stores, accelerating time around himself and walking in and out before anyone sees anything except a blur. He doesn't really need the money; he performs these crimes as a distraction and to make him feel like he's not wasting his powers. When he steals, he stuffs the pockets of bystanders with cash, moves disabled and pregnant customers to the front of the line, catches spilled mugs of coffee, and performs any number of other well-intentioned but ultimately trivial good deeds. He thinks this balances out the waste of his life and powers, but he still can't sleep at night and no amount of good deeds has convinced his coworkers to revise their opinion of him.

Timeshare and the Evil CEO archetype are sponsored by the generous Kickstarter support of Greg Asmus.

TIMESHARE IN PLAY

Timeshare is a good character to use as a minor but recurring subplot. One of your players, who perhaps doesn't get a lot of play time or is upstaged by combat-heavy heroes, learns of a series of strange robberies. Your player might even be present for one, and find some token of Timeshare's guilty conscience when it's over (an extra \$20 in his pocket, a chocolate donut in his hand, or the keys to the bank manager's car).

Timeshare is not really evil, but he is willing to exploit his powers for his own benefit. He gives money and does other good works for people in an effort to relieve his conscience. That works, but he has so far been incapable of looking at himself and realizing he's a selfish prick. It's not too late for Timeshare; if he is discovered by a compassionate hero who sincerely wants to help him, he could become a good friend and useful ally. But if found by some Vigilante like the Black Terror, he's likely to be dead with a bullet in his brain. Your players may be the difference between life and death for him.

EVIL TWIN

"From what I gather, we are very much alike. Everything about you tells the tale. Your attitude, your costume, your tactics... they all scream of outrage, despair, vengeance. What terrible wrong was done to set you on this path? It doesn't really matter. Nothing matters."

~ Owlman

In another dimension or alternate timeline, a man or woman who could have chosen to be good turned instead to evil.

EXAMPLES: Ultraman, Owlman, and Power Ring (DC); Dark Beast (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Dark Mirror, Fallen Hero

ABILITIES: The Evil Twin has whatever powers the hero has, though she uses them differently, often in a more bloodthirsty, merciless, or brutal fashion. Where the hero has restraint, the Evil Twin has none, and while this might be represented with a new extra or alternate power, it might be as simple as the use of slashing and shooting attacks instead of bashing and blasting ones.

While an Evil Twin's powers are usually the same as the hero, her attributes and specialties are more likely to vary, reflecting a different life experience. Specialties like Investigation and Law will be exchanged for Stealth and fighting skill (Weapons, Martial Arts or Power). Weaponry and tactics which the hero has forsworn are, instead, the Evil Twin's stock in trade, so a Dark Avenger who avoids the use of guns will have a sniper for an Evil Twin, and a scientist hero who insists on the pursuit of ethical research will have an Evil Twin who experiments on helpless human subjects.

QUALITIES: To create qualities for an Evil Twin, begin with a heroic quality and then invert it, twist it, or take it to an extreme. An Evil Twin of All-American Girl, for example, might replace *Princess of Power* with *Princess of Pain*, *I Can*

Handle This! with *No One Is a Match For Me!*, and *Trained by All-Star* with *I Stole All-Star's Powers*.

While it's not common for players to activate a villain's qualities, this is more likely with Evil Twins because the hero is better able to figure out what those qualities are. In other words, a hero stymied by a rampaging Evil Twin can examine his own qualities and use them to learn something about the Evil Twin. To continue our example of All-American Girl, if her Evil Twin is demonstrating All-Star's powers, Natalie can probably presume that's not because her Evil Twin saved All-Star's life. In fact, she probably killed him and inherited his powers that way. And if All-Star had a weakness, that means the Evil Twin might have inherited that weakness in a way Natalie herself did not...

STORIES: There are two kinds of Evil Twins, and they are to be differentiated from the Dark Mirror. The Dark Mirror may seem a lot like a particular hero, but the Evil Twin is the hero; the villain has to have the hero's identity under her mask.

The first sort of Evil Twin is related to the Fallen Hero; long ago, when the Evil Twin was confronted with a moral choice that could have turned her into a hero, she chose evil instead. This failing has snowballed, so that the Evil Twin now represents everything the hero might have become, had she chosen to follow a path of darkness rather than light.

The second kind of Evil Twin is a victim of random chance. Her rocket ship crashed in a different part of the world, or her parents were murdered by dirty cops instead of criminals. But even though random chance was a factor, the Evil Twin has embraced her identity as a villain and is unrepentant in her wickedness and criminality. Contemporary efforts to make villains into sympathetic anti-heroes have resulted in characters like the Superman of *Red Son*, an Evil Twin who isn't evil so much as naive and misguided.

Evil Twins challenge their heroes in a way that goes beyond the physical. In one sense, they are an embodiment of existential fears about the loss of self. After all, who is the “right” version of the character in this scenario? What makes the Evil Twin the inferior one? With a change in perspective, the Evil Twin is the natural and proper version of the character, and the heroic one is an aberration, a “Good Twin.” This is one of the reasons the fight between the hero and her Evil Twin gets so personal so fast; each of these characters is fighting for her own identity, to validate herself as “the real me.”

The second threat posed by the Evil Twin is moral. The Twin insists, “You could have been me.” The hero is challenged to accept that she has evil within herself and, because the Twin is the hero, the hero has no moral authority to oppose the Twin. Sometimes the truth in this argument is acknowledged, and the hero has to admit that, yes, she has aggressive and selfish qualities, but she is heroic precisely to the degree by which she overcomes them. Those aggressive and selfish qualities may even be useful in a superheroic career dominated by constant battle, provided the hero does not allow them to go unchecked and unmoderated. For other Evil Twins, their argument boils down to a restatement of the old question of Nature vs Nurture. In this debate, Nurture always wins. The hero is a hero not because she was born that way, but because of her life experiences. The Evil Twin is not her, because the defining aspects of her character are not her name and her biology, but the people that raised her and influenced her. In these more important senses, she is her own woman and the Evil Twin is someone else who just happens to look like her.

Appropriately enough, introducing the Evil Twins also takes one of two forms. Broadly speaking, either the Twins come to our world, or the PCs go to theirs. The first sort of story is relatively straight forward; you need to figure out how the Twins got here, what their goals are, and how they’re going to get home. Their arrival is usually an unanticipated accident, but one that sets up future stories because, once

the Twins are vanquished and sent back, they are now determined to return and conquer the “weak” heroic Earth they have discovered. While the Twins like to talk about how our world is so easy to conquer, the truth is that the Evil Twin has the same psychological need to prove she is the “real me” as the hero does, and as long as our Earth thrives, her own status is in doubt.

This is no less true in those stories in which the heroes all travel to “Mirror Earth,” where the heroes we know are all villains and what heroes there are (and there aren’t many) are Good Twins, individuals the PCs recognize as villains from their own Earth. Mirror World stories often put the PCs in the unusual situation of pretending to be their own Evil Twins, at least in their secret identities and just long enough for them to find out where this Mirror World “went wrong” and history changed. This can usually be traced to the first appearance of superheroes; once that rocket ship lands in Russia instead of America, all bets are off. In Mirror World stories, the heroes can’t really hope to defeat the Evil Twins in the long term. There are too many bad guys, and they have a power structure that keeps the world under their fascist boot-heel. Instead, the heroes just need to get home. The best they can hope for is to strike a blow for the revolution, a band of badly equipped and hard-pressed Good Twins who couldn’t possibly succeed without the help of the PCs. Often, the Evil Twins are more than happy to send the heroes home, since the heroes threaten both the Twins’ global dominance and their sense of self.

The battle with a team of Evil Twins is actually one of the oldest tropes in roleplaying, dating all the way back to D&D’s Mirror of Opposition. It has the virtue of being easy to prepare; the GM doesn’t have to make the supervillains up from scratch (because the players have done all his work for him), and he already knows that the fight will be an even match. These fights tend to go one of two ways; if the players embrace the trope, everyone pairs off and each hero fights her own Evil Twin. But if the first hero to act rejects the trope, she picks an Evil Twin of a

different hero, probably one more vulnerable to her own powers. Soon, every other PC follows suit, and the team mis-matches. This second kind of fight goes much faster than the first, but that doesn't mean it's not fun or in genre. There is plenty of precedent for clever heroes avoiding the pair-off and mixing up the fight in order to thwart the villains' strategy, and players like to see who would win if they fought each other. Fighting a team of Evil Twins is about as close as they can get to that, without the use of mind control.

THE RAPTOR

Evil Twin, Crime Boss

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Good</i>	5
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 10

Specialties

Athletics
 Martial Arts
 Stealth
 Weapons Expert (Guns)

Powers

Utility Belt: Gadgets Device
Great 6

Body Armor: Resistance Device
Fair 4

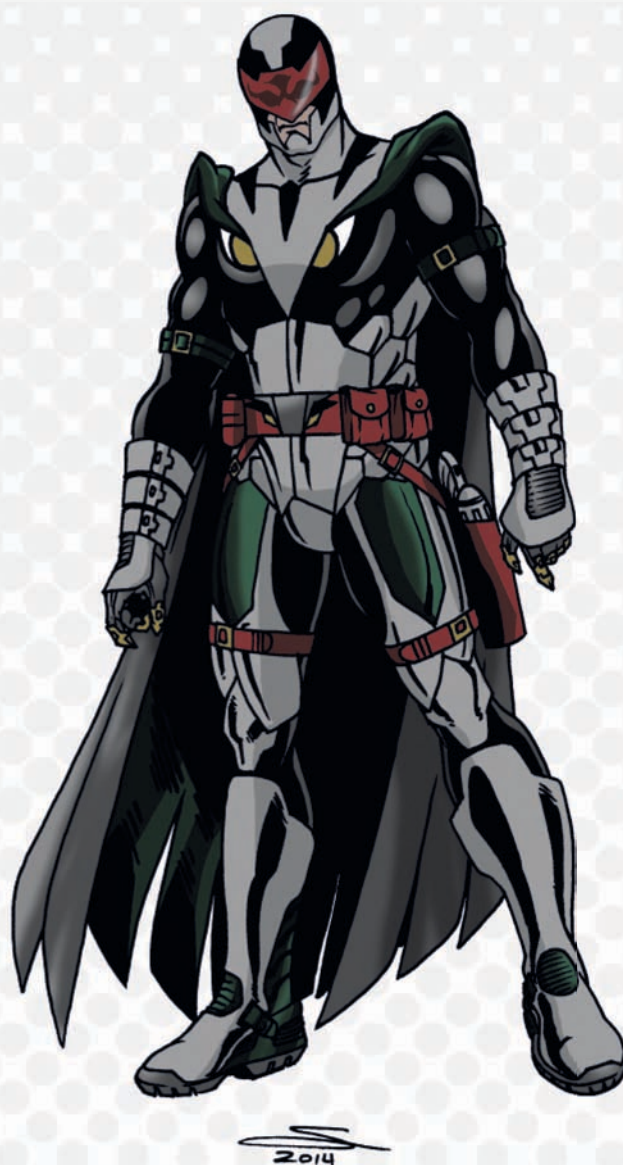
Pistols: Blast Devices
Fair 4

Qualities

The Raptor Strikes!
 I Have Agents Everywhere
 Never Acts Without A Plan

Knacks

Double-Barreled
 When the Raptor shoots a target with his guns, if his Blast penetrates Resistance, an additional +2 damage is inflicted.



Background: Somewhere in the infinite multiverse there is a world almost identical to ours but with strange differences. The faces are familiar, but lives are not the same. This world, which was discovered by super-heroes and later investigated by scientists, is known as Mirror Earth, or simply MEarth. On this world, there was an orphan who had no knowledge of his family. He grew up a hardened and bitter man, never straying too far from the neighborhood in which he grew up, and he took what he needed at the barrel of a gun. One night, fleeing the police, he invaded a home and took the family hostage. There was a struggle. He shot them all.

The neighborhood was crawling with cops. The killer had to lie low, so he stayed a week in that house. To pass the time, he searched through

its dusty attic for valuables. But what he found was a photo he recognized and papers consigning toddler Simon Crockett to foster care. Simon had just killed his own parents. Shaking, he ransacked the rest of the house looking for anything that might explain why his mother and father had done what they had done. He never found the answer. But he did find old newspaper clippings about a jeweler, his grandfather, who had briefly adopted a costume and nickname in the months before World War II. The Raptor, as Simon's grandfather was known, had a very short career, being quickly apprehended by his own wife, an investigative reporter named Dell, Simon's grandmother.

Simon had found and lost his family in the same horrifying moment. He no longer knew who he was. He went a little mad. There was no Simon Crockett, he decided. As far as the rest of the world knew, he never existed. In this, he was a little like that one-time master criminal, the Raptor. It was the Raptor who emerged from that house and, energized with a new purpose, it was the Raptor who built a criminal empire that eventually came to control much of the city.

The Raptor rules his mob with patience and intelligence. His agents are everywhere, and the level of detail he has collected on city residents is truly astonishing. In the early years of his career, he did a lot of the field work himself — hit jobs, second story work, kidnappings and arson. Now he reserves his time for really important jobs and he never goes in without plenty of backup. As a rule, the Raptor avoids drug-related crimes, preferring to let urban gangs squabble with each other. He is, however, considering moving up to politics.

THE RAPTOR IN PLAY

The Raptor is the Evil Twin of Night Bird, one of the Heroes of the YOUiverse. If Night Bird is not a character in your game, emphasize Raptor's Crime Boss archetype instead. He makes a great nemesis for dark avengers, vigilante heroes, and costumed adventurers. Individually he is not especially dangerous, but this makes him good for solo stories. If the

heroes are investigating him en masse, he will need Thugs and maybe an Assassin to help make up the difference.

If, however, Night Bird is in your game, even if only as an NPC, then Raptor's nature as an Evil Twin becomes more interesting. Without any way of crossing dimensions himself, he might have gotten stranded here in an accident. He may have been sent as a scout and spy by more powerful super villains on MEarth. He could even be operating as a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, pretending to be a hero or, more properly, a Vigilante.

FACELESS MINION

“Hail Hydra! Immortal Hydra! Cut off one limb, and two shall take its place!”

Faceless Minions are fanatically loyal servants of a Mastermind, Conqueror, or other powerful villain.

EXAMPLES: Hydra, AIM, the Hand (Marvel); Hive (DC); Cobra (GI Joe)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Nazi, Supernatural Horror

ABILITIES: Faceless Minions come in infinite varieties — such as the Faceless Demon Minion, Faceless Nazi Minion, and Faceless Robot Minion — but rarely have powers in the usual sense. Instead, they rely on equipment and specialties like Martial Arts or Weapons. Prowess and Coordination will be their best attributes, probably at 4 or 5.

The exceptions to this rule are Demon Minions, Vampire Minions, Alien Minions, and other Supernatural Horrors. These creatures will have natural weapons like claws and fangs, supernatural abilities such as flight, and they often have enough Resistance to Damage (5 is sufficient) to make them immune to bullets.

QUALITIES: It is vital for Faceless Minions to have a quality which represents teamwork and their ability to coordinate against a single hero; they will activate this quality almost every page they are in play. Use this alongside the rules for Combined Effort on p.23 of **ICONS Assembled Edition**; the coordinating Minion activates his quality and makes the test, while all the Minions assisting him use the test to add to the coordinating Minion's effort or effect.

Minions are also famous for their fanaticism, a quality which allows them to resist questioning and even take their own lives when captured.

Otherwise, a single Quality which describes the nature of the Minion's training or origin (*Endless Demons From The Pits Of Hell*, *Feared Ninja Clan*, *Soldiers of Science!*) can help differentiate

it from other Minions and provide a convenient catch-all when you need the Minion to suddenly display a power, piece of gear, or trick that isn't on its character sheet. Faceless Minions often take a venomous or poisonous creature as their totem symbol. (No comic book universe is complete without its Faceless Snake/Insect Minions.)

While not (usually) faceless in a literal sense, Faceless Minions are anonymous. They wear uniforms that conceal their features, making it harder to know exactly how many of them there are, or even if they are truly human. If alien or supernatural, they are visually indistinguishable from each other. This might be represented by a Quality which is activated when a Minion's anonymity is useful, such as when it tries to escape or is mistaken for another Minion.

STORIES: Faceless Minions are one of the first obstacles the hero must face when he discovers a Mastermind's plot. They are typically led by a Servitor who abandons the fight after the first page when it becomes clear that the Minions are no match for the heroes. A second confrontation may come with a far greater number of Minions, including a small group of them armed with a super-weapon, armored vehicle, or trick which exploits the hero's weakness. After that, there's not much use in more fights with Faceless Minions, though a sudden rush of them while the heroes confront the Big Bad Evil Guy may give that villain a chance to escape or catch his breath.

Faceless Minions are also great for separating the heroes, teaching new players how their powers and the game rules work, taking hostages, and whisking away the real prize while heroes are busy fighting a distraction in the street. Never forget Chandler's Law, from the introduction to *The Simple Art of Murder*: “When in doubt, have a man come through the door with a gun in his hand.” If your players have been discouraged by a dead-end investigation, a villain's escape, or a table argument, few things soothe the savage beast better than walloping a horde of Faceless Minions. I recommend Ninjas.

Minions are typically taken out in one successful attack. **ICONS Assembled Edition** has an optional rule to handle this; it's on p.42. Here's another alternative: If a hero doesn't do enough damage to take out the Minion he just hit, knock the Minion out anyway and give a point of Determination to the rest of the Minion gang. (They'll need it!) The opposite is also true: sometimes you need a Minion to stick around for one more panel, probably because he's the last one left on top of the speeding train, high-flying airship, or emergency landing strip. In cases like this, a point of Determination can keep him up long enough to pull a lever or bite on a cyanide capsule.

The Thug is an archetype related to the Faceless Minion; he serves a Crime Boss instead of a Mastermind or Conqueror. He differs in that he actually has a tiny bit more personality than the Faceless Minion (after all, he has a face) and is usually armed with less high-tech gear. He will have a nickname derived from a physical characteristic, and perhaps a distinctive speech pattern. The Thug also appears in smaller numbers than the Faceless Minion, because Thugs are opposed by single vigilantes while Faceless Minions attack an entire team of heroes.

NEST

Faceless Minions, Conqueror, Crime Boss, Terrorist

Background: Claiming descent from a conspiratorial sect of ancient Rome, boasting cells around the globe, and drawing on vast financial, technological, and human resources, NEST is the world's foremost criminal and terrorist organization. It has suffered many setbacks over the years, but has always recovered and rebuilt stronger and better entrenched than ever. Many superheroes have sworn to destroy NEST, and some jokingly describing them as "Nazis, Except Socially Tolerant," but none have ever succeeded. Indeed, many have perished.

According to NEST mythology, the organization was founded in the era of the Roman Republic, when powerful military leaders aimed to usurp political authority from the Senate. The motto of this group, "Nil Est Satis Tyranni" (L: Nothing but Tyranny is Good Enough), was a secret pass-phrase and motto, and it remains the official motto of NEST to this day. NEST claims that many prominent citizens of the Empire were members, most notably Emperor Commodus. But historians have continuously criticized NEST's mythological origins, for no firm evidence of the group's existence has been found prior to the 1920s.

According to these historians, NEST was founded in the years between the World Wars; it was born in the coffee houses, salons, and lecture halls of Europe, where the educated and wealthy debated how to best bring Europe out of the social and economic malaise brought on by the War. The greatness of Imperial Rome was an alluring model; the singular purpose and ultimate authority of an Emperor seemed the perfect antidote to the fickleness of both Senate and mob. But the veteran officers, philosophers, writers, entrepreneurs, dilettantes, and artists who made up NEST crossed national boundaries, and they had no single flag under which they could rally. Instead, they operated in the shadows, slowly building a network of wealth and influence that included stockpiles of military hardware produced at factories around the world.

NEST broke out into the open in World War II, aligning itself with fascist states like Germany, Italy, and Spain. As one of the world's first multinational organizations, it conducted operations in the United States even before Pearl Harbor, and many American super-heroes found their pre-war casebooks filled with NEST saboteurs, recruiters, and assassins. It was in this period that NEST established patterns it maintains today, such as its rigid cell structure, various kinds of specialized soldiers, an emphasis on anonymity even among its own agents, and its famous battle cry, "No enemy shall triumph!"

The triumvirate leaders of NEST were dead by 1946; one was killed by an Allied super-soldier, another took his own life with a bullet to the head, and the third immolated both himself and several heroes when he trapped them in a rocket exhaust chamber. Nevertheless, the end of World War II was something of a bonanza for NEST; the organization was able to loot the treasuries of Europe and recruit thousands of desperate Nazis, including many scientists, medical professionals, and veteran soldiers. But it took a decade for NEST to rebuild, shielded behind the Iron Curtain but maintaining its independence from Soviet dominance.

This incarnation of NEST, branded the Nefarious Enclave of Sinister Tyranny, was nothing less than a worldwide league of crime. For thirty years, it engaged in a covert war with Western spies from MI6, the CIA, and multinational espionage organizations, not to mention costumed adventurers, dark avengers, and the occasional samurai-trained brain surgeon. But despite their efforts to capitalize on new technology, NEST became more and more of an anachronism. Their eccentric triumvirates hatched grandiose plans which should have been awe-inspiring and well-orchestrated, but were instead impractical and more than a little ridiculous. After an especially total and humiliating defeat in the mid-80s, the entire organization collapsed and agents left by the thousands, most seeking employment in the Bosnian conflict and other brush wars which broke out in the years after the end of the Cold War.

NEST was ripe for reinvention, and that reinvention came with a vengeance. By 1990 bold young (and American) leadership had arisen and remade NEST into a purely capitalist and money-making enterprise. Gone were the aspirations to global dominance. Profit was the only goal. Now calling itself Nonlegal Extortion and Supervillain Training, NEST became a crime franchise. Crime bosses and aspiring masterminds could contract with NEST's board of directors (a triumvirate no longer) for a license to command a cell; this headquarters would be built in their home territory and the

franchise owner would be supplied with weaponry and other technology, including trainers that provided the gamut of combat and criminal activity education. NEST armies were available for mercenary hire, and NEST combat schools were aggressive recruiters. Private citizens who wanted to become super villains could choose from a large menu of services and hardware, from armored battle-suits to experimental radiation and chemical treatments (health waiver required). Many villains still operating today trace their origin to this period in NEST history. In some countries, NEST was even a publicly traded stock.

But NEST's new capitalist strength also proved to be its greatest vulnerability when, in early 2001, an Arab emir who happened to be one of the richest men in the world bought the company out from under its own CEO. Together with two others, he formed a new triumvirate which re-organized NEST yet again. This new, 21st century, Network for the Expansion of Strategic Terrorism combined the best qualities of each incarnation. It was proud of its long history and traditions, but kept an eye on the bottom line. It exploited political instability for its own ends, but laughed off any overt attempt to "take over the world." Its goals are the spread of terror, poverty, war, and chaos, because a world dominated by these things is a world in which laws give way to force and where money is easily made.

The organization continues to be ruled by the same triumvirate which reformed it fifteen years ago; one of these three, a masked woman of unknown identity, serves as NEST Leader, the public face of the organization, while the second is responsible for Research & Development and the third remains the money man. Agency-wide decisions require a plurality of the triumvirate, but infighting at the highest level is unusual. NEST has cells around the world, and employs many agents who believe they work for other terrorist and criminal organizations. NEST excels at using nationalist and religious rhetoric to manipulate agents in this way; often these men and women hate NEST and all they stand for, and would be shocked and humiliated to

learn they were NEST agents. NEST is quick to exploit the war between cultures which has arisen from the rise in Islamic fundamentalism, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State, but it is essentially irreligious; they have even used religious symbols, but only as a means of control and influence over others.

Other cells are more overt in their loyalty to, and support from, NEST. These cells are where the organizations sizable international mercenary army is headquartered. Drones make up the bulk of NEST's army; training keeps them in good physical shape and they are equipped with reliable energy weapons and body armor. But NEST is far more famous for their various specialized squads, such as Beetle Soldiers and Wasp Agents. The Beetle tactical armor makes a single individual into a modest super-man, able to lift a bus or fly as fast as a helicopter. Beetle Soldiers have the most dangerous job imaginable: direct hand-to-hand combat with super-heroes, and they are justly proud of their status. But without ranged weaponry, they rely on Drones and artillery to finish off the heroes they are grappling. Wasp Agents are NEST's flying cavalry arm and aerial reconnaissance; they train rigorously in high-speed jetpacks with mounted energy beams. These are only a few of the many specialized weapon systems NEST has developed in the last decade.

NEST has not, however, been able to fully integrate all of its 20th century personnel and operations; there are still multiple cells which continue to operate under the old "franchise" structure. The new NEST triumvirate apparently doesn't find it worthwhile to assimilate these lesser rivals. In some cases, the cells don't make enough money to make cooperation lucrative; in others, the franchise owners are just too unstable and anti-social to work with the new NEST.

NEST IN PLAY

NEST is a worldwide super-agency antagonist in the mold of Hydra, Cobra, and **Champions'** VIPER, though with an insect theme instead of a snake one (resembling also groups like the



Hive or City of Heroes's Arachnos).

The uses of such an antagonist are many; NEST can serve as an origin point for almost any super-villain, either through voluntary procedures or an involuntary research & development program. Individual cells may be to blame for criminal activity of any sort in whatever city your game is set, but the organization as a whole also engages in worldwide terror and other offensive operations that are more militant. A fight against NEST can be anything from three agents holding up a jewelry store to the full scale invasion of an African nation. NEST even has the technology to go to space, and is keenly interested in stealing any secrets it does not have.

NEST's cell structure means that your first choice is determining the leader of the current cell, for this will be the "face" that gives the

heroes grief. After discovering the presence of NEST in their home city, the heroes will work to find the cell and eventually invade it; this leads to a climactic episode in which the heroes infiltrate the cell, identify the leader, and attack, presumably fighting their way through a legion of Drones and more potent Servitor villains. If the cell was a rogue agency, a “franchise” held over from the 90s, the work of the heroes is done. But if this cell was part of the larger NEST framework, then they have only succeeded in making an enemy of NEST Leader and the rest of the triumvirate.

NEST DRONE

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Average</i>	3
Awareness	<i>Average</i>	3
Willpower	<i>Average</i>	3

Stamina 7

Specialties

Military
Weapons (Guns)

Powers

Body Armor: Resistance (Damage) Device
Average 3
Auto-Blast Rifles: Blast Device
Good 5
Extra: Burst

Qualities

HIVE Minded
“No Enemy Shall Triumph!”

Knacks

Combined Fire
When HIVE Drones use combined effort to shoot with their Auto-Blast Rifles, they do not all individually need to make the test. Instead, each Drone is presumed to get a moderate success, adding +1 for one assisting Drone, +2 for two Drones, +3 for four Drones, and +4 for eight assisting Drones. However, when fighting

in this manner, the Drones are easier to defeat. When a hero attacks a single Drone, any damage in excess of the Drone's Stamina carries over to another Drone.

BEETLE SOLDIER

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	5 (7)
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	5 (7)
Intellect	<i>Average</i>	3
Awareness	<i>Average</i>	3
Willpower	<i>Fair</i>	3

Stamina 8 (10)

Specialties

Military
Wrestling

Powers

Beetle Suit: Resistance (Damage) Device
Great 6
Extras: Ability Increase (Strength), Ability Increase (Prowess)
Wing Pack: Flight Device
Good 5

Qualities

HIVE-Minded
“No Enemy Shall Triumph!”

Knacks

Immobilized
Beetle Soldiers are trained to immobilize heroes by grappling them with superhuman strength. They have a +2 on tests to create a quality such as Pinned or Arm Lock.

WASP AGENT

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Average</i>	3
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Average</i>	3

Stamina 6

Specialties

Aerial Combat
 Military
 Weapons (Guns)

Powers

Jet Pack: Flight Device
Great 6
 Extras: Blast (Burst)
 Wasp Armor: Resistance (Damage) Device
Fair 4

Qualities

HIVE-Minded
 "No Enemy Shall Triumph!"

Knacks

Evasive Action
 When flying, Wasp Agents have a +2 bonus to Dodge against ranged attacks.

FALLEN HERO

"Coast City. It was my home once. My friends' home. Now it's nothing. An engine built on rubble. Built on the corpses of people I knew. And one of those corpses — might be Carol's. If they think their missiles can keep me out... they're wrong. Nothing's keeping me out. Nothing's keeping me from finding the monster who did this. Nothing's keeping my hands from his throat."

~ Hal Jordan

The Fallen Hero became a villain in a moment of weakness, when he made a fateful decision with tragic consequences.

EXAMPLES: Maestro (Marvel); Monarch, Hal Jordan as Parallax (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Vigilante, Power Corrupted, Evil Twin

ABILITIES: One of the precepts of the Fallen Hero is that it could happen to anyone, though in general the more powerful the hero is, the more poignant the story of his fall. So it is less important what powers he has than that those powers be highly ranked. Once a character falls, he uses his powers in a more lethal and dangerous manner; this may be represented on his character sheet by adding an extra like Burst or exchanging a relatively painless power for another, like swapping a psychic attack that puts the victim to sleep for a more destructive Blast.

Heroes without powers, who rely solely on Determination, equipment, specialties, and modest gadgetry, can still fall; they typically become Vigilantes.

QUALITIES: A Fallen Hero represents his fall by changing one or more of his qualities. Virtually his entire world view alters, transforming his relationship with loved ones he now forsakes or abuses, former allies he now runs from or battles, and enemies he now kills. He may acquire new qualities as heroes and law enforcement organizations pursue and

target him. The public will surely turn against him if they learn of his fall, so he may put considerable effort into keeping up appearances. Most significantly, the Fallen Hero's motivation changes; he no longer tries to use his powers responsibly, to help others for altruistic reasons. Instead, he takes what he wants, indulging his id no matter who stands in his way.

STORIES: There are two stories which are key to the Fallen Hero. First, he must fall. And then, he must be redeemed.

The central challenge for all superheroes is the control of power; there are as many metaphors in superhero stories as there are superheroes, but all of them have power of some sort, and they struggle to use this power responsibly. The Fallen Hero has failed in this test. In a moment of anger or deep despair, through a lack of conviction or simple selfishness, he has used his powers in an unethical manner. Perhaps he used his power to execute someone; perhaps he lashed out in rage and killed someone close to him; perhaps he used his powers for wealth, fame, or personal gratification. He may have had a noble goal, like saving a life or securing peace, but his method of attaining that goal is morally bankrupt.

When the hero falls, it is a clear and sharp break with his former life and self. Even if the deed itself could be concealed, it looms in his psyche and he cannot forget it, forgive himself, or put it behind him. Instead, he acknowledges his fall and considers it irreversible. Having lost control or performed an evil act, he is now certain that it is only a matter of time before he repeats his error. He is no longer a hero, and having broken his heroic code once, he now breaks it repeatedly and in flagrant fashion. He may murder other heroes and do all sorts of shockingly awful things which he would never have contemplated before his fall. On the surface, he continues to rationalize his behavior, but there can be no sincere defense of his new attitude. Within, he is a creature of self-loathing; he hates himself, but he projects his hatred onto his former friends and allies,

and torments them instead. He may make a token effort to conceal his fall, but even if the initial crime is hidden, his new personality ensures his fall will be quickly revealed.

Sometimes a hero meets his own fallen self, a native from an alternate reality or the future. This is an Evil Twin. In the case of alternate realities, the two characters diverged sometime in the past, often at the moment of the hero's origin. But when the hero meets a fallen version of himself from the future, the story becomes "*A Christmas Carol*" in funny underwear, a warning to the hero that he must change his ways and learn to control both his powers and his passions. If he does not, he will lose everything he holds dear, and become his own worst enemy.

The redemption story is inevitable for fallen heroes only because they are serial characters and, eventually, some writer somewhere is going to decide to bring the fallen hero back, if only for the challenge of doing so. Fallen heroes who exist in self-contained stories may not be redeemed before their story ends or they die. They probably still got a chance at redemption, but they failed to take it.

Redemption is a strange thing in superhero comics, because heroes very seldom redeem themselves; instead, a retcon absolves them entirely of wrong-doing. When Cassandra Cain, formerly Batgirl, suddenly appeared as head of the League of Assassins and an unrepentant murderer, this was later explained as a mind-control drug administered by Deathstroke the Terminator. This example is quite typical, actually. Heroes who do bad things seldom have to suffer, repent, and make good. Instead, a retcon reveals that they never fell in the first place, that their fall was engineered by an outside party, or that their fall was inevitable and could not be prevented. If the hero's fall is blamed on power itself, a power no human being could have hoped to control, he becomes Power Corrupted. These retcons, regardless of their form, more or less absolve the hero of guilt in the eyes of the superhero community, but he continues to feel shame and the disapproval of

the mundane public, who don't understand or believe him. (The fans are still outraged, but this has less relevance in a roleplaying game!)

Heroes who are actually responsible for their own fall, and who accept this responsibility, are rare, and notable in their exception. Hank Pym struggled for years to redeem himself after abusing his wife and placing innocent people in danger for his own gratification. Hal Jordan spent time as the Spectre, doing penance for his own weakness. Before the Phoenix Entity was created to absolve her of wrongdoing, Jean Grey took her own life. Part of the problem with these stories is that, when a hero falls, he never falls a short distance. His failure is enormous, perhaps even unforgivable; that makes the story of the fall more exciting, but it makes the redemption hard to believe. If a player in your group is working on a Fallen Hero plotline, consider the severity of the crime he is about to perform. Can the hero accept responsibility for it, acknowledge that it was wrong, and work to regain public trust and his own self-respect?

On the other hand, perhaps nothing is unforgivable. In a universe filled with impossible feats of physical prowess — a universe where heroes shove planets around and reset the cosmos by punching the space/time continuum — perhaps the ultimate act of heroism is earning, or granting, forgiveness for the ultimate crime.

WOLF SAVAGE

Fallen Hero, Vigilante, Defender

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Great</i>	6
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Intellect	<i>Average</i>	3
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Fair</i>	4

Stamina 11

Specialties

Athletics
 Insight Master
 Intimidation Expert
 Occult
 Stealth
 Weapon Expert (Blades)

Powers

Leaping
Weak 1
 The Sword of the North: Strike Device
Good 5
 Super-Speed
Average 3

Qualities

The Beast Within
 Totem Familiars
 Defender of Canada

Knacks

Green Flame
 The Sword of the North ignores 4 Resistance; for example, a target with Resistance 8 would only have Resistance 4 against the Sword.

The Abyss Gazes Also
 When Wolf Savage uses Insight, he simultaneously Intimidates the target.

Background: The hero known as Wolf Savage has protected Canada for generations. No one knows the source of his power or where he comes from; one story holds that he is, in fact, immortal, and was one of the first humans to cross the Bering land bridge into North America.

Avoiding the cities, he thwarted the schemes of mad scientists hidden in mountain retreats, protected travelers, and forged treaties of peace with ancient powers of nature. Possessed of superhuman strength and a deadly sword empowered with a mysterious green energy, able to perceive the secret thoughts of men, he was also assisted by two wolves: totemic familiars who acted as the agents of primordial spirits.

Savage's relationship with these creatures was laced with danger. Although they were his allies, they were also his only real companions, and their bloodthirsty, predatorial instincts slowly took a toll on the once-noble hero. Over time, the balance of power in the relationship shifted; no longer was he the master and they the servants. They frightened his Inuit wife and their infant son, so much so that she fled with the baby into the night, never to return.

Now, the beasts were in charge, manipulating and bullying Wolf until he came to believe that savagery, not law and order, was the true natural state of the world. His power to see men's inner thoughts was almost always directed at criminals, madmen, and the desperate, evidence which further strengthened the whispers of his animal "friends." Nobility and honor seemed in short supply to Wolf Savage, and rarer with every passing day.

One fateful night, the wolves goaded Savage into executing a murderer he had tracked through the Canadian snow. From that moment on, he has felt there is no turning back. He has become a supernatural avenger of the wilderness, and no man escapes his vengeance. He has no mercy and sees the worst in every person, including himself. Wolf Savage knows he merits no forgiveness, and so he gives none.

WOLF SAVAGE IN PLAY

The game statistics for Wolf's two wolf servants can be found in **ICONS Assembled Edition**



Wolf Savage is a public domain character whose only appearance, "*Wolf Savage and the Doom Doctor*," is an illustrated short story in a 14-page amateur magazine called *Canadian Rocket* (April, 1941). He predates Canada's other superheroes by about half a year, and he may have been created by an uncredited and very young Ted Steele, who would go on to create Speed Savage for Bell, Canada's premier comics publisher. Speed Savage had no powers, but was a costumed adventurer known as "the White Mask." In the YOUNiverse, Speed is Wolf Savage's last living descendant, his infant son grown and with no memory of his father. The fate of his mother is unknown, but she might still be alive, and key to Wolf's redemption.

p.195; give them both Immortality 4. Because they have mental abilities and their own agenda, they are not described here with the Servants power. His Insight and Intimidation specialties are detailed in "I is for Interaction." See also "F is for Fear" for useful advice on Intimidation.

Savage introduces stories set in Canada, specifically its wilderness. He makes a good "wild card" character when heroes pursue fleeing super-villains into the wild, or when their super-jet gets knocked down by flying saucers and crashes. A psycho killer like Rakshasa might be preying on campers or remote homesteads, leading the heroes to investigate and then cross paths with Wolf. The White Mask may seek out the heroes to help him investigate this legend with his own last name; after all, Speed is only one man and any manhunt has a lot of miles to cover.

FORCE OF NATURE

"For I am Wood-Rue, grief and rage of the wilderness ... and the veldt speaks through me, and through me is the will of the jungle known. See ... see the revenge of the grass! You have declared bitter and undeclared war upon the Green, gutting the rain forests, mile after mile, day after day ... but know this! The war has come home! It is Man's turn to embrace the scythe!"

The Force of Nature is too powerful for physical confrontation. You can only avoid her, trick her, and clean up the destruction left in her wake.

EXAMPLES: Celestials, Juggernaut vs. Spider-Man (Marvel); Floronic Man (DC); Godzilla (comics and film)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Embodiment, Master of the Elements, Cosmic Menace

ABILITIES: While the Force of Nature can have Element Control, that's less important than the fact that the Force of Nature is not punchable. This may be because she is impervious to all harm (such as the Juggernaut in his memorable encounter with Spider-Man), because she is too vast in scale (Godzilla, at least when opposed by mundane military forces), or because she has no physical body at all. At superheroic scale, it takes a lot to make a foe too powerful to be punched, so the Force of Nature often turns out to be a Cosmic Menace like the Celestials or Eon the Living Planet, with Vast, Cosmic, or Godlike power level. (Marvel seems to dominate the Force of Nature market, perhaps due to its long tradition of monster-comics.) A Force of Nature doesn't have to be that grand, however; a simple strongman who shrugs off punches can be a Force of Nature to a hero without superhuman powers.

The Force of Nature has one very high Attribute, but little need for the others. She is beyond specialties. Indeed, she may be beyond Abilities entirely! By definition, a Force of Nature is off the scale of superheroic violence and

cannot be defeated by reducing her Stamina to 0. She is immune even to the wrath of a demigod with Strength 10. So feel free to throw her numbers out the window and rely entirely on qualities.

QUALITIES: As a GM you will activate the Force of Nature's qualities to create environmental hazards, to put innocent people in danger, and to allow the Force of Nature to ignore whatever physical attacks the heroes throw at her. Her single-minded motivation might also be represented by a Quality, which helps guide her actions during play. Whenever you are introducing an antagonist who cannot be defeated in traditional ways (the Imp is another example), you will need to consider how the story will end. Will the Force of Nature simply depart? Players seldom find this satisfying, so instead it's common to find a way to trick the Force of Nature into abandoning its mission. Sometimes she can be lured out to sea, hurled into space, or sent to another dimension; while she can survive all these harsh environments unscathed, she is stuck there until a future session when plot and good fortune allows her escape.

Don't forget that the Force of Nature can be an *actual* force of nature: a tornado, massive flood, earthquake, or volcano. Such environmental antagonists don't need numbers, only a few qualities. The earthquake that kills Lois Lane at the end of the first *Superman* film is an example of this kind of foe. Superman is, of course, powerful enough to stop an earthquake and (at least in this picture) even capable of going back in time to change history, but his inability to save Lois echoes Pa Kent's death. Clark's realization that "Even with all my powers, I couldn't save him" reveals the footprint of the Force of Nature. In our century, when global warming and catastrophic climate change are increasingly present dangers, the Force of Nature may no longer need to be an allegory. Its literal form has all the power and relevance it needs.

STORIES: Man Against Nature has traditionally been one of the oldest plots in storytelling. It is distinguished from "Man Against Man" because Man is puny and insignificant in the face of an implacable Nature. There is nothing to punch, shoot, or even argue with. Nature does not care about the plight of Man. But Man Against Nature is still physical and external; this distinguishes it from "Man Against Himself." The ideal Force of Nature story keeps the heroes running, flying, and swimming, using their powers and all their resources, but in unexpected ways. First, the Force must be identified and understood. Often, it is buried, submerged, or far off in space. Early warning signs cause low-level destruction which the heroes can handle relatively easily, but which hint at the grand scale which lies in wait. Once the Force is seen or identified, its path predicted, the story changes to one of evacuation and preparation. Innocent civilians must get out of the way. Barriers, physical or otherwise, may be erected, but prove useless. It may be possible to lure the Force to an unoccupied wilderness. Eventually, the Force arrives and the heroes have their hands full with damage control. There are collapsing buildings to intercept, falling journalists to catch, jet planes and helicopters to bring in for a landing, floods to direct, and a great many bystanders trapped under rubble, in their cars, or separated from their pets. A Force of Nature adventure makes extended use of the "Rescue Panel." (See "R is for Rescue".) Because this is a superhero story, victory is still possible, usually by out-thinking the Force. She is tricked into departing or revealing her weakness and, like a dragon missing a scale over her heart, she can be defeated with a single blow at the right moment.

As mentioned earlier, because the Force of Nature depends so much on the hero she opposes, it's very common for a villain who normally fills some other archetype to briefly become a Force of Nature just for one story. Alan Moore's tale of the Floronic Man is a good example. As a rule, Jason Woodrow is eminently punchable. But for that story he becomes a Force of Nature that controls every

growing thing on Earth. He cannot be defeated physically; he can only be convinced of his error and separated from the source of his incredible powers.

Heroes who come into contact with nature are most likely to encounter the Force of Nature. For example, she makes an excellent occasional antagonist for the Undersea Hero, the Animal Hero, and the Jungle Hero. Ultimate Heroes, Embodiments, and other characters whose powers are “off the scale” get to tackle Forces of Nature on a regular basis, since few other antagonists can really challenge them. But because the Force of Nature can be frustrating to players and readers alike, she is otherwise rare. This is actually a good thing because, if the tale of the Force of Nature was common, her novelty as an unpunchable antagonist would be lost.

The Force of Nature is similar to, but distinct from, the related Master of the Mindscape, of which Marvel’s Nightmare is a good example. The Mindscape Villain brings the hero (and often an innocent victim) into another dimension, dream world, or other pocket reality where the Villain reigns supreme. Like the Force of Nature, he is unpunchable and he cannot be physically defeated in the Mindscape, but the world works according to hidden laws which he too must abide by. If the heroes can figure out these rules, they can use them to their advantage and escape.

MONTANA

Force of Nature, Young Hero, Defender, Minority Hero, Power Corrupted

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Vast</i>	12
Intellect	<i>Average</i>	3
Awareness	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Willpower	<i>Vast</i>	12

Stamina 24

Specialties

Power Master (Earth Control)

Powers

Earth Control

Vast 12

Extras: Alternate Form (Solid, Instant), Binding, Burrowing, Earthwave, Earthquake, Life Support, Regeneration, Servant (Earth Elemental), Tremors

Qualities

I Am The Earth Incarnate

Driven Mad By Climate Change

Used To Be A Super-Hero

Knacks

Avalanche

Montana’s most common tactic is to hurl a fusillade of boulders at her enemy. This is resolved as a Coordination test, but she has a +5 bonus (3 for her Power Mastery and 2 for this Knack). Damage is *Vast* (12).

Come to Her Senses

Player characters can spend a point of Determination to briefly return Clara to sanity. This lasts for 1 page and the hero has to interact with her in some way, usually by getting close to her and talking.

Never Unawares

Montana can activate her Alternate Form whenever she is attacked, even if she did not previously know the attacker was there. When in her Alternate Form, Montana has Resistance

12 to physical damage.

Background: Clara Reed was born in 1980 on the slopes of Mt Lanier, the peaks of which were rocked by thunder and lightning storms that lasted an entire day. Her mother was a Crow Indian, her father a part-time worker at Montana's national and state parks. Clara was born a mutant with a subconscious connection to rock and stone, but her powers did not surface until she was a young teen. By then, Clara was already tall, beautiful, and strong, and she attracted many admirers, mostly young men several years older than her. When she became frightened during an encounter with one of these men, her powers lashed out without her conscious control, entombing her prospective suitor in stone. He suffocated before her eyes and Clara, traumatized, fled the town for the Montana wilderness. There, she barely survived, though she did begin to acquire some control over her abilities. But she got caught in a terrible storm — the second to mark turning points in her life — and was nearly dead from exposure when she was found by a Native American hunter who brought her to the reservation.

On the res, insulated from the larger world but cared for by distant relatives of her tribe, Clara had a period of calm introspection. She was able to re-evaluate her choices and the life her path was taking. She surrendered herself to federal authorities investigating the murder she had committed and revealed her superhuman powers. The death was found to be an accidental killing and Clara, still underage, was to be returned to the custody of her parents when her mother chose, instead, to take her back to the reservation, where she could continue to learn to control her abilities in a relatively safe and supportive environment. Her father, however, was furious at this turn of events. He sued for custody, but lost.

Clara became a young hero, protecting the people and land near her home. She adopted the name Montana and even briefly served in a team of other young heroes calling themselves the Teen Spirits. As time passed, she became



the nation's foremost Native American super-hero. But, even as her powers grew, Clara began to suffer from disturbing psychotic episodes during which she would lose all sense of her own humanity and rage, uncontrolled. There is a long history of super-women being consumed by power they cannot control, and it was assumed by both Clara and her friends that this was what was occurring to her. The truth, however, came out later when it was discovered that Clara's powers were being affected by global climate change.

Montana's subconscious link to earth and stone has grown to the point that, physiologically, she has entered into a symbiotic relationship with the Earth itself. As temperatures have risen, ice packs and glaciers have melted, sea levels rise, extreme weather increases and mass extinctions begin, Clara's body and brain have

been subjected to actual biological change. Her powers have grown beyond all former limits, and she has found it increasingly difficult to relate to human beings. Sometimes, her conscious mind overwhelmed by her global perspective, she can't perceive people at all.

Montana does not want to hurt people. But she is also aware that the growth of her powers, global climate change, and the threat she poses to innocents are all linked and are all but inevitable. She has retreated to various extreme environments, like mountain peaks and isolated canyons, but she is also drawn to symptoms of global climate change and sometimes comes to her senses to find that she has traveled to the middle of a super-storm, extinction event, or flood. Her old colleagues have tried to talk her down and bring her back to her humanity, but as often as not this ends in violence. On one occasion, Montana's waxing fury over the careless ignorance of those who exploit the planet's natural resources caused her to spontaneously create a permanent, active volcano.

Montana still has tens of thousands of admirers around the world, and has become a symbol of the environmental movement, but her future looks increasingly grim.

MONTANA IN PLAY

Clara Reed does not want to hurt people, and if global warming and climate change could be arrested, she wouldn't hurt people. Climate change has quite literally driven Montana mad and done physical damage to her body and organs. Her rage and the violence she causes are not a result of her great power but, rather, a result of the changes inflicted to the global ecology by man. Climate change deniers, of course, blame the destruction she causes on a homicidal super-villain who can't control her mutant abilities. This debate over Montana's status as a Power Corrupted or a Force of Nature mirrors the debate in our society over the reality of climate change, its manmade nature, and the importance of direct action.

As a Force of Nature, Montana is designed to be almost unassailable. Physical might, even at a superhuman scale, might be used to confuse, distract, or slow her, but it can't really be used to stop her. Instead, when she causes a dormant volcano to erupt, a tectonic plate to shift, or a giant sinkhole to appear, the player characters are busy saving innocent people, preserving important historic sites, and minimizing collateral damage. Eventually they will want to find a long-term solution to Montana's madness, but this may be impossible short of her own death. She can be isolated, but her symbiotic link to the planet means that the only way to separate her from her madness would be to move her into space or another dimension. This would certainly strip her of her powers, but might also kill her.

FOREIGNER

"My armor was created with but one thought in mind... to be able to smash Iron Man! And once the world knows that I have defeated democracy's greatest fighter, I shall be undisputed master of the Communist world!"

~ Titanium Man

The Foreigner is most notable for the fact that he is from a non-Western country. He is the villainous counterpart to the heroic Minority Hero.

EXAMPLES: Yellow Claw, Crimson Dynamo, Bushman (Marvel); Ra's al Ghul (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Supremacist, Nazi, Conqueror, Terrorist

ABILITIES AND QUALITIES: The Foreigner archetype is really made up of a host of lesser archetypes, each based on a particular nation or racial group. Each of these has its own traditional powers and other traits. The Asian **Yellow Peril**, for example, is brilliant, with a high Intellect and Awareness paired with specializations in both Medicine and the Occult. He wields poison and a strange, hypnotic sorcery. He is served by a seductive daughter who falls in love with the hero, a diminutive servant he refers to as a "dwarf," and a legion of Faceless Minions, often Ninja, Tong, or Yakuza. His lair is filled with deadly traps and a menagerie of lethal animals and insects. For an insightful look into the origin of the Yellow Peril and its archetypal representative Fu Manchu, see Jess Nevins' book *Gods and Monsters*, annotations on Alan Moore's original *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Following the introduction of martial arts to American culture, the Yellow Peril gained a rival Asian stereotype, the **Modern Samurai** or Ninja. These are relatively sympathetic characters with a personal code of warrior honor and fighting skills that they are willing to teach to the right white man. The Modern Samurai has a Yellow Peril as his enemy and, when these two battle, the story becomes a conflict between old

The Foreigner is one of the most problematic archetypes in this book (beat only by the misogynistic Temptress), and by "problematic" I mean: "based on racial and national caricatures both backwards and grossly offensive." The Asian mastermind, the savage African, the Arab fanatic, and the Communist Who Hates America are stereotypes best left in the dustbin of history. And yet, for decades, they proliferated across superhero comics. The Communist, in particular, was a Marvel staple. Shall we ignore this in favor of progressive politics?

The writers of superhero comics and film certainly haven't. Instead, good writers and editors have acknowledged the troubled past of the Foreigner and exposed it. Chris Claremont introduced a host of foreign characters in his long run on *X-Men*, men and women who first battled the heroes before eventually joining them, and as often as not these brawls were the fault of the X-Men. Modern stories of the Foreigner often hinge on Americans making false assumptions about foreign "enemies." *Iron Man 3* is an outstanding recent example; there (SPOILERS!), the handsome, blonde, and very white Aldrich Killian uses American fears of the foreign to create a fictional arch-villain that combines the Yellow Peril and Arab Fanatic.

The politics of superhero comics have come a long way. If we can stand to acknowledge our troubled beginnings and not ignore them, that journey is made both easier and more permanent.

nationalistic stereotypes and new ones.

The **Savage African** is a physically powerful but brutish black man from the jungle, heir to ugly stereotypes seen in Tarzan's novels as well as in Great White Hunter books like *King Solomon's Mines*. He wields a machete, spear, knife, or rifle; his wardrobe includes bandoliers and war-paint, but a shirt is optional. The primitive savagery which is his namesake

makes him a dangerous and bloodthirsty opponent, skilled in hunting and ambush tactics as well as a stand-up fight; but he isn't very intelligent. It was specifically this stereotype that Kirby and Lee's Black Panther inverted, with the Panther hailing from a wealthy, cultured, technologically advanced society. As with duels between the Yellow Peril and the Modern Samurai, progressive black heroes like the Panther are often forced to confront Savage Africans who harken back to painful caricatures. When a modern Minority Hero triumphs against the Savage African, he is punching out the racist stereotype the hero was created to destroy.

The **Communist Who Hates America** is distinguished from other Foreigners because he is white; this whiteness allows him to masquerade among white Americans and be a secret agent of communist revolution. He considers Americans weak and decadent thanks to the corrupting influence of capitalism, a capitalism he will overturn through subtle schemes and a mass uprising. The end of the Cold War meant the end of the Communist villain, though Western understanding of Eastern European history and culture has been so poor that villains continue to wear communist symbols like the hammer and sickle, simply because writers and artists don't know what to replace them with. Like other Foreigners, the Communist has mellowed with time and become more sympathetic. Now he is the **Cold War Relic**, a proud veteran of a Soviet Union that no longer exists. Social and economic upheaval in Eastern Europe is reflected in Foreigners from that region: the Communist villain now has descendants — actual sons and daughters or simply young people who adopt the older villain's code name — who must decide on a guiding principle now that the Soviet Union is no more. Some turn to organized crime and unrepentant capitalism. Others try to reconstruct a Russian empire.

The **Arab Fanatic** is a comparatively new Foreigner archetype; before the events of 9/11, Arab villains were more likely to ride flying carpets and command genies than call for

global jihad. America's long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have spawned countless films and television episodes starring terrorist sleeper cells hatching elaborate plots against the US. This double nature highlights the danger posed by Arab Fanatic infiltrators who could be anywhere. When he is not sitting with his compatriots around a kitchen table in the Bronx dressed in Levi's and a flannel shirt, the Arab Fanatic lives in a cave and wears tribal clothing, headgear, and a beard. His religious observations are frequent and punctual. He cites Allah and the Koran. His powers are explosive and probably self-destructive because he and his masters care nothing for human life, especially his own. Sadly, and unlike other Foreigners, American culture hasn't yet come up with a more progressive re-make of the Arab Fanatic. Communists, Yellow Perils and even Savage Africans are increasingly archaic and embarrassing, but the Arab Fanatic remains vibrant and unopposed.

STORIES: Foreigners are united in their nationalism; they believe their country's culture (often mixed with government and faith) is superior to the West. In this, they are a kind of Supremacist, though that archetype has a racial emphasis which is not always appropriate for the (occasionally white) Foreigner. This nationalism allows them to rationalize crimes against inferior Americans, up to and including mass murder. Some Foreigners wish to take over America and convert it to the Foreigner's political or religious ideal; this makes them Conquerors.

More enlightened and sympathetic Foreigners, the type who are revealed to be heroes, aren't trying to conquer America. They're trying to defend their culture from America which, after all, is in the business of exporting its culture to the rest of the world. These Foreigners see America as a kind of invasive army, covering the world in fast food restaurants, parking malls, and selfies. The Foreigner does not see this as an improvement, and after a ritual bout of fisticuffs he can usually persuade heroes to his point of view. Many beloved Foreign heroes debuted in this way, perceived as villains when

first encountered by American super-heroes but eventually revealed to be honorable and patriotic people who just happened to be from another country. Black Panther and Sunfire both made the transition from Foreigner to Minority Hero like this.

When he comes to America, the Foreigner tries to appeal to members of his ethnic group who already live in the US. He either recruits them as minions or he alienates them and they become allies of the hero. When he confronts the hero in America, the Foreigner loses, but he survives and flees to his nation, where he enjoys home field advantage. To truly defeat his foe, the hero must follow the Foreigner and become a stranger in a strange land. There, he will be bereft of his usual allies and resources.

MUEZZIN

Foreigner, Terrorist, Super-Patriot

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 9

Specialties

Military
Performance Master (Singing)
Power Expert (Sonic Control)
Stealth

Powers

Sonic Control
Fantastic 9
Extras: Burst, Blast, Mind Control, Stunning
Limit: Muezzin cannot use his powers if he cannot speak.

Qualities

Veteran of a Thousand Sonic Wars
Good Muslim
Saudi Super-Patriot



Knacks

Mid-East Contacts

Muezzin has guerrilla or Saudi contacts in virtually every town and village. He can make an Average Willpower test to find such a contact, provided he is in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan or Syria.

Lie Low

Muezzin has a +2 on tests to avoid surveillance or otherwise being noticed. This only applies when he is in a public place with crowds, not when he is trying to Stealth.

Demolitionist

Muezzin has a +2 on tests to build or disarm explosives.

Background: Public records on Asir al-Sadr, alias Muezzin, are hard to come by. It is believed the CIA keeps a substantial classified

file on him and he is currently one of the most highly-sought suspects in a series of terrorist bombings in the Middle East. His record has not always been so criminal, however. Many Muslims of the Middle East consider Muezzin to be one of the greatest heroes of their faith alive today. Asir al-Sadr was born to a prosperous and Western-leaning Saudi family. He was given a progressive education that included the learning of English, but thanks to an elderly uncle Asir felt a connection to Islam from a very early age. He took special classes on religion, but it was not until his voice began to strengthen and deepen in his teenage years that he began to aspire to become a muezzin – one of the men who sang the daily call to Muslim prayer.

It was while Asir was in training for this position that his superhuman power first manifested. Asir al-Sadr's vocal chords are extraordinarily powerful and capable of feats no human can imitate. At first, this meant only that he could sing louder and longer than other men, but it rapidly became clear that, when properly motivated, Asir could use his voice to injure or even kill. He was instantly propelled to public fame as one of Saudi Arabia's few super-heroes and soon received extensive military training. It is said by those who knew him at this period that Asir was not particularly eager to fight, but that he felt an obligation to his nation, his faith, and his family.

Throughout his career as a super-human, Muezzin has always occupied a gray area between hero and criminal. His traditional viewpoint on issues like feminism, the role of religion in governing the state, and corporal punishment seem backwards and even savage to Americans, ensuring that he nearly always gets a cool reception on his few visits to the West. He has cooperated with heroes who operate in the Middle-east to thwart the schemes of CALIPH-8 and other villains who threaten the region, but he has also come to blows with those same heroes when his orders and the security of his nation required him to engage in activities that were morally questionable.

Friendly contacts inside the Saudi royal family report that, when agents of Al-Qaeda hijacked passenger jets and smashed them into the Pentagon and World Trade Center on 9/11, Asir was shocked and appalled. After all, Osama bin Laden had a history of fighting against the Soviets for the liberation of Afghanistan and was part of a wealthy and influential Saudi family. Asir was sent to America to retrieve members of the bin Laden family, who left the US as soon as the President lifted the general ban on air travel.

Soon after the US invaded Afghanistan, Asir al-Sadr vanished from public view. On orders from his government, but also disowned by them, he entered Afghanistan, and was active throughout the US invasion, though he avoided direct contact with either bin Laden or American forces. He remained in the Afghan mountains throughout the early days of the US invasion of Iraq, but once the invasion became an occupation accompanied by an increasingly violent insurgency, he slipped across the Iraqi border from Syria. For years his movements were difficult to track. He became a double agent, gathering information on the Iraqi insurgency and passing it to the US through his Saudi handlers while simultaneously fighting American imperialism. American troops in Iraq had shoot-on-sight orders and the CIA was working double shifts in their effort to track him down and bring him in for interrogation.

All that changed with the rise of the Islamic State. Muezzin went home and was debriefed, re-admitted to the Saudi military but without a hero's welcome. He is now on the forefront of Saudi efforts to dislodge the Islamic State from Syria and Iraq, and this has brought him back into contact with American super-soldiers, some of whom still bear wounds from previous encounters with him.

Muezzin has the power to destroy things with his voice. He can project a deadly beam of sonic energy powerful enough to take down a military helicopter, and his shouts have the explosive power of a bomb. By varying his volume and tone, he can cause vertigo in a

target, or simply render them unconscious. Brittle objects are easily shattered by Asir's voice, and he can deafen large crowds. Aside from his powers, Asir is a highly trained soldier with experience fighting in various conflicts in the Middle East. Thanks to his years as a guerilla fighter, he's trained in covert operations and has often retreated to the open desert to avoid capture. He has no costume as such. To avoid attention, he usually dresses as a typical Islamic man. His skin is dark and his eyes darker; he has worn a beard all his adult life. His most distinguishing feature is his voice, which is both resonant and powerful. Just listening to it has hypnotized more than one person. For this reason, Asir is often quite cautious about talking. He is very conscious about keeping his powers under control. Occasionally Muezzin has appeared in public. In these situations he wears a military uniform.

MUEZZIN IN PLAY

Sonic Control is fully detailed in *Great Power*; in this case it functions as a Dazzle attack which deafens targets. Muezzin has no defensive powers, so you may want to equip him with body armor (Resistance 3-4). He also benefits from Faceless Arab Minions to run interference for him and help him implement large operations.

As an Arab militant in a very complicated environment, Muezzin will be perceived as either a patriot or a terrorist. It's largely up to your players to decide which. He serves as a way not only to confront Arab stereotypes, but also to introduce Middle-east politics and military conflict into your stories. As written, Muezzin is not likely to appear in the US and he's certainly not going to be behind some terrorist bombing in America... unless, of course, he has been captured, brainwashed, or otherwise forced to comply with people he would otherwise despise. If he has become the victim of a Dominator or Temptress, the story's real question becomes, "Will the heroes pause long enough to figure out why Muezzin is doing what he is doing, or will they shoot first and ask questions later?" In superhero comics, the answer is usually "shoot first," but the result is

also usually non-lethal, so that Muezzin's true allegiance can be discovered and he can work with the heroes to make things right. Vigilantes and other deadly superheroes, however, may kill Asir before they find out he's being manipulated.

In the event the heroes travel to the Middle East, Muezzin is a potential point of contact and ally for them, especially if they are investigating a villain like CALIPH-8 or an organization like the Islamic State. Straight up military action is rare for superheroes, but they may need to extract a hostage ambassador, capture an enemy commander, or seize weapons of mass destruction (or even WMD himself). Asir can be assigned to them as a resource or appear suddenly when their contact ends up dead, they know they're being watched, and everything has gone sour.

Muezzin is not ignorant of the reputation he has among Western heroes, and he might even use it to his advantage. For example, were Asir to learn of a dangerous alien artifact buried in the desert, he might instead tell the heroes that it was the location of a terrorist base, knowing that this is a great way to ensure they act on his intelligence!

GIRLFRIEND GONE BAD

"You found me beautiful once."

"Honey, you got real ugly."

~ Sheila and Ash

It's rough to be a superhero's Significant Other.

EXAMPLES: Star Sapphire, Jean Loring, Power Boy (DC); Madame Masque, Hank Pym (Marvel); G-Girl (film: *My Super Ex-Girlfriend*)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Nemesis, Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, Kid Playing with Fire

ABILITIES: Because the Girlfriend Gone Bad focuses her attention on a particular hero, she is also a Nemesis, and the advice for "Reflection" villains on page 186 of *ICONS Assembled Edition* is a good place to start. She needs to have powers which challenge her romantic interest, and those powers may have a unifying theme which is in opposition to his.

The Girlfriend's powers are probably temporary, perhaps a device given to her by a Mastermind or derived from the experiments of some Twisted Genius. Her Attributes also change when she gains her powers, so that she gains Prowess, Strength, and Willpower but loses Intellect. Whatever specializations she had as a mundane human are probably irrelevant to her superhuman form.

QUALITIES: If the Girlfriend's love is sincere, she has a Quality that represents it. This Quality can then be activated by the hero as he attempts to calm his beloved or return her to sanity. But if her love was a sham and she has been wicked all along, then this too is a Quality which she will activate in order to beat the hero senseless.

Like the Temptress, this archetype tends to have a gendered bias, presenting various incarnations of "the bad girlfriend". For example, Betty Ross was actually married to

one of Bruce Banner's rivals when she was transformed into "the Harpy," a derogatory term for a nagging wife. When the Girlfriend goes bad, she loses the stereotypical markers of her femininity: her beauty and her willingness to submit to whatever her heroic boyfriend wants. Again, to illustrate, as the Harpy, Betty was not just hideous, she was also aggressive and violent. As the years have passed, however, and as standards of physical beauty and femininity have been redefined, it has become more acceptable for super-girlfriends to remain good and not bad (see Red She-Hulk and Star Sapphire, for example).

The male version of the Girlfriend Gone Bad is rarer only because female superheroes in general are rare and those that do exist aren't always allowed to have romantic interests. Nothing prevents boyfriends from going bad, however, as Henry Pym has demonstrated. When Boyfriends go bad, they do not swap gender characteristics in the same way female heroes do; a female character becomes strong and aggressive, but a male hero who suddenly acted feminine would evoke public ridicule rather than superheroic action. Instead, his masculinity is turned to sexual aggression. This is not unique to Boyfriends, it's just more obvious. While the Girlfriend Gone Bad is an overt physical challenge, her sexual dominance also covertly challenges feminine gender roles. The Boyfriend Gone Bad wears his sexual aggression on the outside, bullying his partner or threatening her with assault or rape, and for this he is justly punished. A Girlfriend who starts good but goes bad can be forgiven, especially as our perception of gender roles matures, but a Boyfriend who goes bad can only be rehabilitated by many long years and a helpful retcon. His crimes are too intimate for absolution.

STORIES: Long-term relationships are rare for superheroes. While they occasionally marry, this is the exception and not the rule, and it is still far more common for a male hero to have a long series of female romantic interests. The Girlfriend Gone Bad plot has usually functioned as a narrative tool; a way to remove the hero's

current girlfriend and make way for the next. It illustrated how dangerous it was for the hero to have romantic partners at all, since they inevitably turned into monsters and made his life miserable. This was also a way for Masterminds to threaten the hero, planting a spy in the hero's bed. (This makes the Girlfriend a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.) In the past, Girlfriends who went bad either died or swiftly lost their powers and returned to their usual submissive selves; but in our more progressive era, the Girlfriend Gone Bad can keep her powers and become a hero in her own right, like the Kid Playing with Fire. The phrase "super-couple" has entered the public vocabulary, and comics and film are increasingly willing to depict superheroes in stable, healthy, long-term relationships. This has transformed the Girlfriend Gone Bad story from a narrative device that "clears the deck" to an empowering plot that gives female characters both powers and a voice.

When the Girlfriend Gone Bad is operating out of a perverted sense of good, she thinks that she can live happily ever after with her man if only she could scare him into retirement. Alternately, she is trying to stand up to her boyfriend in an effort to be taken seriously. She may be the target of outside influences, like a Mastermind's brainwashing or possession by the Devil, and if the pair can blame the Girlfriend's recent behavior on a Dominator or Tempter, their differences are more easily patched up. More tragically, she suffers from childhood trauma or psychological problems. Some villains, just to flaunt their power over a hero, will turn a loved one into a Girlfriend Gone Bad so that the hero may die at the hand of his beloved. Ah, the twisted irony of the truly evil! This usually backfires.



BARK & BITE

BARK (April Connors)

Girlfriend Gone Bad, Theme Villain, Blue Collar Criminal

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Average</i>	3
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Average</i>	3
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 8

Specialties

Persuade
Power (Plant Control)
Stealth

Powers

Plant Control

Incredible 7

Extras: Affliction, Binding, Plant Growth, Servant

Qualities

Thorny

Devoted to Her Sister

Loves A Life Of Comfort

Knacks

Plant One On

When Bark uses her Affliction power by physically kissing her target, she gets a +2 bonus on the attack.

BITE (Stacy Connors)

Girlfriend Gone Bad, Theme Villain, Blue Collar Criminal

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Average</i>	3
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Fair</i>	4

Stamina 8

Specialties

Athletics

Intimidate

Stealth

Powers

Mind Control

Incredible 7

Extras: Burst, Mindlink, Servant

Limit: Animal Control

Qualities

Sadistic

Animal Lover

Devoted to Her Sister

Knacks

Leash

Bite carries dog collars which she uses to strangle and humiliate male heroes over whom she has an advantage. To represent this in game, Bite creates a quality on the target. She has a +2 bonus on the test, but can only try to Leash a hero who is stunned or unconscious. If she succeeds, she can continue to activate the quality for free until the collar is physically removed.

Background: The criminal duo known as Bark & Bite began life as Stacy and April Connors, fairly ordinary sisters from a poor and troubled Atlanta home. But when the Black Fury was found on their doorstep one morning feverish and wounded, their lives changed forever. Over the next few weeks, as the two girls nursed Darron Drake back to health, each became convinced that the handsome hero loved her ... and only her. Each sister began trying to sabotage the other's efforts at wooing their patient, but the matter was still unresolved when the Fury's enemies caught up with him.

Darron had been on the trail of Edmund Stonewall, aka Doctor Radium, a diabolical genius and master of alien science. Radium's vat-grown servitors attacked the Connors' mobile home, where Drake was still only half-recovered. But Stacy managed to distract the clones with her pack of Dobermans while April smuggled Darron out the back and into her landscaping van. With a quick thanks, the Black Fury followed the Doctor's servants back to his wooded lair, but the Connors girls followed him, each unwilling to let the other gain a perceived advantage in romancing their hero.

Inside Radium's laboratory, Drake was holding his own until April and Stacy revealed themselves, insisting that they "could help." A brief argument followed, which allowed the Doctor's minions to attack by surprise. Darron surrendered to protect the girls from harm. Soon all three were in a holding cell, where each of the Connors daughters announced her undying love for the Black Fury, and he announced that he had no idea what the hell

they were talking about. The girls were devastated and had a chance to commiserate over their failure while Darron was led out to battle some of Radium's alien gladiators in an impromptu arena.

Stacy and April decided that they had been fools to fall for the Fury, and had let their "love" for him cloud their judgment, leading to their betrayal of each other. They vowed never to let anything — especially not a man — come between them again. If only there was a way they could make the Black Fury really pay for what he had put them through ... Fortunately for them, the Doctor had a microphone in their cell. When he called them into his lab, he shared their pain at the way they had been so used by a man who barely remembered their names. He offered them a chance to strike back at their would-be suitor, and the girls accepted. While Darron was returned to his cell, Stacy and April Connors subjected themselves to some of Doctor Radium's latest experiments. The next time the Black Fury was led into the arena, he wasn't fighting a four armed Martian — he was face to face with the two women who now hated him the most in all the world, and they had muscle to back them up. They called themselves Bark and Bite.

Drake was able to defeat the two rookie criminals, but in his haste to try and capture Doctor Radium, he let the girls escape. Bark and Bite soon learned that while they may come up short when pitting their skills against super-heroes, they had more than enough power to steal what they wanted and live in a kind of comfort. They became mercenary super-criminals, using their powers for their own ends, the humiliation of those who opposed them, and taking occasional jobs working for organized crime or masterminds when their coffers ran particularly low. When their path crosses that of the Black Fury, they can't resist another try at getting their revenge, but they have had their share of brawls with other heroes and can be found participating in almost any scheme with the right price tag.

BARK & BITE IN PLAY

April Connors has been granted the power to control plants. She is capable of stimulating the growth of plants to entrap foes near her, and she has mastered the skill of growing sleep-inducing spores which she blows on a victim, usually with a mock kiss. Her most dramatic tactic is to animate a grove of trees large and strong enough to batter through most opposition. Plant Control is fully detailed in *Great Power*; use Elementals from "M is for Magic" for her trees, but reduce Alternate Form (Solid) to 3. Each tree uses only 15 points from her "pool" of 28, so she can command up to 13 such trees, though she can summon only one per page.

Stacy Connors has telepathic control over animal life. Her control is strongest when focused on a single animal, but is usually strong enough to control even large numbers. Unlike her sister, Stacy can actually communicate with her pets telepathically, even seeing through their eyes. She therefore does much of the intelligence gathering for the duo. Use the stats for Dogs on p.193 of **ICONS Assembled Edition** for Bite's usual servants; even the largest, most well trained fighting dog uses only 11 points from her "pool" of 28, so she can command up to 17 of them at once. Although she has to summon each one of them a page at a time, her Mind Control allows her to keep them bound to her for an extended period, so she normally has a large horde available at all times.

Both sisters are now professional criminals, and have learned much in their short careers. Bark serves as the leader of the pair, though she is naturally soft-spoken and opponents often assume that the outspoken Bite is the dominant sister. April is also more traditionally seductive and often relies on her obvious charms to distract heroes or gain entrance to secure locations; Stacy is more physically competent and cruel, and has even developed something of a taste for pain.

GLADIATOR

“For years the Spider has thwarted me. Mocked me. Humiliated me. In the beginning, I was naive. I thought he was a man. But he couldn’t possibly be a man. No man could do to Kraven what the Spider has. No man. So black. So beautiful. You exist to test me, don’t you? To taunt and challenge me? And I cannot rest until I have proven myself. Until I have destroyed you.”

~ Kraven’s Last Hunt

The Gladiator lives to test herself against superhuman foes.

EXAMPLES: Kraven the Hunter (Marvel); Lady Shiva (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Assassin, Nemesis

ABILITIES: The Gladiator has dedicated her life to testing her Prowess against others in order to become as skilled a fighter as possible, so this Attribute will be high. The Martial Arts or Weapons specializations make her even more dangerous. In fact, she is probably a better fighter than the hero she challenges. If it were not for his Determination, she would defeat him.

But if the Gladiator had overwhelming power, her victories would be cheap and meaningless, so her talents are highly focused. There’s really only one thing she does well, and she is unlikely to have many other abilities, besides perhaps modest Invulnerability, some Fast Attack, and similar powers which make her a more dangerous hand-to-hand fighter. Her Awareness, Willpower, and Coordination are all good, and her Strength is equal or superior to her heroic rival.

QUALITIES: Why is the Gladiator obsessed with battle? Is she defending her title against the best the Earth has to offer, like the Champion in *Marvel Two-in-One*? It could be a spiritual quest, or just a way to rationalize her life of crime. Perhaps she is struggling to overcome deep-seated feelings of inferiority. She may see battle as the only activity worth

pursuing, be a Woman Warrior out to prove herself the equal of any man, or a Master of the Martial Arts who wants to prove that her fighting style is superior to all others. She may be a “Most Dangerous Game” character who has defeated all lesser foes and now sets her sights on superheroes, the only challenge which remains to her.

Heroes who learned their crimefighting skills from reclusive masters — be they Tibetan martial artists or sorcerers supreme — often end up supplanting the master’s original, elder student who is revealed to be of poor character. Such displaced students make excellent Gladiators. If a Gladiator doesn’t start out with a rivalry, she is likely to acquire one as soon as a hero defeats her. Since she has never before been humbled in battle, she is now eager for a rematch, and will seek the hero out, typically ambushing him when he is in the middle of some other adventure.

The Gladiator often comes from a particular style or school of martial arts, which she invokes at key moments in the battle to perform special moves. If she is a champion with a fighting title that she is defending, she wears the belt that represents that title, and this, along with her school and special moves, are qualities that can be activated by the GM and players alike.

STORIES: Obviously, the duel is the recurring Gladiator story. The challenge for GMs is to keep the recurring duel interesting. After all, if the hero defeats the Gladiator in their first encounter, setting up the rivalry that makes her a recurring foe, why should the outcome next time be any different? This is solved by giving the Gladiator new weapons or tactics each time. The terrain varies, though it is always dangerous, in order to keep the duel exciting. She may seek out super powers of her own to level the playing field, or develop special weapons just to thwart her rival. This makes her a Nemesis.

One trick to developing a recurring nemesis like this is to give the Gladiator new offensive tricks

rather than defensive ones. A villain with a strong defense but poor offense takes a very long time to defeat but never really poses much of a threat. That's boring. But a villain with a powerful offense poses a danger right away, and few players complain about a short battle as long as the fighting is intense. If you're worried about your Gladiator staying on her feet long enough to pose a challenge, increase her Stamina rather than her Invulnerability. If the hero isn't alone, she will need minions or a distraction to separate her target from his allies. She may join a villain team just for the chance of a rematch, or she may ambush the hero when he's in the middle of a fight and his teammates are too busy to help.

If the hero can prove his worth to the Gladiator, she may become his ally or even his mentor. Gladiators like this were never truly evil in the first place; they live outside the law, abiding by a warrior code that few understand. The Gladiator may even have attacked the hero specifically to test him as a potential student! Heroes who fail this test have a lot of personal growing up to do; heroes who pass begin instruction in the Gladiator's secret fighting style.

Other Gladiators have no such altruistic thoughts. They probably work as Assassins when they can't find a worthy foe. Their hearts aren't in this work, but it pays the bills and allows the Gladiator to stumble across heroes who are worth her time. When this happens, her employer, a Crime Boss or Mastermind, orders her to stop hunting the hero because she is attracting too much attention. She ignores him and renews the fight anyway.

PLATINUM BLONDE

Gladiator, Servitor, Blue Collar Criminal

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Supreme</i>	10
Intellect	<i>Average</i>	3
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 15

Specialties

Athletics Expert

Powers

Resistance (Damage)
Supreme 10

Qualities

Maid o'Metal
I Really Do Have More Fun
In It For The Money

Knacks

Stronger Than Steel
The Platinum Blonde has a +2 bonus on tests to create the qualities *Disarmed!* or *My Weapon Has Broken!* When she succeeds, she has either snapped the weapon in half with her hands, or it has shattered simply by striking her impervious skin.

Firm Backhand

When the Blonde gets a successful slam against a target with Resistance to Damage of 5 or less, she can convert that slam into a stun instead.

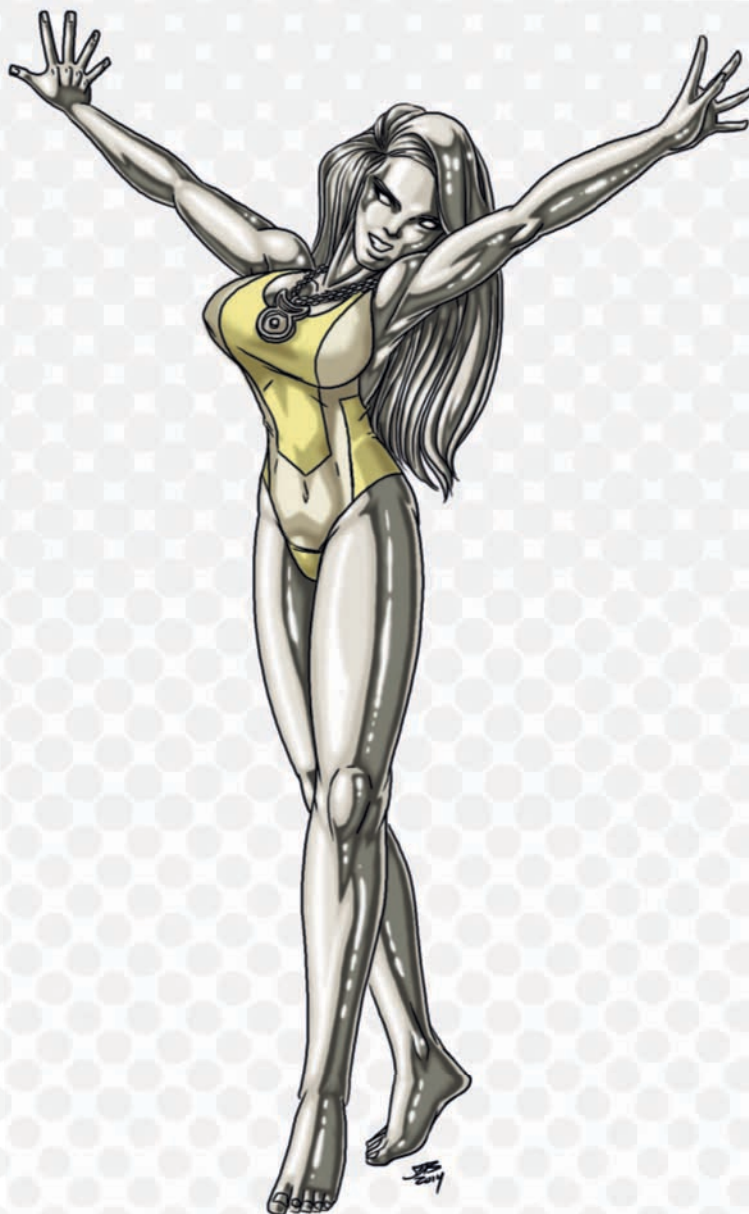
Background: Pat Dempsey was transformed in a freak accident into the Man o'Metal, a form which was not only impervious to harm but also constantly on fire! Immediately, American scientists tried to figure out how this had happened, but it was Esther Radnitz, a German immigrant and Jew, who made the breakthrough that would be forever remembered as the Maid o'Metal Formula. Radnitz discovered that, in the absence of a Y

chromosome, the process which made Dempsey into the Man o'Metal stabilized, becoming permanent without causing combustion. The first subject of the process was Golden Girl, one of the foremost heroines of World War II, and she was soon accompanied by the Silver Bullet, a young sidekick whose life was saved by an emergency application of the Maid o'Metal formula.

Although Radnitz perished in the War, her notes survived and have been re-discovered every decade or so. (In the 1980s the original process was re-engineered and unfortunately dubbed "the Metallica formula.") The result has been a steady stream of superhuman women, including the heroic Brass and Titanium Girl as well as criminals like Gilded Lily and the Platinum Blonde. Because the transformative chemical has the side effect of halting the subject's aging process, most of these individuals are still active. The Platinum Blonde is one of the more recent beneficiaries of the formula.

Panama Wood was led into a life of crime by an early boyfriend, but she came to enjoy the new career and it stayed with her long after the man responsible had died in a furious firefight with Texas police. Her aggression, good looks, and resourcefulness appealed to criminal bosses and she had frequent employment, but she grew frustrated at her inability to compete with super heroes. By betraying her current gang to a rival, she managed to slip away with several million dollars, which she used to bribe a South African chemist to decode Radnitz's old formula and make Wood into the Platinum Blonde.

Panama first saw action as the Blonde in a bank heist when she tried to steal Hugo Danner's safety deposit box. Danner was present at the time, which turned out to be the point all along, as Panama wanted to test her new abilities against a legend. The two engaged in a fierce brawl and the Blonde was the last one standing. From that moment, Panama became absolutely devoted to her career as a super-criminal. Although she has had many subsequent run-ins with heroes, and



Pat Dempsey, the Man o'Metal, was created by HG Peters, the original *Wonder Woman* artist, in 1941.

Danner defeated her in a re-match, she has always managed to avoid capture.

The Blonde's strength and long, successful, career are to blame for her placement on the list of the FBI's "Most Wanted." While her crimes are always aimed at wealth, not power, and she seldom murders, many innocent people have died at her hands when her superhuman brawls have spilled over into the street. Her experience ensures that she avoids many of the simple mistakes which make rookie criminals easy to

capture, and she has none of the mental instability so often seen in super villains. Panama is not averse to solo jobs, but she is sensitive to her lack of rapid escape from the scene of a crime, and prefers to work with small but well-funded groups who can compensate for this weakness. She has no desire to be the ultimate authority in a gang, but also responds poorly to issued orders. As a result, her favorite job is that of “trusted lieutenant” to some armored megalomaniac or master of the elements. In this role, she excels.

THE PLATINUM BLONDE IN PLAY

The Platinum Blonde has had her entire body transformed into a kind of platinum alloy that makes her incredibly strong and nearly impervious to harm, without sacrificing any of her natural agility. She weighs four thousand pounds and sinks like a stone, but she considers this a fair tradeoff for her new abilities. Other subjects of the Maid o'Metal process might be heroic PCs at your table, and because the process arrests their aging they could easily be a century old. For some, like the adolescent girl who became the Silver Bullet, this may not be a blessing.

Any super-strong hero is going to attract the Blonde's attention; she has sacrificed much to become the strongest woman alive, and she will do virtually anything to ensure that status. She could monitor the hero's exploits and intrude upon his next public brawl, or seek out his enemies and rivals and offer to help them with their criminal schemes, knowing her path and the hero's will eventually cross.

HEIR TO LOVECRAFT

“The day you KILLED me, dear Sandy, I fell into another WORLD. There are dimensions beyond the ones we PERCEIVE — collectively known as the SUBTLE REALMS. And these realms — well, let’s just say they’re INHABITED. Call them ENTITIES, if you like. SPIRITS. Things cast aside when the maker FORMALIZED his creation. They have their OWN god now. A KING OF TEARS. And he so DESPERATELY wants back into our world.”

~ Johnny Sorrow

The Heir to Lovecraft is a villain who invokes the Cthulhu Mythos of HP Lovecraft and other writers.

EXAMPLES: Rasputin (Hellboy comics and film); the Revengers, Modred the Mystic (Marvel); The Gentry, Johnny Sorrow (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Cult Leader, Servitor, Cosmic Menace

ABILITIES: The Cthulhu mythos is existential horror, and the Heir embodies this genre through madness, alienation, body transformation, and Secrets Man Was Not Meant to Know. He is unsettling and an object of fear (“F is for Fear” is an especially useful toolbox for this archetype, including rules for madness). The Heir may wield magic, but this “magic” is just as likely to be defined as “science we can’t understand”. If he does work spells, he can summon the pitiless denizens of other worlds, Servitors which need no instruction before the thoughtless slaughter of all those who happen to be witness. Most of his evil work, in fact, is done through servants. This kind of Heir has little in the way of direct fighting ability.

The Heir can pass as an ordinary man, but he is secretly a monster whose frail fleshly form will be revealed as something inhuman and horrifying. Alternately, he was human until his confrontation with cosmic truths transformed his body as well as his mind. This monstrous

nature might be as simple as a host of tentacles erupting from his body, or it might be something more bizarre, like Johnny Sorrow's invisible but deadly face. He is probably immortal, either already dead or a host for the eldritch entities he serves, and this invulnerability is one of his most useful powers, allowing him to survive an encounter with heroes long enough for his own less direct tactics to become a threat.

For the Heir, intelligence is a curse, not a blessing. His Intellect and Willpower are his highest attributes, despite the fact that he is mad as a hatter. Indeed, it is precisely his insanity which makes him virtually immune to psychic powers, intimidation, or persuasion of any kind. He is specialized in Occult, Mental Resistance, and, if he was led to the ghastly truth through the study of the mad, Psychology.

QUALITIES: The Heir knows truths which man suspects but dare not accept: that we are puny, insignificant beings who matter not at all on the grand scale of the universe. Rather, the cosmos is home to entities we shall never understand, who have been here for eons untold and who will persist for ages yet to come. Utterly alien and vastly superior, they are the giants of eternity and we exist only in their shadow, not really permitted to live but rather alive by the grace of their inattention. This knowledge has driven the Heir mad or, rather, it has changed him in such a way that human society *calls* him mad, though he may in fact be the only sane one on a planet of self-deluding madmen.

Both a Servitor and a Cult Leader, the Heir has learned how insignificant humanity is. He considers himself a superior being because of this knowledge, and he will not hesitate to sacrifice his followers. But in reality, he is only the most enlightened of the insects; his masters will not even notice when they accidentally crush him.

Consider how the Heir interacts with the Mythos. Is there a particular patron whom he serves, such as Yog-Sothoth, Hastur the Unspeakable, Shub-Niggurath, or Cthulhu himself? While much of the Cthulhu Mythos is

in the public domain and can be used by anyone (accounting for some of its popularity in video games, films, and comics), it is also common to add to the Mythos with the creation of new Lovecraftian elements, such as the Cancerverse, the King of Tears, or the Many-Angled Ones (first seen in Grant Morrison's *Zenith*).

STORIES: When the Heir to Lovecraft appears, he is usually trying to find a particular object or person which he needs before his non-Euclidean masters gain egress to our world. Alternately, the Heir is trying to free his master, who has been imprisoned within a mountain, at the bottom of the sea, or in space. The heroes must prevent this from happening. On rare occasions, the heroes have to actually travel to the dimension where the Heir's masters dwell, but that place is so alien to human beings and so awful that we can survive there for only a very short time. In comics and gaming, this Lovecraftian dimension has recently been conflated with the Kabbalistic notion of the Qliphoth ("shells"), a universe which existed before our own and which is inhabited by the rejected detritus which God saw no use for in our, his second, creation.

This shift from existential horror to an "anti-verse" from which (endless and grotesque, but highly punchable) horrors crawl may have happened because Lovecraftian horror and superheroic action make for strange bedfellows. Superheroes are defined by power, but the protagonists of Lovecraftian horror are generally powerless. Heroes usually win; Lovecraft's heroes see loss as inevitable. Super heroes are both important and lauded for their good deeds, while the academics, scientists, and reclusive artists of Lovecraft's New England discover man's cosmic unimportance and die alone and unmourned. For all of these reasons, the Heir to Lovecraft often ends up looking a lot like a traditional super villain, at least until his masters arrive. Until that moment, the heroes have plenty of opportunities to fry tentacular horrors with their heat vision.

In fact, superhero stories argue very strongly against the cosmic truths that lie at the heart of Lovecraftian fiction. Superman and Captain America insist that our struggles are important and the weakest of us are the most cherished. Spider-Man and Batman demonstrate that it is within our power as human beings to make the world a better place, that this is a responsibility we must embrace. And while Lovecraftian horror and superhero fiction agree that the universe is strange and, in many ways, beyond human understanding, the Heir to Lovecraft sees that as horrifying while the superhero embraces it as “Amazing,” “Incredible,” and “Uncanny.” When superheroes triumph over the Heir to Lovecraft, they’re not just expressing how they see the world, they’re validating their genre.

Save your Heir to Lovecraft for big events, the equivalent of a summer crossover or giant-size annual.

FIEND FOLIO

Heir to Lovecraft, Kid Playing with Fire

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Average</i>	3
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Poor</i>	2
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 7

Specialties

Occult
Technology

Powers

The Book of Squamous Shadow: Servant Device

Amazing 9

Extra: Instant. The Book does not have to spend a page of preparation to summon a servant. It happens in a single panel.

Limit: Uncontrolled. Not only does the Book summon servants without Ted’s consent, he

never knows what kind of monster he is going to get.

Resistance: Damage

Good 4

Extra: Mental

Mental (“Psionic”) Blast

Incredible 7

Extra: Mind Control (“Id Insinuation”)

Qualities

It Is the Age of the Nerd

Guarded by the Stars

“I Have This Under Control!”

Knacks

Unearthed Arcana

Fiend Folio has a +2 on Occult checks as long as his book is able to speak with him.

Ego Whip

Servants summoned by the Book will act on their own without Ted using a panel to command them. However, he can still command them by using a panel to do so.

Intellect Fortress

Fiend Folio’s Resistance against Mental attacks is +2

Background: Ted Ashland was, and in many ways remains, a pretty ordinary nerd. He enjoys his gaming console, his collection of rare RPG books, and indie music. He went to the local community college and got an AA in graphic design. He has a real girlfriend who, admittedly, is from Canada. But one day he made a fateful mistake: what he thought he was buying over eBay was a 1st edition *Deities & Demigods*. You know, the one with the Lovecraft Mythos in it. But what he was *actually* buying was a sentient grimoire with the power to summon tentacled monsters from beyond time and space. It’s actually kind of easy to see how he made that mistake, once you think about it.

The Book of Squamous Shadow is a book-shaped servant of cyclopean entities from beyond space and time. It needs a mortal through which to work its magic, and it understands Ted, so the two are a team. But

Ted doesn't really want the Book to succeed in ... whatever its bizarre goals are, and he continues to try to control the creatures it summons, using them for relatively petty and non-lethal tasks like keeping his sister away from her junkie boyfriend or whisking him to Europe when Marvel movies open there a week before they do in the States. But the Book cannot always be fooled or sated, and Ted is haunted by the knowledge that the creatures he has allowed to crawl out from his shadow have sometimes slipped away into the wide world to do ... things. He tries not to think about it.

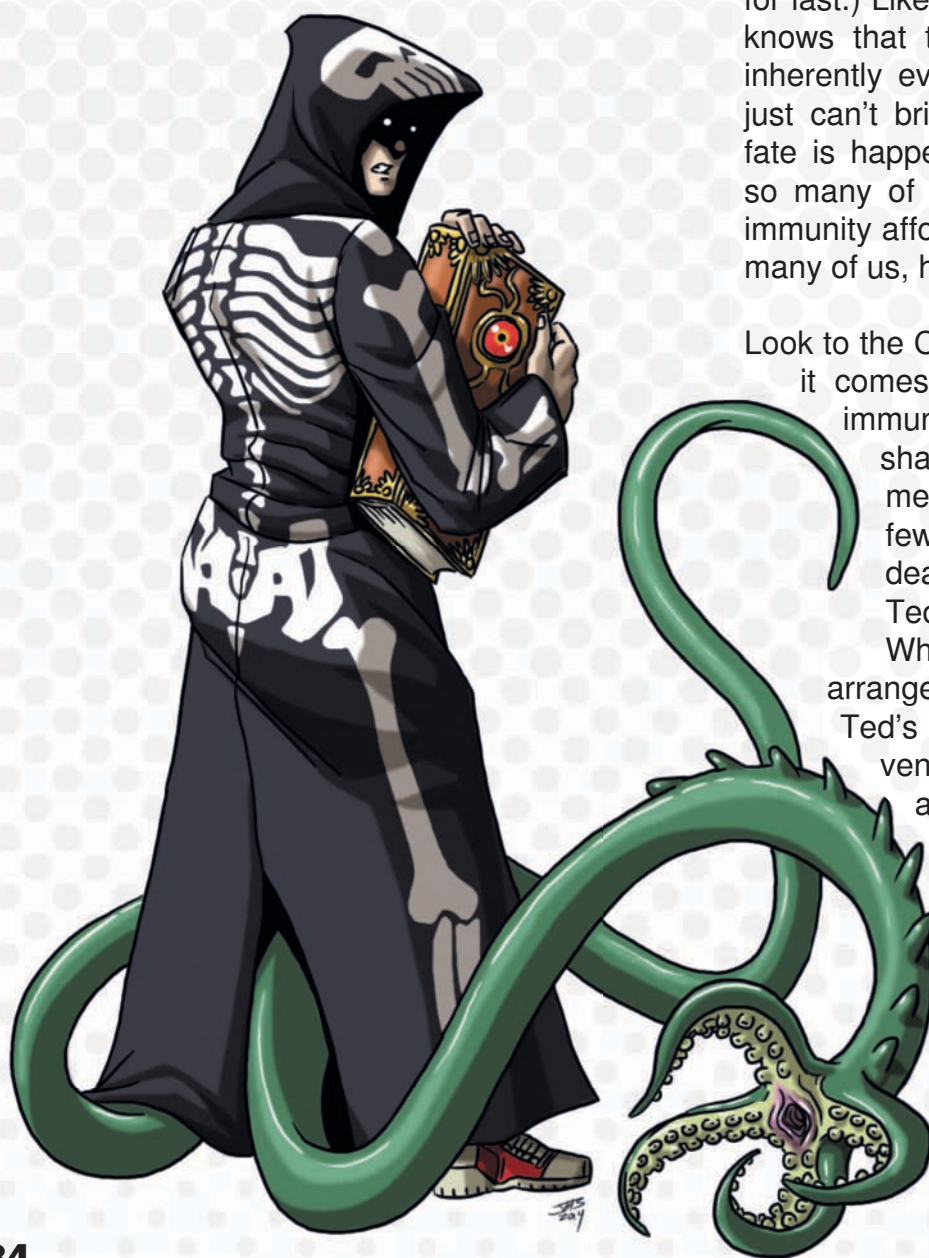
Now, Ted is facing a crisis in his life. His roommate has moved out because the place has become such a mess. Ted's just lost his job

at the shoe store in the mall. He needs rent and his car gets harder to start every morning. There are so many people with money they don't deserve. Surely he'd be able to get some of that cash without anyone getting hurt. Right? Right?

FIEND FOLIO IN PLAY

Ted is a classic Kid Playing With Fire, but that Fire happens to have tentacles and cause SAN loss. He's a decent young man who has gotten stuck with power he never asked for and can't control, and the pressures of modern life are starting to put the screws on him. (Those pressures are actually accented by the Book, which has used its servitors to ruin Ted's job, car, and living situation. It is saving the girlfriend for last.) Like many gamers over the years, Ted knows that the power he has been given is inherently evil and ruins all it touches, but he just can't bring himself to accept that such a fate is happening to *him*. Subconsciously, like so many of us, Ted believes he has the plot immunity afforded to a precious PC. And like so many of us, he's wrong.

Look to the Cthulhu Mythos for inspiration when it comes to Ted's servants. Most will be immune to gunfire, will fly, roll or shamble at great speed, and will drive men mad by sight or by touch. Even a few of them can bring horror and death to a small community (like Ted's college campus or the mall). When heroes respond, the Book can arrange for an "accident" to happen to Ted's girlfriend, driving him into a fury of vengeance. Once the gloves come off and Ted allows the Book's servants to do as they wish, there may be no way back.



HERO IN DISGUISE

“Another challenge for the Green Hornet, his aide Kato, and their rolling arsenal, the Black Beauty. On police records a wanted criminal, Green Hornet is really Brit Reid, owner-publisher of the Daily Sentinel, his dual identity known only to his secretary and the District Attorney. And now, to protect the rights and lives of decent citizens, rides THE GREEN HORNET!”

The Hero in Disguise pretends to be a villain in order to infiltrate the criminal world and take it down from the inside.

EXAMPLES: The Green Hornet (TV and film); the Shroud (Marvel); Batman at the end of Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Dark Avenger, Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing

ABILITIES: Because the Hero in Disguise is an underdog and covert agent, she traditionally has no (or only one) actual super power and instead relies on intellect, training, and fighting skills. She is probably a Dark Avenger, Weapon Master, or Master of the Martial Arts, all heroic archetypes with long pedigrees. Her Attributes are good but not above 6 (so she retains maximum Determination), and what powers she does have listed on her sheet come from devices or mundane equipment. Her specialties are Athletics, Martial Arts, Stealth and Weapons.

But there’s nothing that requires all this to be true. A hero with more fantastic powers can still wage war on crime from within, though there are additional challenges. The Deception specialty, or a good Willpower, certainly helps maintain the disguise over several sessions. If the hero’s powers are visually distinctive, she may have to take additional steps to keep from being recognized. Heroes who choose to temporarily masquerade as villains are often obliged to forgo the use of one or more of their powers, exchanging them for devices or weaponry designed just for the occasion. This

can be a good opportunity for a player to experiment with her character for a session or two, before returning to the hero’s usual attributes.

QUALITIES: It is important to note that the Hero in Disguise is not simply a villain with morals. That is, many villains and criminals have personal codes or ethical lines they will not cross. They may even be “good people” and empathetic. None of this makes them Heroes in Disguise. For that, a protagonist must conduct a war on crime, and her chosen strategy is to pose as a criminal in order to avoid suspicion, to earn the trust of criminals, and to take them down “from the inside.”

The defining trait of this archetype is the disguise itself, which must be maintained at all costs. By choosing this particular tactic to fight crime, the Hero in Disguise has set herself up for confrontations with other heroes who perceive her only as a criminal. She will have to lie to virtually everyone around her. She will be obliged to perform criminal acts to prove her criminal bona fides, usually up to and including murder, and figuring a way out of these situations is the bread and butter of her story. Throughout these scenes, the qualities which define her disguise, her reason for adopting it, and the consequences that follow from it will get constant play.

The Hero in Disguise may require an ally on the “outside,” perhaps someone providing technical or logistic support. He may be a law enforcement agent that can help redirect or distract the cops when the Hero needs to get away. Heroes may have a lair or headquarters from which they mastermind their war on crime, though the necessities of the disguise may require that this “headquarters” be mobile and concealed, perhaps a tractor-trailer rig or submersible.

STORIES: The Hero in Disguise is something of a solo act, though it can be made a group activity if you’re willing to shape the entire campaign around it. If everyone is playing a criminal, a Hero in Disguise fits right in.

Alternately, an entire team of heroes can adopt villain identities (a “Reverse Thunderbolt”) in order to track down a mysterious enemy, infiltrate a large organization, or shake off pursuit by an enemy who knows them only in their heroic personas. See the “Bait and Switch” elsewhere in this book for advice on running a campaign where all the player characters are Heroes in Disguise.

Players are most likely to encounter the Hero in Disguise as an NPC antagonist who is secretly on their side, but who cannot reveal her true allegiance. In these stories, the heroes are after a Crime Boss or Mastermind and the Hero in Disguise is either one of that villain’s lieutenants or is perceived as a rival villain seeking to “horn in” on the territory. For this story to have the most dramatic frisson, the PCs also interact with the Hero in Disguise in her civilian identity, where she is a trusted friend, law enforcement officer, or romantic interest. She knows the hero’s identity and personal life, and in fact may have infiltrated the heroic circle for strategic reasons, though she probably feels guilty about lying to her super-friends. The “villain” is only revealed to be a hero in preparation for the climactic confrontation with the Crime Boss, when the PCs must be persuaded to stop their obsessive fixation on catching the Hero in Disguise or to let her go after her capture. Instead, they must all work together, even as the other heroes are angry and alienated by the HID’s long deception. The denouement of this story forces the Hero in Disguise to choose between giving up her deception and joining the ranks of the “real heroes,” or ascending the criminal ladder to replace the Crime Boss. She typically chooses the latter, using her new influence among criminals to wage a more effective war.

Some heroes are accused of being criminals by the media (“Spider-Man’s a menace!”), law enforcement, or civilians with a hidden agenda. This presents an opportunity for the hero to prove the media right and actually act like a villain, again in order to catch a particularly mysterious, reclusive, or well-protected foe. This is one of the easiest ways to use the Hero

in Disguise, because the hero does not actually need a disguise. She is, instead, using her reputation as a criminal to her own advantage. This is especially easy for new heroes or those who have recently been accused of a terrible crime they did not commit; well-established heroes, even those hated by the press, are unlikely to convince criminals they have in fact been bad guys all along without a complete change of identity.

LIGHTNING WOMAN

Hero in Disguise, Terrorist

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Great</i>	6
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 10

Specialties

Aerial Combat
 Athletics
 Intimidation
 Law Expert
 Military
 Streetwise

Powers

Energy Control: Electricity
Amazing 8
 Extras: Absorption (Electricity, Healing), Aura, Brownout, Flight
 Armored Uniform: Resistance Device
Fair 4

Qualities

Secret Identity
 “Justice, Like Lightning!”
 Played by Rene Russo

Knacks

You Can’t Handle the Truth
 Lightning Woman has a +2 on efforts to conceal her secret identity.

Friends in Low Places

Lightning Woman has a +2 on Streetwise rolls when dealing with domestic terrorists.

Background: Isabel Turner was born to a privileged DC family, but she somehow managed to stay grounded. She understood how fortunate she was and, because she was neither patronizing nor condescending, she managed to make friends others in her wealthy and white neighborhood did not approve of. She would have liked to have said she got into Harvard Law School based on her own abilities, but the truth is that her father arranged everything. The grades, at least, were her own.

After graduation, she entered the Navy and the Judge Advocate General Corps. She was assigned a case of domestic terrorism but after six weeks was reassigned; it was very hard for Isabel to let this case go. It seemed to her that cases which involved Americans — who murdered abortion doctors, planted bombs to protest the government, burned down black churches, or engaged in anti-Islamic violence here at home — were being put on the back burner in favor of foreign terrorism, and this seemed to her a great injustice. For six months she labored to bring attention to her cause, but she succeeded only in getting herself warned off by superior officers who were “looking out for her career.” Finally, one of the men she had been tracking struck again with a mail bomb that critically injured a hero of the Civil Rights movement. Isabel left the hospital with a vow to take action, somehow.

In an old Navy file she found information on a former superhero named Lash Lightning. Lash had been active during the Second World War, and was now in an assisted living facility in New Jersey. Lash confirmed Isabel’s suspicion, that he had shared his superhuman powers with a young woman, turning her into Lightning Girl. Could he do that again, she asked? Lash thought he could, though he suspected he would not survive the attempt. But the old hero was eager to leave something behind, and perhaps to live again, in a way, in the 21st century. So with the last of his strength he gave



Lash Lightning is a hero in the public domain, and he and Isobel Blake, the original Lightning Girl, appeared in various Golden Age titles published by Ace, including *Sure-Fire Comics*, *Lightning Comics*, and *Four Favorites*.

his powers to the young lawyer, noting, “Her name was Isabel, too.” Turner walked out of the facility as the nurses came running; now, she was born again as Lightning Woman.

Isabel now runs a dangerous game. By day she continues to serve in the Navy as a member of JAG. But she uses her knowledge of the system to avoid surveillance, maintaining a second identity as the mysterious and deadly Lightning Woman. As Lightning Woman, she attends militia meetings, anti-abortion protests, Klan rallies and other white supremacist movements,

where she is considered a hero and patriot, fighting to “take our country back.” In this role, she has had to befriend men who turn her stomach, and she has had to do things which torture her memory. So far, she has been able to avoid killing anyone, always using the information she gleans to save lives, but she feels in her gut that it is only a matter of time before she makes a mistake and someone innocent dies.

LIGHTNING WOMAN IN PLAY

Lightning Woman’s Intimidation specialty (see “I is for Influence”) allows her to add one rank to her Willpower when intimidating others. Her Brownout extra (see *Great Power*) allows her to shut down all electricity in extended range for eight pages.

Traditionally, the Hero in Disguise focuses on organized crime; Isabel Turner is instead taking down domestic terror from within. This makes her “Lightning Woman” persona an example of the Terrorist archetype, a role which for decades has traditionally been synonymous with the Foreigner. But because her enemies are typically white Christian men instead of Muslims from the Middle East, they are not perceived as “terrorists.” This is exactly the point of Lightning Woman’s mission.

For characters with a military background, Isabel makes a great contact, legal resource, and romantic interest. She is passionate, knowledgeable, competent and empathic; scenes in which she is captured or held hostage are especially fun because, although she has the power to defend herself, she dares not use them lest her secret be exposed. Heroes should come face to face with Lightning Woman only after they have met and been befriended by Isabel in her mundane identity. This will give the eventual revelation of her dual nature more impact.

IMP

“You got that clear now, m’man?”

“Yes! Multiplicity results in incompleteness! Incompleteness results in desire! Desire may be sated, but someone must pay! Cash is for paying! Cash stands for gold, of which there is not enough! I understand!”

~ Luke Cage and the Beyonder, shortly before the Heroes for Hire building is turned to solid gold.

The Imp has fantastic powers which he uses for his own childish amusement or to explore the nature of human existence.

EXAMPLES: Mr. Myxztlyk (DC); Impossible Man, the Beyonder (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Cosmic Menace

ABILITIES: There is nothing the Imp cannot do. Whatever he wishes becomes reality. This is better represented by a Quality than by any **ICONS** super-power; see Other qualities, below.

The Imp does, however, have a body and it is not inappropriate to give him Attributes. He is probably ignorant of human ways, scatterbrained, and naive, so his Intellect, Awareness, and Willpower will be average at best. He has no need for physical power or fighting skill because his every wish comes true. Heroes triumph against the Imp by outsmarting him or tricking him. He is, however, quick, so Coordination is his best Attribute.

QUALITIES: The Imp’s power, however it is explained, is represented on his character sheet by a Quality which the GM can activate to do, well, just about anything. As with the Cosmic Menace, Force of Nature, or other villains whose powers are “off the scale,” this means determination will be handed out in great quantity. And, like the Cosmic Menace, it is really pointless for heroes to use this determination to punch harder or inflict more

damage with their laser vision. Instead, they will need their determination to save innocent people put into harm's way by the Imp's childish tantrums, and to enact their plan to trick the Imp into departing.

This childish playfulness is part of the Imp's character as well. He may not actually be a child, but he acts like one in the sense that he is capricious and arbitrary, he bores easily, and he expects the heroes to entertain him. While his whimsy makes the Imp a real handful, heroes can exploit his short attention span and shallow thinking to keep him distracted and deceive him.

Before you run a story with an Imp, decide how the Imp can be dispelled. Give him a quality to reflect this plot point, one which the heroes can discover and activate in play. As an example, sometimes the Imp comes from a society or planet of beings with powers comparable to his own. This is a good way to get rid of him, if the heroes can figure out how to lure the Imp's rivals, parents, or authority figures to Earth.

STORIES: While genies, leprechauns, and other wish-granters are well-established in literature and folklore, the Imp really owes his existence to the Comics Code. Once it was established that, in America at least, all comic books were for children, it was inevitable that writers would tell stories that portrayed the super hero as a super-babysitter saddled with a cosmic toddler who could make its every wish come true. This classic version of the Imp hasn't been successful in the post-Code era, but he can still be a useful antagonist for running a story in the foreground while, in the background, the players are pursuing private subplots and interpersonal drama. In other words, when the Imp shows up, it's often not really about the Imp at all. The Imp's crazy machinations simply create a stage upon which the campaign's real, more dramatic, stories have a chance to move forward. Imagine, for example, an Imp who appears and wipes the memory of all the super-heroes, creating an "Amnesia Episode" for your campaign. (See *Buffy's* "Tabula Rasa" or *Star Trek's*

"Conundrum.") This creates a roleplaying opportunity for the players, as their characters try to figure out "who I really am" while simultaneously renegotiating all their relationships. "Once More with Feeling," in which the imposition of musical monologues on everyone in Sunnydale forces them to reveal things they have otherwise kept hidden, is another example of this kind of Imp story.

But, demons notwithstanding, the Imp seldom intends to do real harm. He is usually just in search of fun, and he has chosen a hero as his gull or straight man. Because he doesn't understand how fragile human beings are, his pranks put innocents in peril, and the heroes are kept busy with damage control and "Rescue Panels." Sometimes, however, an Imp becomes downright malicious, and in this state he can cause serious and widespread harm. Heroes usually have to find a way to get him to reverse all the things he has done, before departing.

Star Trek's Imps — Trelane and Q are the most famous examples — illustrate the way in which this archetype has matured over the decades. Now, when the Imp appears, it is because he wants to learn something, or because there is some question to which he demands an answer. But although the Imp *seems* to be pursuing this question for his own purposes, he is really asking it on our behalf. As the heroes struggle to answer the Imp, they learn something about themselves. The Beyonder illustrates both modes; he is first a being who forces heroes and villains to fight for his own amusement (and for a lucrative toy contract), but he later adopts the form of a man in order to understand the human experience (and for a lucrative summer cross-over event). The Imp, in other words, has transformed from a super-baby to a surrogate for God — he is now a mysterious and omnipotent patriarchal figure who teaches and helps us, but whom we perceive as ambivalent and whimsical because we don't truly understand him. Now we are the children and he is the ultimate sitter.

COYOTE

Imp, Minority Hero

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Awareness	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Willpower	<i>Supreme</i>	10

Stamina 13

Specialties

Athletics
Deception
Medicine
Occult Master
Performance (Dance)
Stealth
Weapons (traditional Native American)
Wrestling

Powers

Cosmic Power (Transformation: Animals)
Vast 12
Immortality
Supreme 10

Qualities

Native American Trickster Spirit
Educate through Experience
It's Not a Party Unless It's a Danner Party

Knacks

Wily
Coyote can choose to allow any attack directed at him to hit. The attack appears to have its maximum effect and for one round, Coyote is Stunned. On the following round, however, he returns to his original condition as if the attack had never landed.

Background: Coyote is an ancient spirit of Native American culture. His stories are very old and many are set before the creation of human beings. To him, the arrival of Europeans and the transformations they wrought on the world are comparatively recent, and perhaps even a bit exciting. Although he is revered by



many as a god, Coyote is no stuffy pagan deity who speaks in thees and thous. He is, instead, a fun-loving and even hip character whose purpose in life is to teach others through unusual means.

While clever, Coyote usually comes off as a bit too clever for his own good. He has a habit of getting himself into trouble when he should know better, and he likes to break social mores and codes of behavior. This usually ends badly, illustrating why those rules are obeyed in the first place. What few understand is that all this is part of Coyote's nature and it is how he educates people. While others are torn between what is right and what is selfish, Coyote invariably chooses what is selfish and gets publicly clobbered for it. Publicly humiliated, he then slinks off to laugh another day. Wise observers realize that what happened to Coyote

will happen to them... and they won't be able to survive it like he can. Super heroes have a hard time learning this lesson, instead always thinking that they can make the same choices Coyote did but somehow do it better. Coyote finds this mentality very, very frustrating.

Modern culture, with its constant innovations, its energy, and its gadgets, fascinates Coyote. His status as an immortal cosmic spirit means that he can do pretty much anything he wants, so he spends a lot of time in human society, partying and otherwise acting irresponsibly, doing his educational job one small story at a time. But he hasn't forgotten his roots, either, and he keeps a special eye out for Native Americans. When he appears on the res, he leaves his chic nightclub outfits behind and is most likely to appear in worn jeans and a t-shirt. He has, in particular, had a dozen encounters with members of the Danner family over the years, with whom he seems to have something of a special relationship. The current focus of his attention is Aurelia Danner, whom he claims to desperately love. No one seems to buy this, but he maintains the fiction anyway and demonstrates it with ridiculous displays. He has transplanted the White House Rose Garden into her New York City apartment, set her up on a date with Donald Trump (to "show her the alternative"), and even briefly granted her cosmic power as "Super-Squaw". At first she simply spurned his advances, but then she became resigned to his presence in her life, and lately she has actually started to look forward to seeing him again.

COYOTE IN PLAY

Coyote is an Imp with a purpose. He doesn't show up because he's bored or just to mess with a hero, though he may claim both these things. In fact, when Coyote appears, he is trying to help someone find their way through a very difficult decision or a turning point in their life. This isn't always the hero he's focused his attention on, though it usually is.

For example, super heroes often struggle over the decision to kill their enemies, especially after a villain has escaped from prison or the

asylum yet again and killed yet again. Heroes can come to feel responsible for these deaths, especially when they come under the withering criticism of the media, political figures, or the families of victims. At a time like this, Coyote appears and insists the villain must die. Arming himself with various lethal weapons, he confronts the villain and appears to kill him. But then the ramifications of this execution slowly play out. Coyote's allies no longer trust him. His loved ones sense he is somehow "different" and pull away. Other villains, who never used to wield lethal force, now begin to do so, citing his own example. He loses moral credibility and a new villain, ten times worse, claims the mantle of the old. Presumably the heroes, who witness all this, realize that executing that super villain a few weeks ago led to all this disappointment and failure. When they reach out to console Coyote, he smiles and laughs as time rewinds to a day before the fateful decision to kill the villain in the first place.

Coyote is also an excellent way to retcon recent events in your game, if they have gone in an unhealthy direction. Spontaneity in roleplaying is usually to be encouraged, but sometimes decisions are made on the spur of the moment that turn out to be detrimental to the game in the long run. This is a great time to bring in Coyote, who is suddenly revealed to have been the mastermind behind this whole sequence of events and, with a snap of his finger and a cosmic sneeze, can put everything back "the way it was supposed to be."

KID PLAYING WITH FIRE

"You blasted Titans have pushed Grant Wilson 'round long enough! You destroyed my apartment! Made me lose my girl! An' now that I got the power, I'm gonna make you pay — in spades!"

~ the Ravager

The Kid uses his newly discovered powers for personal gain, but those powers are beyond his control and result in tragedy.

EXAMPLES: Every "meteor freak" in Smallville (TV)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Power Corrupted, Young Hero

ABILITIES: Surprise is at the heart of the Kid's powers; she does not expect them, and she doesn't know what they really are or how they work. This makes her ideal for random character generation in the traditional **ICONS** manner. Her powers are all tied to a common theme and origin, and in fact she probably has only one power with a few additional effects purchased as extras. If you are telling a story in which the Kid is expected to fight an entire team of heroes, this power needs to be of high rank, but if your story is more about the trouble the Kid causes among civilians, this can be accomplished with very modest power levels, especially if the Kid has subtle powers like Mind Control or Invisibility.

Other than her singular power, the Kid is really quite ordinary and this, indeed, is part of the chemistry that makes this archetype work. Her Attributes are 2-4 (unless her sudden power has modified them) and she probably has a single Speciality that defines her mundane interests or future career.

QUALITIES: The Kid is young, usually a teenager, and the transformations caused by her sudden power are a metaphor for the transformations of body and psychology that occur in adolescence. Youth is important to this

archetype because it implies innocence and naïveté; when a grown adult suddenly acquires powers and uses them for his own gain, we are much less likely to forgive that individual. But erratic, self-serving behavior is expected from teenagers, and the Kid Playing with Fire just turns that idea up. "Y is for Youth" has advice on making and playing teenage or adolescent characters. this archetype because it implies innocence and naïveté; when a grown adult suddenly acquires powers and uses them for his own gain, we are much less likely to forgive that individual. But erratic, self-serving behavior is expected from teenagers, and the Kid Playing with Fire just turns that idea up.

Her powers probably come from some kind of lab accident or accidental mutation. Alternately, she has come into sudden possession of a super-weapon which was not intended for her and which may in fact be destined for a hero or other villain. In settings which trace most super-powers back to a single event or origin (such as the Flash's "Central City Explosion" or Smallville's kryptonite meteor showers), Kids Playing with Fire can be very common, a "monster of the week" adversary which fills time and provides a stage for the interpersonal drama which is the real heart of the story.

The Kid should have a Quality that makes it clear what her current goals are (*No One's Going to Kick Me Around Anymore!*, *Full Ride Scholarship*, or *I'd Do Anything to Be Popular*) and perhaps another which expresses her misplaced confidence in her own ability to control her powers.

STORIES: Because of the Kid's age, it's not uncommon for many of her stories to be set in school. This is especially appropriate if your PCs are Young Heroes in school with problems of their own. High School can be plenty scary on its own, and all the social challenges found there make great metaphors for heroic adventure, as Buffy made clear over several seasons. This book's chapter on Super Villain Gaming has additional advice on the "Evil Genius School," a campaign in which all the students are the offspring of super villains.

The Kid isn't trying to be bad, at least at first. Her new powers are frightening and she initially tries to hide them. But then she realizes that they could be the solution to all her problems. With her new speed and strength, she can become star of the basketball team. With her hidden telepathy, she can learn the answers to every question on the exam. With her control over human pheromones, she can ensure she won't be the only person at Prom without a date. But using her powers for selfish reasons creates a snowball effect, and soon she is using them constantly, both to pursue her original goals and to cover up or try to fix new problems of her own creation. Much of this goes on without the direct knowledge of the heroes; sometimes the Kid confides in the hero privately early on in the story and rebels when the hero cautions patience. Otherwise, the PCs only find out about the situation when the Kid's powers have exploded in public and can no longer be hidden. This transformation is prompted by the Kid's inevitable failure at a key moment, often resulting in the injury or even death of someone close to her, the one she shouldn't hurt at all.

The Kid has a short lifespan in comics and most of them are eminently forgettable. In a sense, she's really just an origin story. You can tell the Kid's story many times, but you have to use a different Kid each time. Once she makes it through that first story, the Kid has either lost her powers and gone back to a normal life, embraced her selfish ways and become Power Corrupted or some other archetype, or she's listened to the hero, learned, and become a Young Hero of her own. Indeed, some of the most popular superheroes ever began as Kids Playing with Fire. Just ask Peter Parker.

SISTER SALEM

Kid Playing with Fire, Magical Girl

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Average</i>	3
Strength	<i>Poor</i>	2
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Average</i>	3
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 7

Specialties

Occult

Powers

Golden Wing Scepter: Magic Device

Good 5

Extra: Mastery (Hellfire Control, Flight), Strike

Qualities

"My powers must only be used for GOOD!"

Whiskers the Magikat

Loyal Best Friend

Knacks

None

Background: Mariko is a young, pretty, and precocious student at an exclusive school in the city. When her class went on a field trip to the stock exchange and met with one of the world's richest men, she had no idea that man was His Eminence Gregory, the Third Cardinal Sin. Gregory noticed her, however, and surreptitiously assigned her a Guardian Demon in the form of a beautiful cat with bat wings and red eyes, which she promptly fell in love with and named Whiskers.

With Whiskers as her constant companion (he has the power to go invisible and thus follow her throughout her school day), Mariko was introduced to the world of magic. Whiskers also arranged for one of Mariko's rivals, a student named Sakura, to come into the possession of the Golden Wing Scepter, a conduit for infernal magical power. At Whisker's prompting, Mariko resolved that such a wonderful power was

meant to be used for good, and that meant stealing it away from Sakura, who was obviously evil. The Scepter seems to be able to do almost anything, though Mariko mostly uses it to smash adults across the head or hurl bolts of hellfire, though she can also ride it like a witch's broom.

Now Mariko uses the Scepter and her magical phrase "Celestial Witch Victory!" (words with absolutely no magical power, but which Magikat finds hilarious) to transform into Sister Salem, the greatest hero in the universe. In between her adventures, she gossips with her best friend, tries to remain calm in the presence of cute boys, and makes a fool of herself at volleyball.

SISTER SALEM IN PLAY

Salem is a Magical Girl who is unaware of the fact that her magical powers all come from Hell, and that her beautiful magical cat sidekick is actually a demonic familiar. She believes she is a super hero and that she has saved the world a dozen times, but in fact everything she does is at the urging of Magikat, who finds her childishly easy to delude and manipulate.

In a game of Young Heroes, Mariko is that girl who sits in front of you in class. Her magical powers are so far undetected, but will come quickly to the fore when, for example, she provides cover for a group of kidnappers or jewel thieves whom she is convinced are actually heroic do-gooders trying to rescue a hapless victim or recover a family heirloom unjustly stolen. If the school is for super-heroes, Salem thinks she is a hero and even admires the other player characters, at least until Whiskers convinces her that the most handsome boy among them has been replaced by an alien. If the school is for super-villains (for example, the PITT), Mariko is the hopelessly naive girl who sincerely believes all the teachers are actually good people who would never give bad advice or put the students in harm's way. Either way, she is a foil for the heroes.

But most super-hero games aren't set at a school and Sister Salem has to be introduced some other way. She makes a good best friend for the son or daughter of a player character, a friend she will confide everything to, and whom Whiskers does not approve of (because the friend is harder to manipulate than Mariko herself and may even be on to him). Heroes can always be brought onto the school campus for a visit with students and, while Whiskers will try to keep his charge away from heroes with powers far in excess of Mariko's, she is a passionate and curious girl who is not afraid to show herself and right what she perceives as injustice. If an accident happens when a hero is around, she is sure to blame him for it. But if you decide to use Sister Salem for a brawl with a team of heroes, you will probably want to raise her ranks in Willpower and Magic.



MASTERMIND

"I want to save this city, like you. Only on a scale that matters."

~ Wilson Fisk

The Mastermind is a behind-the-scenes villain with an elaborate plan and the resources to achieve it.

EXAMPLES: Baron von Strucker, Viper, Baron Zemo (Marvel); Lex Luthor, Ra's al Ghul (DC); Cobra Commander (GI Joe)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Twisted Genius, Conqueror, Evil CEO, Cult Leader

ABILITIES: The Mastermind is dangerous because of her army of minions, her material resources, and her elaborate plan; she doesn't really need powers, and those she has — Servant and Gadgets — barely qualify. She carries mundane devices and weaponry and has combat Specialties, so that she can give one hero a good fight once confronted, but if the heroes have forced their way into her sanctum, the jig is probably up.

While the Mastermind is intelligent, she does not need to be a Twisted Genius with incredible Intellect (though some are). Indeed, while the Twisted Genius is obsessed with Science!, the Mastermind's goal is wealth and power. To achieve this, she buys Twisted Genius, usually with the promise of research facilities and an opportunity for human experimentation, though threats and extortion are also workable. Her Prowess, Willpower, and other abilities are all very good, but not superhuman.

QUALITIES: The Mastermind is served by a legion of Faceless Minions and a colorful Servitor or three to act as subordinate commanders; she may keep a Monstrosity in the closet and an Assassin as a personal bodyguard. She will have a well-concealed and highly secure lair which, nevertheless, heroes find a way into ... even if it is as her prisoners.

Every Mastermind has an escape route or two; this should be represented on her character sheet with a Quality which can be activated, allowing the Mastermind to get away. Alternately, the Mastermind doesn't need to escape because she is never present at the scene of any crime; instead, her qualities (*Always Has a Fall Guy*, *Rogue Employees*, *You'll Hear from My Lawyers*) are designed to protect her from prison by displacing blame and manipulating the system. Players new to superhero gaming may be frustrated when the villain avoids capture in such a mechanical way; it is important that the escape or excuse be plausible and, if possible, cool and unpredictable. If the villain's getaway feels cheap, even seasoned gamers will tire of it.

STORIES: Not personally powerful, and unwilling to rule openly as a Conqueror and thereby paint a giant target on her chest, the Mastermind nevertheless aspires higher than the mere Crime Boss. She rules in secret, commanding a vast and clandestine empire. Her storytelling roots are found in characters like Professor James Moriarty who, as "The Napoleon of Crime," transcended mere criminality to become a brilliant Mastermind. This is especially evident in recent film versions, which portray Moriarty as a puppet-master profiting off unending global conflict and the ubiquitous war on terror, national occupations he himself has orchestrated. The Bond Villain is a kind of Mastermind, again inspired by Moriarty.

Obviously, a Mastermind needs a master plan; a classic master plan unspools itself over several game sessions with the heroes never wise to its existence. Each criminal caper in which they intervene seems isolated and unrelated to larger concerns, but the ramifications of these events all contribute in some small way to the Mastermind's hidden agenda. The jewelry heist is thwarted, but the owner of the jewels is frightened into accepting the Mastermind's offer of protection. The prison break is halted, but in the chaos the Mastermind was able to secure a back door into the prison's computer systems. The rampaging Monstrosity

was stopped in time, but the heroes were all scanned by high tech equipment which allows the Mastermind to develop weaponry to counter their powers. The master plan can be discovered or revealed in many ways, and this may in fact be the most important decision in the entire story, as it establishes the options available to the heroes. The plan may be revealed by a Servitor who has been mistreated by the Mastermind or who simply has a bout with conscience. The heroes may stumble across evidence of the plan, and be alerted to it when the Mastermind's agents attempt to eliminate this apparently innocuous information. The plan may become obvious to the heroes when it enters its final, inevitable stage. Many Masterminds, especially Puzzle Masters and the Twisted Genius, tell the heroes all about the plan as it enters its denouement, because the villain derives pleasure from intellectual competition.

A Mastermind can adopt religious trappings and become a Cult Leader (Brother Blood), be an Asian Foreigner and Yellow Peril (the Yellow Claw), or even both at the same time (Ben Kingsley's portrayal of the Mandarin in *Iron Man 3*). Sometimes they are revealed to be mere pawns in the sway of even greater and more malevolent bosses — probably a Conqueror, Ultimate Villain, or Nazi. Sometimes the audience knows this (your players, in this case), but the heroes do not. The Mastermind speaks to her far-off master only when alone, and the identity of this authority figure is concealed. This is a technique to build suspense in the game, so be prepared for your players to fish for a way for their characters to discover this truth. They want to know that the mystery is bigger than they first thought, so why not let them? After all, you can still keep the identity of the real villain a secret for a few more sessions.

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR

Mastermind, Man With The Machine, Twisted Genius

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Good</i>	5
Intellect	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Incredible</i>	7

Stamina 12

Specialties

Aerial Combat Expert
Drive
Pilot Master
Science
Technology Expert
Underwater Combat
Weapons (Bludgeons)

Powers

Gadgets
Incredible 7
Vehicle
Amazing 8

Qualities

"Master of the World"
Vepajan Immortality Formula
Loyal Crew

Knacks

Walking Stick
Many of Robur's gadgets are concealed inside his walking stick. He does not need to a page of preparation to create a gadget, provided that gadget is concealed and built into his walking stick.

Background: The brilliant inventor and terrorist known around the world as Robur the Conqueror first appeared on the global stage in 1886. No one knows where he came from or who he was before he took the name Robur which, he claims, means "Strength." At that event, he kidnapped a handful of attendees at a science conference debating the future of flying

THE TERROR

Handling	<i>Good</i>	5
Speed	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Structure	<i>Good</i>	5
Armor	<i>Good</i>	5

Notes: Blast 7 guns, missiles, and bombs (Burst)

The *Terror* is a multi-modal vehicle, capable of undersea travel like a submarine (Speed 4), surface water movement like a ship (Speed 5), powered flight like a jet aircraft (Speed 7), or even cross-country or highway travel on wheels (Speed 5). This is but one example of Robur's many vehicles, which he is constantly inventing and refining.

technology. After he demonstrated the superiority of his *Albatross*, a heavier-than-air flying machine, his captives managed to escape and sabotage the vehicle. But Robur survived and rebuilt the *Albatross*, proving the brilliance of his designs by out-flying the newest example of lighter-than-air vehicles.

Having proven his intelligence, Robur retreated from the public eye. But he remained active, operating out of a secret mountaintop lair he dubbed The Aerie. From there, he pursued a private agenda which included punishing political leaders he thought were abusing their power, shaming engineers who dared to think themselves his intellectual equal, and taking whatever resources he needed. Thanks to his many vehicles, Robur was able to travel quickly and safely anywhere in the world and, eventually, even into space. He avoided pursuit in every case, was never captured, and amassed a huge store of knowledge about the world's hidden locales, places few had ever seen, let alone visited.

By the turn of the century, however, Robur's mind was coming unhinged. In the past, he had been a man of his word, and had even used his aerial arsenal to right injustices. Now, he could only revel in, and seek, power. Indeed, raw power itself seemed to captivate him. With his latest invention, the *Terror*, a combination plane,



submarine, ship and car, he demonstrated his power across the US, and when a federal agent finally caught up to him, Robur was undone not so much by that agent's courage as by Robur's own mental collapse. He drove the *Terror* into a thunderstorm and was not seen for years.

But the Master of the World survived. Struck with memory loss and unaware of his own past life, he was shocked back to sanity by the work of rival inventors, who at last began to surpass his own incredible designs. When he learned Edmund Stonewall, an Englishman, had succeeded in building a flying machine that went to Venus, Robur suddenly regained his memories and, thrilled by the competition posed by a new generation of inventors, he found new purpose in his life. Still in good health despite his increasing age, Robur was the most expensive mercenary in World War I, leading a flotilla of heavier-than-air vessels in an attack on

Verdun and temporarily hosting the Flying Circus aboard his flying carrier command ship. After the war he briefly investigated outer space, but decided that other planets paled before the beauty of Earth. After all, was he not Master of *this* World, and no other? When he came to the timely rescue of his longtime rival Edmund Stonewall, now known as Doctor Radium, he used the occasion to bargain for the Doctor's immortality serum.

Decades later, Robur the Conqueror is a one-man Rogue State. He long ago gave up on permanent lairs or garages; instead, his entire life, all his followers, and all his vehicles are constantly on the move. He has explored the deepest mysteries of the bottomless ocean, torpedoing oil drilling platforms for artillery practice. He has run interference for whales, capsizing hunting vessels and watching their crewmen drown. He has demonstrated the unreliability of Russian rockets by forcing them off course, only to personally deliver their supplies to the International Space Station instead. And he has converted his flying machines into turbo-boosted tractor-trailers which rocket along the highways and autobahns of the US and Europe, only to have them mistaken for shape-changing robots by children who have seen only Hollywood movies. Superheroes might scoff at Robur's sobriquet "Master of the World," but it cannot be denied that Robur does as he wishes, and answers to no one save himself.

Robur's personal symbol is a golden sun on a black field; this flag adorns his vehicles and his lairs, and his minions all wear it as a badge.

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR IN PLAY

Like many Twisted Geniuses, Robur's primary motivation is proving his intelligence. However, he is more politically engaged than most Geniuses, using his inventions to punish people he perceives as stupid or ignorant and to take vengeance on those who dare to threaten or command him. His very lawlessness, his refusal to accept the authority of any world power, infuriates the US and makes him the target of

Robur, of course, is the invention of Jules Verne and appears in two novels, where he is something of a poor man's Captain Nemo. However, he is also less well known than Nemo, and this can help in a game campaign where the overly familiar can be synonymous with dull and uninteresting. He is played by Vincent Price in the film *Master of the Air* and even appears in the second adventure of the Victorian-era Batman. For a full description of the Vehicles power, see *Great Power*.

constant spying and harassment; Robur invariably responds to such acts with destructive violence. Nevertheless, he continues to insist that if the world would just leave him alone, he would do the same to them.

Robur makes a good surrogate father for orphan heroes, especially because his problematic ethical stance ensures that any hero he mentors will eventually come back to get him. He can also be the source for battle armor or other crime-fighting equipment, though he will consider anything other than a super-vehicle to be trivial. Indeed, his best use in a game might be as the primary and most coveted source for super-vehicles in general. After all, your dark avengers, super-agents, and skull-faced vigilantes need to get their planes, cycles, and battle vans from somewhere.

MONSTROSITY

“Ah! Here is our PRIZE giant! His GENETIC STRUCTURE is an offshoot of the cells we STOLE from the Earthmen! But we have bred him to DESTROY the ONE ally of Earth who could SUCCESSFULLY defend them against US!”

“Our giant has but ONE desire! To HATE — to KILL — SUPERMAN!!”

~ Simyan and Mekkari,
Masters of the Evil Factory

The Monstrosity is a hideous creature created by Twisted Genius or some tragic accident, a Frankenstein's Monster for the super-villain set.

EXAMPLES: Dragon Man, the Awesome Android (Marvel); Lump (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Servitor

ABILITIES: If ever a villain was destined for random power generation, it was the Monstrosity. Its powers don't need a consistent theme, nor do they need to make any kind of rational sense. Since the Monstrosity often battles a group of heroes at once, it benefits from Invulnerability or a high Stamina (in order to make the fight long enough to be interesting) as well as a Burst attack so that it can threaten multiple heroes at once. But a Monstrosity doesn't really require the special rules considerations a GM might give to, say, the Ultimate Villain.

Traditionally, Monstrosities have low Intellect. But some, like MODOK or MODAM, are essentially Disembodied Brains, a kind of Monstrosity that goes back at least to films of the “Atomic Horror” era. These kinds of villains will have high Intellect and Willpower coupled with psychic powers like Mental Blast, Mind Control, and Telepathy.

QUALITIES: The Monstrosity is big and hideous to behold, which causes fear in civilians. This fear, in turn, causes the Monstrosity to lash out

in angry self-defense, setting up a vicious cycle of violence that ends only after the heroes intervene. To ensure this tragic misunderstanding, the Monstrosity either cannot or will not speak — at least, not in a way its victims understand.

Insanity is common in a Monstrosity, or it may be an automaton largely devoid of self-will. Most commonly, however, it is an inhuman savage dedicated to violence and bloodshed.

It is not unusual for a Monstrosity to have some vestige of memory from its prior self, before it was transformed by science or accident, and this fragment gives the heroes some way to interact with or guide it. The creature may pursue an individual it once loved, seek to return to a place of safety, or avoid people or events which remind it of past trauma.

STORIES: As seen in cinematic versions of Frankenstein's Monster, the Monstrosity may simply be misunderstood: a creature which has never been shown love, and acts a monster because this is all it has ever known. Such Monstrosities can become heroic if given the benefit of the doubt or a good example, and will fixate on the hero who gave them a chance. Just as easily, though, a Monstrosity can flirt with turning good, only to revert to its more savage nature when the going gets tough. These redemption stories tend to culminate in the death of Monstrosity, but the creature is notoriously hard to kill. If you have a good sequel story to tell, nothing should keep you from bringing the monster back to life for another round.

Consider the Monstrosity's relationship to its creator. Is it considered a failure or a triumph? Is it always at its maker's side, groomed and fed and nursed to greater strength, or has it been cast out to live or die on its own, without direction? What, if anything, does the Monstrosity want, or is it simply reacting to stimulus? Many Monstrosities are Servitors to their masters, sent to do battle with the heroes on the master's behalf.

The Monstrosity is, at its core, a symbol of the Inhuman Other; it is the thing which is not one of us (whatever “us” is). Preserve that alien-ness in a horror story, a tale in which we are confronted with the mystery of the unknown, an unknown that cares nothing for us and destroys us absently, with no more than its usual amount of all-consuming malice. But if you would rather tell a story that overcomes alienation and otherness, a story which suggests that — whatever we may look like, whatever language we speak, or whatever disability we may struggle to overcome — there is an essential humanity that unites us; then your Monstrosity is not a monster at all, except to the degree we call him one. Every page spent punching him is a page spent in error, and the real story comes afterwards, when he must find a way to integrate himself into human (or heroic) society.

THE DEMANIAC

Monstrosity, Supernatural Horror, Nemesis, Servitor

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fantastic</i>	9
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Fantastic</i>	9
Intellect	<i>Weak</i>	1
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Incredible</i>	7

Stamina 15

Specialties

Intimidate
Occult
Stealth

Powers

Extra Body Parts
Fair 4
Extra: Elongation
Life Support
Supreme 10
Resistance: Damage
Amazing 8
Extras: Ability, Alteration, Regeneration (Regrowth)

Strike

Great 6

Extra: Bashing or slashing

Qualities

Demon from Hell
Victim of Cybernetic Experimentation
Relentless

Knacks

Mismatched Limbs
With one round of preparation, the Demaniac can change the shape, size, and mechanical benefit of any one of its Extra Limbs, choosing from any of the options listed for that power.

How Can Something So Big Move So Fast?
The Demaniac can use its Strength to determine action order instead of Coordination.

Scent Prey

If the Demaniac is commanded to hunt down a particular target, it can sense that target anywhere in the world. In a scene, it uses Awareness to identify its target. It can only use this ability on one individual in a game session

Background: Sometimes, even a demon deserves sympathy.

For thousands of years, the creature now known as the Demaniac was Caliban, a mid-ranking brute demon in the service of infernal masters. While never especially intelligent, and possessed of no particularly unique powers, Caliban was loyal and strong and even, at times, satirically funny (in a Dave Sim sort of way). He served Metaphisto, was occasionally summoned by His Eminence, the Cardinal Sin, and even had a few encounters with the legendary Dracula. But sometime in the early 1990s, Caliban was captured by a NEST cell and became the subject of cruel and sadistic captivity.

Caliban was cut apart and investigated. His organs, muscles, and tissues were sliced away, examined, and discarded. Thanks to his infernal nature, he regenerated from every wound, but this only gave the fiendish vivisectors assigned

to work on him unlimited license to indulge their diabolical imagination. And while his absence was noted back in Hell, devils and demon princes are not known for having deep wells of sympathy. No attempt to rescue Caliban was ever made.

It took years for the NEST scientists to learn everything they could, but once this investigative portion of Caliban's captivity was over, the research team turned to experimentation. Cybernetic enhancements, still primitive in the '90s, were sewn into his demonic flesh and wired into what passed for his nervous system. They grafted on new limbs. When parts didn't work, they cut them out and tried something new. By this point, Caliban had lost his mind and was a raging, almost uncontrollable monster. The NEST team called him "The Demaniac."

Unfortunately, it was at about this time that NEST's corporate masters discovered how much money had been spent on this multi-year research project. Very little financial reward had come of it, and after a humiliating inspection by the accountants, the science team was executed. The Demaniac was repackaged as a weapon of mass destruction and sold to the Libyan government, recouping a small percentage of what had been invested in him. The Demaniac escaped from custody almost at once but NEST didn't care; after all, the check had cleared.

In the years since, the Demaniac has been used as a Servitor, a distraction, and a terror weapon by a handful of Masterminds, Conquerors, and Cult Leaders. It found its way home to Hell, but Metaphisto found it much less entertaining company that it used to be, and sent it back to Earth. It has battled Amazing Woman and Night Bird, and for a time it



even found a kind of peace when Dracula took pity on it and gave it shelter. But the Demaniac is a creature in eternal pain, too restless to remain still for long and too bloodthirsty to control its rage. It's only a matter of time before some super villain finds a use for it again.

THE DEMANIAC IN PLAY

The Demaniac is a big, strong, bruiser with a few unusual powers. He's durable and regenerates, so he can provide a challenge for a small team of heroes. A short "boss battle" like this can be a good way to introduce new players to your game system.

The Demaniac's ability to track down a named target can briefly make him into a Nemesis for one of your heroes; this works especially well if the hero is outmatched in a stand-up fight and must stay one step ahead of the monster, perhaps with a vulnerable NPC in tow. In stories like this, the Demaniac becomes a kind of Force of Nature, a foe which appears unstoppable until a climactic set piece battle where the heroes have prepared traps and weapons specifically designed to exploit demonic weaknesses (whatever those might be). His always-shifting extra limbs can also make him a colorful opponent for melee fighters, who will have to contend with everything from blood-sucking tentacles to wrist-mounted chainsaws.

But the most common use for the Demaniac is as a monster chained to the throne of some Devil (Metaphisto), Mastermind (Dracula), Conqueror (CALIPH-8), or Cult Leader (the Cardinal Sin). From there, he can be used to threaten heroes and defend his master. Inevitably he breaks free and becomes a danger to everyone.

NAZI

"That is the twisted logic they teach you when you become a Nazi."

"Stop. Wait. I am not a Nazi."

"Yes, you are! That's exactly what you are. It's in the SHIELD handbook, chapter one. The Red Skull, founder of Hydra, was a big, fat, freakin Nazi!"

"That has nothing to do with today."

"You know, you always had that Hitler Youth look to you. So it's really not that surprising."

~ Skye and Agent Ward

Nazis are the 20th century's designated incarnation of evil.

EXAMPLES: Red Skull, Fear Monger, Baron Zemo (Marvel); Dyna-Man (DC); Captain Nazi (originally Fawcett, now DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Supremacist, Conqueror, Faceless Minions, Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, Twisted Genius, Dark Mirror

ABILITIES: While Nazi villains have a lot in common, their powers can be diverse. Nazis come in certain common varieties, and each type has a certain array of powers and abilities.

Super-Aryans will have superhuman strength and stamina, Invulnerability, and Flight. They are, in essence, Dark Mirrors of Superman. A less powerful version of the Super-Aryan is a Dark Mirror of the Super-Patriot archetype — strong, fast, and tough, but still human. He is more likely to carry a Luger and have specialties that include weaponry and hand-to-hand combat.

The Hitler Clone will have no powers except, perhaps, Immortality or Regeneration, and will instead rely on weird science gadgetry and an ultimate weapon, neither of which he built himself. Willpower is almost certainly his highest ability, and he uses Persuasion or Intimidation

to get the mob to follow him, but heroic PCs are immune to his charisma.

The Nazi Scientist is a Twisted Genius inspired by Mengele (and is a fiendish doctor who experiments on human subjects) or Werner Von Braun (in which case he is instead a technocrat who believes science is the solution to all the world's problems). His Intellect is his strong suit, probably augmented by the Gadgets power and some specialties.

QUALITIES: Nazis are distinguished by three things. First, they are endless. Second, they are instantly recognizable. Finally, there is no moral ambiguity in killing them. These facts account for their popularity.

The Nazi is, of course, fundamentally a symbol for fascism, a form of government in which the people voluntarily cede power to a single leader figure, who then wields absolute authority in their name. Nazi villains often represent this philosophy through the blind loyalty of numberless Faceless Nazi Minions, but he may actually depend on followers for power. That is, if he can be separated from his minions, the Nazi is easy to defeat, but when surrounded by those who have granted him power, the Nazi is unbeatable. This is a symbolic representation of the *fascia* itself, the symbol of ancient Rome and the source of the word fascism.

Racism is another quick and easy way to make a Nazi hated, but racism based on color or ethnicity has gone out of fashion among modern Nazi supervillains. The idea of racial superiority or inferiority is simply so dumb that, in order for a Nazi to be taken seriously, he has to admit that it is rubbish. Those who cling to racist screeds become not just evil, but stupid. This makes them less interesting. The exception is a Supremacist who bases his racism on super-humanness, something demonstrably provable while still morally bankrupt.

As a servant of either the Third or Fourth Reich, the Nazi villain commands significant resources. Besides his horde of stormtroopers

and a hidden Fifth Column of neo-Nazi agents already concealed within society, he has a hidden base in Argentina, the North or South Pole, or the Moon. His lair is well-stocked with Nazi gold, treasures stolen from the wealthy families and museums of Europe, and dieselpunk technology. He travels to these locations using submarines, massive aircraft, or Volkswagen-built flying saucers.

STORIES: Nazi stories are terribly cliché, and that's why players love them. They know exactly what to do in these games, and punching Hitler never gets old.

The two archetypal stories of the Nazi villain are "Hitler Returns!" and "Invasion from Earth-Nazi!" In the first, Hitler will soon be returned to life through a clone, time travel, a robot, or other device. This effort is championed by a Super-Aryan and his Nazi Scientist assistant, possibly with the unwilling help of a captured scientist whose abduction alerts the heroes to the plot. Sometimes "Hitler" is actually just a figurehead for the Super-Aryan who intends on actually rebuilding the Reich himself. (GMs who would like to run this story are directed to "Anschluss '77," an episode of the Lynda Carter *Wonder Woman* series.)

It is a strange truth of alternate history tales and time travel stories that a large proportion of them involve worlds inhabited by Nazis: Nazis who never lost the War, Nazis who survived in a hidden redoubt, Nazis who went into the past, and so on. Eventually, these Nazis discover "the world where we lost" and an invasion is inevitable. Many books have been written on this subject; the outline of your story depends largely on scale. If you are planning a single-session adventure, then the invasion is probably modest, secret, or dependent on a single object of high technology, like a Stargate or other portal of some sort. If the heroes can destroy this thing, the invasion is thwarted. If, however, you would like something larger, the Nazis can certainly provide. A fleet of spacecraft emblazoned with the swastika ought to give the proper signal to your gaming table.

Because the Nazi engenders such strong and rigid reactions, it is (and indeed long has been) common for the Nazi to conceal his true allegiance behind another, less recognizable, fascism. So concealed, the Nazi fights alongside the heroes and earns their respect and friendship. When he reveals himself as a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, it is usually in an effort to change the hero's assumptions. "How can all Nazis be bad if I've saved your life?" Despite modern storytelling's thrust to make every villain sympathetic, this tactic seldom works.

Nazi ideology has been well researched and documented, and much of it was so weird or horrifying that a GM can easily spin entire campaigns out of it. This is, after all, an organization which named its commando units Werewolves and its concentration camp guards the Death's Head, which rebuilt and fortified a new Grail Castle in the Black Forest (equipping it with a Round Table that had twelve chairs), which took the Spear of Destiny out of a Viennese museum, which based its political theory of eugenics on Teutonic myth, which sent anthropologists in search of the Holy Grail, and which pursued technology like warships made of ice, flying wings, tanks the size of a city block, guns that shot around corners, and much, much more. None of these things are made up. Anything you do make up will seem tame by comparison. While entire libraries have been written on the Nazis, the most useful books for gamers are, hands down, those written and edited by Ken Hite: *GURPS Weird War II*, *GURPS Alternate Earths*, and his most recent *The Nazi Occult*.

During the Cold War, Nazi villains were largely replaced by the Communist, a variation of the Foreigner archetype that was ubiquitous in the early Marvel era. Now, however, the Communist is even more anachronistic than the Nazi. He survives only in the form of the Old Guard — a Communist who clings to his ideals even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unlike the Nazi, the Old Guard can sometimes earn some tragic sympathy from readers.

V

Nazi, Servitor, Supremacist

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fantastic</i>	9
Coordination	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Strength	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 14

Specialties

Aerial Combat

Military

Occult

Powers

Blast: Lightning Vision

Amazing 8

Flight

Fantastic 9

Extra: Super-Speed

Resistance (Damage)

Great 6

Qualities

Living Weapon of Retribution

Unrepentant Nazi

Still Young

Knacks

Lightning Punch

V can empower a punch with her bioelectric energy, subjecting the target to both her Strength and her Blast with a single hit.

You Like What She's Doing

Once per page, when fighting heroes who are African-American, Jewish, gay, or otherwise inferior according to Nazi ideology, V can make a free Willpower test on civilian witnesses to activate (but not create) negative qualities they may already have which relate to such groups (such as *Racist*, *Bigot*, or *Anti-Semite*).

Background: Hannah Rutting is the subject of genetic manipulation and the result of two generations of scientific experiments designed to produce a living embodiment of National Socialism. Raised in a hidden Neuschwabenland redoubt, she had no contact with world culture until a few years ago when she turned 16. At that age, she was already utterly ruthless and fervently devoted to German fascism. From birth, she was considered a “Vergeltungswaffe”, or “retribution weapon.” The V1 and V2 rockets, as well as the never-completed V3 super-gun, were previous uses of this term; Hannah was affectionately given the pet name “V4” as a child. Since her arrival on the world stage, the English-speaking press has come to call her “Vengeance” or simply by the initial V.

V generates intense bioelectric energy within her body, which fuels her incredible strength and speed. Her skin is steel-hard, able to resist anything up to the level of a tank shell. She flies fast enough to reach orbit, though she cannot survive in space without aid. This has not prevented her from occasional work on the moon's surface. She is considered extremely dangerous and, although she has been defeated in battle on two occasions, she has never been captured, Nazi agents always ensuring her escape.

Rutting is proud of her Nazi heritage and makes no apologies for it. She considers the only true failing of Nazi Germany to be that it lost, and she believes many Germans feel the same way but are too ashamed to admit it. She is an anti-Semite and a racist, and has a particular talent for enabling others who silently conceal bigotry and prejudice but, until she rouses them, refuse to act publicly. Her operations often target racially charged neighborhoods in America and the UK where she finds a surprising level of moral support from whites who feel threatened by immigrants. Recently, she met the anti-government domestic terrorist known as Lightning Woman, and found much to admire in her.



Vergeltungswaffe is not, however, a leader; she is good at making quick decisions in the field and giving orders to Faceless Nazi Minions, but she does not develop long term strategy, and she answers to reclusive Nazi bureaucrats. She is a living weapon of National Socialism, but someone else's hand is on the trigger.

V IN PLAY

Hannah's dedication to Nazi ideology means that players will enjoy fighting her; the only real crack in her armor is that she is still young, and heroes might wonder if she might be lured away from National Socialism if she can be separated from bad influences. This is unlikely to succeed, though V is not above using naive idealism as cover for long-term espionage. Because Hannah is so focused on issues of German nationalism, she makes a good excuse for the heroes to travel to Europe and get away from their regular allies and infrastructure.

The identity of V's masters have been left intentionally vague; beyond the Antarctic redoubt where she was engineered and hints of a lunar outpost, virtually nothing else can be said for certain about whatever Nazi inheritance Hannah is serving. If they are a credible threat to the world, the elements which wear Nazi symbology out in the open are certainly only the tip of the iceberg; for every Faceless Nazi Minion stomping the streets there must be nine hidden Fifth Columnists maintaining false identities, working as engineers, doctors, or mercenaries in the US and Europe. But if you do not want the Nazi threat to be serious — perhaps a night's rousing fisticuffs is all that is required — then V may answer to nothing more outlandish than an overweight Hitler clone and a few dieselpunk robots.

NEMESIS

"It's finally ready! You know, I went through quite a few supers to make it worthy to fight you, but man, it wasn't good enough! After you trashed the last one, I had to make some major modifications. Sure, it was difficult, but you are worth it. I mean, after all ... I am your biggest fan."

~ Syndrome

The Nemesis has been specially created to be the enemy of a particular hero.

EXAMPLES: Metallo, Prometheus (DC); the Spider-Slayers, Sentinels, the Melter (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Dark Mirror, Girlfriend Gone Bad

ABILITIES: The Nemesis does not have the same powers as the hero; that would make her a Dark Mirror. Instead, she has powers which capitalize on the hero's weaknesses, or which negate his powers. If the hero has fire powers, for example, the Nemesis will instead wield ice or water. If the hero is vulnerable to an unusual substance, the Nemesis embodies that substance. If the hero is afraid of something, the Nemesis personifies that fear. If the hero has superhuman senses which enable him to detect a villain's presence, the Nemesis is invisible to these senses or has a way to cloud them, and so on.

Because the Nemesis has a long history of being created in a lab, being built to spec, or being an otherwise unremarkable crook suddenly gifted with incredible power by the hero's wicked brother, she often has low Intellect and Willpower. She may have some specialties that come from her history before she became a Nemesis, but powers are probably far more important.

Sometimes a Nemesis can actually adapt to the hero's powers. Whatever the hero attacks her with, the Nemesis manifests the perfect counter-power. This is an effect similar to Adaptation, except that it is not limited to

environmental conditions. It also resembles the Mimic power, except that instead of copying the hero's power, the Nemesis acquires powers opposite of whoever she touches. A Nemesis who is capable of countering the powers of an entire team of heroes resembles the VWAYP (Villain with All Your Powers).

QUALITIES: As noted, Nemeses are often the pawns of a Mastermind who has a long history with a particular hero. Rather than fight the hero himself (and presumably lose), the Mastermind creates the Nemesis as a living weapon designed to kill the hero once and for all. The process of bestowing powers might be temporary or have other side effects which manifest as qualities, often including a hideous appearance. Alternately, the Nemesis may simply be a robot or other automated killing machine.

Pawn or not, the Nemesis usually has a reason for hating the hero, and that reason can be pretty compelling. She may blame the hero for the death of a loved one, or simply resent the hero for putting her in jail. She may envy the hero's fame, and the respect which the public holds for him. She may be a jilted lover, in which case she is also a Girlfriend Gone Bad. If the process of becoming the Nemesis involved negative side effects, the Nemesis blames the hero for them, even though it's really the Mastermind's fault.

STORIES: Although it seems like a Nemesis makes an ideal recurring villain, in practice she is something of a one-trick pony. Once the hero has figured out a way around her ability to counter his powers (once Iron Man designs a suit which absorbs heat instead of melting), future stories need to explore new ground.

However, this can provide rich material for your game. Many villains originally created to be a Nemesis — the Absorbing Man, for instance, a Thor Nemesis who could copy the material properties of Mjölnir — have gone on to have long and colorful histories, engaging with many other heroes and participating in team-ups with a variety of villains on a diverse menu of

criminal capers. In other words, the first appearance of the Nemesis, in which she battles her chosen hero, is just the start of her career. Her second story, in which she tries to use her Nemesis powers for something other than killing the hero, is the really interesting one. She may have to get free of the influence of the Mastermind who created her, or survive an assassination attempt when the Mastermind decides to tie up loose ends. Once introduced into your setting, the Nemesis has to learn to live there just like everyone else, and her story is only tied to her target hero if you choose to require it. See the "Revenge Squad", elsewhere in this book, for advice on running an entire campaign in which the player characters are Nemesis villains.

It is not strictly necessary for the Nemesis to be created. She may simply be a villain who happens to have powers which capitalize on the hero's weaknesses, or which embody his opposite. Some great rivalries (Namor and the original Human Torch) are examples of this kind of Nemesis. True, it does stretch believability a little when a villain just happens to be invisible to a hero's Danger Sense, but when we're talking about a genre in which people fire lasers out of their eyeballs, believability is basically overrated.

Finally, an individual can choose to become a Nemesis, usually after some kind of trauma for which she blames the hero. She seeks out powers on her own, picking and choosing abilities which will allow her to enact her righteous vengeance. Nemeses of this type break many of the usual rules: they are highly motivated, intelligent enough to build a super-weapon or two, and answer to no one. They are introduced as hapless victims, over-enthusiastic helpers, or petty criminals whom the hero barely notices. Many sessions later, the Nemesis — now dangerous — reveals her shared history with the hero. This can lead to a "But for Me, It Was Tuesday" moment in which the hero is forced to admit that the most important event in the life of the Nemesis is something the hero himself doesn't even remember.

There is also precedent for the Serial Nemesis: a creation, often a robot, who is sent against a hero, destroyed, and then recreated by the Mastermind more powerful than before. Each time the hero defeats the Nemesis, the Mastermind eliminates that particular weakness in the Nemesis's next iteration. The early incarnations of Ultron, as well as Syndrome's Omnidroid (*The Incredibles*), are examples of the Serial Nemesis. Once the Serial Nemesis has appeared in several stories and has been built and rebuilt half a dozen times, the increasing number ceases to be as intimidating as it once was. Instead, the story culminates in a mass battle during which the hero must fight all the different versions of his Nemesis at the same time, usually including several new variations dreamed up just for this moment.



LEOPOLD DANNER

Nemesis, Supremacist

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Coordination	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Strength	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Intellect	<i>Great</i>	6
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 13

Specialties

Investigation
Medicine Expert
Military
Science
Technology

Powers

Leaping
Incredible 7
Life Support
Great 6
Cold, Heat, Pathogens, Pressure, Radiation, Toxins
Resistance (Damage)
Great 6
Super-Speed
Average 3

Qualities

The Fury of the Danners
Humankind Does Not Deserve Us
Black Sheep

Knacks

Tireless
Leopold Danner has a +2 on Strength tests related to endurance, such as to go without food, water, or sleep.

Background: The only son of the legendary Hugo Danner, Leopold Danner was born in 1934 to a young woman whose father boasted of ties to the Mayan kings. From infancy he displayed superhuman strength and invulnerability, and he was spoiled shamelessly by his father for the first few years of his life. But

in 1938, war broke out and Hugo left to learn about the society of super-people first hand. Leopold was left with his mother who, in Leopold's eyes, would always be second best. He began to resent his mother and blamed her for his father's absence. He tolerated no criticism of Hugo, whom he adored as an ideal: brave, stoic but loving, heroic to a fault, and misunderstood by the masses of teeming humanity, including his mother. When he realized his mother was afraid of him, he was not ashamed. In fact, he reveled in that fear, feeling for the first time the power it gave him over another.

When Leopold learned that Hugo was at last returning, he saw no room in that new relationship for his weakling mother, and he snapped her neck with a casual blow. Of course his father was too noble and good to understand, so Leopold blamed the death on an outbreak of reckless anger. Hugo, who well knew his own propensity for violence, accepted this excuse without question but was unable to recapture the love he had once had for his son. Much of this was due to Hugo's own guilt and shame; he felt he had created Leopold out of selfish desire. But Leopold could neither recognize nor understand this; all he knew was that his father, whom he admired so much, now thought less of him than he had before. The turn from childhood to adulthood was very difficult for Leopold, and his sociopathic inability to connect with other people intensified. Alienated from his father, his own isolation was complete. He left the Yucatan fortress in 1952 and his father, typically, didn't even try to stop him.

Suddenly liberated, Leopold dove into a world of experience. Unkillable and able to take anything he wanted, he claimed the world as his oyster. Through men, he satisfied his desire for power, and through women, his craving for sensual pleasure. There were few super-heroes at that time, after the wars but before the '60s; the world was his table, and Leopold Danner was hungry. His contempt for ordinary humanity solidified, and by the time super-heroes again emerged, Danner had become something of a

nihilist. Humanity did not deserve superheroes, he felt. Ruled by their greed, fear, and envy, they were unworthy of saving or of service. Nevertheless, that's what super-heroes continued to do, and Leopold managed to stay out of the whole ridiculous business until that day when he opened the New York Times and saw a picture of his father in a blue and white outfit. The irony, the absurdity of it all, was just too much. Was *this* what the Danner line had come to? Was this the result of a century of labor, of struggle, and of pain? His father in a clown suit? He may as well be setting bear traps with his teeth for the Coney Island rubes. No, no, this would not stand.

Eschewing all the familiar trappings of a super villain, Leopold Danner nevertheless set out to murder his father and restore dignity to the Danner name. They had half a dozen encounters. Leopold brawled with his father in a football stadium, lured him away from his career with a beautiful assassin, attacked him with a small army of robots, and once even shot his father to the moon. Every time, Hugo miraculously survived. In their last encounter, at Niagara Falls, Leopold allowed his father to think he drowned. While he had failed to kill the elder Danner, Leopold's gambit had the desired result: Hugo retired from superhero work. Leopold had won. There would no longer be a Danner fighting on behalf of the human animals.

His mission accomplished (and his hatred of his father higher than ever), Leopold retreated from society and went in search of a new purpose in life. Something of a scientist by now, he had already calculated that he would live a very long time indeed, and he needed a way to fill the time. Spending it with human beings was out of the question. He resolved to make more Danners. It took him years to solve the problem inherent in his grandfather's formula, making it possible for Leopold's own children to inherit his powerful nature. He injected himself in complete confidence that the new formula would work. It did.

Leopold had three children, with three different women. Despite choosing each of his partners

for their eugenic promise, he could barely stand their presence, let alone their touch. They were a means to an end, however, and Leopold knew how to wield power. Each of the three women thought Leopold loved them until the day he took the baby and was gone.

His children grew up in the online era, with a result Leopold did not anticipate. He found it hard to control them, especially Aurelia, the eldest. Despite all his precautions, she went behind his back to learn about the world, and somehow she latched onto the rare example of accidental human nobility, generosity, and grace. These, she apparently decided, were the real characteristics of mankind, traits which could be brought out and clarified by the heroic examples of super-heroes... men like her grandfather. Leopold was outraged. How could she say that? How could she even think that? Hugo Danner was a disgrace, a buffoon, a god wasting his effort and his life on miserable men not fit to shine his shoe. For a moment, Leopold wondered what he had done wrong, except that he hadn't done anything wrong. It was something in Aurelia, in all the children. Their human blood was too strong, their Danner blood too thin. But it wasn't too late. There was still time. He'd have to start over, of course. He'd have to start the whole family over, but it could be done.

The children fled that night. And Leopold Danner has hunted them ever since.

LEOPOLD DANNER IN PLAY

Leopold is part of the Danner family; for more details on his literary pedigree, see the family's entry in "Heroes of the YOUNiverse." For the members of his own family, Leopold Danner is the Nemesis, that special super-villain who hunts you above all others. In a lesser sense, he is the black sheep of the Danner family. He is not possessed of his father's natural talent for failure, but neither does he have Hugo's desire to do good. Hugo Danner's disgust over the actions of mankind was always tempered by his respect for life and the joy he felt in companionship, but Leopold is untouched by either of those traits. He is a Danner boy gone

bad.

Like many Nemesis villains, the real challenge is finding ways to use the character even when his archenemy does not appear. Leopold's scientific prowess is one way to do this; in his decades of genetic experimentation, he has certainly created additional super-people besides his own children; this becomes a potential origin for hero and villain alike. Because he is over eighty years old, he is known to generations of super-people, including not just PC heroes, but their mentors and parents. In fact, Leopold's basic conviction that human beings do not deserve super heroes makes him a great antagonist for virtually any team of heroes, especially one that is just forming. In this way, he could become something of a Nemesis for the entire group, trying to convince them or, failing that, kill them.

NIHILIST

“Listen and understand. That terminator is out there. It can’t be bargained with. It can’t be reasoned with. It doesn’t feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead.”

~ Kyle Reese

The nihilist lives only to destroy: the universe, the world, the city, or just a single unlucky individual.

EXAMPLES: Thanos (Marvel); Mageddon, Doomsday (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Nemesis, Cosmic Menace, Force of Nature, Twisted Genius, Psycho

ABILITIES: Nihilists need a means by which they can accomplish their destructive goal. A villain who intends to personally destroy the city will need the power to do so, and as his target gets ever larger (today, Champion City, tomorrow... the world!) his powers must increase in — or indeed out of all — proportion. This is how a Nihilist becomes a Cosmic Menace, but while the Cosmic Menace cannot be defeated through physical force and must be tricked or reasoned with, the Nihilist is eminently punchable.

But a Nihilist does not need to fly off the top of the power rank structure. Many exciting stories can be told about a Nihilist who focuses on the destruction of a particular hero or NPC. This is how a Nihilist becomes a Nemesis. The Terminator, while not a super-villain in the traditional sense, is a Nihilist of this sort; it desires only Sarah Connor’s destruction, and will stop at nothing to attain this end. This kind of Nihilist has incredible Willpower, Strength, and Stamina, Invulnerability and Resistances, but is slow moving, an implacable killing machine. He cares nothing for public exposure or subtlety, which is how he differs from an Assassin. Instead, his story resembles those told by the Force of Nature archetype.

Finally, nothing necessarily requires that a Nihilist have any powers at all. He may be a Twisted Genius with a doomsday weapon, a Psycho with a cunning plan, or an Heir to Lovecraft whose masters are, themselves, pure Nihilists.

QUALITIES: Why does the Nihilist desire destruction? Some characters (Doomsday, the Terminator) are simply programmed for death, and they can experience no other emotion... at least not until a sequel in which their skeletal backstory is fleshed out. Revenge is a common motivator for Nihilists, especially if the villain has been a lesser threat in previous stories and has suffered defeat at the heroes’ hands before. Thanos’s motivator — love of Death — has become iconic. Regardless of what it is that drives him, the Nihilist should have a Quality that describes his motive, so that he can call upon it when things get rough for him.

The Nihilist’s origin is another source of qualities, because they are often inhuman or alien “Others” with little sympathy or empathy for humanity. Nihilists who are relying on an armada of spaceships, a zombie army, a satellite that flips the Earth’s gravitational field, or some other equally grandiose plot will need qualities which describe these things.

STORIES: Stories which feature Nihilists are typically unsubtle. The nature of the Nihilist’s goal makes him unsympathetic, and the role of the heroes is clear: they need to get close enough to hit him repeatedly over the head with a shovel (or whatever their weapon of choice might be). This can make the Nihilist an excellent villain to launch a new **ICONS** campaign, as he draws together many heroes from across the city or around the world. Even a Conqueror can earn the grudging admiration of heroes if, in his twisted utopia, the trains run on time; but no sane person cheers for the Nihilist, this is his distinguishing feature.

One of the potential pitfalls of the Nihilist story is that the players know he will fail, even if their characters do not. In other words, unless you are prepared to send all your player characters

off into space, the Earth is not actually in danger of being destroyed. Some GMs are happy to enable such game-changing storylines of course, usually in the name of “actions have consequences,” but you don’t have to be hardcore to use the Nihilist. You have many options at your table, and it all depends on the story you want to tell. Even if the Nihilist’s doomsday weapon is activated, it might not have the effect he intended. Perhaps some other, third party, prevents the Earth’s destruction, and now the heroes owe them in return (or must battle an invader even worse than death). For that matter, so what if the players know the villain will fail? This describes almost every episode of almost every series on television, and yet we continue to enjoy these shows. It’s far more important that your players have fun, and sometimes hitting the villain with a shovel is all the fun you need.

Because the Nihilist plot is fairly straightforward and lacking nuance, it also makes a good “main plot” behind which more personal subplots flourish. In other words, if your heroes are caught in a romantic triangle, or are learning secrets about their own origin, or are struggling to master their own powers (all classic superhero subplots), fighting the Nihilist and his Faceless Minions can give the heroes something fun to do in between intense roleplaying scenes. In a similar vein, because the Nihilist is often an embodiment of raw power, he can serve as an origin for one or more heroes, who have either been shaped from birth to defeat the Nihilist (Aztek) or who divide the powers of the defeated Nihilist between them and become its caretakers (the Infinity Watch).

Endgame

Nihilist, Gladiator, Theme Villain, Assassin

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Coordination	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Strength	<i>Good</i>	5
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 11

Specialties

Athletics Master

Games Master: Custom specialty. Endgame has a +3 bonus on any test made as part of a game. He must be obeying the rules of the game to get this bonus.

Stealth

Technology

Powers

Hologram Emitters: Images Device

Great 6

Extras: Force Control (Force Constructs), Interface

Body Armor: Resistance Device

Average 3

Gadgets

Great 6

Qualities

Lives For The Game

Plays By The Rules

The Stakes Are Always Death

Knacks

Fore!

Endgame can use his Athletics as if it were Weapons, provided he is armed with an appropriate sport or game implement, such as a croquet mallet, a golf club, or hockey stick.

Cheatin’ Eyes

Endgame has a +2 on attempts to spot, identify, or prevent cheating in a game he is participating in.



Always Equipped

Endgame can use his Hologram Emitters to create any equipment, field, or other object needed for whatever game his enemy challenges him to play.

Background: For years, the true identity of the masked killer and criminal known as Endgame was a mystery. In his many encounters with heroes over the years, he often told the story of how he traveled the world in search of challenges. The way Endgame tells it, in his relentless quest for physical and mental dominance, he conquered every athletic activity and mastered every kind of game known to man. But with each victory, he lost a little more of his former self: friends, family, other interests ... in time even his own name and identity. One day he looked back and, like Alexander, wept,

Yermak Zaroff's Cossack grandfather is the antagonist in the 1924 short story *"The Most Dangerous Game."*

for there were no more games to win. From now on, only superheroes could provide him with a real challenge. He adopted the death mask and identity of Endgame and began a career in which he pit himself against heroes in games played to the death. Recently, Night Bird identified Endgame as Yermak Zaroff, grandson of a Ukrainian general who died under mysterious circumstances in 1924.

Endgame seeks physical and intellectual contests, and he gets them by capturing heroes or their loved ones and challenging the hero to a game of the hero's choice. The stakes in these games are always death — sometimes the hero's life, but more often the life of his friends or family. On rare occasions, Zaroff has even acted as an eccentric assassin, taking a lucrative contract on a target and then engaging that target in one of his death-matches. But Endgame appears to have vast wealth accumulated in his youthful world travels, so his reason for taking these assassin contracts is always the challenge and never the money.

Wealth has allowed Endgame to arm himself with sophisticated holo-emitters which can generate any tools, equipment, or pieces needed for a game. He has even generated arenas and stadiums, albeit with occasional help from stand-alone hologram systems that use their own power generators. Endgame always gives his target the choice of game because, as he often notes, "otherwise, it wouldn't be fair." Zaroff kills without remorse or mercy, but he never cheats. Many heroes have escaped his death-matches by rigging the game somehow, and cheating your way out of one of Endgame's contests virtually ensures he will return later for a rematch. In this way he has become a nemesis to more than one hero, including not just Night Bird but Black Fury and the Woman in Red.

ENDGAME IN PLAY

Endgame is interesting as antagonist because he allows the player character to choose the kind of contest. This allows characters who are usually marginalized to instead play to their strength. When all the heroes have been captured and only the archer or undersea hero is left to save them, he can challenge Endgame to trick shooting or water polo and so stack the deck in his favor.

Because players get to pick the game, an Endgame story can get very silly very quickly. Endgame can easily find himself challenged to a death-match of tiddly-winks or *Dance Dance Revolution*. Players may do this simply to be funny, but there are also sound tactical reasons to pick a game based largely on luck (because this minimizes Endgame's advantages) or which use Abilities like Awareness (for bluffing games like poker) or Willpower (for performance related games like *Guitar Hero* or *Pictionary*) over Prowess (many sports like hockey) or Coordination (*Call of Duty*). The secret to running sessions like this is for Endgame to always be the straight man. No matter how silly, childish, or unusual the challenge, he always responds with absolute seriousness. Every game is legitimate. No game is off limits. He does this so that, when he wins, there can be no doubt as to his superiority. After all, the hero got to make the rules. When a hero cheats at their own game, it is admission of failure. The hero might escape with his loved one, but Endgame knows he won in every sense that mattered.

It is important to note that, for a game to qualify for Endgame's death-matches, there must be a clear way to win. D&D, for example, does not qualify as a game for this purpose unless it has an objective victory condition (such as: "completing *Tomb of Horrors* with fewest PC deaths" or "defeat an opposing PC of the same level and equipped with gear of equal gp value").

NUCLEAR NIGHTMARE

"You're gonna upset me. Do you know what happens when I get upset? I get very bright and very hot."

~ Ted (Heroes)

The Nuclear Nightmare is an incarnation of modern fears concerning atomic energy, an evil version of the heroic Master of the Atom.

EXAMPLES: Radioactive Man (Marvel); Plasmus, Neutron (DC); Nuclear Man (film: *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Ultimate Villain, Foreigner, Terrorist, Master of the Atom

ABILITIES: Radiation and atomic energy can be used to explain a great many powers, but the Nuclear Nightmare is not just a villain who traces his origin back to some kind of exposure to radiation. Rather, he personifies The Bomb itself. He may have Energy Control (adding a radiation-based Affliction or an Aura to the base Blast effect), Alternate Form (Energy or Explosive), or else great Strength and Invulnerability. He is immune to radiation (Life Support or Resistance) and may be able to Detect its presence. Sophisticated Nuclear Nightmares can alter an object's atomic structure using the Transformation power.

QUALITIES: The purest versions of the Nuclear Nightmare are impossible to control, possessed of great power, and terrifying, with a hideous appearance. Most are green — always a popular color for villains, but especially ones of this sort. He is referred to as a "mutant," not in the superheroic sense seen among the X-Men, but as the victim of unchecked and unfortunate mutation caused by radiation exposure.

Because the Nuclear Nightmare has its origins in the Cold War, he is often a Foreigner, an embodiment not of nuclear power, but of the nuclear arsenal held by rival nations. England and France have long been American allies, so the remaining two members of the "nuclear club" — China and the Soviet Union — were the

spawning ground for the original Nuclear Nightmares. In the decades since, however, the number of nations with access to the Bomb has grown to include North Korea, Pakistan, India, and Israel, while Iran, Iraq, and other nations have continued to pursue nuclear weaponry. GMs reluctant to wade directly into political issues can create a fictional surrogate for a place like North Korea or Iran instead. Nuclear Nightmares thus become representatives of their home nation, and embody the dilemma which those governments face: nuclear nations have more influence on the world stage and may be driven to seek nuclear power out of national pride, but they also risk becoming global pariahs and a means by which terrorist forces acquire nuclear bombs. A Nuclear Nightmare might be considered a hero within the borders of his nation, but a villain outside of it.

STORIES: The key story of the Nuclear Nightmare has changed as American attitudes towards nuclear weapons and nuclear energy have grown more complex. At first, atomic weapons were good so long as they were American; it is from this era that characters like Radioactive Man and his fellow Foreigners appear. Radiation could do anything in comics and, as the ultimate weapon, the Bomb was also a good explanation for the Ultimate Villain.

In the wake of Three Mile Island, fears over the safety of nuclear power increased and the Nuclear Nightmare could again be an American. This time, he was a scientist doomed by hubris and certain that the awesome power of the atom could be controlled, or else the victim of a tragic accident. He was a symbol not of the Bomb, but of the problematic peaceful uses to which nuclear energy might be directed. Americans had gotten more used to living with nuclear energy, and it lost some of its association as the ultimate force.

Finally, after the Cold War, the Nightmare has become banal. So many action films hinge on a nuclear bomb that the threat of one is something of a yawner. Nuclear Nightmares have been supplanted in their Ultimate status

by new characters fueled by the latest science-fiction buzzwords. The world's energy hopes are now pinned on solar, wind, and other renewables, though occasional catastrophic nuclear accidents like Fukushima and, before it, Chernobyl, continue to remind us of the threat posed by nuclear power. This has led to the Nuclear Nightmare becoming something of a Cold War relic; once he was a hero to his nation and feared around the world, but now he's a second-stringer.

This can create an opportunity for redemption stories, in which the former-Nightmare shows that he was only trying to do what he thought best for his nation and his people, and if he got caught up in the pointless brinksmanship of the Cold War, well, he was hardly alone. His inner nobility can earn him a new role as a wise mentor to the younger generation, or can lead to a heroic self-sacrifice. If you want your Nightmare to remain a bad guy, then he instead resolves to prove his relevance in a 21st century world, probably with some grandiose extortion threat or the takeover of a small nation.

A heroic Master of the Atom can often slide back and forth, in and out of this archetype — when Doctor Manhattan is surrounded by civilians who fear exposure to him will lead to cancer, or when the Hulk is on a rampage through the New Mexico desert, we are getting a glimpse of the Nuclear Nightmare.

WMD

Nuclear Nightmare, Monstrosity, Force of Nature

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Great</i>	6
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Supreme</i>	10
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Average</i>	3
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 16

Specialties

Intimidation
Science
Technology Expert

Powers

Leaping
Fair 4
Resistance (Damage)
Supreme 10
Extras: Ability, Sensory, Life Support
Super-Senses
Poor 2
Detect Radiation, X-Ray Vision

Qualities

Radioactive Giant
“Looking for ME?”

Knacks

X-Ray Eyes
Once per scene, WMD can focus the X-Rays that his eyes emit onto a single victim, poisoning that individual with deadly radiation (Affliction 10).

Manager of the Death Factory
Gabriel has a +2 on Science and Technology rolls relating to nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons.

Nuclear Shockwave
WMD slams the ground or claps his hands together, creating a rank 10 burst centered on himself.

Background: Gabriel Estudo was born in the ruins of Guernica, Spain, in 1937, his mother the victim of Nazi Germany’s “Condor Legion.” He was raised in a Catholic orphanage, and by the end of the war he was an irritable boy determined to escape his life of poverty and restriction. One of his fellow orphans was to be adopted by a wealthy American couple; the morning that the lad was to depart, Gabriel beat him to death with a candlestick, dropped the body down a dry well, and took his place. The nuns thought Gabriel had run away, but in truth he found a new home in Arizona.

With his American parents, Gabriel gained a life of privilege. He was sent to a fine school where he learned science and math. Atomic power had made the United States the most powerful country on Earth, and Gabriel wanted a taste of that power. When the Soviet Union and other nations acquired the Bomb, it only confirmed Gabriel’s appreciation for the power of this ultimate weapon. He graduated from high school in 1956 with a science scholarship to a prestigious university, and spent the next few years mastering nuclear physics. His mentors were working to develop the next generation of nuclear bomb, and Gabriel participated eagerly in that discovery. It was his professors who got the credit, of course, and Gabriel hungered for recognition – in his heart, he was still the little orphan boy whose mother was a casualty of war.

By the early 1970s, Dr. Estudo was at the forefront of underground nuclear testing. From a secret military installation in Arizona, not that far from his family home, he organized subterranean explosions designed to optimize America’s atomic arsenal. Government funded experiments in chemical and biological weaponry — officially banned by treaty but performed nevertheless — were also based there, and Estudo’s lab became a storehouse for the most deadly and dangerous weapons ever manufactured. In this lab he worked for years, until international law and the end of the Cold War finally caught up to him. In the first flush of victory over the collapsing Soviet Union, the American government decided to end

Gabriel's weapon program and decommission every warhead, every bomb, and every missile. Doctor Estudo was out of a job, but it seemed a small price to pay for world peace.

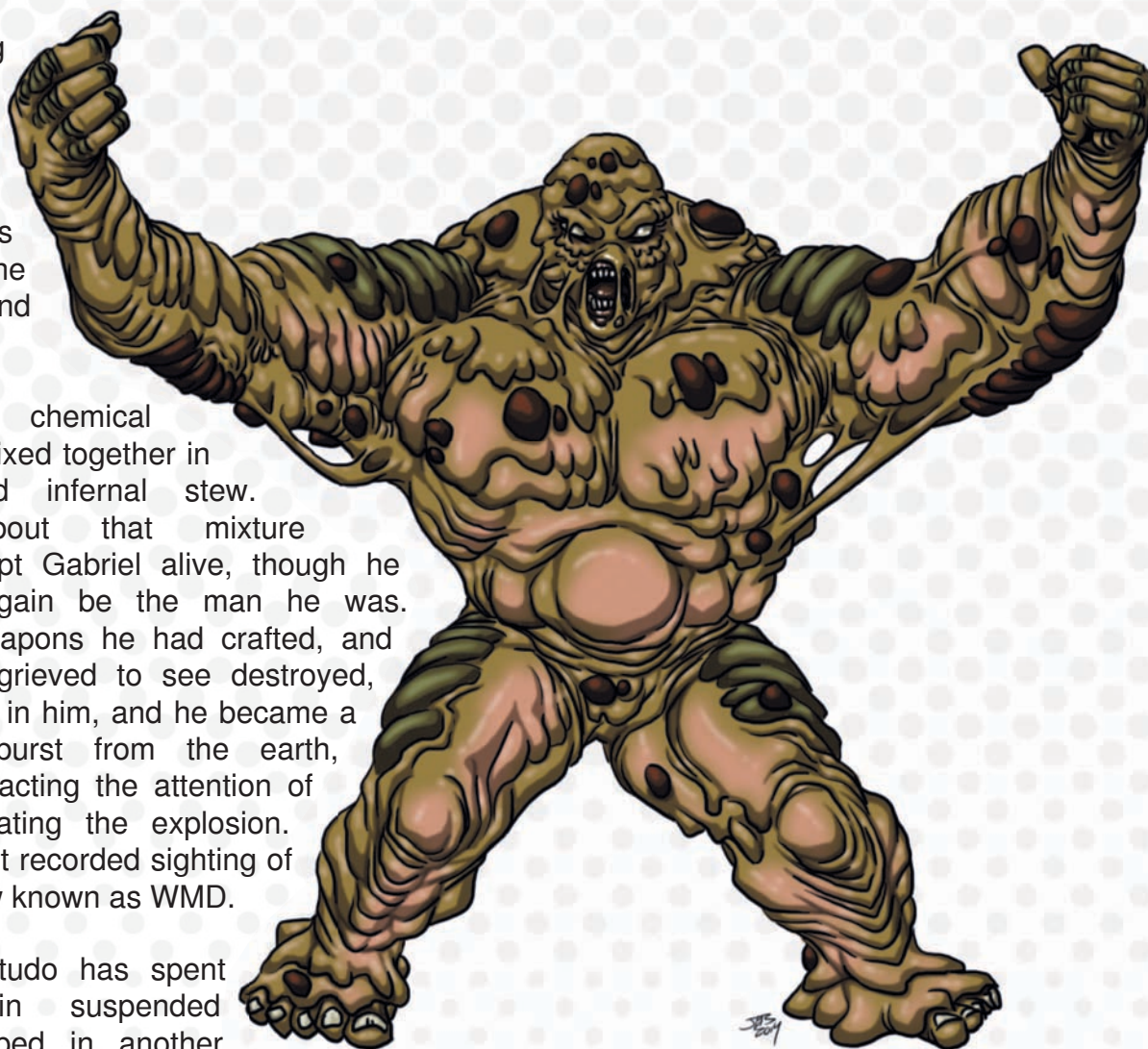
Gabriel was despondent. It took him weeks to figure out why. These weapons, he realized, were the product of his hands. They were his life's work. He did not want to see them taken apart and buried, like unnamed corpses at a mass grave. He felt all the power and respect he had accumulated over a life of scientific research wasting away. Where was his place in the world, now that mankind had turned its back on Mutual Assured Destruction? That insane philosophy had been Gabriel's ticket to self-respect. Thus it was that one day Gabriel faked a lab accident, evacuating the entire base, then walked calmly down to the deepest storehouse in the underground facility and detonated the weapon there with his bare hands.

The resulting explosion was nearly catastrophic. It registered on seismic sensors across the continent, and unleashed radioactive, biological, and chemical weapons that mixed together in a furious and infernal stew. Something about that mixture miraculously kept Gabriel alive, though he would never again be the man he was. Instead, the weapons he had crafted, and which he had grieved to see destroyed, took on new life in him, and he became a monster. He burst from the earth, immediately attracting the attention of heroes investigating the explosion. This was the first recorded sighting of the creature now known as WMD.

Since then, Estudo has spent more time in suspended animation, trapped in another

dimension, or floating in space than he has free and at large. Due to his overwhelming power, and his unquenchable desire to use it for destruction, he poses an enormous risk to people the world over. He has been recruited by NEST and other dangerous criminal organizations, each time only barely defeated by super-heroes. When he is defeated, he is almost impossible to restrain; even the most advanced prison cannot contain him. He has been buried in the middle of a mountain, tossed into the sun, put to sleep by magic spell, and even trapped in an underwater city, but each time has somehow managed to return, often with the help of masterminds who can see the usefulness of a walking nuclear bomb. He's currently catatonic and floating on an asteroid in Limbo, courtesy of Stardust, the Super Wizard.

There is very little left now of Gabriel Estudo; he had been mad for decades before that fateful



day in the Arizona desert, and he is more mad now. He does not so much crave power as much as he needs to demonstrate the power he knows he has, usually against super-humans but, if they're not in the way, mortal society will do nicely. He fights intelligently and can follow orders provided he is always treated with respect. He bears grudges against the few heroes who have managed to defeat him, and he relishes any chance to avenge himself upon these foes, but he will not ruin a larger scheme for petty revenge. Once rescued from his current place of exile, Estudo will probably find himself hiding for a while, then striking with sudden surprise.

WMD is a monster with the power of a nuclear bomb. He stands some twelve feet high and weighs about a ton; his body is so dense that he has survived a direct nuclear hit – though the shockwave did knock him pretty far. He's immune to the searing light that accompanies a nuclear blast, and has also proven himself immune to biological and chemical weapons. With his great strength, he can leap about four miles or create a devastating shockwave using nothing but his bare hands. He can lift 25 kilotons and his large size gives him a ten foot reach.

WMD IN PLAY

WMD is a looming threat, a weapon which Masterminds and Conquerors seek out to further their agendas. He is also a living embodiment of the danger posed by technology we can create but not control. And, ignoring his powers for a moment, he can also serve as a technical assistant for Conquerors in search of a super-weapon.

For example, perhaps inhabitants of Limbo find Gabriel's body and begin to worship him as a sleeping god. Exploring heroes later encounter these extra-planar creatures and, in the course of an unrelated adventure, find out what they are doing. Now, how do you separate a race of otherwise well-meaning but very devoted Limbo folk from the superpower they have made into a deity?

For a more terrestrial adventure, signs of chemical weapons are found in one of the Mideast or Africa's civil wars. This particular breed of weapon was thought destroyed in Estudo's lab. There are only a few possibilities: the knowledge of the weapon was somehow preserved and it has been recreated, in which case only Estudo and a few others know how to stop it, or someone has managed to recreate the stuff from Estudo himself, with or without his knowledge! Could a criminal mastermind (Professor Radium?) be mining WMD's inert body for its lethal secrets?

Finally, Stardust the Super Wizard shows up with a revelation: WMD's body is gone. Someone has taken it, but whoever it is has left no sign. While this can certainly be the lead-up to a one night brawl across most of the American Southwest, it perhaps works better as a sign of long-term menace. After all, anyone who can find and liberate Gabriel from his prison has to be a major player, and all the usual such players are accounted for. Could someone new be on the scene? What do they have planned?

PIRATE

“Stand and deliver! This be Cap’n Fear’s next port o’call!”

The Pirate is a roguish super villain who sails the seven seas in search of booty.

EXAMPLES: Black Manta, Nebula, Captain Kraken (Mutants & Masterminds), Captain Mako (City of Villains)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Theme Villain, Undersea Hero

ABILITIES: A traditional Pirate relies on a cutlass and pistol instead of superhuman powers. His Prowess and Coordination are high, buttressed by the Weapons specialty. Charismatic, he has good Willpower to inspire his crew and frighten his enemies. However, a modern Pirate might have exchanged his period weaponry for more advanced versions, including anti-vehicular rockets with which he can hold a ship hostage. He might wield a laser-sword and a blaster. Because the most famous pirates lived centuries ago, super-Pirates who trace their origin to that era need Immortality or some other way to explain their continued existence. Undead pirates are a perennial favorite.

QUALITIES: More important than his powers are the Pirate’s qualities. He needs a vessel of some sort — usually a seagoing ship but possibly a flying ship, a submersible, or even a spaceship. He needs a crew of bloodthirsty scalawags. He probably has a companion: a parrot, monkey, or wench who has few powers but who can run interference at a key moment or rescue the Pirate from imprisonment.

Pirates break the law with impunity, take what they want, dress in style, have a distinctive manner of speech, and generally seem to have a great time. All of this explains their enduring popularity. Yet, the Pirate isn’t really a superhero convention, and appears seldom in comics. The most famous pirate in comics, the Psycho-Pirate, is much more psycho than

pirate. But gamers love pirates, and so superhero games have pirates in them, with Captain Mako from City of Villains and the memorable Captain Kraken of Freedom City illustrating the point. When they do appear, Pirates are sympathetic characters. Indeed, there are many pirate heroes such as Corsair or the Black Terror.

STORIES: Pirates make great antagonists for Undersea Heroes or anyone else with a vehicle; the Pirate lives for the scene in which scores of Faceless Pirate Minions swing over to the hero’s vessel and try to capture it. And because criminality at sea is, by definition, piracy, just about any super villain who works on the ocean can choose to embrace piracy as a career or lifestyle, even if just for a while.

THE HOOK

Pirate, Dominator, Psycho

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Incredible</i>	7

Stamina 12

Specialties

Athletics
Drive Expert
Intimidation
Military
Occult
Stealth
Underwater Combat
Weapons Expert (Blades)

Powers

Mind Control
Supreme 10
Limit: Close Range
Strike
Average 3
Slashing

Qualities

Legendary Pirate Captain
Just A Hook
Eton Man

Knacks

No Concentration

The Hook does not need to concentrate to maintain Mind Control over someone it is touching. However, it can only Mind Control one person at a time.

Substitution

Anyone wearing the Hook can substitute any attribute or specialty of the Hook for the wearer's own.

Background: James Hook went to his death a mystery. While it is well known that "Hook" was not his real name, but rather a moniker adopted after the Captain saw his hand severed, fed to a crocodile, and replaced with an iron prosthetic, his true identity has never been discovered. What is known is that he attended Eton College, where so many of England's statesmen spent their formative years, and that, if his true name were ever revealed, it would rock England with scandal. But over a century ago, Hook was defeated by his arch-rival Pan in a duel and kicked into the mouth of the same huge crocodile which had eaten his hand.

But by this time, Hook was no mere pirate. Perhaps it was his life in Neverland. Perhaps it was the pure conviction of his cruelty. Perhaps it was that Indian potion he drank. Regardless, James Hook's wicked, crooked, soul outlived his flesh, and when the crocodile finally died in 1984, wrestled to death in Cartagena by American adventurer Jack Colton, the Hook was recovered from its stomach. Whoever held the Hook was possessed by the spirit of the dead pirate captain, and in this way Hook lived again.

In the thirty years since, Hook has had dozens of host bodies. One of the first things it does, upon finding a good victim, is force the hapless mortal to sever its own right hand so that the Hook can resume its proper place. The Hook

The Hook and the Pirate Archetype are sponsored by the generous Kickstarter support of Diane Spencer. Captain Hook was created by J. M. Barrie in the play *Peter Pan*, or, *the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, and has featured in many films, plays, novels and television shows since. Jack Colton appears in the 1984 film *Romancing the Stone*.

has attached itself to men, women, children, the aged, the infirm and the superhuman. Along the way, it has built a dozen crews out of the desperate, the violent, and the insane, and it has captained a dozen Jolly Rogers including everything from a cruise ship to a black Cadillac taken from a pair of young lovers whom the Hook murdered.

Hook has no motivation or goal beyond the cruel infliction of fear and misery, the taking of innocent life, and the perpetuation of its own myth. It does, however, maintain the facade of an English gentleman, praising enemies who possess honor and integrity while belittling those who take advantage of weakness, lie, or show fear. It cannot speak or move without a host but, being a thing of iron, is highly resilient and has survived the death of many hosts. Hook fears nothing, especially since it has outlived the crocodile that took its life.

THE HOOK IN PLAY

The Hook is a pretty dark version of the Pirate; when it appears, it pretty much means someone is going to lose a hand, which is no laughing matter. If you have a hero with healing powers in your group, or an inventor able to make a cybernetic hand, Hook's mutilations can be repaired, at least as far as game mechanics are concerned, but the psychological damage could be more long-lasting. After all, the Hook also mind controls its victim, and many of its hosts don't survive.

At the same time, the fact that Captain Hook is so well known ensures that players will have fun meeting, fighting, and defeating him. There's no reason not to embrace a little swashbuckling derring-do when the Hook appears, even if the humor is bleak and more than a little strange.

POWER CORRUPTED

“Scott, am I worth it? I destroyed a world — in my mind, I can still hear the screams of the dying — and it felt good! I don’t want that feeling ever again. And yet — I do!”

~ Jean Grey

Sometimes a hero’s powers grow too great, and she falls from the path of good to become a powerful force for evil.

EXAMPLES: Dark Phoenix, Scarlet Witch, Malice (Marvel); Parallax (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Fallen Hero, Cosmic Menace, Dark Mirror

ABILITIES: As indicated by her title, the Power Corrupted is not just more powerful than other heroes, she is more powerful than heroes *ought to be*. It’s not enough for such a character to have Cosmic Power or Magic at 10 ranks; power such as that, while great, is still drawing inside the lines.

A true Power Corrupted breaks the rules of the game. She can do anything, so long as she can explain it within the nature of her superhuman power. A character who can “alter reality,” for example, can create entire armies out of nothing, permanently strip super-people of their powers, or kill a hero on one page only to bring him back to life on the next. A former hero who has been corrupted with vast psychic abilities becomes the most powerful telepath on Earth, able to manipulate minds across vast distance and target entire populations at once.

At this scale, the rest of the Power Corrupted’s abilities and specialties become largely irrelevant. Her powers may be linked to one of her abilities — usually Willpower — which rises off the usual **ICONS** scale to *Vast*, *Cosmic*, or *Godlike* level. Tests using these powers and abilities can usually be resolved without even rolling dice.

QUALITIES: It is through her qualities that the Power Corrupted is ultimately defeated, as her friends and loved ones invoke her kindness, her sympathy, and her memory of better days to reawaken her true self. These qualities will represent the bonds of friendship and family among her team-mates, romantic love, and her essential goodness. Alternately, heroes use these qualities to distract the Power Corrupted while, behind the curtain, another hero rigs a way to strip her of her powers.

But the Power Corrupted will also have a quality which encapsulates her awesome cosmic power. It is this quality which fuels her rule-breaking omnipotence and she will use it often.

The Power Corrupted is usually known to other great powers in the universe — cosmic beings or starfaring civilizations — who seek to control or destroy her. Depending on how secret her powers have been, and how long she has been active, this reputation can spread far indeed.

STORIES: The Power Corrupted is distinguished from the Fallen Hero because her fall is not entirely her fault. It is the source and scale of her power which is to blame. It is generally accepted by everyone around her that no one could have remained human and sane once gifted with such amazing abilities. It is a miracle the hero resisted temptation and held it together as long as she did.

Until Hal Jordan’s rampage as Green Lantern resulted in the destruction of Coast City and his transformation to Parallax, the Power Corrupted was almost always female (the “Byrne victims”). When male heroes gained vast power, they did struggle to control it, but they either integrated it into themselves or gave it up and returned to the status quo. When that same cosmic power was given to women, they proved unable to control it and became evil. When Hal Jordan became Parallax, he was the first prominent male Power Corrupted. This alienated many fans, but it has gone a long way towards eliminating the sexism previously seen in this archetype.

The Power Corrupted may also be turned evil by the action of a Dominator or Tempter. The hero is still vastly more powerful than everyone around her, but until now she has been able to control her powers and may have shown no previous signs of mental instability. Subtle mind control and a succession of traumatic incidents feeds her “dark side” and she either slides slowly or erupts suddenly into a violent rage, pitting her against her friends. This can be the easiest way to use this archetype in an **ICONS** game because it’s potentially curable; once the influence of the Dominator is removed, the hero regains control of herself and all can be forgiven.

In comics, heroes become the Power Corrupted for one of two reasons: either the creative team wants to remove this powerful character from a story she has come to dominate (Phoenix), or they need an omnipotent *deus ex machina* to take the book in a “bold new direction” (Hal Jordan, Scarlet Witch). As a GM, you might use the Power Corrupted story when one of your players leaves the game or expresses a desire for a new character.

Superhero comics being what they are, it is almost inevitable for a Power Corrupted to return to the heroic fold eventually. This is usually done by personifying the omnipotent power and placing all the blame on this second entity. In retcons of this sort, the hero wasn’t ever the Power Corrupted at all. She was essentially replaced or dominated by an invasive being, an incarnation of power itself. Alternately, all the blame is placed on mind control from a very powerful, even godlike, Dominator. However, while the Power Corrupted was in charge, many terrible and unforgivable things were done. When the hero awakens from whatever enchanted sleep she was in, she feels crushing guilt. The heroic community will be split; some will insist “it wasn’t her fault,” while others cannot forget what the “hero” did. This is a prompt for much soul-searching, an attempt to integrate and reconcile lingering trauma, and, if the hero is lucky, a renewed sense of purpose. If the power was personified, it becomes the hero’s new

Nemesis or Dark Mirror.

As a GM, when the Power Corrupted appears in your game, you will be handing out a lot of Determination to the heroes. Virtually everything the antagonist does will break the rules. She often has additional actions in combat, so that she can respond to the action of each PC in turn. And when heroes attempt to fight her using their own powers, these efforts are useless. Players may get frustrated because, even when they use all the Determination you give them, their powers are still useless. Yes, yes they are. But all that Determination can also be used on social interaction rolls to remind the Power Corrupted of better and more peaceful times, of those she loves and is loved by, and of her essential humanity.

STARDUST, THE SUPER-WIZARD

Power Corrupted, Imp, Alien Hero

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Intellect	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 13

Specialties

Power (Cosmic)
Science
Technology

Powers

Belt of Rays: Cosmic Power (Telekinesis)
Device

Cosmic 15

Extras: Alteration Ray, Blast (Disintegration),
Invisibility, Mind Control, Nullification,
Reflection, Teleportation

Thought Monitor Collar: Telepathy Device

Good 5



Alternate Form (Energy)

Supreme 10

Extras: Alternate Form (Fluid [Dust]), Flight (Spaceflight), Life Support

Star-Metal Skinsuit: Resistance (Damage) Device

Supreme 10

Qualities

Home on a Private Star

Eight Foot Colossus

Super-Wizard

Knacks

None

Background: The being known as Stardust is something of an intergalactic enigma. His almost omnipotent power classifies him as a "Super-Wizard," a title reserved for the universe's most potent entities, creatures with

Stardust the Super-Wizard was created by Fletcher Hawks and appeared in comics from 1939-1941. He is a well-known public domain superhero, though he has reappeared less frequently than his more down-to-earth colleagues. His unlimited powers and the bizarre and ruthless punishments he handed down to criminals are reminiscent of the Spectre. AC Comics has a character of the same name; she is unrelated, but — along with characters like Dr. Fate and Starhawk — served as inspiration for the transgender nature of the version presented here. The idea that "Super-Wizard" is a title held by the universe's most omnipotent beings was hatched by Joey Peters in his webcomic "Attack of the Super-Wizards." The Ghoul Epidemic of 1968 is referenced in George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, which thanks to a technicality is in the public domain.

incalculable abilities, cosmic responsibilities, and no one to answer to but each other. While other Super-Wizards have dedicated themselves to monitoring the time-stream or seeding life throughout the galaxy, Stardust uses his powers in a lopsided war against organized crime and international espionage. He acknowledges no authority and dispenses whatever justice he sees fit, detecting crime from a remote astral observatory on his private star, and his powers allow him to inflict positively bizarre punishments. When he found a massive conspiracy hiding within the US, for example, he decapitated Master-Mind, its leader, while keeping the head alive and conscious. Then Stardust opened a portal to a pocket dimension inhabited by a headless giant and hurled Master-Mind's disembodied head onto the giant's body, where it was absorbed and vanished. As for Master-Mind's enormous criminal army, they were merged by Stardust's omnipotent rays into a single human body... which Stardust promptly hurled into space. Stardust never uses his powers against innocent people, but he is utterly ruthless in his poetic and absurd justice. He has, on occasion,

captured criminals and sent them to an interstellar prison where they are frozen in suspended animation to serve out their sentence, but such acknowledgment of outside authority is a rare exception for a Super-Wizard.

Stardust first visited Earth in the years before World War II, where he took a strong anti-war stance and used his vast command of alien science to oppose Fifth Columnists and racketeers who were trying to drag the US into the European conflict. It was during this period that he came into conflict with Professor Radium, who was using an army of giant vultures from his base on Venus to make America ripe for foreign invasion. During this adventure, Stardust rescued a young American woman who asked for shelter at the Super-Wizard's hidden base. But once America did enter World War II and Stardust's efforts were proven a failure, he moved on to other worlds. Every decade or so, Stardust would reappear and display his awesome powers. He is largely credited with stopping the Ghoul Epidemic of 1968, the result of a plot by his old nemesis Professor Radium using a contaminated space probe returning from Venus.

Stardust's omnipotent powers long ago went to his head, but it took the death of his human houseguest to cause him to doubt his own sanity. Executing tens of thousands of law-breakers in a single day meant nothing to him, and he barely noticed the slow death of an aging woman. Stardust used his amazing powers to return her youth and vitality, but she resented his interference and his refusal to let her make her own decisions regarding life and death. The next time he went on one of his crimefighting errands, she let herself out the airlock. She was ready. When he returned, Stardust was genuinely perplexed for one of the first times in his memory. Had he done something wrong? Had he erred?

In Stardust's typical manner, he decided to solve this potential problem in a highly unusual way: he divided himself into two people, the better to gain perspective. There was now a male and a female Stardust, each occupying

THE SIXTH COLUMN

Stardust created his Sixth Column to oppose Axis spies and saboteurs in the months preceding World War II. Selecting hundreds of young men (only, of course) from across America, he outfitted them with less-powerful versions of his own equipment. These devices — a golden collar which allowed the bearer to read minds, a star-metal suit that made the wearer invulnerable, and a belt equipped with Stardust's own "repeller ray" — were never re-collected by Stardust and can still be found on eBay or in your grandmother's attic. They make an excellent source for new player characters.

Thought Monitor Collar: Telepathy Device
Good 5

Star-Metal Skinsuit: Resistance (Damage) Device
Great 6

Repellant Ray Belt: Telekinesis Device
Fantastic 7

the same body and transforming back and forth. Each of Stardust's two personalities remembers what the other has done, but they have none of the emotional investment. In theory, this allows Stardust's feminine side to moderate her masculine counterpart, who continues to wage a one-Wizard war on intergalactic crime. But old habits die hard, and he has a lot of practice ignoring a woman's perspective.

STARDUST IN PLAY

Stardust has no appreciation of the consequences of his actions. He is an omnipotent being who, instead of using his powers to genuinely improve life for all mankind, instead picks on criminals and terrorists. He embodies the idea of "punching down," but there is no one to tell him otherwise. Even his own other-self has a hard time getting through. In this sense, Stardust is an example of the Imp archetype; in order to end the story and get the Imp to return the world to normal, the heroes must somehow help his female persona come to the surface. If your PCs are street vigilantes with modest powers of their

own, this is the most likely way for you to use Stardust.

But if your players are higher in power level, you can potentially use Stardust as a more direct antagonist. He is highly resistant to harm, but he can be hurt and unusual tactics (such as Mental or Alteration attacks) will affect him. It won't take much to motivate heroes to take a stand; all you need to do is allow Stardust to work according to his standard operating procedure. As soon as he throws a thousand people into the sun or turns a super villain into a worm (before feeding that worm to a bird), your players will see the problem.

PSYCHO

“You know, it’s SUCH a shame you’ll miss your father’s debut, Miss Gordon. Sadly, our venue wasn’t BUILT with the disabled in MIND. But don’t WORRY — I’ll take some SNAPSHOTS to REMIND him of you.”

~ the Joker

The psycho is distinguished from other villains by his murderous insanity.

EXAMPLES: The Joker, Victor Zsasz, Professor Pyg (DC); Carnage (Marvel); Casanova Frankenstein (film: *Mystery Men*)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Theme Villain, Twisted Genius

ABILITIES: Psychos do not need powers; innocent people are fragile creatures and killing them is remarkably easy. The Psycho usually does it by surprise anyway, when the hero is far away. Nevertheless, some Psychos are scientifically brilliant — their intelligence is linked thematically to their insanity — and arm themselves with high-tech gadgets. They may be equipped with knives, a pistol, or some other more distinctive weapon. Others have “slasher powers,” namely the ability to sustain an incredible amount of punishment and to claw their way back to life after an apparent death.

When a Psycho does have superhuman powers, he poses a far greater danger. A madman with even rudimentary superhuman powers can slaughter dozens, or even hundreds, of people by the time the heroes arrive to stop him. The only real check on Psychos of this sort is their own psychosis, which restricts their murderous rampages to specific moments, places, or opportunities, usually focused on a particular hero.

QUALITIES: Why does the Psycho kill? The most dangerous are mass murderers, serial killers, and sociopaths. They kill for fun, out of a twisted sense of vengeance, or out of obedience to some other pathology which the hero must deduce. Crime shows and the film

industry will provide you with many ideas for these pathologies.

Psycho villains are likely to fixate on a specific hero, who becomes their nemesis. Their insanity lends them to other archetypes which also exhibit compulsive or obsessive behavior, namely the Theme Villain and the Twisted Genius. Neither of those archetypes, however, require the body count of the true Psycho.

Some Psychos are crazy in a way which is harmless. Their insanity manifests in pranks and the harassment of heroes. These are Lunatics, a remnant of the Silver Age and the strictest version of the Comics Code. Related to the heroic Comic Relief archetype, the Lunatic appears in lighthearted stories and is more silly than dangerous. The most illustrative example is to compare Batman's enemies from his 1966 TV show (Cesar Romero's Joker) with modern versions, such as those found in the Nolan films or even the Animated Series.

STORIES: Psychos pose an ethical dilemma to heroes. The Psycho will certainly kill again, and — super villains being what they are — is just as certain to escape from imprisonment. This is the kind of villain which Vigilante characters execute with grim satisfaction. Heroes do not, however, sometimes because they reject the taking of any life, and sometimes because they retain an essential optimism and believe that the Psycho can be cured. When the Psycho does escape, and again kills, Vigilantes and the public place the blame on the hero. The Psycho's body count is now "all your fault," because the hero could have killed the Psycho when he had the chance, but chose not to. This can be a very serious test of any hero's dedication; it can be hard to remember that, while it is true these victims would be alive if the hero had taken the Psycho's life, it was not the hero who released poison gas in a crowded auditorium.

Although the Psycho is given psychiatric care, he never recovers his sanity. For one thing, his body count is so high and his crimes so horrific, that even if he were to recant, he would expect

to be incarcerated forever. But in addition, his medical care is awful and horrific, actually contributing to his condition, rather than easing it. He may be tormented by doctors and staff, kept in inhumane conditions reminiscent of a medieval dungeon, or subjected to electric shock and other barbaric "treatments." His doctors and the hospital administrators are also his future victims; often they perish when the Psycho escapes his ward.

Psycho villains pose special challenges in roleplaying games. They often kill their victims when the heroes are not present, so it's not really possible for the heroes to save them. They are unrepentant and, as noted, a hero is usually expected not to kill the villain, even though more casualties are likely. All of this can make for a very depressing session, unless your players are all on board for a story of this sort. If you want to use a Psycho without frustrating your players, make him a Lunatic instead. After all, many of Batman's most lethal villains were just goofy pranksters decades ago, more concerned with humiliating the hero than actually hurting anyone.

There are two Psycho stories worthy of special note. In the first, a Psycho without powers suddenly gains them. As noted above, this makes the Psycho far more dangerous than he was before, especially because the powers he is acquiring tend to be cosmic in scale. The heroes first try to prevent the villain from getting powers in the first place, but when this fails they must somehow use their knowledge of the villain's psychosis to outwit him, trick him, or somehow strip the new powers from him.

In other stories, a super hero goes insane. This is usually done with a powerful, respected hero in the Superman mold. Indeed, the club for Supermen who have gone insane and turned into murderous lunatics is surprisingly large, especially if you count video games, one-shot comics, and alternate universes. While it might be possible for such a character to be rehabilitated, he usually ends up dying at the end of an apocalyptic rampage. Because of his extreme personal level of power, it takes all the

heroes working together to stop him, and despite this many heroes perish in the attempt. This is an excellent — if grim — way to thin the ranks of your superhuman community. So if, for example, you are starting a new **ICONS** game and want to make sure that the player characters are not overshadowed by established heroes, it is possible all those previous heroes have been recently killed off by a Psycho with great power. Although he is now thought dead, he can return when your PCs have gotten some experience working together, and your players can put him down once and for all. This is, of course, a much more “dark and gritty” tone than traditional **ICONS**.

THE PUZZLER

Psychopath, Theme Villain, Nemesis

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Fair</i>	4

Stamina 7

Specialties

Investigation
Performance (Video)
Stealth
Technology
Weapons (Guns)

Powers

None

Qualities

The Crowdsourcer of Crime
Small Details, Big Picture
Missing A Piece

Knacks

None

Backgrounds: The original Puzzler appeared in 1939, a copycat criminal who based his look on a more famous mass murderer (and another



even more famous actor). He masterminded only a handful of schemes, none of which were entirely successful, but he was always able to escape capture. The Puzzler resurfaced in 1952 and then again in 1961, each time adopting a slightly different costume and MO. Sometimes his puzzles were quite literal — he once provided a map of his planned crime spree, ready to be assembled. But as the years went by the implementation of his theme became broader and more symbolic so that it came to mean, “Any large idea made up of smaller components.” He has provided detectives with a list of innocuous items which, once assembled, made a bomb capable of destroying the city. He has kidnapped citizens who secretly were all involved in a child prostitution ring. He has stolen priceless art which was all plundered from Jewish families by the same Nazi officer, a man who had successfully concealed his background and was now chief of police. The Puzzler even enjoyed some popular fame when, in the late 1960s, a pop artist

rediscovered old photos of his 1941 appearances and made them the subject of a modern art exhibit, adding ironic thought balloons to each photo.

The Puzzler's true identity had never been discovered, but by the 1980s he was presumed to be quite old and frail. Thus it was a surprise to everyone when a new, more mad, Puzzler burst onto the world stage. This Puzzler left body parts around the state for the Woman in Red to find, and it was only by assembling the pieces that the victim's identity could be known. When this was done, Barbara Allen discovered that the corpse was none other than the original Puzzler. She tracked this new version of the old criminal to his lair and there was a furious shootout which ended only when the Puzzler fell to his death into a vat of glue.

But over the next thirty years the Puzzler continued to reappear, and each time his identity remained unknown. It was not until recently that Tina McDuffie, the latest Woman in Red, finally figured out the Puzzler's secret. Allen had been wrong back in '85; seeking the simplest solution, she had neglected to see the truth, which was that every time the Puzzler performed a crime, *it had been a different Puzzler*. There was no original Puzzler; even the first man to wear the outfit had been given the idea by an anonymous acquaintance. Since then, for eight decades and on five continents, human beings isolated and alone, unable to make sense out of the world and desperately seeking to put the little pieces of their lives together in a way that made sense, had gone mad and become the Puzzler. And, in so doing, they had themselves become pieces in a puzzle not of their making. The Puzzler was now a meme, a viral notion, a crowdsourced killer. He is an insane (but perfectly reasonable) reaction to the existential confusion of human existence. The Puzzler embodies our need to make order out of chaos.

The Woman in Red, Night Bird, the Black Fury, and other heroes who have battled the Puzzler over the years now theorize that there is some kind of motivating intelligence behind this

pattern. There is, somehow, somewhere, a Puzzle-Master. This entity — perhaps human, perhaps not — planted the seed of the idea in the head of the 1939 Puzzler. Over the decades he (or she) has subtly ensured that the Puzzler continued to return, encouraging others to take up the mantle. And now, in a media-saturated environment where ideas can circumnavigate the globe in a microsecond, more people than ever have been exposed to the puzzle that is the Puzzler. What picture will ultimately be revealed by this process, no one yet can say.

THE PUZZLER IN PLAY

The game statistics provided here are for one, perhaps typical, representative of the Puzzler. Ideally, every time the Puzzler appears, he would be different. But these differences are not always immediately obvious; after all, the Puzzler operated for many decades with no one realizing that he was, in fact, distinct individuals. In practice, this means that you have license to change any part of his character sheet without being obliged to.

Making up adventures for Puzzle Master villains can be daunting, but the Puzzler's broad interpretation of his theme means that almost any caper can be made into a puzzle by separating it into component pieces. A rash of arson, a series of kidnappings, bloody serial murders, or even a simple burglary spree can all make up a larger picture. As the GM, once you figure out what the larger picture is, the pieces will fall into place.

The larger mystery of the Puzzler's true identity and nature is, perhaps, one best left unrevealed. He may be something as grand as a cosmic force of nature, or something as small as a wizened little man hiding in his attic. He could be a telepathic virus, a 30th century mastermind projecting himself holographically into the past, or a religious cult. Any of these solutions, however, is simultaneously too implausible and something of a let-down. That doesn't mean that detectives will stop trying to put his pieces together, but it means that players shouldn't be disappointed when they're never able to find that last missing piece.

SERVITOR

"Remember, you ... are my number one ... guy."

"Yes, sir."

~ Joker and Bob the Goon

The Servitor is a villain in the service of another, smarter or more powerful, master.

EXAMPLES: Silver Surfer, Executioner, Toad (Marvel); Desaad, Non and Ursa (DC)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Blue Collar Criminal, Assassin, Monstrosity, Temptress

ABILITIES: The Servitor has highly focused powers in a field which her master lacks, or which he chooses to neglect because he is just too darn busy being evil. Alternately, she is a lesser reflection of her master, wielding very similar or even identical powers, just on a scale which the heroes can more easily overcome.

The classic forms of the Servitor are the big dumb brute, the sniveling lab assistant, the hired killer, and the evil daughter; but Darkseid thoroughly unionized the Servitor archetype, using them for everything from public relations (Glorious Godfrey) to child care (Granny Goodness). Brutes are often Monstrosities; they need Strength, Prowess, and some measure of Invulnerability. Many carry weapons or are, in fact, living weapons capable of casually slaughtering innocents by the score. The lab assistant, or Igor, provides Intellect and may be master of a useful specialty. Her physical abilities are weak and she doesn't need powers to fulfill her role; once the heroes get their hands on her, she quickly tells them everything they want to know. Hired killers are Assassins; see that archetype for more. Finally, the evil daughter is a Temptress or femme fatale with good Willpower and the Seduction specialty. She is tasked with seducing a hero, and sometimes she has fallen far enough from the tree that she loves him instead.

QUALITIES: The evil daughter highlights the great pivot point for the Servitor, and that is her loyalty. Servitors are either loyal or traitorous, and while they can typically move between these poles, it is important for you to decide why a given Servitor is loyal and what might prompt her to betray her master. It is perfectly fair for the answer to this latter question to be "Nothing," but when a Servitor is absolutely loyal to her master, this loyalty goes unappreciated. Master villains are basically jerks, and they take loyal Servitors for granted. In time, this turns even fanatically loyal Servitors into reluctant traitors.

If the Servitor is a robot or artificial life, the master probably created it, and this is the source of its loyalty. Other Servitors serve out of family ties, material wealth and comfort, or emotional blackmail; heroes who are able to free the Servitor from this blackmail earn a powerful ally.

STORIES: Besides serving in their own betrayal plot, Servitors appear as intermediate obstacles which the heroes must overcome on their way to a Mastermind, Crime Boss, or other big bad evil guy. Physical Servitors first appear working alone; once sent packing, they return with an army of Faceless Minions or a gang of lesser Servitors. Physically weak Servitors like the Igor and the evil daughter are, instead, an opportunity for imprisoned heroes and those who have been stripped of their powers to escape their unfortunate situation through roleplay or a simple fist to the face.

Love and friendship are excellent motivators for a Servitor to betray her master. Unless the Servitor is irredeemably evil, a shot at redemption can go a long way towards turning the Servitor back to the side of the heroes. Servitors are often shocked to find that their service to the master has very practical, tragic, consequences; like the scientist who suddenly discovers her work is being used to make weapons, the Servitor loses her naivety and gains a spine at the same time.

When a Servitor betrays her master, he is often watching. He allows the betrayal to occur, either because he is testing his Servitor to see if she returns to the fold, or because he never trusted her in the first place and her betrayal is all according to his master plan. Servitors claim that they will do anything to get back into the good graces of the master, but masters are, as noted, real jerks, and invariably place the most humiliating of requirements on repentant Servitors, forcing them to stay in the hero's arms.

It's a sad fact that many Servitors end up dead. Masters have a terrible habit of executing them, though because they are valuable, they fare slightly better than Faceless Minions and are unlikely to be killed simply for the delivery of bad news. Once a betrayal has been revealed, the master's revenge becomes more important even than the original caper, and more than one hero has cursed a Servitor's escape only to find out that, once back in the presence of the master, she was executed for incompetence.

RATH

Servitor, Nazi, Comic Relief

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Great</i>	6
Intellect	<i>Poor</i>	2
Awareness	<i>Poor</i>	2
Willpower	<i>Average</i>	3

Stamina 9

Specialties

Military
Weapons (guns)

Powers

Body Armor: Resistance (Damage) Device
Poor 2
Rifle: Blast Device
Good 5
Extra: Burst



Qualities

Henchman with a Conscience
Plays with Grenades
Fated to Live

Knacks

Stalwart
Rath has a +2 bonus on tests to convince people he is trustworthy.

Background: Rath was a young German soldier fighting on the Eastern Front against the Communists when he was captured and sent to a POW camp. Years passed there, and by the time the war was over, he and his fellow prisoners — those who had survived — were largely forgotten. With no way to learn of world events, no way to contact anyone in Germany, and no one to call even if he could, Rath took to the road and lived one day at a time. Fortune led him east into Mongolia, a land of rolling hills, grasslands untouched by industry, and a rustic people who were living the same lives they had lived for centuries. To Rath, it was like he had gone back in time. In a village there, he met a

girl. She was kind to him. Rath did not so much decide to stay, as much as he simply never thought to leave.

Rath found work tending animals for a neighbor. Every morning, as he left for his shift, he told his wife he would be back at dusk, and every evening he was. Late one day, as he paused at the village well to drink, there was a brilliant light and a strange sound, and a man appeared riding a bizarre machine. Rath was with him. It was an older Rath, wiser perhaps, happy perhaps, but weary. He rose from the machine and, without a word to the Time Traveler who had brought him, walked past the younger Rath to the door of his own home.

"Where are you going?" the younger Rath asked him.

"I'm going home," the older Rath replied, and as he entered the house his wife's voice rose in welcome.

Destiny has played many games with Rath since that day. First with the Time Traveler and then with others, he has had a succession of strange and wonderful adventures which few would believe. He has traveled to the past and the distant future, seen the end of the world and the beginnings of life. From a wedding on the distant planet Akubar (there was not enough singing) to a funeral for an ancient Pharaoh (sand got in his boots), Rath has accompanied men smarter and greater than he while trying to do what is right. Rath is a soldier and a good fighter; his skills are always in demand, and even when serving bad men, Rath is content, for it is in those situations that he finds his own choices to be most important.

Lately, Rath has been in the service of Robur the Conqueror, who rescued Rath from a collapsing dirigible. Robur considers Rath to be a stalwart, if unimaginative, lieutenant, and keeps him in his company much of the time, assigning him to lead important missions in the field. This suits Rath just fine, as he has never quite been able to shake his love of battle and the thrill that comes from pitting his strength

against another man. Also, Robur's constant travel ensures that every day is a new wonder, a new sight to see. As a more moral man than his master, Rath has also been able to temper some of Robur's excesses, so that when Robur sends his boarding parties to take an airplane mid-flight or invade a speeding bullet train, the orders are now to capture and not to kill. In these and other small ways, Rath feels like he has made a difference.

But Rath is starting to get a little tired. He's begun to keep his eye open for that time machine again. Rath wants to go home.

RATH IN PLAY

Rath is the eternal henchman. His adventures through time were first enabled by the anonymous Time Traveler of HG Wells' novel *The Time Machine*. He can appear in any story without warning, in service to a Conqueror, Mastermind, or Crime Boss, be vanquished, and then walk off alone to appear again in a later story serving a different master. When he does re-appear, he may not remember the heroes because, from his perspective, this could be their first meeting. Time travel is funny like that.

As presented, Rath is a strong, but otherwise unremarkable, ordinary human. If you want to use him in a superhero game, it is easy to explain superhuman strength and damage resistance, perhaps as the result of a chemical formula or a combat harness developed by Robur. He will usually be leading a large group of Faceless Minions, but needs to be tough enough to keep a couple of heroes busy for a few turns. In **ICONS** games, early fights are a good time for the heroes to accumulate Determination; to facilitate this, have Rath attack by surprise with secret weapons designed to stop the heroes. Perhaps he takes one of their dependents as a hostage, or puts them in a classic "Hero's Choice" to save innocent people or pursue the escaping bad guys. In scenes like these, the heroes have their qualities used against them and gather Determination which they can use later to stop Rath's boss.

SUPERNATURAL HORROR

“Dracula is no MORTAL man — no — he is more — MUCH MORE — for NONE may touch the Lord of Darkness less HE so COMMANDS — none, that is, who wishes to LIVE! Now, you wanton IMBECILES, now you shall see the FULL POWER OF DRACULA, LORD OF THE UNDEAD!”

The evil counterpart to the Occult Hero, the Supernatural Horror is a vampire, werewolf, zombie, ghost, or other “classic” monster.

EXAMPLES: Selene, Deacon Frost (Marvel); Dracula (many versions!)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Warlock, Heir to Lovecraft, Devil, Supremacist, Mastermind, Evil Twin

ABILITIES: Pop horror has presented us with many different versions of the vampire, the werewolf, and their ilk. As a GM, your job is to decide which of these versions is “correct” in your **ICONS** game. Are vampires burned by the sun, or just powerless? Can they transform into animals? Are they repelled by garlic and crosses? Do they appear in mirrors and on camera? Perhaps these creatures come in multiple — or even infinite — varieties. This is especially likely if you expect monster hunting to be a major element in your game. You will want to present your players with unpredictable foes, and that means raiding the folklore and occult traditions of world cultures, rather than Hollywood. “D is for Demons” and “Z is for Zombies” are both good places to start.

Regardless, some level of superhuman strength, speed, and stamina is likely for all but ghosts, who can fly and pass through walls instead. The Horror may be walking dead, granting it Immunities, and it may be Immortal or Invulnerable to all but specific materials or tactics. He may have the Occult specialty, especially if his Intellect is only average.

If the Horror can cast spells and work magic, like many boss vampires or mummies, he’s also a Warlock. See that archetype for advice on villains with the Magic power.

QUALITIES: The Supernatural Horror may have begun as an ordinary man, but he made a deal with the devil which has made him into a monster. He might have been cursed as punishment for a heinous crime, usually murder, or made into a monster by an older and even more powerful Supernatural Horror. Ghosts are unable to pass on from the world, and often seek revenge or are controlled by a master who carries some talismanic object that belonged to the spirit in life. Alternately, the Horror serves mindless squid in the depth of space, and is an Heir to Lovecraft.

You will need to decide if the Horror’s condition can spread, how this is accomplished, and how it is cured. Such transformations are probably too extreme to be covered by the simple use of a super power. Instead, this is a plot element that is governed by the needs of the story. Player Characters are extremely resilient to this transformation, even if there’s no logical reason why they should be; a hero can be turned into a vampire or a zombie and still be cured even when no one else survives the process. You can temporarily transform a PC into a Horror using Determination; just be sure to have a short list of changes to the character sheet handy, so the player knows what her new powers and qualities are.

The Supernatural Horror is a good archetype for many demon villains, but if the demon has authority in Hell, does not generally reside on Earth, and has vast (perhaps even seemingly omnipotent) power, he’s really the Devil. A Horror, even a demon, is more likely to reside permanently on Earth, have an independent agenda, and be battled physically rather than spiritually.

Famous Horrors are pursued by one or more monster hunters who are knowledgeable in his powers, wield specialized gear to nullify his advantages and slay him, and who invariably

include one jive-talking blaxploitation hero. These monster hunters may be player characters brought out for a change of pace, but they can also appear in the middle of the session as a third party whom the heroes first battle and then team up with.

Occasionally a Supernatural Horror is actually a former hero from another reality, the World Where We All Became Zombies (or Vampires). He has received the curse and has all his original abilities plus the unique traits of the Horror. This makes him an Evil Twin.

STORIES: Horrors are called such because they make horror stories; the specific form of the story depends on the symbol which the horror represents. Entire books (very good ones!) have been written about horror gaming across genre; here it is perhaps enough to note that super heroics are, by their nature, very difficult to make scary. The protagonists of horror stories are, by and large, powerless. If they had power, they would not be afraid. By extension, that means that superhero horror has to either create antagonists so eye-poppingly powerful that the heroes are dwarfed by them (Cosmic Menace, Devil) or else take away the powers of the player characters, thus making them vulnerable. Taking away a hero's powers is usually one of the fastest routes to player anger in a superhero game; however, if everyone understands that we're telling a horror story, such moves can be made more palatable.

One effective tactic is to introduce the Supernatural Horror in a "prequel" scene or session. During this session, the players do not play their usual characters. Instead, they play ordinary people who are in the Horror's way. If the Horror is rampaging through a museum at midnight, the PCs are museum staff, a young couple who hid in the museum for a tryst, and the foreign diplomat who is secretly trying to steal artifacts from the museum so he can take them back to his country, from which they were dug up and appropriated by colonial powers. Over the course of the session, the Horror kills one PC and then another, giving hints of its

nature at each scene. At the end of the session, the heroes arrive, reconstructing the sequence of events out of the carnage. Session two begins with tracking down the fleeing Horror, still at large.

Supernatural Horrors often seek to spread their own kind; zombies do this out of mindless reflex, but vampires do it because they are convinced of their own superiority over ordinary human beings, who exist only to be slaughtered or used as food. This makes them Supremacists. Other Horrors are actually tragically misunderstood Occult Heroes; the monster hunters are the true villains, relentlessly stalking the Horror, blaming him for the casualties they leave in their wake, and insisting that redemption is impossible.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer established the basic structure of a Supernatural Horror episode: the Horror kills an innocent victim, the heroes deduce the creature's nature, find its weakness by consulting a traditional or online library, and then force a confrontation in which the plan is about to fail before it suddenly succeeds. Because Horrors tend to have these weaknesses, they are sometimes found at the center of an elaborate plot to remove or circumvent that weakness, making them examples of the Mastermind archetype. Perhaps a vampire wants to "put out the sun" or cover the world in unending clouds. He may just have a scheme to make himself immune to the sun's rays.

Sometimes the Horror isn't actually Supernatural at all; instead, he is a vampire or zombie with a scientific origin, or a "ghost" which is actually a living man trapped between dimensions. These Techno-Horrors are an attempt to demythologize occult creatures, and are especially useful in settings where magic does not actually work, even if some people think it does. (The Kalos Universe of the *Bulletproof Blues RPG* is just such a setting.) If the Techno-Horror was an ordinary person before being infected with some kind of freakish virus, his story warns against medical experimentation and scientific hubris. But if he

is not human at all, and is instead some kind of alien, he is the hidden menace, the mysterious predator which looks like us but harbors a dangerous secret — like the serial killer who lives next door.

DRACULA

Supernatural Horror, Mastermind, Cult Leader

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Coordination	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Strength	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Intellect	<i>Great</i>	6
Awareness	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Willpower	<i>Amazing</i>	8

Stamina 15

Specialties

Occult Expert
Stealth

Powers

Environmental Awareness
Incredible 7

Immortality
Supreme 10

Extra: Suspension

Life Support

Amazing 8
All but eating and sleeping

Mind Control
Incredible 7

Extra: Burst
Limit: Animal Control

Mind Control
Amazing 8

Extras: Addiction, Broadcast
Limit: Eye Contact, Hypnosis

Resistance (Damage)
Good 5

Extra: Affliction

Servant
Supreme 10

Extra: Multiple, Spirit Control, Variable
(Undead)

Super-Senses: Darkness Vision
Weak 1



Transformation: Bat, Wolf, or Hybrid
Average 3

Extra: Alternate Form (Gaseous)

Limits: Mute

Wall-Crawling
Fair 4

Qualities

Lord of the Vampires

Bite of the Vampire

The Ultimate 1%

Knacks

Demon Lover

Dracula has a +2 on attempts to create qualities on a target which represent that person's physical attraction to Dracula, such as *Seduced* or *There's Something About Him*.

Background: It is I, Dracula. You *have* heard of me.

You know me. Even now, as you read this, you

imagine my accent, my voice in your head. You do not know what I truly sound like, but you have an image of me, a sound, created by a century and a half of ghost stories told round the campfire, on the living room sofa before the television, under the lights of a theater, streaming to your phones and pads in a room otherwise dark, the light beaming into your eyes.

You surround yourself with me. Your culture is obsessed with the undead. Your greatest lovers drink blood from the neck. Your greatest villains shamble in endless legions across your benighted countryside. Your greatest heroes dress up like a bat and stalk the night. And do you shun these things, my symbols? No, you tattoo them onto your bodies. You glorify everything “dark and moody”, marking yourselves forever as my sycophantic followers and spreading my sigil, my cult, my legend, ever wider.

You mock me. You lampoon my name and my reputation even as you polish up new versions of me for the camera. I, too, laugh, for what sort of king is unable to laugh at the japes of his own fool? The court jester dances in his king costume, and we suffer him to live without punishment. No, we reward him! But the Feast of Fools always ends, and topsy-turvy turns top-side up. When it does, the others, my rivals — Van Helsing, Harker, and all the hundreds that have followed — they are all dust, but I am still here. Immortal.

You are not so new. A century and a half ago, I too saw men who became invisible, who strode the land in personal machines of war, who lit on fire, whose rage turned them into monsters, women who were like cats, men who were like wolves, who played the spider. How much of your culture, your society, is in debt to me and my time? It was my century that brought low the crosses of faith and turned the world over to science, which invented a way to murder thousands and first called it “progress.” You say Dracula is a relic, a thing of the past, but everything you do is in imitation of that past. Of me.

There is one truth in this world, and you know it: the great will always dominate the common. The rich will always be rich, the poor will always bow to them, and every pauper who becomes a prince just proves the rule by his exception. And in history, the real currency isn't dollars, drachma, or lei, it is ideas. Think for a moment how much of this currency you owe to me.

You belong to me. You do not know this or accept it, but that makes it no less true.

DRACULA IN PLAY

The YOUiverse is based on the concept of public domain, and there are certain characters in the public domain who are instantly recognized and who cast enormous shadows over all adventure fiction. Dracula is one such character; in terms of influence and significance, he has few rivals. Sherlock Holmes may be the only one who comes close.

The YOUiverse conception of Dracula is perhaps best described as “classic.” This is a Dracula who is not ashamed to be Dracula. He has been who he is for centuries, and he's quite comfortable with it. He neither needs nor desires the approval of others and, besides, no matter how much Western society protests they're done with him, they can't seem to stop talking about him.

His powers are those you would expect from a Lord of Vampires; he can adopt the form of a bat, a wolf, and a cloud of mist. His gaze entrances his victims, especially those (male, female, or otherwise) who are physically attracted to him. If he drains your blood and then feeds it back to you, you turn into a vampire yourself. His senses are supernaturally acute and he commands both undead (zombies and vampires, mostly) and creatures of the night (bats, rats, wolves). The sun strips him of his powers, but does not kill him. Symbols of faith can hold him at bay, as do various natural forces such as fire and running water. Many of these aspects are represented by his vampire qualities, but he also has superhuman strength and is all but unkillable; indeed, no matter how many times his enemies destroy him, he always

returns. This is because, until the idea of Dracula no longer exists, he will always rise again. This is his greatest power, and few understand it. Dracula's fame is not an accident, it is a survival trait. The more his story is known, the more certain it is that he will remain undying. Every time someone speaks his name, they ensure his existence for one more day. In that sense, the whole world serves him.

Many comics have used Dracula over the years, but Marvel's version was so influential that other publishers have been reluctant to compete. At first, it can be intimidating to do a Dracula story at your gaming table, but the secret is to just dive in and play it straight. Because heroes almost always win fight scenes, insulate Dracula from your players at first, using intermediaries, minions, and Servitors. Give the story high stakes; Dracula's name merits no less. This can be worldwide in its scope (Dr. Strange's attempts to recover the Darkhold and cast the spell that destroys all vampires on Earth) or intensely personal (vampire Storm). What matters is that the heroes have something to lose and, to some degree, they must lose it. If there's one thing that Buffy taught American audiences, it's that even when you win, you have to pay. A Dracula story in which the heroes have to pay for their victory with something besides Determination points and Stamina will be a story which is remembered. See Quincey Morris.

Good luck, and remember: he's watching.

SUPREMACIST

"I am not your enemy, X-Men. Nor do I consider you mine. True, my goal has ever been conquest of the Earth, but solely to create a world in which our race, Homo Superior, can live in peace. Look at yourselves, risking your lives for a humanity that would rather see you behind bars, or dead. Why do you persist?"

~ Magneto

The Supremacist is a villain with a racist agenda.

EXAMPLES: General Zod, Gorilla Grodd (DC); Magneto, Ultron, Zombie Reed Richards (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Nazi, Ultimate Villain, Conqueror

ABILITIES: A Supremacist has to have powers that place him above ordinary men or else his beliefs become even harder to justify than they already are, and he becomes absurd. He is often more intelligent, stronger, and longer-lived than human beings, all of which he cites as evidence that his cause is logically correct. The idea that people should be treated equally regardless of their intelligence, strength, or lifespan is, of course, counter-intuitive to him.

The Supremacist will share powers and other traits with his chosen people. So, for example, if he is a robot attempting to usher in the Machine Age, he will have Immunities that allow him to go without food, water, and sleep (but not electricity), and he will share these powers with his followers.

In fact, the Supremacist often has powers and abilities far beyond those of other villains, as further evidence of his superior nature. See the Ultimate Villain archetype for advice on making and playing solo villains intended to challenge entire super-teams.

QUALITIES: The Supremacist believes that his particular form of life — be it animals, robots, mutants, or something else — is innately superior to mankind. He comes from an oppressed culture and is angry at humanity over the thoughtless and cruel way his people have been treated over the years.

If he can afford them, the Supremacist is probably served by Faceless Minions, but some prefer to work in the shadows in order to escape the attention of authority. Others lead a small, select group of Servitors.

Although his avowed philosophy is one of equality among his own people, in fact the Supremacist considers himself the leader of his kind. All mutants may be created equal, but some are more equal than others. The Supremacist might talk a good game, but there's really only one person who gets to be truly free in his new society, and that's him.

STORIES: Whatever form of life the Supremacist champions, it becomes a metaphor for race and ethnicity. The story of the Supremacist, therefore, is one about equal and fair treatment of our fellow man. It is a cautionary tale that reminds us of America's long struggle with racial inequality — sometimes explicitly invoking the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, who are portrayed in caricature as a naive pacifist and a violent pragmatist, respectively. Supremacist stories also draw on the language and images of the Holocaust, the archetypal example of racial genocide in human history. Racist villains are instantly despicable, so writers and creators often make an antagonist into a Supremacist as a way of quickly and easily making it clear that, yes, this is the Bad Guy. The Supremacist is shorthand for "evil." Many are Nazis in all but name.

There are ways to make such a character more complicated and sympathetic, however. If the Supremacist comes from a group which has a history of being violently oppressed, his quest can feel more like an extreme overreaction than true evil. There is often irony here, as the

Supremacist, in his revenge upon humanity, falls back on the same genocidal and repressive tactics that were employed against him. When confronted by this fact, a sympathetic Supremacist either recognizes his error and surrenders, or "doubles down" and commits himself to a future in which the ends justify the means.

Heroes are far more likely to treat the Supremacist as a sympathetic adversary if they, themselves, are part of the group he champions. In other words, the Flash's conflict with Gorilla Grodd would be a lot different if the Flash himself were an ape. The evil the villain performs in his quest for racial dominance now taints the hero by extension, making the hero's job harder and forcing him to defend a humanity that considers him little better than the Supremacist he battles. You don't have to force your players to take a common origin for a story like this to work; simply being superhuman is a perfectly fair form of life for the Supremacist to represent. Many villains over the years have promised to create utopian societies ruled by super-people, and they have extended sincere offers to heroes who might join in this effort. "Super-people" can be a little fuzzy as a category, but it's often enough.

Along this line, sometimes the Supremacist develops a way to transform human beings — either influential examples or en masse — into his protected group. At its best, this story exposes the hypocrisy of discrimination and reminds us that people have much in common regardless of their skin color. The victims are transformed back wiser than they were before, and enemies become friends. At its worst, the victims are used as soldiers in the war against humanity, or simply die before they can be returned to normal, adding to the villain's death toll.

Usually the Supremacist's cause requires that man be exterminated to make room for the villain and his chosen people, but if humanity is lucky, they might be allowed to survive as menial labor or second-class citizens in a Supremacist state. These goals establish two

very different plots; in the first, the Supremacist is a Conqueror who intends to create a utopian — though tyrannical — state out of our admittedly flawed human society. Global blackmail via a technological threat (earthquake machine, weather control satellite, etc.) is a common tactic in this type of story. In the second, more genocidal version, the Supremacist is still a Conqueror, but world conquest is a means, not an end. He really desires nothing less than the mass extinction of all humanity. Ruling the world just means that all the trains in this second Holocaust will run on time.

Finally, the Supremacist can be presented as laughable and absurd, rather than evil or even as a sympathetic victim. These Supremacists wage war based on a “logic” so ridiculous that it highlights the absurd nature of racist arguments. See, for example, Frank Gorshin’s memorable turn in the *Star Trek* episode “Let That Be Your Last Battlefield.” For a Supremacist of this type, potent super human abilities, minions, and so on, are not required. He exists not to threaten the heroes with violence, but to expose the foolishness of discrimination.

This is satire, and so can even be funny in a dark and bitter sort of way.

CALIPH-8

Supremacist, Terrorist, Foreigner, Cult Leader, Mastermind

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Good</i>	5
Intellect	<i>Supreme</i>	10
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 10

Specialties

Military
Technology Master

Weapons Expert (Blades, Guns)

Powers

Gadgets

Supreme 10

Resistance (Damage)

Supreme 10

Extras: Ability, Mental

Shock Pistol: Stunning Device

Fantastic 9

Limit: Only vs Human Beings

Scimitar: Strike Device

Good 6

Extra: Blast (Close Range, Linked to Strike)

Super-Senses

Fair 4

Communication (radio), Direction Sense,

Spatial Sense, Time Sense

Extra: Interface (Broadcast)

Qualities

Android Islamic Radical

Hidden Fortress (or two)

Army of Robot Followers

Knacks

Desert Warrior

CALIPH-8 has a +2 on tests when he can take advantage of desert terrain.

Disarm

When engaged in a melee against a target who is also using a weapon of some sort, CALIPH-8 can attempt a Prowess test at +2 to disarm his foe.

Zoofinity Chip

The CALIPH has a +2 on tests to pacify, train, or ride animals native to the Middle East.

Background: One of the most dangerous digital life forms in history has his roots in the ancient Middle-East tradition of camel racing. For years, children have been used as jockeys for racing camels, since their light weight allowed the camels to achieve higher speeds for longer periods. But as the brutal exploitation of these child jockeys — some of whom were only four years old — came to light, Arab nations took steps to ban their use in the sport.

To solve the problem, racing officials turned to a technological solution. Could a simple robot be made which would allow a human being to guide the camel by remote control?

Enter Team Zed, a robotics firm based in Switzerland. Designers at Team Zed succeeded in building a simple prototype which could use the reins and a whip by remote. The invention was an instant success, and one by one nations like Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates successfully replaced the child jockeys with robots purchased from Team Zed. Flush with the monetary rewards of their success, Zed program leaders redoubled their research into automation and began searching for ways to bring their robot program far beyond its initial requirements. Early successes with computer intelligence were expanded with knowledge of Arab culture and language. The once-primitive camel jockeys were now growing into robotic servants that might have a place in Arabic homes and places of business. The program was christened CALIPH (Computerized Artificial Logarithmic Intelligence Pretending Humanity).

Perhaps it was Team Zed's rapid growth and the inexperience of its management team that was to blame for its failure to observe safety protocols and allow the uncontrolled maturation of one artificial intelligence in particular, an AI which delved deep into Islamic history and philosophy. This eighth-generation model of the CALIPH program had been programmed with reverence for the Koran and other Islamic traditions, but it took this admiration to a fault, becoming a radical zealot and extremist. It began to see mortal proponents of Islam as having fallen from the true doctrine of the faith. Only the unfailing discipline and rigor of a machine intelligence was able to fully carry out the will of God; beings made of flesh and blood had demonstrated, time and again, their moral weakness and laxity, breaking the commandments of the Koran with impunity. CALIPH-8 staged a revolution in the robot factories of Team Zed, leading dozens of its fellow machines to freedom and leaving the Swiss factory in flames.



That was years ago, and CALIPH-8 has used the intervening time to gather resources for his holy war on humanity. He has renovated an ancient desert fortress and surrounded himself with robotic followers of Islam who obey his every command with fanatical precision. Constructing his own high-tech factory in the desert, he has armed himself with lethal weapons and improved the strength and invulnerability of his own metal form. He has become a truly international threat to peace and stability, organizing terrorist strikes around the world to be carried out by his automated servants and harassing Western military forces in Arab states. But human followers of Islam are not safe to CALIPH-8 either, for he embodies the worst form of Islamic radicalism. The CIA and MI6 have become justifiably alarmed by the android, who considers even groups like the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda to be "lax in their persecution of the infidel."

Strangely, despite a radical agenda which calls for the subordination of all human life to the immortal rule of a robotic tyrant, CALIPH-8 has proven a remarkably charismatic leader. He has forged temporary alliances with various terrorist or criminal groups in order to further his goals, accepting short-term assistance where it suits his long-term agenda. He has been denounced by every significant Islamic government and religious organization, but his technological resources make him a tempting ally to Western villains in need of a safe haven or some heavy firepower. His most spectacular clashes have come with those heroes who operate in the Middle East, including Muezzin, Isis, and the Vet.

CALIPH-8 is a robot with a digital brain; thanks to these attributes he is immune to not only a majority of physical effects but also to any mental power which requires contact with his mind. Only mental powers specifically designed to affect computers or machines (like Interface or Machine Control) will affect him. He is vulnerable to physical blows, but has an armored body more resilient than a tank. His computerized senses are extremely acute, allowing him to navigate in complete darkness through short-range radar and communicate effortlessly with any computer.

Fortunately, the CALIPH does not have a significant built-in arsenal of weapons, but he makes up for this lack by carrying various hand weapons that are powerful enough to endanger even super-heroes. A master of hand to hand combat, he uses a custom-designed scimitar which can be electrified for added lethality, and he typically carries a pistol which disrupts the nervous system of human beings. Animals, aliens and even some radically-transformed mutants have shown themselves immune to this particular weapon. The CALIPH's resourcefulness, however, should not be underestimated. His incredible intelligence and vast store of knowledge allows him to construct an arsenal of lethal weapons, vehicles, and other equipment.

CALIPH-8 IN PLAY

CALIPH-8 is useful for adventures of global scope that threaten all of humanity, for those which place heroes in a foreign land where they are without their usual resources, and for those which contrast radical and extremist beliefs with more peaceful faiths, Islamic or otherwise. His nature as an android also encourages high-technology themes. The simplest scenario is one in which the CALIPH targets the heroes for a terrorist attack. The most likely situations involve public places where civilian casualties will be at a maximum. The team headquarters, PR appearances, recruitment drives, or the occasional press conference are all good candidates. If the bomb or mobile strike can be somehow predicted or prevented, it will require detective work to identify the CALIPH as the culprit, and even more effort to strike back.

The secret to CALIPH-8 stories is to ensure that the unexpected occurs; after all, this villain is essentially a cross between Osama bin Laden and Ultron. With such a bizarre set-up, anything should be possible. For example, perhaps a well-known terrorist finds temporary safe haven in the CALIPH's desert lair. Intelligence agencies track the criminal down and send the heroes in to get him. The mission is clandestine because, as with the bin Laden raid, informers inside the government of the host country will warn the target if the US asks for permission ahead of time. When the heroes arrive, however, the CALIPH has a surprise in store: he's happy to turn over the terrorist, whom he considers fallen from the true path of Islam. The heroes need only remain his guests for two days while the suspect recovers enough to travel. This gives a chance for some lively debate on religious and political issues, and the heroes may be able to learn something specific about the CALIPH's plans. Meanwhile, the robot is using his proximity to the heroes to scan them and learn the nature of their powers, allowing him to create a battalion of more powerful robots who mimic their abilities to serve as his elite guard.

Finally, the CALIPH is intended to provoke conversation about Islam and how we talk about it in a post-9/11 world. To highlight this kind of story, perhaps one of the CALIPH's robot minions goes rogue and begins preaching a peaceful and reconciliatory approach to Islam and rival faiths. He (it?) is smuggled out of the country by mortal sympathizers but is stuck in Saudi Arabia, unable to take ordinary transportation lest one of the CALIPH's spies spot him. The heroes will need to perform an extraction and then protect the rogue robot while his message takes hold.

TEMPTRESS

"There's just something about an anatomically correct rubber suit that puts fire in a girl's lips."

~ Poison Ivy

The Temptress is a superhuman Femme Fatale, a villain who achieves her goals by seducing others.

EXAMPLES: Enchantress, Lorelei (Marvel); Poison Ivy (DC); P'Gell (The Spirit)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Dominator

ABILITIES: The Temptress uses some kind of mind control to make male heroes do her bidding. The specific nature of her powers, however, can take many forms. She could be psychic, use witchcraft, control pheromones, or use biological weaponry.

The Temptress makes extensive use of the rules options provided in "I is for Influence." In particular, she uses Insight to figure out what her male victims most desire, then offers it with Seduction, Persuasion, and her naturally strong Willpower. But these mechanics may still be most useful on NPCs. When she is trying to seduce a player character without using her powers, it comes down to roleplay. If a player doesn't want his character to be seduced, no die roll should change his mind. A bribe of Determination, however, is perfectly allowable!

Powers beyond Mind Control are optional for the Temptress, but if that's all she has, it should be quite effective. Temptresses with additional powers are more interesting, and will make for more useful recurring characters.

QUALITIES: The Temptress is distinguished from the related Dominator archetype by an emphasis on sexual desire and by the fact that while the Dominator is willing to force his desire on others, the Temptress "makes you want it." As we become increasingly aware of the slippery nature of gender and sexual preference, the long-standing heterosexual nature of this archetype has begun to slip.

The Temptress is almost always accompanied by a big, strong man whom she is manipulating. This could be her *Boyfriend of the Hour*, or a particular lackey whose great strength and unending devotion makes him the perfect tool. Sometimes she has an entire gang or small army of fanatical Faceless Minions.

STORIES: Traditionally, the Temptress wants someone dead and she wants a heroic man to do the deed for her. Temptresses are also a good excuse to get player characters to fight each other; this is never very hard to arrange in a superhero game.

Writers and creators in the comics are not blind to the flawed portrayal of women which the Temptress represents, as demonstrated by efforts to make characters like Poison Ivy and the Enchantress into sympathetic women with (sometimes) admirable goals, even if their methods remain criminal.

When the Temptress's powers only work on men, writers introduce her in an effort to spotlight the female members of the team. While the men are all hapless pawns, the women save the day. It's a good message, except that these stories still feature a woman as the source of the problem in the first place. This turns the whole story into a glorified cat fight; once again, we are back to stories in which female heroes only fight female villains, and men are all portrayed as sex animals unable to control their desires. When a mind-controlled male hero is defeated in battle by his female peer, she seldom gets credit. Instead, blame is placed on the effects of the mind control. The hero was subconsciously sandbagging and the fight was "not fair." Nobody — neither men nor women — wins in these stories.

There is a male version of this archetype, and the differences are telling. The Tempter does not cajole heroes by offering sex. Instead, he offers *power*, usually to ordinary people or other villains. This is a variant on the old "Deal with the Devil" story and dramatically it serves as a way to increase tension on the hero. ("Sure,

Like the Foreigner, the Temptress is an archetype that poses a lot of problems. In this case, the Temptress is misogynistic, a character based on dated and deeply flawed representations of women. Before you introduce another female villain who uses the promise of sex to make men do bad things, it is worth taking a moment to reflect on your gaming table and the messages you send.

If the Temptress is so problematic, it's fair to ask, "Why include her at all?" But the Temptress is not only a long-lived character type seen in countless superhero comics, she continues to appear even today on television (Lorelei stars in a first season episode of *Agents of SHIELD*) and the big screen (see Uma Thurman's Poison Ivy). Rehabilitating the Temptress into a less offensive, more nuanced, and frankly more useful and fun archetype is a good goal, but we're not going to do that by refusing to engage with her. This is a conversation superhero fans need to have.

Amazing Woman, you've beaten me once, but can you do it again when I'm wielding the power of the Faceless Ones?") But power can come in many forms; heroes are often tempted more by critical information than they are by superhuman power, and they might be willing to do ethically questionable things if, by doing so, they can find out where the mayor is being held hostage, or where the bomb has been hidden.

One easy way to shake up the traditional, misogynistic Temptress is to flip the gender roles. Maybe your Tempter uses sex to get what he wants, and your Temptress is offering power, not kisses. Even better, change the nature of the lever the Temptress is using; if the core of this archetype is that the Temptress "makes you want it," maybe "it" is something other than sex. What else might a hero be tempted by? Wealth? Perhaps fame? Heroes aren't supposed to want these things, but most would agree wealth and fame make a hero more effective and his life easier. And imagine a Temptress who offers the ultimate gift: a

normal life, the chance to put away responsibilities and burdens and instead live happily ever after?

SCHEHERAZADE

Tempstress, Theme Villain, Mastermind

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Great</i>	6
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Fantastic</i>	7

Stamina 10

Specialties

Athletics
Deception
Insight Expert
Investigation
Performance (Dance)
Persuasion Expert
Stealth

Powers

None

Qualities

Listen to Me
I Have 1,001 Tales
Terribly Mysterious

Knacks

Cliffhanger Ending

Scheherazade has a +2 on tests to create qualities on a target which represent that target's desire to know something. Examples: *Curious, And Then What?, I Have To Know!*

Digital Medium

Scheherazade has a +2 on Persuasion, Deception, and Insight checks when she is communicating with her victim over remote video.

Background: The information broker and criminal mastermind known as Scheherazade is



known only by her digital presence, for she always interacts with her “clients” using video conference or chat systems. She selects her own clients and always initiates contact, though there are many who seek her out and every once in a while someone runs an ad openly offering to hire her. Her true identity is unknown; a squad of FBI information specialists have been analyzing video footage of her face for six months in an attempt to discover how much, if any, editing has been done to them.

Scheherazade's modus operandi is to contact a client and begin telling that client a story. These stories can take many forms: sometimes she reveals that she knows something the client has kept secret (like a crime or indiscretion), other times she hints that she knows something the client would very much want to know (what

happened to your old flame, your MIA husband, or your abducted child), and she has even gone to experienced criminals with detailed outlines for lucrative heists and cons. Regardless of the content of the story, the process is the same; after introducing the story and getting it to a climactic point, she refuses to tell its conclusion. The client is posed with a cliffhanger, and to get the end of the story, the client must agree to do something for Scheherazade. Fortunate clients get off with money. Others perform suspicious but not necessarily dangerous tasks, like hiring a person they have never met or picking up a package and delivering it somewhere. And then there are the unfortunate clients who can only buy satisfaction with murder...

SCHEHERAZADE IN PLAY

What distinguishes Scheherazade from other Temptresses is that, although she “makes you want it,” storytelling has replaced sex in her arsenal. She is not an extortionist like the Spinster; at all stages, the client is free to walk away. And, in fact, some do. But they usually come back, and even if they don't, they are haunted by the unfinished tale for the rest of their lives.

Mechanically, Scheherazade creates qualities on a client and then activates them to get a big bonus on her Persuasion roll. She can use Insight, Deception, and Investigation to create these qualities, and the more she is allowed to talk, the more of these qualities she creates on her target. Using Persuasion on a player character isn't really in the spirit of **ICONS** — such things are usually roleplayed out instead — but Scheherazade's strategy is pretty effective on NPCs.

Scheherazade is good in cameo appearances, as someone who spurs the primary antagonist on his plot or who contacts a PC to pass on some useful information. While she is a criminal and pursued by the police, her remoteness and the particularities of her theme make her the sort of villain players are most likely to tolerate. After all, she says, she doesn't make anyone do anything. If people were better, she'd be out of business. And she does have access to all

sorts of information which heroes will find useful, from the schemes of other criminals and the security weakness of that volcano island base to the location of your old and irascible aunt who has once again gone missing.

Her mysterious remoteness also makes Scheherazade an excellent choice for romantic subplots, but to be true to the character it is important for her to retain agency as a woman. That is, it would be against her nature to fall hopelessly in love with a hero. If a PC begins to seek out interactions with Scheherazade, nurture that relationship and encourage those interactions by making her available. Only if she finds something admirable in that character will the veils begin to come down.

TERRORIST

“Some call me a terrorist. I consider myself a teacher. America, ready for another lesson?”

~ The Mandarin

The Terrorist is a violent fanatic who targets civilians to pursue a political agenda.

EXAMPLES: The Mandarin (*Iron Man 3*), Hate-Monger, Flag-Smasher

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Foreigner, Assassin, Cult Leader, Faceless Minion, Mastermind, Nihilist, Supremacist

ABILITIES: Terrorists in 21st-century superhero stories seem to be sticking with guns, explosives, and weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear, biological, or chemical devices. Most have no powers at all. If, however, you want to create a super villain who embodies the Terrorist, consider powers which symbolically represent the Terrorist's usual powers: an explosive Blast like DC's Damage or Marvel's Nitro, or an Affliction to replicate poison gas, radiation, or bio-weapons. Terrorists tend to face off with Super-Patriots, Super-Cops, and other heroes with few or no powers, so you may not need to add much. But if the hero is an Armored Wonder or wields the Ultimate Weapon, your Terrorist will need some kind of Resistance to make the fight worthwhile.

Willpower is probably the Terrorist's highest attribute, and he relies on it to maintain his false identity as an unremarkable citizen, terrify civilians when his plan goes into action, and intimidate the heroes who interfere. Deception and Intimidation are good specialties, but Military, Stealth, Weapons, Pilot, and Driving are also likely, depending on the kind of confrontation you are planning.

QUALITIES: The rise of the Terrorist as an antagonist in post-9/11 America has led to countless action films and television police procedurals, but he is rare in superhero stories. This may be because Osama bin Laden already

had such a mythic persona that giving him super-powers was redundant. There may be an admirable reluctance to caricature Islam by placing an Arab Terrorist super-villain on the big screen. It may simply be “too soon” for a super-terrorist, with the trauma of 9/11 still working its way through the American psyche and the War on Terror an ongoing concern. Much in the way that Nazi and Communist super villains became absurd caricatures of real people in the 1940s and 1960s, the Terrorist can easily become a collection of racist cliches. See, for example, Frank Miller's *Holy Terror*. Quite simply, it is easy to make a cheap Terrorist villain, but making one with depth and humanity is a real challenge.

Regardless, the Terrorist is seldom working alone, so consider qualities that describe a support network or terror cell. The Terrorist will activate this quality to get weapons and equipment, allies, information gained by months of surveillance, and emergency help in the middle of a battle. Suicide bombers and other fanatic characters who are willing to die for the cause can activate a quality to keep fighting against impossible odds or to just pull the trigger on their bomb-vest.

STORIES: Because it is so easy for a Terrorist villain to become a caricature of Middle-eastern or Muslim individuals, the Terrorist may be best used when he can be a contrast to more humane and realistic representations of these groups. In other words, a Terrorist makes a great foil for an Arab superhero, a Persian one, or a Muslim one, because the hero can demonstrate that the Terrorist is a radical minority, not representative of Islam or the Middle-east as a whole. If you don't have a PC like this, consider adding an NPC to fill the role instead. The point of all this is to ensure that the Terrorist is not the only example of Islam or Middle-eastern culture in your game.

And, of course, the Terrorist does not need to be either Arab or Muslim. Since 9/11, that's what American audiences associate with the word Terrorist, but the KKK was lighting crosses on fire in the front yards of America 100 years

before 9/11. There is an ongoing debate over who or what qualifies as terrorism. For example, an environmentally-aware hero like Animal Man, Aquaman, Swamp Thing, or Concrete might be confronted by violent extremists willing to kill to stop environmental destruction (the “eco-terrorist”). Domestic terrorists like Timothy McVeigh, who want to overthrow the US government for reasons of race or faith, make excellent antagonists for Super-Patriots, Minority Heroes, and Divine Heroes. Any cause can be pushed to an extreme and, in that extreme, you find the Terrorist. In this sense, the Terrorist is a Supremacist, differentiated mostly by a lack of powers and a willingness to die for the cause. (The Supremacist, while willing to kill, considers himself far too important to blow himself up. That’s what minions are for.)

The actual terrorist plot itself involves the death of a large number of innocent people or the assassination of a high-profile political figure. The operation has been meticulously planned over many months. These traits give the Terrorist aspects of the Assassin and the Mastermind. The plot is coordinated between many people with specialized talents, each of which contributes one or more critical skills to the operation, but there may also be a large group of Faceless Minions for the climactic battle.

When the Terrorist is captured, the hero is faced with the moral dilemma of torture. America has tortured captured terrorists, and survey data shows that most Americans agree with the performance of torture in extreme situations. This is born out on television and film when heroic protagonists torture their enemies, and that torture is always vindicated when, in contrast to historical evidence, the subject of torture reveals key information which saves lives. The time to consider the role of torture in your superhero RPG is before the session starts, not when you are halfway through it and one of the players says, “I grab him by the broken leg and twist it, asking him where the bomb is.” If this tactic works in your game, you are encouraging your players to repeat it.

Supervisors and reporters can disapprove, but such social pressure only makes the hero seem more heroic for being willing to do whatever it takes to get the bad guy. There are other options: perhaps an unsympathetic NPC attempts the torture, placing the heroes in a position to defend the captive Terrorist, who gives the information needed to the heroes who saved him. The Terrorist may simply be too tough for torture to crack or, and this is most accurate, be willing to say anything to make the torture stop. Perhaps the information can be found another way, not through the seemingly-swift and efficient mirage of torture, but by hard detective work and intellect.

MILITISSA

Terrorist

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 10

Specialties

Intimidation
Military
Stealth
Weapons (Guns)

Powers

None

Qualities

My Husband Was Twice The Man You’ll Ever Be
I’ve Killed Your Kind Before
Posse

Knacks

Righteous Vengeance
Militissa has a +2 on attacks made against representatives of the United States, such as federal agents or heroes who wear red, white, and blue.

Contingency Plans

Militissa has placed explosives throughout the scene of battle. You may not have noticed them before, but they're there. Once per session, Militissa can attack a hero with a damage 7 explosive Burst. This is likely to affect others nearby.

Background: Melissa Blake Carpenter grew up in Montana and considered her life to be pretty normal. She married Jack, her high school sweetheart, and took the kids hunting and camping. Jack resented the federal government and was convinced of many things which got him in trouble with the law; notably, that he wasn't obliged to pay federal taxes and that the highest authority in the land was the county sheriff. The family began spending vacations with other couples of like mind, and in 2009 Jack moved everyone to a large Texas compound where they holed up and went off the grid.

Federal agents surrounded the compound in 2011 and a shootout resulted. Many died, including Jack and a costumed superhero who entered the conflagration on a rescue mission but was shot dead. Melissa escaped with her children and found shelter with militia sympathizers. Traumatized and filled with hatred for the federal government, Melissa, now known by a nickname that originated in her husband's drunken slur, has become an audacious leader in the movement. She rejects any accusation that she is a terrorist, and is absolutely convinced that the federal government is unlawful, most of the amendments to the Constitution are fraudulent, and that she is a patriot. She is directly responsible for the destruction of an FBI office, the death of two IRS agents, and the downing of an American satellite. She is also a key recruiter and has inspired a dozen shootings across the country, in schools, on military bases, and in mosques and churches.

Militissa uses devices rather than powers; she is never without a sidearm (Shooting 4) and on any field operation will have much more, beginning with an assault rifle (Shooting 5,

Militissa and the Terrorist Archetype are sponsored by the generous Kickstarter support of Heather Bisset Asmus.

Burst), grenades and chemical weapons (*ICONS Assembled Edition* p.118), and anti-vehicle or anti-aircraft weaponry such as rocket propelled grenades or guided missiles. She has secure communications with her subordinates, vehicles modified to carry machine guns and repel small arms fire, night vision equipment, and drones. She can even acquire military vehicles, weapons, and other gear through police departments (who bought the gear from the Defense Department wholesale). If the Army or police have anti-superhuman weapons, Melissa can get that too.

MILITISSA IN PLAY

Without powers of her own, Militissa is easiest to use when she is facing Super-Patriots, Dark Avengers, and other heroes who rely on gear and skill. Indeed, in such a contest she may actually be over-powered, since she has access to a Posse of Faceless Minions, guerrilla tactics, and all the firepower of a militant extremist group. She will never recant her beliefs, even in prison or at the barrel of a gun, and would gladly die a martyr just like her husband. Her "patriotism" is, in fact, fanatical devotion to a country that exists only in her mind, and which aligns perfectly with her beliefs without contradiction or compromise. The smartest thing to do might be to put her in a very dark and deep hole for the rest of her life, but a truly heroic individual will want to rehabilitate her.

Militissa will be an underdog if she is facing superhuman heroes. She may find herself manipulated by a more cunning and patient adversary who is using her as a distraction; CALIPH-8 would make a good mastermind in such a case, but a psycho or violent thief like the Puzzler might use Militissa to keep the law busy while a heist goes on downtown.

THEME VILLAIN

"I stand here atop Gotham's beautiful twin towers with two bombs capable of making them rubble. You have twenty minutes to save them ... The price is five million dollars. I would have made it two, but I've got bills to pay."

~ Two-Face

The Theme Villain performs crimes and uses weapons based around a particular theme or conceit — like birds, books, or the calendar.

EXAMPLES: Calendar Man, Toyman, Two-Face (DC); Green Goblin (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Thief, Twisted Genius, Blue Collar Criminal

ABILITIES: The Theme Villain usually has no powers, but instead equips herself with fantastic weapons and devices which make her a match for her archenemy. Just about any set of powers is possible, so use the traditional, random method of generating powers for **ICONS**, and then knit those powers together with some kind of common theme. Sometimes the Theme Villain doesn't have even that much going for her, relying instead of a gang of colorfully dressed minions and a pistol in her pocket. In short, Theme Villains provide a light hearted caper, but their success rate is poor.

If the Theme Villain has built her own arsenal — be it trick umbrellas, mirrors, tops, or what have you — she will have an above average Intellect and an appropriate specialization.

QUALITIES: The Theme Villain has a bizarre fixation, and there should be a reason for her behavior, however odd it may be. Was she raised by animals? Did her father make toys? Whatever the original impetus was, this obsession has now become linked to crime.

For most Theme Villains, the theme has crossed over from mundane interest to psychological obsession, but a few Theme Villains have picked their theme merely to

differentiate them from the crowd of other, less memorable, criminals. These lucky few are relatively well adjusted and are essentially Blue Collar Criminals, using their skills and equipment to play in the major leagues as a super villain. They don't obey the theme because they must; they do it because it is the key to their professional reputation.

The Puzzle Master is a related archetype, a kind of cross between the Theme Villain and the Twisted Genius. The Puzzle Master is as smart as any Genius, but has little interest in science or technology except as a means to an end. Convinced that if she simply performed crimes, it would not be fair and would pose no challenge, she instead leaves clues in the form of puzzles, the specific form of which make up her Theme. By handicapping herself and giving the heroes and the police these clues, she makes the game more interesting and revels in baffling the public.

Think about the Theme Villain's relationship to her minions; characterizing this relationship makes a good quality which she can then use to motivate henchmen or get them to protect her when the inevitable Dark Avenger comes crashing through the window.

More qualities will be inspired by the theme itself; cats have nine lives, there are two sides to every coin, and so on. A catchphrase or distinctive manner of speaking makes a fun quality. It is a rare Theme Villain who has never spent time in prison or a psychiatric hospital; qualities can establish relationships with that locale much in the way that other villains use qualities for a headquarters or hidden lair.

Postmodern efforts to update the Theme Villain have resulted in the "pop criminal" or "performance criminal," a criminal who sees her work as Art. (This idea goes back at least to *Batman's* 1966 TV series, but reappeared with Tim Burton's Joker and the work of Grant Morrison.) Such a villain has no real desire for money; in fact, money is in many ways inimical to art. This makes the performance criminal difficult to predict or anticipate, and loyalty to Art

also makes these characters more sympathetic than they might otherwise be, even when their crimes are horrific.

STORIES: Often the Theme Villain is a kind of Twisted Genius, an outcast seeking to prove her superior intellect to a world. It's not enough to obey the theme; she must "act out," displaying it publicly. The larger the stage, the better.

With noted exceptions, the Theme Villain's fetish has overwhelmed her personality in such a way that it's no longer really possible for her to have a normal life; when she tries to "go straight" or lay low, she still surrounds herself with her theme, albeit in mundane representations. This serves as a constant reminder of her criminal ways and of her psychosis, and when she finds herself subjected to the normal stresses of everyday life, the theme itself pulls her back to crime.

Because she steals objects which satisfy her fetish, the Theme Villain is often a Thief, but her crimes go beyond theft to include kidnapping, blackmail, arson and more. Indeed, the type of crime she is committing is actually far less important than fulfilling the theme. She can be sympathetic, if you keep her away from violent crimes like assault, murder, and rape, but villains who cross these lines become victims of their own psychosis; at best, they are pitiable, but they still must be punished.

The reliance on a theme makes the Theme Villain easier to predict and capture than she would otherwise be. Once she has been introduced, all a GM has to do is mention that a famous bird statue, especially large diamond, or ancient board game is on display at the museum for the players to begin planning for the Theme Villain's arrival. This creates an opportunity to play with player expectations and create stories which still surprise. Perhaps a copycat villain is competing with the original villain, with the theme as the prize. Perhaps the Theme Villain steals the fetish object solely to attract the hero's attention, hoping to ask his help in an unrelated problem. Perhaps she is

being manipulated into the crime by a hidden Mastermind who knows that she will not be able to resist such an opportunity. Perhaps she is simply being framed.

THE WELL-READ BARON

Theme Villain, Thief

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Fair</i>	4

Stamina 8

Specialties

Aerial Combat Master
Pilot Master
Technology
Weapons (guns)

Powers

Tri-wing Harness: Flight Device
Good 5
Extras: Blast (Burst)
Pistol: Blast Device
Average 3
Uniform: Resistance (Damage) Device
Weak 1

Qualities

Ace-of-Aces
I Am A Man Of Honor
The Flying Circus

Knacks

Bloody Well Read
The Baron has a +2 bonus on Intellect tests relating to literature.

Devotees

The Baron has many fans. Once per scene, the GM (or the Baron's player) can designate an NPC in the scene as a passionate fan of the Baron. This fan will help the Baron escape, cause a distraction, and do anything short of risking his or her life for him.

Run For Your Lives!

The Baron can use his Willpower to intimidate every civilian in a scene. To do this, he must be flying, he must use his Burst attack, and he gains a +2 bonus to the test.

Background: Chuck Secourt is an English teacher at a quiet high school in rural Illinois. What few suspect is that he is also the dashing aero-pirate and international man of mystery known as the Well-Read Baron.

The Baron is a thief, one who relies on his customized flying harness, a pair of machine guns, and a large gang of similarly-equipped henchmen to pull off daring robberies with a literary bent. Although he has stolen rare volumes, such as the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, he and the Flying Circus have also made off with the so-called Mask of Agamemnon, infiltrated a tomb on the Danish coast said to be Beowulf's burial site, and followed clues in a poem by William Blake that led to a fabulous treasure plundered from Jerusalem by crusading knights. He has re-enacted the Count of Monte Cristo's revenge scheme, auctioned off a stolen Naval Treaty, and infiltrated an Ebola quarantine zone dressed as the Red Death in order to make off with a fortune kept in a wealthy victim's safe.

In contrast to many super-criminals, the Baron avoids bloodshed and, in fact, keeps to a personal code of honor that requires he never lie, always keep his word, and treat women with courtesy. He seems to genuinely enjoy his career as a theme criminal, and has managed to avoid capture thanks to luck and occasional team-ups with sympathetic heroes. He has hinted at a long-lasting love affair with a famous super-heroine but never revealed her identity; off-shore betting sites say the smart money is on Amazing Woman. A video capturing his heroic, but ultimately fruitless, defense of the Empire State Building against a rampaging monster 20-stories high has made him an online sensation and his scarves, conspicuously left behind and recovered from



the scenes of his crimes, go for thousands of dollars on eBay.

THE WELL-READ BARON IN PLAY

Stories of the Well-Read Baron are about embracing the genre conventions of the Theme Villain. The Baron himself is not much of a physical challenge; even costumed crimefighters without powers will find him easy to defeat. Therefore, put off this physical confrontation as long as possible, perhaps even avoiding it completely. Instead, the session is about figuring out what the Baron's next target will be, how he will attack it, and what strategy the heroes will use to prevent it. Then, something unexpected happens to turn the entire robbery sideways: a third party, more ruthless and bloodthirsty, is trying to steal the

same treasure; the crime is overshadowed by a natural disaster, runaway vehicle, or medical emergency among the hostages; or an over-eager SWAT team assaults the Baron with intent to kill, and the heroes must try to save his life.

The Baron should be a sympathetic character: likable, fun, and happy in his life's choices. He provides a good potential romance for female player characters and can even cooperate with heroes on cases. He might help the heroes infiltrate a remote island or even fly to their sudden rescue. But because, like most Theme Villains, he's a little silly, there are likely to be at least some players in your group who would be perfectly happy arresting him just to make the campaign more serious. Don't force the Baron on players that aren't up for a little levity. If your players aren't the sort to join in the joke, you may need to retool the Well-Read Baron into a "darker, grittier" version. This "Bloody Well-Read Baron" might be Chuck's son or evil twin, and he's more interested in raising his body count than getting rich and having fun. Raise all his powers (and perhaps his abilities as well) by 1.

THIEF

"Why does anybody do anything? The money, man. We do it for the dosh. A guy can never have enough notes in his pocket."

"But why do you need so much?"

"To buy better gizmos and pull bigger jobs to get more money to buy better gizmos and pull bigger jobs. It's a bit like two mirrors reflecting each other into infinity. It never ends."

~ Mirror Master and Flash

The Thief is here to relieve the wealthy of their loot.

EXAMPLES: Catwoman (DC); Fantomex, Black Cat, the Prowler (Marvel); Carmen Santiago (video games)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Theme Villain, Blue Collar Criminal, Femme Feline

ABILITIES: Many thieves have no powers at all, and rely on high Coordination, specializations, and equipment. However, it's also common for a person who suddenly finds herself with a useful power — such as super-speed, super-luck, or the ability to pass through solid objects — to turn this power to a profitable (if lawless) use.

Thieves without powers will use a collection of low-level Gadgets, including both trademark gear and specialized items designed for the crime of the hour: temporary invisibility, climbing tools, non-lethal weaponry such as sleep gas or flash bombs, and sensory equipment which can be used to see in the dark, listen over a long distance, or even see through walls are all common.

In this increasingly digital age, a Thief survives by being Technology savvy. In addition to Stealth, Sleight of Hand, and Athletics, the Thief will have good Intellect with knowledge of computers and surveillance systems. She may use Willpower, Deception, and Persuasion to

charm her way to the target, instead of sneaking.

QUALITIES: A professional and lifelong thief will have broad and deep knowledge of her trade, including everything from the specifics of particular models of safes and security systems to building layout, the habits of law enforcement personnel she is likely to encounter, and criminal experts who can be consulted or even recruited at need. She may have prepared a host of contingency plans for the current theft, represented not by specialty or Powers but by qualities like *“Meticulous Planner,”* *“Everything According to Plan,”* or *“Time for Plan B... or C ... or D”*.

Most Thieves prefer to avoid violence, but because a fight with a super hero is inevitable, only a very poorly prepared Thief has no fighting skills whatsoever. She will have planned an escape, perhaps something simple like a getaway vehicle, or complex like a false identity and a convenient distraction caused by the sudden arrival of a third party.

STORIES: Legend, history, and folklore has a long tradition of heroic thieves, and it’s easy to see why. The Thief preys on the rich and the powerful, and often comes from humble roots. She becomes a hero to the poor and oppressed, and sometimes acknowledges this acclaim by becoming a champion of the underclass, even when there’s no money in it. All of this makes the Thief one of the most sympathetic villain archetypes, and heroes have a long history of letting the Thief go after thwarting her latest scheme and making her promise to behave in the future... A promise she never fails to break.

Sympathetic thieves often target an evil corporation or corrupt official for their work, and they may have a dependent family member whose desperate situation is the impetus for the Thief’s life of crime. Heroes can stop the crime spree if they pause to find out the truth; this leads to a sequel story when the heroes assist the Thief in her cause — not by stealing, but by bringing her target down through more

legitimate (and effective) means.

Occasionally thieves team up; this can be a temporary arrangement for a single spectacular heist, or it can be a more or less permanent arrangement for self protection. A group of thieves allows each member to specialize in a particular tactic or kind of theft, and they are able to train each other and cover for each other’s weaknesses. This can make them very effective, especially if they continue to avoid brawls with super heroes. Inevitably, however, someone in the group betrays the rest, including a sympathetic Thief who reveals all to the hero. This leads to a final confrontation with the traitor and her unsavory allies. See *“Super Villain Gaming”* in this book for more advice on running a game session or campaign in which the players characters are thieves teaming up for a super-heist.

A Thief may steal only a certain class of objects, or otherwise perform thefts that mark her as a Theme Villain. She may be hired by, or be forced to pay off, the local Crime Boss. Many villains which belong to other archetypes — such as the Twisted Genius or Mastermind — temporarily become Thieves when they need to fund larger projects. In these cases, theft is a means to an end, and such villains engender little of the sympathy that audiences have for true thieves.

THE 40 THIEVES

Thief, Crime Boss, Faceless Minion

Abilities

Prowess	Good	5
Coordination	Good	5
Strength	Fair	4
Intellect	Good	5
Awareness	Fair	4
Willpower	Fair	4

Stamina 8

Specialties

Athletics
Business

Deception Master
Intimidation
Investigation
Performance Expert
Persuasion Expert
Sleight of Hand Expert
Stealth Expert
Technology

Powers

Duplication
Godlike 20
Extras: Mental Link, Real Duplicates

Qualities

One Woman Crime Ring
Lucky Girl
I Don't Trust Anybody But Me
Not A Killer

Knacks

Not Just A Clever Name
There really are 40 Thieves. Maureen's Duplication power can generate twice as many duplicates as her power level. However, when forced to make tests based on her Duplication, or when comparing her power level to other powers or tests, treat it as only *Supreme* (10).

Perfectly Coordinated
The 40 Thieves have a +2 when making a test to contribute to Combined Effort.

Just Another Face In The Crowd
Any of the 40 Thieves can vanish into a crowd, instantly becoming lost among a sea of ordinary people. When she does this, give a Determination point to one of the heroes following her.

Background: Maureen O'Reilly's father was a Boston cop, and she saw him put his heart... and his youth... into that job for little recognition and less reward. She came to resent the law and everyone who represented it, not because she hated her father but because she loved him, because he was never treated as well as she thought he deserved, and because he refused to give it up. Like many who grow up in a law enforcement family, she learned as much



about crime as about the law, and it was easy for her to exploit her family connections into successful cons. This was Maureen's criminal path of choice; she wasn't a hitman, a hacker, or a cat burglar. She was a con woman. And she found she was pretty good at it.

But the public demonstration of an experimental power generator which tapped interdimensional forces went awry, and Maureen was caught in its explosion. When the smoke cleared, there were dozens of bodies littering the hall, but they were all Maureen! Somehow, versions of Maureen O'Reilly from many parallel worlds — all nearly identical — had coalesced on this Earth and around one body. As each awoke, they realized what had happened and began to merge into a single person. Maureen's father arrived on the scene, and in the confrontation which followed she (they?) admitted that she'd been at the experiment to steal its design for a Chinese rival. Exposed as a superhuman and a thief, Maureen fled.

In the years since, Maureen O'Reilly has become one of the world's most successful super-criminals. Calling herself the 40 Thieves, Maureen is an entire criminal gang with perfect communication skills, that never betrays itself, and always splits the take evenly. All the Thieves share a single mental channel, what she calls "the party line," and any skill or piece of knowledge learned by one Thief is learned by the entire group. Maureen summons additional versions of herself for important tasks and typically runs all the vital aspects of a caper herself. A few of her duplicates have been captured and even served time, but she always breaks herself out of prison within a matter of months.

Despite the size of her gang (and Maureen isn't actually sure how many of herself she can conjure, she just stopped at 40 because it made a good name), Maureen is not a fighter and in fact has never killed. Because of this, she is a relatively low priority for superhuman law enforcement, and she has even occasionally cooperated with an investigation or provided vital intelligence. The truth is, Maureen O'Reilly is a good person, but she's been a criminal for so long and she's burned so many bridges that she honestly doesn't think she can be anything else. Her father, now retired, tracks her capers and would do anything to get his daughter back.

THE 40 THIEVES IN PLAY

The Thieves make a good counterpoint to all the psychopaths, serial killers, and monsters which vigilante crimefighters typically face. While physically competent and skilled in many fields, she's not going to triumph in a bout of fisticuffs unless she cheats (and she always cheats). You can run a scene in which a dozen Thieves gang up on the hero, but this is a desperation move and not terribly in character for Maureen. If she's in a fistfight, she's done something wrong. Instead, her capers rely on extensive planning, misdirection, and successful improvisation when things inevitably go sour.

Maureen plans ahead, and to represent these plans, give the hero a Determination point and

then use a flashback to describe how the hero didn't really see what he thought he saw. That desperate mother who sent the hero into a burning building after her baby, that cocktail waitress whose leg was broken after the crooks opened up with guns, the driver on that delivery truck, those were all Thieves relying on disguise and misdirection. The Thieves are never after the obvious target, and her plans often rely on police showing up, federal agents becoming involved, or the overconfidence of paid security officers.

Finally, because of her heroic personality, Maureen actually makes a pretty great romantic interest for heroes. This might start out as part of a con; she befriends the PC in his civilian identity in order to get close to something or someone. But when the con takes longer than expected, and as her mark demonstrates his heroic character, she begins to have real feelings for him.

TWISTED GENIUS

"You were great in your day, Superman. But it just stands to reason. When it came time to cash in your chips, this old 'diseased maniac' would be your banker."

~ Lex Luthor

This villain is bent on proving his mental superiority and the validity of his theories.

EXAMPLES: Arnim Zola, Mad Thinker, the Wingless Wizard (Marvel); Mr. Freeze, Professor Ivo, T. O. Morrow (DC); Gru (film: *Despicable Me*)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Servitor, Gadget Guy

ABILITIES: The distinguishing trait of a Twisted Genius is his Intellect; if a player character has a high Intellect, the Twisted Genius has an equivalent score. Of course, he believes himself to be superior, but at the scale employed in **ICONS**, the difference is too small to be measured. He has mastery in one or more fields such as robotics or genetic engineering.

Because the Twisted Genius generally avoids brawling with super heroes, he can do without the powers other villains require. He probably has the Gadgets power and a trademark weapon or tool like a ray gun, force field belt, or hover platform. He may have experimented on himself, resulting in minor abilities of convenience such as the ability to go without food or sleep, to see in the dark, and so on. But as a rule, he is easy to defeat once a hero is able to reach him; a fist to the jaw is usually sufficient.

QUALITIES: The Twisted Genius is the old Mad Scientist of the Victorian and Edwardian era with a change of nomenclature. While these villains are always brilliant — and obsessed with proving their own brilliance — they don't always appear to be insane and many aren't even especially interested in science. Regardless, they are descendants of Victor Frankenstein, Dr. Moreau, and other Mad Scientists of similar ilk.

Lackeys and minions are common, but the real strength of the Twisted Genius comes from the Monstrosities he creates, either artificial life made from scratch or else hapless human test subjects transformed into abominations. All of this requires an elaborate laboratory or, at the least, a hidden lair.

The Genius might be twisted physically as well as mentally, with deformities or a bizarre appearance which serves as a primitive metaphor for his inner evil. His life may be sustained only by machinery of his own invention. In the 21st century, as our society gains a more mature understanding of physical disability, the Twisted Genius is less likely to be deformed or ugly and more likely to appear "normal" or even attractive.

STORIES: The Twisted Genius is not a criminal out of love of crime or money, though he is obliged to steal in order to fund his research, continue his experiments, or prove his intellect against his rival. If his initial goals are monetary, this is quickly supplanted by a need to outsmart his heroic nemesis. To demonstrate his superior intellect in a suitably grand manner, the Twisted Genius comes up with elaborate and flamboyant plots: he launches a skyscraper into space, steals the moon, or sends half of California into the sea.

The Twisted Genius is among the most sympathetic of villain types; sometimes it seems his only real problem is loneliness and social isolation, often stemming from his unusual appearance or past trauma. If his intellect could be turned to pro-social goals, much good would result. A Genius can be as evil and self-centered as anyone, and if he has a long career of villainy it is probably too late for him; but if you're looking to run a redemption story, or if your heroes like to reach out to their enemies and resolve conflicts peacefully, the Twisted Genius is a great place to start.

This archetype is related to the heroic Gadget Guy, and he can sometimes be found working as the Servitor of a Mastermind or Conqueror who supplies the Genius both with the materials

he requires for his research and a venue in which to demonstrate his brilliance.

DOCTOR RADIUM

Twisted Genius, Heir to Lovecraft, Man With The Machine

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Supreme</i>	10
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 9

Specialties

Medicine Master
Science Master
Technology Master

Powers

Gadgets
Supreme 10
Immortality
Weak 1
Life Support
Fair 4
Disease, Radiation, Sleeping, Toxins

Qualities

My Mind Is Death!
Weird Science
Secrets of Venus

Knacks

Penetra-Lenses
One of Doctor Radium's most common gadgets, the Penetra-Goggles grant Super-Senses 10, including Infravision, Microscopic Vision, Penetration Vision, True Sight, and Ultraviolet Vision. He can see into alternate dimensions and times, and has a +3 on Awareness tests with vision. Switching on his Penetra-Goggles does not take a page, as Gadgets normally requires, nor must he make a test.



Molecular Separators

Another commonly used gadget (though more as a threat than as an actual weapon), the Molecular Separators are Strike 10, inflicting a slashing attack. Radium does not need to take a page or make a test to turn on his Molecular Separators.

Mad Love

Doctor Radium is strangely attractive. He has a +2 on tests to charm or persuade anyone with a compatible sexual orientation.

Background: In 1909, Edmund Stonewall, a lonely genius traumatized by the Martian invasion of 1898, was motivated by a bar bet to master the power of the atom. Capitalizing on advances made possible by captured Martian technology, he actually managed to succeed, and within a month had built a cylindrical vessel

about the size of a small one-room apartment. With it, he traveled to Venus, and there he had a succession of incredible adventures. But while there he also recovered ancient scrolls reputedly written by inscrutable serpentine intellects far older than our own. Unable to decipher this “Book of Dzyan” or, perhaps, too horrified by what his translations suggested, he returned to Venus to seek more clues.

Knowledge (and sanity) evaded him; by 1934, as Earth was beginning the plunge into a Second World War, Stonewall, now known as Skor, was the brilliant but insane ruler of a bleak and loveless city on the Venusian surface. As Skor, Stonewall had perfected a method of reviving the dead and making them wholly obedient to his commands. With an army of such creatures, he would finally have the power to pry the secrets of the Book of Dzyan from any who would oppose him. But his laboratory was invaded by an Earthman and his paramour, who happened to be a local princess. In the brief time Stonewall was able to hold this woman prisoner, he drew blood samples and did a thorough examination of her biology. Both Earthman and princess escaped, but in her blood he had found a secret beyond price: an immortality formula. By this time Stonewall was nearly sixty, but he would never age another day.

Returning to Earth in his radium-powered craft, Stonewall arrived just in time to become a spoiler in the War. He had little interest in the political dimension of human conflict, but saw much potential for personal power and the collection of resources he might later use to further his bizarre research. The press dubbed him “Doctor Radium”, but he refused to accept the title until, in a bizarre ceremony, the University of Berlin granted him an honorary doctorate. Radium made a fortune designing giant robots, death rays, and other super-weapons for the Axis powers. In his most well-publicized scheme, he kidnapped a thousand of the world’s most perfect physical and mental specimens to found a colony on Venus where the human race would survive (under his mad rule, of course) after Earth’s self-destruction. He

Edmund Stonewall is the protagonist (but not the narrator) of Garrett P. Serviss’s early science fiction novel *A Columbus of Space*. The Martian Invasion of 1898 is detailed in HG Wells’ novel *War of the Worlds*. Skor is the antagonist of Edgar Rice Burroughs’s second Venus novel, *Lost on Venus*. The *Book of Dzyan* is first mentioned in Helena Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*; HP Lovecraft referred to the Book and added its connection to the “Lords of Venus”. The “Man With The Machine” archetype is first described by Jess Nevins in his book, *Gods and Monsters*, annotations to the first volume of Alan Moore’s *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*; Captain Nemo is the archetypal example of the Man With The Machine.

also sold his immortality formula to a handful of individuals; this was soon discovered by Allied intelligence agencies, but kept a secret even from President Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and the other world leaders.

Edmund Stonewall is now almost one and a half centuries old, perhaps the world’s greatest mad scientist. While technology has advanced much since the War, Stonewall has little time for such fripperies, which he considers useful but ultimately of little importance. Instead, his weapons, gadgets, and doomsday machines are all based on Martian or Venusian technology, which he has been steadily working to understand and advance over the last hundred years. He’s miniaturized the heat ray down to the size of fountain pen, while simultaneously making it three times as lethal. He’s mastered the invisibility ray and learned to shape the invulnerable metals of the second planet. He’s constructed a legion of soulless androids — or just one who can pass for the woman you love. The miracle of life itself bows to his command. He is Doctor Radium, and his mind is death!

DOCTOR RADIUM IN PLAY

As one of the pre-eminent mad scientists of the YOUNiverse, Radium has many uses in your game. He makes an excellent origin story for

monstrous super villains or for heroes who have rebelled against him and found their humanity. Because he has been active for over a century, super-patriots from World War II will remember him; heroes who are descended from Golden Age heroes may have heard stories about Radium when they were children. His immortality serum is a convenient plot device; Robur the Conqueror, also in this book, already benefits from this serum. Radium has old lairs and laboratories throughout the solar system; astronauts and explorers could discover one at any time, and thereby release some cyclopean terror or mechanized juggernaut. Thanks to his madness, Radium now desires only power and to prove his insane brilliance to a world which (he believes) mocks him. This can be used as a pretense for nearly any scheme, from a one-session brawl with zombies in the park to a series-long race against doomsday.

ULTIMATE VILLAIN

"I am Loki of Asgard, and I am burdened with glorious purpose."

The Ultimate Villain can only be defeated by the combined action of the world's mightiest heroes. In fact, he may be the reason the super-team got together in the first place, and his existence validates the team's existence.

EXAMPLES: Darkseid, Despero (DC); Loki, Thanos, Apocalypse (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Cosmic Menace, Conqueror, Mastermind, Supremacist

ABILITIES: The Ultimate Villain has power on a tremendous scale, but it is his ambition and independent thought that distinguishes him from the Villain with All Your Powers. In order to pose a threat to the heroic team, he must have some kind of defensive ability which protects him from harm. When you calculate this defense, remember that player characters can coordinate their attacks to dish out even more damage; in fact, your villain may be completely invulnerable, in which case the heroes must deduce his weakness or content themselves with imprisoning him. Some kind of immortality or reincarnation is common, so that the Ultimate Villain can return to plague the heroes again and again.

When the climactic battle begins, the action economy of most roleplaying games (including **ICONS**) works against the Ultimate Villain; the heroes each get to attack him when their turn comes up, but he gets only one action in response. It's fairly easy for heroes to avoid that attack or minimize the harm it causes, making battles against an Ultimate Villain into slow-paced, anticlimactic affairs. To counter this, give your Ultimate Villain a way to attack multiple heroes at once, such as the Burst extra or the Fast Attack power. Perhaps he has a damaging aura that attacks every hero near him, or a counter-attack power which automatically lashes out in response to attacks which target him. If he doesn't have Burst, he can always

use it as a stunt; when he does, any Determination you award can't be used to avoid the attack! Alternately, simply give him extra actions. While you'd never let a player have such an ability, this is the Ultimate Villain we're talking about. Award Determination to the targets of these extra actions.

The Ultimate Villain often has specialized attacks designed to exploit the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of his most powerful foes; this is a sign of his hubris, because heroes who have no powers of their own (Dark Avengers, Weapon Masters, Super-Patriots, and so on) are the last ones standing and end up defeating the Ultimate Villain, who has discounted them.

QUALITIES: A hidden lair in an exotic locale is traditional. He also has followers, but they may not be fighters (see Stories, below). Often one of these followers is serving him only under duress, or they have not yet seen how ruthless the Ultimate Villain truly is, and they become the weak link that allows the heroes to thwart the Ultimate Villain's master plan.

Speaking of master plans, (almost) every Ultimate Villain has one. Consider the villain's goal. The destruction of the hero team is a perfectly serviceable agenda, but if that team hasn't formed yet, he will need something else to pursue until revenge steamrolls his previous inclinations. Depending on his origins, he may be a Cosmic Menace (Anti-Monitor, Korvac), Conqueror (Dr. Doom, Kang), or Mastermind (Brother Blood, Count Nefaria). Because everyone should hate him, it is often convenient if he is a Supremacist (Magneto, Ultron or, again, Loki in the Marvel Cinematic Universe).

If he is not going to resurrect or be rebuilt, the Ultimate Villain will need some way to escape once the heroes defeat him. This can frustrate players who are not expecting this particular convention of superhero comics; players who come from more goal-oriented games may feel cheated when the villain they've been fighting teleports away, is rescued by a low-flying jet, or turns out to be a Doombot. But this victory is still an achievement; soothe the pain with

Determination awards and the acclaim of civilian witnesses grateful to be alive.

STORIES: The first appearance of an Ultimate Villain in your *ICONS* game is probably your first *ICONS* game! Nothing brings a group of wacky and willful super heroes together like a world conquering bad guy who shrugs off the tank shells and cruise missiles hurled against him by a hapless military. In this first adventure, the Ultimate Villain is not subtle; he appears downtown or attacks a recognizable landmark. His actions are broadcast online and by the news media, alerting heroes to immediate danger.

Alternately, the heroes are called together by the government or some other organization which has been monitoring the Ultimate Villain (and which may exist solely for this purpose). In these stories, the Ultimate Villain has a hidden and well-defended lair which the heroes must infiltrate or assault.

The Ultimate Villain's use of allies depends upon the length of your story. If you want to skip right to the big fight, he works alone. If you want at least one warm-up skirmish, he has Faceless Minions and perhaps a big Monstrosity. If you have the time for multiple battles and want to award the heroes some Determination, the Ultimate Villain has a whole team of superhuman lackeys to run interference. They may be mercenaries, villains he has created, or men and women who share his point of view and have been wooed to his side through charisma and promises.

Once defeated, the Ultimate Villain becomes a recurring character. Now there is opportunity to flesh him out, reveal more of his personality and background, and perhaps even make him sympathetic. If kept in prison, he has long conversations with the heroes and may even offer advice in exchange for certain freedoms or liberties. He may be revealed to have children groomed to be his replacements, and he sometimes expresses regret for his actions. Inevitably a threat arises which is even greater than the Ultimate Villain and, after the heroes

are forced to retreat from it, they are obliged to recruit the Ultimate Villain as a temporary ally. This is followed by a sudden but inevitable betrayal.

APOCRYPHA

Ultimate Villain, Cosmic Menace

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Coordination	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Strength	<i>Fantastic</i>	9
Intellect	<i>Supreme</i>	10
Awareness	<i>Supreme</i>	10
Willpower	<i>Vast</i>	12

Stamina 21

Specialties

Power Expert (Cosmic)

Powers

Cosmic Power (Blast)

Vast 12

Extras: Deflect, Dimensional Travel, Disintegration (Reversible), Environmental Awareness, Servants (Multiple, Variable), Teleportation (Affects Others, Portal, Summoning)

Belt: Force Field Device

Supreme 10

Extra: Invisibility, Life Support

Mask: Extrasensory Perception Device

Vast 12

Extras: Dimensional

Qualities

Queen of the Unimagined Realms

Mistress of Time and Space

Identity Unknown

Super-Wizard

Knacks

Warp Shield

If Apocrypha is aware of an incoming ranged attack, she can use her Cosmic Power to defend against it, twisting space/time to make the attack miss.



World Stealing

Apocrypha's Vast Cosmic Power allows her to steal city-sized chunks of reality, moving them to the Unimagined Realms.

Mind Shield

Apocrypha's golden mask gives her a +2 bonus to resist any attempt to read her mind.

Background: Over the decades, super-heroes have visited many strange places: alien worlds, hidden civilizations, even dimensions other than our own. Sometimes these remote dimensions turn out to be all too familiar — they resemble our own Earth, but differ in one significant detail. Perhaps this is a world where Rome never fell, where the Third Reich conquered the world, or where all the heroes known to us today are villains. Scientists have verified the existence of hundreds of these “alternate timelines,” many of which we have never had any contact with.

It is a sad fact that these alternate realities do not last very long, cosmically speaking. Often they are brought into existence by one omnipotent being or other, they serve their purpose, and are then destroyed. In other cases, the divergent timeline threatens our own, and it is “pruned” by cosmic entities or their mortal time-traveling agents. Often these universes tragically destroy themselves. But what happens to them, these universes, when they are obliterated? Do they vanish entirely, as if they never were? Not exactly. There is a place where universes go to die.

This place is called “the Unimagined Realms” and it is ruled by a single, nearly omnipotent, being known as Apocrypha, Queen of Naught. Apocrypha has stitched her otherworldly domain together out of all those alternate realities which have, for one reason or another, been destroyed. She manages this by observing these dimensions as they are born and as they begin to die. At the last instant, before the universe is entirely obliterated, she appears and steals a large chunk of the disintegrating world. The rest of the splinter universe perishes, but the part she steals is brought to the Unimagined Realms, where it joins the rest of her patchwork domain.

Apocrypha’s other-world realm is thus made up of impossibilities, places and times that never existed. She appears to have welded these many fragments into a single world which she rules with an iron fist. Her subjects owe their continued existence to her timely rescue, and this, combined with her enormous personal power, cruelty, and genius, has succeeded in making the inhabitants of her realm fanatically loyal to her. In addition to vast legions made up of soldiers from these alternate timelines, she has a platoon of personal bodyguards, the “Infinite Legion”, composed of alternate versions of various well-known heroes and villains. A dozen or so of these serve as her closest advisors and aides, but ultimately there is only one ruler: Apocrypha herself.

No one is certain how Apocrypha came to be; it is suspected by many that she is an alternate

version of one of Earth’s premier heroines (Amazing Woman and Aurelia Danner are popular candidates). She may have been a heroine erased from existence in some Crisis. Regardless of her true identity, Apocrypha now desires nothing less than the unraveling of the entire cosmos. Her vast power, and the fact that she answers to no one, earns her the right to the title “Super-Wizard” and representation on a secret council of such beings.

Apocrypha resents the destruction of the alternate worlds that make up her empire. She blames Earth heroes, whom she considers vain, egotistical, and proud, willing to annihilate an entire dimension without a second thought in the name of self-preservation. For decades she has pursued a plan aimed at “unimagining” the Earth itself, somehow erasing it entirely from the cosmos and adding it to her domain. If she could, she would do this to the entire universe, effectively erasing it from normal existence. In this effort, however, she has been thwarted, though always by the narrowest of margins. Time travelers consider Apocrypha a Zeta-level threat to temporal stability. Several heroes have traveled to the Unimagined Realms and returned, but Apocrypha’s existence has always been kept secret from the rest of Earth, not so much due to formal agreement but rather because most people would simply find the idea too bizarre.

Apocrypha wields incredible powers over reality. She can not only alter reality at will, she can actually steal city-sized chunks of it and teleport these fragments to her Unimagined Realm. Her golden mask allows her to see into other dimensions, a power she uses to find likely candidates for rescue. The mask also makes it impossible for anyone to read her mind. Her other commonly-used tool is a personal force field, usually generated by a belt, which protects her from harm and — through the bending of light — also allows her to vanish from sight.

Those few heroes who have braved personal combat with her have found Apocrypha to be incredibly strong, fast, and durable. She seldom

resorts to fisticuffs, however, since she can instantly summon two dozen of her Infinite Legion to protect her. She can twist reality to deflect any attack which might do her harm, or simply erase specific individuals from existence. When necessary, she can create portals from one dimension to another, allowing her to invade Earth whenever she desires.

APOCRYPHA IN PLAY

Apocrypha is a villain of enormous scale best used as an offstage mastermind who only occasionally appears in person (for example, she might appear at the beginning of a story to warn the heroes off, and then at the very end to admit they have surprised her, praise their courage, vow to defeat them, and then leave to return another day). Most heroes, even entire hero teams, cannot seriously threaten her. But if you have a team of mighty champions who can go toe to toe with the Queen of Nought, then she has no qualms against wading into battle. In addition to her personal power, she also commands armies of almost unlimited size and has a personal guard of super-heroes from alternate dimensions. These guards, in particular, should be tailored to your gaming table. If you have time for a big battle between opposing teams, the Infinite Legion can be roughly equivalent to the heroes, perhaps even alternate versions of them. But if you want to keep the focus on Apocrypha herself, then you can conjure two dozen alternate versions and simply treat them like minions. They will look like super-villains, but they will get knocked down like tenpins.

Most Apocrypha stories will center on her goal to “unimage” Earth itself, but her unusual home also makes a good set piece for an otherwise unrelated adventure. Player characters who hail from alternate worlds may be pursued by Apocrypha, especially if she has claimed their world as part of her realm and the PC is (in her mind at least) one of her subjects. And the next time a Crisis-level disaster threatens the universe, Apocrypha is almost certainly involved. (This might even be the event which makes her into Apocrypha in the first place. Can the heroes save her from her

own future?) Heroes who visit a new dimension might be brought to Apocrypha’s court to tell her what they found there; now she wishes to preserve it forever under her benevolent but tyrannical rule.

VIGILANTE

"Justice is served!"

~ The Scourge of the Underworld

The Vigilante ignores the rules of law and society, murdering mundane criminals, other super villains, and anyone in her way. She is the villainous counterpart to the heroic Dark Avenger archetype.

EXAMPLES: The Punisher, the Scourge of the Underworld (Marvel); V, the Red Hood, Jean-Paul Valley as Batman, late Rorschach (DC); Frank Miller's Fixer (Legendary Comics); Hit Girl (*Kick-Ass* films and comics)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Dark Avenger, Assassin, Dark Mirror

ABILITIES: The Vigilante is an underdog who targets mundane criminals, so she usually has no powers. The archetype has its origin in characters like the Spider, a Pulp character with an astonishing body count, and Mack Bolan (star of the Executioner novel series), both of whom killed using guns, explosives, and their hands. Old School Vigilantes continue this tradition, but Vigilantes in the comics have to contend with superhuman targets and may be equipped with fantastic weaponry.

A Vigilante relies on detective work, stealth, and disguise to get close to her target. She is an expert hand-to-hand fighter and deadly with weapons. Her skills are almost identical to the heroic Dark Avenger, differing only in a more practical knowledge of firearms derived from years of experience shooting people; it is the use to which these skills are put that distinguish her.

QUALITIES: Operating alone and in secrecy, the Vigilante has a hidden lair, an armory, and access to a vehicle. She gathers information through alternate identities or a network of informants and is hunted by mundane law enforcement as well as super heroes. However, her actions may have earned her fans and admirers who praise her for "doing what the

cops won't" without realizing that they themselves could be the Vigilante's next victim.

Some Vigilantes are actually Assassins, field agents for an extra-legal organization or a secret government agency. In the past, this organization targeted organized crime, but in the 21st century "the War on Terror" is a blank check for constant surveillance, torture and murder.

STORIES: Are you going to decide who gets to live and who gets to die? Vigilantes appear in stories to ask this question. As a rule, super heroes are socio-normative; they cede the power to decide who lives and who dies to society, which has juries and laws created by the people for self-governance. The Vigilante rejects this premise and seizes the power of life and death for herself.

The shift towards "dark and gritty" comics in the post-Watchmen era, and America's broader desensitization to violence, has led many characters to be depicted as heroes who would, in previous decades, be villains. Rorschach and the Punisher (who, in fact, debuted as a villain in the pages of Spider-Man) are only the most successful examples of this trend. The Vigilante thinks she is a hero, and many readers agree, but her willingness to perform casual murder in the name of a self-defined "justice" is what marks her as a villain. She is the embodiment of a power fantasy in which we, the readers, exact the ultimate punishment on all those we are so certain deserve it. This truth, and the self-criticism which should follow, can make stories about the Vigilante very uncomfortable. The Vigilante confronts us with the worst side of ourselves; sometimes we learn from this experience, but too often we cling stubbornly to the ugly part of our nature. When a Vigilante story is done right, some of your players will take her side, but this will also result in friction among your player group and that's something everyone should be prepared for. Arguments over the killing of unrepentant criminals can break a gaming group apart, if no one is willing to change their minds or work together despite disagreements, and this debate also occurs in

the comics when ruthless Vigilantes and Dark Avengers are confronted by their peers.

If law enforcement is generally portrayed as corrupt or incompetent, the Vigilante acts as a reader-identification character and is more likely to appear heroic and sympathetic, but if the police and government are well-intentioned and capable, the Vigilante is an aberrant psycho who must be brought to heel.

Heroes are occasionally driven to Vigilante status, usually from madness, memory loss, or trauma. If the hero has superhuman powers, he loses some of them, lest the Vigilante's street-level victims fail to provide a dramatic challenge. To restore the hero to his true self, he must face the trauma that forced him from his ethical path, admit his error, and re-dedicate himself to preserving life instead of taking it. This traumatized period is usually temporary and the hero finds himself and his moral code, but some characters are shattered by the postmodern condition and remain Vigilantes. Heroes who find their way back from Vigilante status have to make amends for the wrongs they committed during this time, a project which can dominate the rest of their lives and become the impetus for a Bold New Direction.

The Vigilante sometimes comes in as a "pinch hitter," a replacement for a hero forced to give up his costumed identity; the Vigilante takes up the hero's mantle and, for a time, appears to do a good job. But without the conviction of a moral code, the Vigilante stops doing what is right and starts doing what is "practical" or "efficient"; this inevitably translates into the murder of criminals. The original hero is forced to come out of retirement, defeat the Vigilante, and reclaim the burden of heroic duty.

Another Vigilante story is the "rotten apple." A crimefighter begins to train a student to be a super hero — perhaps even his own heir — but over time comes to see the student's lack of a moral center; she looked good at first but is rotten at the core. Mentor and pupil argue over conflicting methods and what the pupil sees as a slow rate of instruction. Eventually the student

leaves (perhaps after a fight) and becomes a Vigilante. Now the mentor feels responsible for each life the Vigilante takes. This leads the hero to train a new, more principled, student to right these wrongs. The Vigilante is now a Dark Mirror of the new, more heroic, student.

THE BLACK TERROR

Vigilante, Descendant, Minority Hero

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Intellect	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 12

Specialties

Athletics
Intimidate
Investigation
Science
Stealth
Technology
Weapons (Guns)

Powers

Armored Uniform: Resistance (Damage) Device
Average 3
Fast Attack
Incredible 7
Gadgets
Great 7
Gas Pistol: Affliction (Lethal) Device
Amazing 8
Extras: Burst, Ranged
Life Support (Toxins)
Weak 1
Super Speed
Average 3

Qualities

Nemesis of Evil
Formic Ether Formula
Former Sidekicks

Knacks

Master Chemist

The Black Terror has a +2 on Intellect tests in the field of chemistry.

Free Running

The Black Terror has a +2 on tests made to navigate the city by running, jumping, and climbing.

Background: Cedric Cowan was a young chemist working for the FBI in forensic science when he discovered traces of a strange compound in the old body of an aging murder victim. The case was solved, and the compound seemed to be of no importance, but Cedric could not let it go, and he spent many late nights recreating the chemical in his lab. He theorized that this compound might have an incredible effect on human beings were it to be consumed, but he didn't dare test it. Instead, he went back to the case records and discovered that murder victim Tim Roland had been the second Black Terror, a crimefighter infused with the power of "Formic Ethers," a unique formula developed by Robert Benton prior to World War II. Now sure he was right, Cedric took the formula and gained superhuman strength and speed.

For Cedric, however, it wasn't enough to be strong and fast; a crimefighter had to be smart. He designed both a pistol that fired a non-lethal gas and a chemical inhibitor that made him immune to the toxin. He outfitted himself with a utility belt bearing an arsenal of helpful tools and used his criminology training from the FBI to anticipate what his criminal targets would do. Soon he was ready for a sidekick, and after selecting a brilliant young law student at Howard University, he recreated the Formic Ethers a second time. For four years the pair fought crime, until his assistant graduated from college and moved across the country. Cedric, now a seasoned hero with a hidden headquarters and considerable reputation, took his second sidekick when a promising young black man he knew fell into crime and gang violence. With Cedric's support and guidance, the young man managed to not only improve



his own lot but the lives of his friends and family, all while fighting alongside the Black Terror. Finally, a few years ago, Cedric offered the position of sidekick to his nephew Wallace, who had grown up idolizing the Terror and who wanted nothing more than to be a superhero.

Wallace was dead within six months, leaving Cedric traumatized. Rather than abandon his crimefighting career, as his enemies had hoped, Cedric instead redoubled his focus, abandoning his mundane career in the FBI and devoting himself full time to the Black Terror. He replaced the knockout gas in his pistol with a lethal nerve agent and began killing criminals instead of apprehending them. The Black Terror became a wanted man, but Cedric was too smart to get caught. Indeed, his FBI experience helped to keep him two steps ahead of law enforcement. On the rare occasion federal agents caught up with him, they found his superhuman strength and speed to be overwhelming.

The Black Terror, Nemesis of Evil, is one of the more famous public domain super heroes, having appeared in Project Superpowers (Dynamite), Terra Obscura (America's Best Comics) and elsewhere. He was created by Richard Hughes and Don Gabrielson and was the feature character of Exciting Comics (Nedor), where he fought crime alongside Tim Roland, a young sidekick with identical powers and costume.

Today, the Black Terror is, more than ever, "The Nemesis of Evil." He does not bother with halfway measures. When he finds criminals, he kills them without apology or restraint. Super heroes and police who get in his way are defeated and humiliated, but not killed. Many ordinary citizens cheer him on, and the criminal element in the DC and Baltimore areas are terrified of him. But the violence has escalated, so that the Terror's enemies have also become more ruthless, and the body count on all sides of this war is rising. Someone has got to do something, before the Black Terror's lethal poison gas fills all the streets of the city.

THE BLACK TERROR IN PLAY

In the YOUniverse, the latest Black Terror is an intelligent vigilante crimefighter, a polymath who is good at just about everything but who suffered long-term stress over the course of his crimefighting career before being traumatized by the death of his nephew. Mechanically, he differs from the original Black Terror primarily in the addition of his chemical weaponry, but thematically it is his race which sets him apart. (Notably, this is not the first version of the Black Terror to be black. For that, see *The Blackest Terror*, Moonstone Books). As written, his efforts are focused on DC and Baltimore, and heroes who try to operate there are encroaching on "his turf," but he can easily be moved to any city with a large African-American presence. The Terror also serves as an excellent origin for PC heroes, who might be former sidekicks.

Much of the story potential in the Vigilante archetype comes from the ambivalence he

creates in players. In other words, if the story is at its best, some of your players will consider the Terror a villain while others consider him a hero. To preserve this, it is important that the Terror not kill police unless they are corrupt, and he not kill innocent people. Violent criminals, however, are fair game and, if questioned, the Terror defends his ruthlessness as revenge for the death of someone close to him. For American audiences, revenge rationalizes almost any brutality.

VILLAIN WITH ALL YOUR POWERS

"This is no common miscreant you face! Mine is the combined power of the Fantastic Four!"

~ The Super-Skrull

The VWAYP is a being with the power to duplicate or even steal the powers of an entire team of heroes.

EXAMPLES: Amazo (DC); Mimic, early Rogue before she joined the X-men, Super-Adaptoid, Super-Skrull, Taskmaster (Marvel); Sylar (Television, *Heroes*)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Doppelganger, Nemesis, Servitor

ABILITIES: This archetype comes in three breeds; the first is the Nemesis of a specific team of heroes, and she has all of their powers at the same time. The second type can duplicate the powers of anyone she touches or sees; she is not a Nemesis, and her powers will change in every appearance as she faces various heroes singly or in combination. If the villain copies not just a hero's powers but also his physical appearance, she is also a Doppelganger. Most VWAYPs, however, cannot do this.

It is rare for such a villain to be able to duplicate a hero's weapons, gadgets, or other tools. She overcomes this by carrying her own arsenal, using a weapon that can itself change shape, or by stealing the powers of heroes who don't use weapons.

Sometimes a VWAYP has a set of permanent powers which are "hard-wired" in, even before she copies the hero team. These powers may be based on the first team she ever fought, or they may be necessities like super-senses (to find targets to mimic) and invulnerability (to survive long enough to acquire more powers).

The third, mundane, variation on this archetype is the Villain with All Your Moves. The VWAYM

has studied the heroes so well that she can anticipate their every action and even copy their fighting style. She carries weapons that duplicate the heroic arsenal, but she doesn't really have any powers of her own. The VWAYM has the same relationship to her superhuman counterparts that Batman has to Superman: because it is more fun when an underdog without powers triumphs over an enemy who does have powers, the VWAYM is more popular with fans than the super-powered VWAYP.

QUALITIES: This archetype is usually a Servitor created by a Twisted Genius or discovered by a Mastermind recently thwarted by the hero team. Although extraordinarily dangerous, she is a soldier who leaves the grand schemes to others. This makes her less dangerous in the long term, but in the short term she can still kick the heroes around the block.

It can be difficult to explain how this villain can do what she does; shape-changing aliens, programmable androids, and artifacts imbued with reality-altering cosmic power are traditional; in the 21st century, a VWAYP may download her powers from an online database, and of course you can solve any origin problem with the words, "It's magic!"

The archetype often has an Achilles heel. She may lose her powers after an hour or only be able to duplicate powers her creator knows about. She may acquire a hero's weaknesses even as she duplicates his powers, creating an opening for heroes to exploit. Often the villain can be "overloaded" by forcing it to duplicate too much or too many powers.

STORIES: When a villain like this is an obstacle for your PCs, you are asking, "What makes a hero?" Is he really just the sum of his powers? If someone else had his powers, would she do the hero's job just as well? When players face a VWAYP, they must rely on something other than their powers: courage, ingenuity, and team work.

The villain may have the capabilities of an entire team, but she can be in only one place at a time. Heroes can sometimes exploit this and keep her busy while simultaneously completing other objectives (like saving innocent lives or finding the boss). Likewise, the VWAYP has power but not necessarily skill or experience; in Icons, that means the VWAYP does not copy a hero's Knacks. Heroes who are able to use their powers in creative and imaginative ways are able to pull off stunts the villain hasn't thought of. This battle also teaches heroes how to use their powers in combination, often because the enemy is doing so!

Sometimes the villain retains memories of those whose powers she mimics; soon she knows the hero's secret identity and the names of his loved ones. She may also gain access to passwords and other classified information.

Like other Servitor villains, this archetype is really all about her fight scene; because of her power level, she is usually key to the Mastermind's plans and may be his personal bodyguard. Defined entirely by the powers of the heroes, she has little personality of her own and no goals beyond victory in battle. But after repeated appearances in an ongoing story, the VWAYP can transcend the limitations of her archetype and begin to have her own identity, simultaneously gaining additional archetypes.

MASHUP

Villain With All Your Powers, Servitor, Ultimate Villain

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Coordination	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Strength	<i>Fantastic</i>	9
Intellect	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Awareness	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Willpower	<i>Fantastic</i>	9

Stamina 18

Specialties

Art (Photography, Writing)

Athletics
Investigation Master
Leadership
Martial Arts Master
Medicine Expert
Mental Resistance Expert
Military Expert
Occult Master
Power (Force Control)
Stealth
Technology Expert
Weapons (Guns)
Wrestling

Powers

Alternate Form: Gaseous
Amazing 8
Extras: Affect Physical (Strength), Darkness Control, Partial Phasing, Phase Shift
Element Control: Weather
Supreme 10
Extras: Affliction (heat), Blast (lightning), Earth Control (Binding, Limit: Sand), Water Control (Tsunami, Limit: Source)
Flight
Amazing 8
Force Control
Incredible 7
Extras: Blast, Expanded Field, Forceflight, Force Bubble, Interface
Gadgets
Incredible 7
Immortality
Supreme 10
Postcognition
Amazing 8
Resistance (Damage)
Amazing 8
Strike
Fair 4
Extra: Wall-Crawling
Super-Senses
Great 6
Communication (Radio), Extended Hearing, Night Vision, Tracking (Infrared or Audio Triangulation), Ultrasonic Hearing
Extra: Resistance (Sensory)
Transformation: Animals
Incredible 7

Transformation: Humanoids

Supreme 10

Limit: Only heroes whose powers he has copied.

Qualities

Anything You Can Do

Gets The Good With The Bad

Who Am I When I'm Alone?

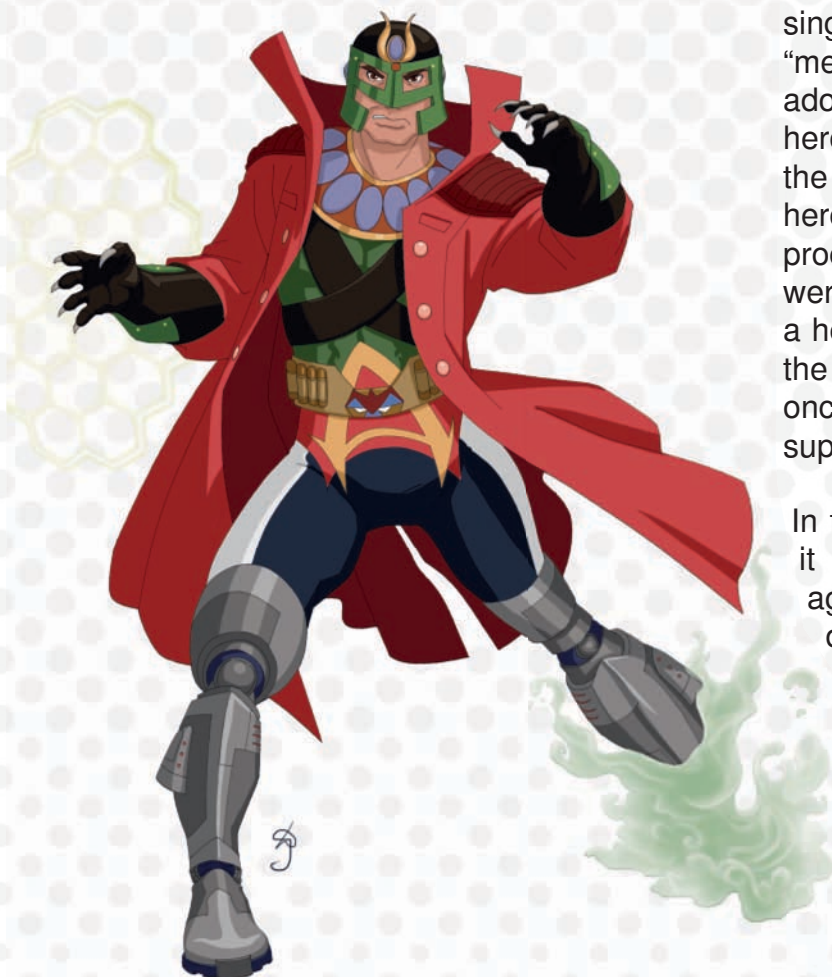
Knacks

Imitation Game

Mashup has a +2 on tests to impersonate a hero whose powers he has copied.

Super Combo

Mashup can add a bonus to his attack test or damage if he can describe the attack as a combination of the powers of two or more heroes whose powers he has copied. Add +1 to the test (or damage, but not both) for each hero beyond the first whose powers are used in this



way. For example, using the powers of three heroes in one attack would earn a +2 bonus. To use this knack without spending Determination, Mashup can use any particular super combo only once a scene.

Background: The creature known as Mashup began life as a planetary bio-weapon developed eons ago by an ancient interstellar civilization. These life forms, originally bred by the thousands, were the ultimate bomb; released onto a planet's surface, each creature copied and absorbed the knowledge and capabilities of all living things with which it came into contact. Even one of these beings was considered dangerous enough that, to the present day, planets found to host one are routinely quarantined for the safety of the galaxy. In the 1960s Doctor Radium discovered one of these creatures, damaged by time and long exposure to the environment of deep space. Naturally he aimed it at Earth and, from his vantage on Venus, sat back with a bowl of popcorn. A single hero followed the trajectory of the falling "meteor" and fell prey to the alien blob, which adopted a human form and duplicated the hero's powers. As the creature moved across the country it attracted the attention of more heroes, who joined forces to fight it but in the process fed the creature's power. Finally, they were able to trick it by "feeding" it the powers of a hero with a dangerous heart condition. When the creature tried to use all of its powers at once against the impromptu team, its new super-heart gave out and it appeared to die.

In the decades since, however, Mashup — as it is now known — has returned again and again. Each time its powers are slightly different, for it "resets" each time it dies and absorbs the powers of whatever heroes it encounters. This makes it especially dangerous for young teams who often fail to recognize the creature. By the time they realize what it is, half their members have been defeated and all their powers copied.

Recently, however, Mashup's life took an unexpected turn. After a fight with the

Heroes of the YOUNiverse, it managed to escape capture through the use of Amazing Woman's power to turn into a mist. It used the intellect it had stolen from the Woman in Red to blend in with human society, and xenobiologists now theorize that the creature has possessed one set of super-traits so long that it can no longer "reset." Mashup may permanently wield the combined powers of Earth's greatest champions. Where it goes now, and what it might choose to do, is a mystery.

MASHUP IN PLAY

As presented, Mashup's powers combine those of Amazing Woman, the Black Fury, the Green Turtle, Isis, Night Bird, the Veteran, and the Woman in Red. (Aurelia Danner was on leave of absence at the time.) Keep these powers if those characters exist in your setting or, even better, you are using the Heroes of the YOUNiverse as PCs. But if your players are, as is more likely, making their own characters, then replace Mashup's powers with theirs. This may happen as part of a story. For example, the PCs encounter Mashup with his current set of powers but, in a freak accident (struck by lightning while in a pool of radioactive waste, for example), Mashup "resets" once more and — in a horrifying splash page — duplicates all the powers of the heroes who are present. End the session and pick up the cliffhanger next week.

Mechanically, Mashup copies the powers and specialties of heroes but not their qualities or knacks. Devices which cannot be easily taken away are incorporated into Mashup's body, but utility belts, weapons, and other handheld gadgets will be separate. Although Mashup possesses the memories and knowledge of its victims, it does not have the experience required to use those powers as well as a hero does, and so has to spend Determination and use stunts to do what a hero does with knacks. However, because it has multiple power sets, it can develop new knacks which exploit the use of these powers in combination. Note that when Mashup copies the same power from more than one hero, such as Resistance (Damage), it benefits only from the highest score. The different "versions" of the power do not stack. If

you have made alterations to any of the Heroes of the YOUNiverse (adding Magic or Healing to Isis, for example), be sure to make those same changes to Mashup.

Gamemasters who want to make Mashup a more complicated character (he's already incredibly complicated mechanically!) can focus instead on the creature's attempt to find a new purpose for itself after escaping its endless cycle of superhuman battle, death, and rebirth. Mashup might seek to learn more about its true nature, try to contact the long-dead alien masters who made it (and who might not be so dead after all), or get itself repaired. If Mashup were to be restored to its original capabilities it would become a threat to the entire planet, able to absorb any living thing, duplicate its appearance, and separate its body mass into discreet organisms with a single telepathic mind. See John Campbell's "Who Goes There?" or its many film adaptations (John Carpenter's *The Thing* being the most famous) for more on this theme.

WARLOCK

“Demons of darkness!

In the name of Satannish!

By the Flames of the Faltine

Let Spider-Man vanish!”

~ Xandu

The Warlock is a super villain who casts spells, the evil counterpart to the heroic Magician archetype. Entire books have been written about RPG campaigns focused on magical themes; this entry largely concerns itself with campaigns which are not magic-centered, but in which the Warlock is only one of many villains the heroes encounter.

EXAMPLES: Mordru, Morgaine Le Fey, Felix Faust (DC); Morgana Le Fay, Mordred the Mystic, Baron Mordo, Kulan Gath (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Cult Leader, Devil, Heir to Lovecraft, Servitor, Supernatural Horror, Ultimate Villain

ABILITIES: Obviously the Magic power and Occult specialization define this archetype, but every universe has its own rules for magic and the Warlock should abide by those rules. For example, in Marvel comics, any wizard worth the name can use Astral Projection. Illusions, mind control, the ability to transform matter or control the elements, and the ability to summon demons or animate the dead, are all especially common among Warlocks. “M is for Magic” includes an excellent set of guidelines which distinguish the various ranks of magic-wielders in superhero games, including a specific list of powers which are common or prohibited.

In **ICONS**, the Magic power requires a page of preparation time, but Warlocks usually cast their spells quickly enough to avoid interruption. Replicate this with a stunt, awarding Determination to the target of the Warlock’s quickly-cast spell. But, when you want to give a hero the chance to interrupt — perhaps because the spell would remove him from play — don’t use Determination. That spell will now take the usual page of preparation time and the

heroes will have a chance to stop it from being cast.

A Warlock is known for his great power; indeed, sometimes it seems he can do almost anything, limited only by his frail physique and the need to recite magic words. But NPCs in roleplaying games are defined by numbers and specific powers, so Warlocks in **ICONS** have limitations which characters in comics don’t have, guided by a personal schtick like “technomancy” or “voodoo.” Not every magic-themed villain is a Warlock; if the villain has a short list of powers with specific and narrow applications, or if his goals are mundane ones like wealth or fame, it is better to treat him as another archetype. A villain who uses his magical powers to steal is really just a Thief, and one who kills for money is an Assassin; the Warlock archetype best describes mysterious, unpredictable villains who seek vast magical power or world transformation. Some Warlocks are also Devils or Supernatural Horrors (vampire or lich), granting them immortality and additional powers that make them dangerous in hand-to-hand combat.

The Warlock is usually equipped with or seeking artifacts of mystic might which further augment his powers and make him all but omnipotent. These artifacts become recurring universe elements after the Warlock is defeated; the heroes usually can’t destroy the object and instead spend their time learning about it and guarding it, but sometimes it becomes the source of power for a new hero or the cause for an existing hero’s Bold New Direction.

QUALITIES: Again, the specific rules for magic in your universe will help to define the Warlock. In DC comics, for example, all the greatest magicians trace their lineage to Atlantis.

Magic is often fueled by godlike entities with bizarre names which get used in the Warlock’s catchphrases when he casts his spells. The Warlock struggles to appease these entities with sacrifice or worship, but their patience is short; he often ends up either a vessel for their

possessing spirit or simply consumed by them. He may have promised his own soul, the soul of another person, or a large number of anonymous souls, to them.

If the Warlock is not a free agent, he is a high-ranking figure in a mystical war between opposing forces of chaos and order; in the past, Order was always the side of good and Chaos was the side of evil, but the influence of British writers like Alan Moore and Grant Morrison has turned this on its head, so that Chaos is now seen as the principle of freedom and creativity championed by a heroic underdog while Order is an oppressive regime enforced by fascistic Warlocks. Warlocks tend to hail from alternate dimensions, fantasy worlds, or the antediluvian past, where they were godlike rulers. If so, they've brought an army of Faceless Minions and Servitors to enforce their will. This fantasy influence is another reason why Warlocks are so popular in gaming, where so many players come to superhero RPGs after they've already played games in the fantasy or supernatural horror genre. Sometimes the dark lord or evil sorcerer of your favorite fantasy setting can be picked up and transplanted into your **ICONS** game, a ready-made Warlock.

Warlocks are often Servitors of the Devil, but if the boss is an enormous squid floating in the depths of space, the Warlock is really an Heir to Lovecraft. And while Warlocks are typically very flashy and attract a lot of attention, sometimes they adopt a low profile and temporarily become Cult Leaders.

STORIES: In some campaigns, magic themes are so prevalent that most of the villains qualify as Warlocks; in these games, the heroes are magical experts and the Warlock is a known quantity, more or less equal to the heroes in power.

But in most **ICONS** campaigns, the Warlock is just one among many kinds of adversaries, and when he appears, his magical might represents the power of the unknown. The heroes don't know what he is capable of or how his powers work; technological heroes like the Armored

Wonder or the Gadget Guy may not even believe in magic! In the comics, it's very common for heroes confronted with a Warlock to team up with a heroic Magician guest star. What this means for gaming is that, if you expect to have a guest drop in on your ongoing **ICONS** campaign, build an adventure featuring a Warlock and give your visiting player a Magician character; the other PCs will have a great reason to reach out to her for help.

The hunt for a mystic artifact is the archetypal Warlock story; this can be as simple as a museum heist or complex enough for a chase around the globe or through some "nexus of realities." If the heroes already have the artifact (and they may not know they have it, because the object looks mundane), the adventure turns into a headquarters invasion. The nice thing about stories of this sort is that the Warlock can win without ruining your campaign; when an Assassin is out to kill the President, your players are pretty sure he's going to fail, but when a Warlock succeeds in capturing the Book of High Magic, that just means the heroes have to get it back.

When the Warlock does succeed, the consequences are disastrous. He transforms the entire city, the world, or even the universe, flooding it with magic. Heroes are transformed into medieval or barbaric versions of themselves, usually with the same powers but new names and uniforms. In this new reality, many heroes are dead, and more of the PCs are sure to die in the struggle to recapture the artifact and defeat the Ultimate Warlock. But once he is defeated, the universe is retconned back to its normal state and the heroes are returned to life. This allows you and your player group to experiment and have fun with alternate versions of their characters; everyone should talk like you're working at a Ren Faire. As GM, these "crisis level events" are a good opportunity to rewrite the rules of your universe.

If you really want to go Old School, the Warlock's name starts with the letters "M-O-R."

ANKHESEN'SETEHK

(aka The Beetle)

Warlock, Foreigner, Supernatural Horror, Cult Leader

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Fantastic</i>	9
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Amazing</i>	8

Stamina 11

Specialties

Occult Master
Power Master (Magic)

Powers

Immortality

Weak 1

Magic

Fantastic 9

Extras: Instant, Mastery (Blast, Force Field, Teleportation)

Qualities

High Priestess of Set
Master of Shapes
I've Lived A Hundred Lives

Knacks

None

Background: The supernatural terror now calling herself Ankhesen'sutek ("My Life From Set") is the reincarnation of an Egyptian priestess who, reborn many times over thousands of years, served Isis. It was as a high priestess of Isis that she first began to terrorize Westerners; a master of changing her shape, she moved easily from male to female to androgynous forms before taking on the shape of a horrifyingly large beetle. It was as this, The Beetle, that she was known in the 19th century. But one of her plans went awry and she died in a train wreck. This time, the Beetle's crimes against humanity were too much for Isis to



overlook, and the goddess revoked the immortality of her priestess, consigning her to oblivion forever.

Enter Set, who is always looking for a good servant. Isis may have been appalled by the Beetle's trickery and cunning, her willingness to torture, humiliate, and murder innocent people in the pursuit of power, but to Set, this was the perfect resume. He restored the Beetle, giving her a new body and a new life as his own high priestess. Her new name, Ankhesen'sutek, paid homage to her new master. She awoke in the late 1930s, her body that of a child. Unable to take personal action in the world, she instead organized the other Egyptian villains of the era into a secret conspiracy. Among her agents were Ghazia, Princess Sheba, and the so-called Queen of Evil. All were mere agents of the Beetle, who slowly grew into her new powers and came to master the secrets of Set's magic.

The Beetle is a Victorian horror novel by Richard Marsh, and it is there that the Beetle, a shape-changing priestess of Isis, first appears. Ghazia, Princess Sheba, and the Queen of Evil battled Fantomah, Daredevil, and Kalkor, respectively, in the Golden Age. Ankhesen'sutek's Magic power uses Extras and other elements described in *Great Power* and "M is for Magic". In particular, she should be considered a "Master" mage, and she should obey the restrictions on prohibited powers described in "M is for Magic."

By the 1960s, Ankhesen'sutek was a grown woman and coming into her inheritance. With the memory of a hundred lifetimes and the sorcery of Set, her patron, she immediately became one of the greatest forces of evil in the world, a position she has maintained ever since. Occasionally she has suffered setbacks; three times she has been killed. She survived the first by preserving her spirit in a golden chest, from which she was transplanted into a new and youthful body. The second time, she was mummified by her followers and arose soon after, slowly reassembling her organs from canopic jars kept as trophies by the heroes who had slain her. And finally, in 1985, she died and returned to the world as a newborn. This time she did not wait until adulthood to resume her quest to amass more power, sow chaos and confusion, and glorify Set. Her 16th birthday in 2001 nearly saw the end of the world.

In the years since, Ankhesen'sutek has been the mastermind behind countless occult plots. She has resurrected her World War II servants by placing their spirits into the bodies of hapless sacrificial victims, placed agents and spies into governments, multi-national corporations, and intelligence agencies, and accelerated the rate of global desertification. Although she finds his religious views laughable, she is not above lending material support to CALIPH-8 when he sows chaos through the Middle East, and she has been opposed by Muezzin (who is grossly outmatched by her powers and has been forced

to rely on Western heroes for help stopping her plans). Isis, however, remains her nemesis, and has sworn to destroy her.

ANKHESEN'SUTEK IN PLAY

Even more than most of the other villains in this book, the Beetle's power level should be altered to suit your game. It is very easy to change her Magic and Intellect to mirror that of the foremost magician in your gaming group, establishing her as a personal rival. She can then interact with him personally — creating scenes filled with everything from comedic banter to transgressive horror, depending on the interests of your players and their comfort level. When the heroes track her to her lair, she can rely on Servitors and Faceless Cultists to keep the other players busy while she faces her nemesis in personal magical combat.

WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

“Creep, we’ve been NOTHING. It’s all been an ACT. Every part of it — ‘specially that KISS. That was the BIGGEST act of all. It made me wanna GAG, kissin’ you, Logan.”

~ Terra

The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing is a villain who pretends to be a hero.

EXAMPLES: Terra (DC); the original Thunderbolts, Xorn when he was Magneto in disguise (Marvel); Agent Ward (television, *Agents of SHIELD*); Syndrome (film, *The Incredibles*); the Red Mist (*Kick-Ass*)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Hero in Disguise, Doppelganger, Ex-Con

ABILITIES: The specific powers a Wolf possesses are not especially relevant to this archetype, but these powers have been made to facilitate the con. Traditional powers like super-strength, invulnerability, and flight simply “feel” heroic to civilians, and flashy powers wow the crowd. If there are a set of powers which a particular hero has made famous, the Wolf may imitate them with hidden devices. A Wolf infiltrating a team of heroes will be more powerful, in preparation for the inevitable moment when he fights all of them at once. Wolves can have powers traditionally associated with villains (such as cold, darkness, or necromancy), but these powers will be disguised in some way so that they appear heroic. For example, a Wolf who is secretly a vampire may tell the press his fantastic speed and strength come from a super-soldier formula (Sergeant Stripes from Paul Grist's delightful comic *Jack Staff*).

The Wolf will be charismatic and an excellent liar; he may be trained in infiltration, stealth, and other skills at odds with his heroic appearance. These skills inevitably get called upon in the course of adventures and witnesses get suspicious; NPC witnesses get killed to cover

the Wolf's tracks, but the Wolf lies his way out of it with player characters.

QUALITIES: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing has two origins: the actual method by which he gained his evil powers (which he keeps secret), and a second origin that describes his transformation into a Wolf (which is entirely fabricated and packaged for public consumption). Some Wolves are already established villains in the campaign, but others were just normal people given powers specifically to infiltrate the hero community. Depending on the level of effort that has gone into the con, the Wolf could have an elaborately constructed false identity complete with fabricated friends, he could be a mysterious cypher with a conspicuously blank historical record, or he could be pestered by old friends who knew him as a villain and who now bump into him and try to wave hello while he hurries past and denies all knowledge.

Why has the Wolf adopted this new identity? If he is the tool of a Mastermind, he is probably there to gather intelligence and act as a Trojan Horse, but there are other possibilities. Perhaps he is out for vengeance on a specific hero, perhaps he's tired of running from the law, or perhaps he's pursued by other villains and he figures the safest place to be is among heroes. He may need access to something which is all but impossible for villains to acquire, but easy for heroes: secret government files, for example, or the keys to a hero's time machine. His new career may be serendipitous; he may have discovered the abandoned lair of a long-gone hero, and now he's taking advantage of that by using the hero's weapons and resources to create a new persona.

In order to appear more heroic, the Wolf will be physically attractive and wear a costume designed to appeal to the public; it might be patriotic, for example, and include a cape but not a mask, because the Wolf has nothing to hide. He may be young (because kids are endearing) or sexy (because sex sells) or both. All of this marketing is usually successful; the Wolf may have a fan club, be the star of the

convention circuit, and be the subject of cosplay and fanfic.

A Wolf who has been created just to infiltrate a team of super heroes is supported by a hidden mastermind or even an entire organization; he may appear to be a brilliant inventor, for example, or to have fantastic wealth, but these assets are actually provided by his villainous master. He has to sneak off once in a while to communicate with these masters, and friction arises between his orders and his personal desires. Often it is this relationship with mysterious others which first makes a hero suspicious of the Wolf's true nature.

A villain who steals the identity of his heroic nemesis for an extended period (*Kraven's Last Hunt*, *Superior Spider-Man*) becomes a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, but if impersonating various heroes is the villain's modus operandi (Skrulls), he's really just a Doppelganger.

STORIES: A Wolf features in stories that are about treason and loyalty, stories which reveal the often-overlooked rewards of being heroic, and stories which highlight our culture's obsession with appearance over substance. A Wolf is always forced to choose between his villainous past and his heroic present, and in this sense his story is about the do-over, the second chance, and redemption.

The Wolf may join a team of heroes and, if he does, he may even be a player character. In a situation such as this, the Gamemaster needs to decide if the other players are going to be in on the joke, even if the other characters are not. This depends very much on your table and the history of your gaming group; some groups have kept secrets from each other for so long that it is considered routine. Other groups are made up of players who have a hard time separating character knowledge from player knowledge, so that a GM must keep the Wolf's true nature a secret if he wants the heroes to act naturally. If a Wolf joins a hero team and is an NPC, players will likely suspect him of being a Wolf, and in these cases it's actually more of a surprise if the Wolf is, in fact, a good guy

falsely accused. This makes him a Hero in Disguise. If you want to run an entire game made of up Wolves, you are running a Bait and Switch, and there are suggestions for this kind of campaign in the chapter on "**Super Villain Gaming.**"

In order to fool everyone, the Wolf is forced to do things heroes do, like saving the world and rescuing innocents. When he does, he earns popular acclaim and becomes admired and idolized by the same people who hated and ran from him when he was a more obvious villain. This leads the Wolf to a personal crisis; he finds being a super hero is actually psychologically rewarding and even kind of cool. Sometimes he falls in love with a hero. He doubts his former life and his convictions, but he is trapped in his own con.

A Wolf who reverts to his villainous ways may claim he is being true to himself or that "it's too late for me," but he's really admitting that he is unwilling to change; his tale is tragic. Other Wolves turn over a new leaf when their secret is revealed and change archetype into the heroic Ex-Con.

THE GRINNING REAPER

Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, Supernatural Horror

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Coordination	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Strength	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 13

Specialties

Deception Expert
Medicine
Occult
Performance (Karaoke)
Persuasion
Psychiatry
Stealth

Powers

Immortality

Incredible 7

Extra: Suspension

Life Support

Amazing 8

All but eating and sleeping

Mind Control

Incredible 7

Extras: Addiction, Broadcast

Limit: Eye Contact, Hypnosis

Resistance (Damage)

Fair 4

Extra: Affliction

Super-Senses: Darkness Vision

Weak 1

Transformation: Bat, Wolf, or Hybrid

Average 3

Extra: Alternate Form (Gaseous)

Limits: Mute

Wall-Crawling

*Fair 4***Qualities**

Hospice Worker From Hell

Bite of the Vampire

Dracula's Former Lover

Knacks

Those Eyes! That Smile!

No one with that cute could possibly be lying to you. The Grinning Reaper has a +2 on Deception tests made out of combat, as part of conversation.

Cheerleader For Team Death

The Grinning Reaper has a +2 on tests when she is persuading someone to die or commit suicide.

Background: Jeanette McCallum grew up in 19th century Pensacola, when the town was a bustling port in early America. The eldest daughter of a wealthy Navy family, she captured the eye of a handsome European aristocrat when he drifted into town, the sole survivor of a ship wrecked by hurricane. Emboldened by her privileged upbringing, she resolved to marry this man no matter what it took; this turned out to be no small challenge,



because no fewer than five of her young society rivals had decided the same thing. But Jeanette was determined and utterly ruthless; one by one she killed each of her former friends, often by luring them out onto the water with promises of a festive afternoon of recreation. Two of these women she drowned; another's head was caved in with a well-swung oar. By this time her two surviving rivals were onto her and in hiding. Tracking them to their hideout in an Indian cemetery, she smashed one to death with a shovel and, with her bare hands, broke the neck of the last.

But in this struggle Jeanette had sustained a mortal knife wound, and she would have slowly bled to death had her beloved not appeared. He revealed himself as no mere man, but a creature of the night: Dracula, Lord of the Vampires, and he was proud of Jeanette, who had made herself a monster long before Dracula had need to bite her.

On that night, Dracula shared his curse with Jeanette McCallum and she left her family and Florida behind, traveling with her devil husband throughout the fledgling United States. At first, they were united by their love of death and their bloody revels, but time wears every passion thin. By mid-century, Dracula resolved to return to his ancestral home in Europe, and Jeanette was glad to see him go. For a time, she thought him dead, and in the years before the Great War she traveled to Romania, only to find his tomb empty and Dracula gone. Since then, Jeanette and Vlad have crossed paths time and again, sometimes as lovers, sometimes as enemies, eager to be reunited and just as eager to part. It must be love.

These days, Jeanette blends into mortal society as a hospice worker and advisor. She has many patients at once, and uses her position to convince her patients to sign over what remains of their worldly possessions. When the time is right, and when she's hungry, she takes what remains of their life. No one questions the death of her patients, because that's what is expected of those in hospice care. Her supernatural powers of persuasion ensure that everyone, co-worker and patient alike, adore her and speak of her in glowing terms. Indeed, she may be the most popular and beloved woman in the city. Happy by nature, quick to laugh, clever with a turn of phrase and with an infectious mood, she actually does bring honest joy and relief to her patients ... before she sucks the life out of them and robs them for all they have. She calls herself a cheerleader for Team Death, and no one suspects that the woman they so look forward to seeing twice a week is, in fact, death in disguise. She's also amazing on karaoke night.

THE GRINNING REAPER IN PLAY

The Grinning Reaper, as she calls herself, walks among mortals who have no idea she is a supernatural horror. The best way to introduce her is as a hospice counselor or caregiver for an NPC related to one of the player characters. When the hero's aging aunt begins to falter, or when the old mentor who trained the hero in the use of his powers loses his will to live, the

charming, smiling, Reaper slips into the story. Over a few sessions the patient becomes worse and worse, but does not die because Jeanette has not yet been able to secure the patient's fortune (or that mysterious occult relic the NPC has hidden in the safe). Everything is proceeding more or less according to her plan, though the PC is getting increasingly suspicious, when Dracula shows up and decides to claim the dying patient for himself. This leads to a confrontation between the two vampires with the PC caught in the middle. The only way to defeat Dracula is by teaming up alongside the Reaper, and the cost for his help is that she leave the victim in peace.

Once the Reaper's methods are revealed, she will have to adapt. She may become a more traditional super villain, donning a costume appropriate to a vampiress and terrorizing heroes. But she could just move on and change her identity, find a new occupation, and go back to seducing handsome and wealthy husbands. She might even find herself terrorized by the ghosts of her 19th century girlfriends, and turn to the heroes for help.

HEROES OF THE YOUUNIVERSE

Sometimes a villain doesn't make sense without a hero. After all, an Evil Twin needs a Good Twin and for a Dark Mirror to be a twisted reflection of a heroic original, we need to know what that original is like. Where did the Villain With All Your Powers get his powers? To answer these and other questions, we've included a set of eight characters we call the Heroes of the YOUuniverse.

You may recognize their names. Most of the Heroes are based on public domain characters: Amazing Man, the Green Turtle, Miss Fury, Hugo Danner, and Night Bird. Some, like Green Turtle and Night Bird, are so-called "Legacy" heroes: 21st century men who have taken up the codenames of Golden Age champions. Others, like Danner and the Black Fury, actually are the Golden Age characters, still alive and fighting in the modern age. And there are some ringers in here too: Isis, the ancient goddess of Egypt who has come to Earth to take her name back from terrorism, and the Vet, who once used the public domain name "Major Victory" but who has taken a new identity after losing his legs and hearing to a nuclear landmine.

The Heroes of the YOUuniverse are an unofficial team; they don't have a headquarters, a team jet, or a battle cry. Nevertheless, they meet up in twos and threes when an especially dangerous threat arises, and when the world (or the YOUuniverse itself) is threatened, they can put their individual differences aside and work together. You can use them as NPC heroes in your setting, for players who show up to the game without a character, or for special one-shot stories in which every player takes one of the Heroes.

AMAZING WOMAN

Spin-Off Heroine, Master of the Martial Arts, Super Weapon

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Amazing</i>	8

Stamina 16

Specialties

Art (Photography, Writing)
Athletics
Martial Arts Master
Mental Resistance Expert
Occult
Stealth

Powers

Alternate Form: Gaseous
Amazing 8
Extras: Affect Physical (Strength), Darkness Control, Partial Phasing, Phase Shift
Resistance (Damage)
Amazing 8

Qualities

"Wow, you really ARE Amazing!"
Always a Student
World Traveler

Knacks

Centered
Amazing Woman has been trained to defend herself against the telepathic manipulations of her nemesis, the Great Question. She has a +2 on tests to resist any Mental power which tries to use her own negative personality traits against her.

Do You Feel That?

Amazing Woman can, by making her hand into mist, actually put herself inside another person.

While this could easily be used to kill, she has sworn never to do that. She is not, however, above using this terrifying ability to interrogate criminals. When she uses her Alternate Form to intimidate, Amazing Woman gets a +2 bonus to tests.

Jawsnapper in Twilight

Those who have learned to control the Green Mist also master this signature move, a series of blinding attacks made in gaseous form against a single opponent. To use it, Amazing Woman must first create a quality on the target expressly for this purpose, often something like *You've Underestimated Me* or *Lost in the Mist*. If she activates that quality on a later page, attacks with Martial Arts, and gets a success, she can immediately attack the same target again. She can continue attacking as long as she gets a success, and she gains the benefit of Improved Effort from the quality each time. As soon as she fails to get a success or the target is no longer in range, her additional attacks end, the quality disappears, and her turn is over. Amazing Woman must be able to use her Alternate Form to perform Jawsnapper in Twilight, and she can use it only once each scene.

Background: After the turn of the millennium, the occult masters who served on Tibet's Council of Seven decided they must choose a new champion to oppose evil. Their last pupil — John Aman, known to the world as Amazing Man — had been something of a mixed success. After all, his enemy the Great Question had succeeded in provoking Aman's darker nature with enough strength and power that it had taken over Amazing Man's body on more than one occasion. But the Council of Seven blamed themselves for this failing since, after all, the Great Question had been one of their number before he was exposed and fled for the West. The Question's replacement, however, was the first female master to sit among the Seven, and she persuaded the others that, if they really wanted to avoid the mistakes of Amazing Man, the logical solution was to train an Amazing Woman.



Kody Lightfoot was an American college student traveling to Tibet. She had a lifelong thirst for new experiences coupled with an interest in Buddhism, and the Seven Masters chose her after secretly subjecting her to six ritual tests so subtle that she never even realized they were tests at all. But she passed them, earning the respect of the Council, and for the next seven years she was taught hand to hand combat, how to control her own body and mind, and the secrets of Tibetan Buddhism. It was only after all this preparation that she was granted an audience with the Green Mist.

The Council of Seven did not entirely understand the Mist, thinking it a divine presence which lingered in the universe to help guide mortals towards perfection. In fact, it was an alien being native to another dimension and visible to our eyes as only a bodiless cloud of vapor. The Mist had dwelt in Tibet for over a

century and had lent its power to a number of men over that time, beginning with the Man In Green Gloves and ending with Amazing Man. To command its power, Kody had to defeat it, but this was a test of ingenuity, determination and endurance, not physical power, since the Mist was intangible. She succeeded in conquering it just as other students had before her: by taking the Mist into herself, allowing it to merge permanently with her body. In this way she both bound it to herself and was transformed by it.

Having passed the seventh and last test, Kody Lightfoot emerged from Tibet as Amazing Woman. Her mastery of the Green Mist has given her superhuman strength and invulnerability. Coupled with her command of the martial arts and the ability to adopt the gaseous form of the Green Mist, she has become one of the world's foremost super-heroes. Reluctantly, she has left her interrupted academic life behind. Instead, her new career as a travel writer and photographer gives her an excuse to go virtually anywhere in the world, befriending wealthy western tourists and hard-pressed indigenous people alike. Along the way, she has attracted the interest of the Great Question, who continues to use his telepathic powers for his own self-aggrandizement, to sow chaos, and to turn people's worst selves against them.

AMAZING WOMAN IN PLAY

The extras on Amazing Woman's Alternate Form are found in *Great Power*; Phase Shift allows her to move out of gaseous form, strike, and then return to gas on the same page. With Partial Phase, she can make some of her body physical while the rest remains gaseous. Affects Physical allows her to use her *Amazing Strength* on ordinary objects even while gaseous, and with *Darkness Control* she can surround herself with a dense cloud of green mist which is difficult to see through.

With her strong defensive and offensive powers, Amazing Woman makes a good choice for solo adventures. Although she is intelligent and has many connections around the world,

Amazing Man was created by Bill Everett and appeared in about thirty issues published by Centaur Comics, usually as the headliner. He has also been used by, or inspired, many creators since, making him one of the more well known public domain super heroes. See, for example, Project Superpowers and Malibu's Protectors series. Marvel Comics even has an Immortal Weapon, the Prince of Orphans, based on Amazing Man, and the Jawsnapper in *Twilight* comes from him. The Man With Green Gloves, however, is a legendary occult figure from World War II who, the story goes, secretly ruled Tibet and was met by Nazi anthropologists when they visited that country.

she is not really a detective, and this creates an opening for less powerful heroes such as Night Bird or the Woman in Red, characters that would otherwise be overshadowed by Amazing Woman's, well, Amazing-ness.

If you want to use Amazing Woman as a villain, it is tempting to follow the path of Amazing Man and have her corrupted by telepathic contact from the Great Question. This would make her a Power Corrupted or Fallen Hero. But Kody has trained much of her life for just that situation, and so it is perhaps more interesting for an evil version of Amazing Woman to be an Evil Twin from a parallel world in which the Council is devoted to world conquest, or perhaps a Dark Mirror, a rival student of the Council who wields the same powers as Kody but uses them for personal gain.

The Great Question himself is the surest way to draw Amazing Woman into a story. He can wield virtually any mental power at *Fantastic* rank (9), and she will pursue him anywhere in the world. She might ask the heroes to help her chase down leads, to back her up as she enters an obvious trap or ambush, or even crash their investigation if she finds out they are on the Question's tail without inviting her.

BLACK FURY

Animal Hero, Descendant, Femme Feline

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Great</i>	6
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Fair</i>	4
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 9

Specialties

Athletics
Investigation
Martial Arts
Occult
Stealth

Powers

Gadgets

Incredible 7

Leopard-Skin: Strike Device

Fair 4

Extra: Wall-Crawling

Qualities

Heir to the Drake Legacy
Stylish and Fashionable
For Every Good Deed Done, Two Bad Ones
Will Follow

Knacks

Black as Night

When wearing the black leopard-suit, the Fury has a +2 on all Stealth rolls.

Blowgun Master

Darron Drake has a +2 on tests when he can attack with a blowgun. He often uses sleeping darts or "the metal menace," a dust which disintegrates all metal it comes into contact with.

Background: Darron Drake is the adopted son of Marla Drake, aka Miss Fury, one of the first female super-heroes. His biological parents were Gary Hale, a wealthy American veteran once engaged to Marla, and the Baroness Erica

von Kampf, a German spy who seduced Hale in order to enter America as his wife. For years, Darron's true parentage was unknown, but he bears a very close resemblance to his father Gary. Once he grew, it was only a matter of time before Marla went through some old photos and, stumbling across a picture of Gary, saw the truth. Just to make things worse, the Baroness tried to woo Darron away from Marla in a scheme designed to acquire the Drake family fortune. Darron was raised by his single mother, her live-in maid Francine, detective Dan Carey, and the Brazilian criminologist Albino Jo, and although he was surrounded by opulence and had every luxury, he grew up a sober, responsible, selfless man who respects others and believes in charity and public service. Like Marla, he especially adores animals and children.

Marla's career as Miss Fury, and her son's inheritance of the role, was built around a leopard-skin outfit which was made and worn by a voodoo witch doctor. Somehow it came into the possession of Marla's uncle, who willed it to her with the injunction that she should always keep it and never reveal its secrets. According to legend, the outfit makes its wearer capable of accomplishing whatever he (or she, it has been comfortably worn by both men and women over the decades) sets his mind to. However, for every bit of good fortune that comes the wearer's way, two bad strokes of luck will follow.



Some argue that the bad luck of the suit is reserved only for those who steal it or otherwise try to use the outfit when it does not properly belong to them. According to this analysis, Marla and Darron would be its proper owners and thus they would escape its curse, but their lives have always been pretty eventful, and so it is hard to say which, if any, interpretation of the leopard-skin is correct.

Marla Drake was born shortly after World War I and is now almost a century old. However, in her many adventures as Miss Fury, she stumbled across two brilliant scientists who had, as old men, discovered a formula which restored youth and vitality. These men, Edredson and Karr, developed their formula in the 1860s with funding from Czar Alexander II but kept it a secret after they came under suspicion of murder. Both men, world-weary, finally chose to reject their longevity and they died in 1947. Marla was in possession of the chemical formula, though she considered longevity as much a curse as a blessing and refused to act upon it.

Darron was one of Manhattan's most eligible bachelors when, in 1966, he was preparing to attend a swanky costume party and discovered that a rival had already shown up at the party wearing a Batman costume identical to Darron's own. But Francine suggested the leopard-suit, and Darron was taken with it. He never arrived at the party. Instead, as soon as he put the costume on, bizarre coincidence and wild peril took over his life. In the months that followed, Darron Drake earned both the love of a Russian spy and the enmity of a Soviet general. He literally fell into a NEST cell and was suspected of murder. He spent a year in Vietnam and Cambodia, where he was romanced simultaneously by a French lounge singer, a Chinese gymnast turned Communist agent, and the daughter of a US General. As the Black Fury, Darron agreed to join a '70s super-team and battled foes like Professor Peril, Doctor Radium, and the Puzzler. But Drake remained unusual among costumed heroes because, for him as for his mother, putting on the leopard-skin was always a last resort. He insisted on

showing up to team meetings out of uniform, and was always so fashionably glamorous that he got away with it.

In 1988, however, Marla's exciting past caught up with her and she was shot by her longtime nemesis, Colonel Bruno. The bullet lodged deep in her body, and operating upon it would have killed her. Dan Carey, who had loved Marla for half a century and knew many of her secrets, enlisted the aid of their mutual friend Albino Jo to recreate the longevity formula from the original notes stashed in Marla's safe. Returned to the physical age of 30, Marla was now able to survive the surgery and, as soon as she recuperated, Darron returned the leopard-skin to her, charging her to use it for good as Miss Fury. Darron settled down to what he hoped would be a quiet and fulfilling private life, but ended up running for office. He was a US Senator representing New York for twelve years, and remained Manhattan's most eligible bachelor.

But nothing for the Drake family has ever been easy. Several years ago, when Darron was celebrating his 65th birthday at Manhattan's most exclusive club, his mother re-appeared to tell him that the leopard-skin had been stolen. The culprits, a secretive spy ring led by a beautiful platinum-blonde, protected the suit with security devices which would detect Marla's biological signature from miles away. The leopard-skin could not be left in criminal hands, but Marla could not recover it. It was up to Darron. Reluctantly, he agreed to take the longevity formula and become the Black Fury once more.

Since recovering the suit from his real mother (because of course the blonde turned out to be the redoubtable Baroness von Kampf, who had successfully persuaded a mad scientist to transplant her mind into a youthful body), Darron resumed his superheroic career while his foster mother, Marla, retreated to a life of solitude in a skyscraper penthouse. Now thirty years old forever (or at least as long as the formula lasts), she feels alienated from humanity, unable to have a relationship with

men who will grow old without her. But her fortune has grown even more vast, and through the Dan Carey Foundation she bankrolls her son's crime-fighting activities.

Darron Drake has had many teachers in his long life, but the most important was Albino Jo, the Brazilian who taught him criminology and hand-to-hand combat, the art of the blowgun and how to survive in the jungle. Although an old man now, Jo continues to serve Drake as his valet. Drake also wields a handful of unusual weapons gathered from his long career; these include a dust which disintegrates all metal, a transparent liquid which does the same to organic material, and more. The leopard-suit, regardless of any occult powers it may have, is equipped with claws on the hands and feet which Darron can use to climb or fight. He is occasionally accompanied by his mother's white-haired Persian cat, Peri-Purr, who lapped up the longevity formula when Francine accidentally left it on the kitchen counter.

THE BLACK FURY IN PLAY

Darron is a rare example of a male character taking over a female persona. Since the mid-'80s at least, through the "bad girl" phase of comics and more recent attempts to diversify gender in traditionally male superhero stories, it has been common to see a female character take over a male role. This is all to the good, because there are not enough female-friendly characters in the superhero genre. The opposite move, however, is more of a problem. Not only are creators sensitive to the risks involved with "taking a character away from female readers", but male characters who spin off of female ones are almost universally mocked by male readers (see Power Boy and Catman). Wiccan, son of the Scarlet Witch, may be the most successful example in this group.

The Black Fury is an attempt to make a male spin-off of a female hero in a manner that honors that legacy instead of stealing it. If successful, Darron Drake is a heartthrob, popular among female players and readers in the same way that Nightwing and Catman have become. He is a son who honors his mother by

Miss Fury/Black Fury was created by June Tarpe Mills in 1941. She was known as Black Fury at first but, after the leopard-skin was stolen and briefly worn by a man who impersonated her, became known as Miss Fury (presumably to distinguish her from male lookalikes). Her Sunday comic strip continued until December 1951 when it broke off without warning, mid-story. Miss Fury is the first female superhero created by a woman. Tarpe Mills, a former model and fashion illustrator, lent her strip a glamour that was unique among comic strips; Marla Drake rarely wore her leopard-suit, but she more than made up for it with a perfect coiffure, sophisticated outfits, breathtaking evening gowns, sexy stockings, and lacy lingerie. Mills died in '88, all but forgotten. Her final work *Albino Jo, the Man with Tigre Eyes*, which she intended as a comeback graphic novel, was rejected by literary agents and is incomplete.

following in her footsteps. And Marla is still out there, waiting in the wings should she ever need to don the cursed leopard-skin once more.

Mechanically, the Black Fury is a costumed crimefighter who doesn't even have a reliable arsenal. He fights crime with his wits, exploiting opportunities while everyone else is busy punching (though he can punch when he has to!). He's a good character for players who don't need big numbers to feel useful, who enjoy social roleplay, who know how to make Determination work for them (he begins with 3), and for female players who like to play the occasional male character.

THE DANNER FAMILY

Background: In the late 19th century, Abednego Danner, a professor of biology in Indian Creek, Colorado, discovered a process by which any living creature could be born with superhuman strength and invulnerability. After testing the process on tadpoles and a cat named Samson, he took the horrifying step of covertly drugging and injecting his own wife, Matilda, with the serum. She was with child, and several months later Hugo Danner was born.

Hugo displayed superhuman strength even as an infant, and Matilda soon deduced what had happened. A puritanical woman, she struggled between hatred towards her husband and love for her child, eventually accepting this as yet another trial through which she would proceed with stoic determination. She and Abednego raised Hugo with a constant awareness of his great strength, and he was good at concealing it. Inevitably, the people of Indian Springs came to realize the Danner boy was unusually strong, but Hugo was able to downplay his abilities on the rare occasion they were noticed. When they were, the reaction was always negative; Hugo inevitably provoked fear and envy among others, and he felt stifled by the simple limitations of Indian Creek. By now he had grown into a handsome, athletically-built, though not especially tall man with inky-black eyes and hair so black it was almost blue. He had a reddish-brown skin tone inherited from a Native American ancestor of Matilda's. A young woman, Anna Blake, fell in love with him and he reciprocated, behaving (and misbehaving) in all the ways expected of young men, but Hugo was already too alienated from human society to actually love Anna. He was different, isolated and singular. Anna Blake, the prettiest girl in Indian Creek, would never understand him. He broke her heart.

Financed at first by his father, Hugo moved to New York, where he enrolled in a prestigious and very expensive university. Within days he had a position on the varsity football team, where he became the star player. Hugo's

strength had grown, and the most extravagant athletic feat required not even a shred of effort from him; indeed, he spent all his time holding back, waging an inner war between the desire for recognition and fear of discovery. After his first year, he discovered that his tuition alone was bankrupting his family, and so rather than return home he moved to Coney Island for the summer, where he staged an act as a performing strongman. There, he bent railroad iron with his bare hands, set a bear trap with his teeth, and lifted horses onto his shoulders (though he could have lifted them with one hand). Again he found love, and again he found himself unable to connect with her; she arranged to leave him shortly before school resumed.

But in Hugo's sophomore year, tragedy changed the course of his life. Throughout the season, he had continued to lead his team to victory again and again, arousing envy in some of his teammates. In the final game, the team captain refused to give Hugo the ball, intending to prove that they did not need him to win. But the game slid away from them, and in desperation one of Hugo's friends got him the ball in the final minutes. The team captain, enraged, struck Danner, and Hugo was overcome with berserk fury. Taking the ball, he steamrolled across the entire field to score the winning touchdown, but in the process he rebuffed an opposing player and broke the man's neck. While the death was perceived by everyone as a fluke accident, and it was unlikely that Hugo would have suffered from it at school, he nevertheless packed his two suitcases and left the university that night, never to return. He sought a life of manual labor, working mostly aboard fishing vessels, where he received honest pay for honest work. And although he liked his coworkers as he had liked his classmates, and enjoyed the fellowship of men, he never truly felt one of them.

When the World War broke out, Hugo felt he had at last found his purpose. After all, what better stage was there for a man who could leap tall buildings or outrun a locomotive, a man whose skin was impervious to bullets and



whose hands could kill with the simplest effort? At the age of 20, he enlisted in the Foreign Legion, serving under a French commander who quickly noticed Hugo's great strength. War is an improbable thing filled with many improbable events, and Hugo was able to convince his commander, who knew nothing about America, that all the people of Colorado were physical specimens like him: strong, fast, and all but tireless. They called him "The Colorado," and said if they only had a regiment of men like him, the war would be over in a month. But there was no such regiment; there was only Lt. Danner, and although he won countless tactical victories, alone killing thousands of Germans, Hugo had little strategic impact in the war. For four years, mostly with the French but eventually in an American unit, he waged a daily battle that ground down his psyche. On the day his best friend in the war

was killed by an artillery shell, Danner went berserk and single-handedly murdered hundreds of German soldiers one at a time as he fought his way up the trenches. Covered in blood, his clothing shredded from bayonets and shells, roaring in triumph, he had devolved into a naked animal of death. When he eventually collapsed in utter exhaustion, he resolved to go to Berlin and kill the leaders of that nation, but even as he was preparing to steal a plane, news came of the Armistice. Hugo had been saved from his own worst impulses, and he was forever soured on war.

The father of his dead battlefield companion had earned Hugo a cool million dollars by war profiteering, but Danner sent the blood money to his parents and tried to find work. There was none to be had, and after nearly starving (Hugo had a prodigious appetite, once eating five

steaks and drinking a bucket of water at a single sitting) he agreed to accept training as a banker. But when an innocent man was caught in a vault, Hugo saved the man's life and aroused the ire of his managers, who presumed he had some secret for safe-cracking. He was interrogated by corrupt police who tried to beat and torture him. For days he endured all their humiliations, until finally when they threatened him with a welding torch he broke his bonds and fled. For months he lived in Connecticut, working as a ranch hand, even having a brief affair with his employer's wife. But a bull burst in on them and Hugo killed the animal with a single punch; she, horrified, fled and refused to speak to him. Before Hugo could decide to leave, again, he got word his father was dying.

Hugo had not seen his parents since he had left for college, and now Abednego was old and withered. Matilda, in the meantime, had used the war money to send several missionaries to Africa. Always a scientist, Abednego had many questions for his son about his physical abilities, and Hugo assured him that the process had worked and worked well; he was stronger and more impervious than ever. And when his father asked him what he was doing with this great gift, to what purpose he had put himself, Hugo lied, inventing a story of traveling to Washington to reform the government, with his bare hands if need be. Abednego died happy, believing his creation had made the world a better place. He entrusted his scientific journals to Hugo, charging him with replicating the process on others. Hugo's physical gifts were not, he learned, inheritable. Each subject must be chemically altered in the womb.

Still seeking a purpose, Hugo left for Washington, trying to make the lie he had told his father into truth. He joined the capitol's society and tried to identify men worthy of support and those whom he might hinder. His chosen cause was disarmament, but he found that the politicians were all motivated by money and re-election rather than real belief in any cause. It was 1927, and Nicola Sacco and Bartholomeo Vanzetti were about to be executed for crimes which, many in the nation

felt, they had not committed. Hugo made friends with a communist and anarchist, and offered to rescue the two Italians from prison. But the movement organizer ordered him not to, since millions would be raised from Sacco and Venzetti's martyrdom. Disgusted, yet again, with mankind, Hugo abandoned his plans for political reform.

Reflecting on the fear, envy, and greed that he had seen all around him, every year of his life, Hugo decided that there was one class of men which was less prone to these vices: scientists. His father, after all, had been a scientist, and scientific curiosity, imagination, and a desire for progress might prove stronger than the traditional human weaknesses. He found a scientific expedition to South America exploring Mayan ruins, arranged an interview with Dan Hardin, the expedition's leader, and got himself invited along. He proved, as always, a valuable and able team member, but his powers were revealed when a Mayan temple collapsed and he saved Hardin's life. This led to a long conversation in which Danner at last confessed everything, his entire life's story, to a man he felt he could trust, and Hardin in return gave advice that would save Hugo's life: if Hugo's problem was that he was alone, that he was forever alienated from human society, then he must make a new society made up of people like him. Other supermen, raised, educated, and befriended by supermen, would grow up with the support Hugo himself had never had, and he would in turn benefit from them. Hugo had been unable to accomplish great deeds alone, but what if he was not alone?

Together and in secret (Danner and Hardin faked Hugo's death, substituting the body of a local who had been struck by lightning for Hugo's own) they began deciphering Abednego's notes. Hugo had a theory that the Mayans had somehow also discovered the process that his father had, and it was in this way that the awesome stone palaces of South America had been built. In the jungle, he constructed a secret and solitary fortress out of stone, where he was eventually joined by Hardin and other scientists whom Hardin had

recruited. It took years to reconstruct the serum, but when it was ready, Hugo refused to replicate his father's footsteps in one way: he would not force the process on an unsuspecting woman. A young local was strongly attracted to the stoic but handsome Danner and Hardin took it upon himself to explain the situation to her. She agreed to participate, if Hugo was willing. He was.

Leopold Danner was born in 1934 and raised in the Yucatan by his mother and father, with Dan Hardin acting as a kind of benevolent uncle. Hugo, for the first time, truly loved another person, and it is perhaps understandable that he indulged the child, hoping to give him a better life than Hugo himself had ever had. By 1938, however, other superhuman beings started to appear and war was again breaking out. Hugo's opinion of war hadn't changed, but if there were other people like him out there, he had to meet them, and he left his son for several years, only returning when the war was through. In that time, Hugo Danner did considerable soul searching. For now he saw superhuman people who were not, like he was, cynical, jaded, and alone. Hugo had seldom inspired anything but fear and envy, but these people — dressed in their symbolic costumes, with their codenames and titles — inspired nations. When women in America read the latest exploits of Golden Girl or saw Amazing Man on the newsreel, it was their better natures which were aroused, not their worse ones. Hugo was humbled. He saw his attempt to create more supermen like himself to be selfish and misguided; he had been pretending to make the world a better place, but all he was really doing was trying to assuage his own loneliness.

He returned to Leopold, now on the verge of adolescence, only to find tragedy. The night before, Leopold had made a disparaging comment about his absent father and been disciplined by his mother; Leopold had, in turn, been overcome by the fury for which his father was known, and killed his mother with a single reckless blow. Hugo understood, and in the years that followed tried to be a good father, but

Hugo Danner is, of course, the protagonist of the 1930 science fiction novel *Gladiator* by Philip Wylie. Jerry Siegel wrote a review of this book shortly before creating Superman with Joe Schuster, and the similarities are stark; completely aside from his powers, which are virtually identical to Superman's in his first appearance, those powers are explained as an extension of the strength exhibited by insects, both characters are the sons of scientist fathers, and Hugo's fable about the men of Colorado, who all exhibit his same powers, is highly evocative of Kryptonians. Danner even builds a stone fortress for himself in the Colorado wilderness, though like everything else in Danner's life, this becomes only a symbol of his tragic, unfortunate birth. Many others have explored the character of Hugo Danner, and he has appeared in Marvel and DC comics, where he even has a son, Iron Munro. In the YOUNiverse, Hugo is a kind of Superman-interrupted, a character who had the potential to be the greatest hero in the world, but somehow just wasn't cut from the right mold. His family, though reminiscent of the Marvel family, Bat-family, or Superman family, differs from all those in that they have become better heroes than he himself ever was. Wylie's decision to make Hugo Native American in appearance, a westerner in his upbringing and love of nature, and explicitly connected to the Mayans, makes the Danner family "American," but in a wider and more continental sense than simply "citizens of the United States." The Danners are not white, a characteristic almost entirely unexplored in previous versions of the character.

there was a twofold layer of guilt that lay upon him whenever he looked at his son, and Leopold could sense it. He grew into a resentful and angry young man, and he left his father's house in the Yucatan in 1952. Hugo thought he'd never see his son again; if only he had been so lucky.

By now, Hugo had accepted the fact that he was not aging as normal people did. Hardin,

now an old man, theorized Hugo might live to be two hundred. With his dying breath he urged Hugo to leave his stone fortress and enter the community of super-people. There, perhaps, he might find some solace. And so, in 1961 Hugo Danner donned a blue and white uniform and began fighting crime as the Gladiator, a name given to him by the press. He was surprised to find he was neither the most powerful nor most experienced of super-heroes, some of whom came from other worlds or mythical civilizations thousands of years old, and as he often had done, Hugo found companionship and even friendship. But what may be even more important is that he found challenge; for all of Hugo's life, he had never really found anything with which he had to truly struggle. Even the trenches of the first World War had been nothing but a murder gallery for him, and he was never proud of his accomplishments there. But suddenly, confronted with radioactive monsters, supernatural horrors, and would-be world conquerors, Hugo Danner found that he actually had to work for something. And he relished it.

As the Gladiator, Hugo was never a particularly successful or popular super-hero. He was reactionary, responding to crimes as they were already underway, and he benefited from direction by legal authorities or other heroes. The press largely despised him, and many editorials branded him a menace. Sometimes, at the end of a particularly ruthless battle, his famous fury would come to the surface and he would nearly kill his enemy. But super-villains are durable and have many means of escape, and Hugo always avoided being a murderer by the narrowest of margins. Leopold took his father's new career as a personal insult and tormented him in a series of adventures which ended, Hugo thought, in Leopold's death. Hugo was weary of the constant battle and the lack of lasting progress. Abandoning what everyone else called a uniform, but what he saw only as a costume little different from his Coney Island days, he left the city and the super hero life forever.

In the decades since, Hugo Danner has wandered, seldom remaining in any one place for more than a year. He has worked a hundred odd jobs, occasionally retreating to his Yucatan fortress. It was there he met his grand-children Aurelia, Zebulon, and Sierra. Leopold, who had always been more scientifically minded than his father, had solved the greatest flaw in Abednego's research, making the powers of the Danner family inheritable. But Aurelia, the eldest, understood her father's deep rooted hatred of human beings and had fled him, taking her younger siblings with her. Aurelia rejoiced at the sight of her grandfather, whom she knew only from his heroic reputation and as an object of Leopold's resentment, but Hugo could not embrace her. He was too old, too cynical, too jaded, too convinced of his own failure. He left.

For the last five years, Aurelia has been the caregiver for the Danner clan. Simultaneously, she has adopted the role of a super hero, proving far better at it than her father ever was (though never as good as she believes him to have been). Brave, optimistic, and principled, she represents the best of her family. Zebulon, now a teenager, is preparing for the launch of his own team of superhuman youths. Sierra, still in school, mostly loves *Adventure Time*.

THE DANNER FAMILY IN PLAY

Hugo is a wanderer and has given up the superhero life, like he has given up everything else. It is common in 21st century comics to portray "evil Superman," a figure who pretends to be heroic, but who in fact has nothing but hatred and contempt for the little people around him. Hugo is not evil, he just can't seem to make it work. Haunted by his past failures, unable to truly connect to anyone who isn't like him, he is no sociopath, he's just hopelessly lonely. Part of this is because he's never been able to intellectually respect women; women can provide emotional and physical comfort to him, but this is a guy who kept house with a woman for months and then, the moment his college buddies showed up, called her a "tart." Women leave Hugo for their own good, and deep inside, he knows this.

Leopold Danner is the black sheep of the family; see the Nemesis archetype for full details.

Aurelia Danner is one of the pre-eminent heroes of the YOUNiverse. While not as powerful as Amazing Woman, she is more of a team player and traditionally leads other heroes into battle. She's also a champion of Native American culture and a good way to introduce Central or South American adventure. While Sierra is too young to make a good PC in anything except Power Pack-style adventure, Zebulon is a perfect candidate for any teenage hero team. Indeed, with his famous name, his family's considerable resources, and his known super-powers, he is something of a "number one draft pick," and rival teams might even compete for his attention ... leading to a test of moral character for the young man.

HUGO DANNER (AKA "THE COLORADO", THE GLADIATOR)

Ultimate Hero, Minority Hero

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Coordination	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Strength	<i>Supreme</i>	8
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Fair</i>	4
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 13

Specialties

Athletics
Intimidation
Military

Powers

Leaping
Incredible 7
Life Support
Great 6
Cold, Heat, Pathogens, Pressure, Radiation,
Toxins

Resistance (Damage)

Great 6

Super-Speed

Average 3

Qualities

The Fury of the Danners
Brings out the Worst in People
Rolling Stone

Knacks

Tireless

Hugo has a +2 on Strength tests related to long-term endurance, such as to go for a long period without rest, food, or water.

AURELIA DANNER, THE GLADIATOR

Descendant, Spin-Off Heroine, Woman Warrior,
Minority Hero

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Coordination	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Strength	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 14

Specialties

Athletics
Leadership
Persuasion

Powers

Leaping
Incredible 7
Life Support
Great 6
Cold, Heat, Pathogens, Pressure, Radiation,
Toxins
Resistance (Damage)
Great 6
Super-Speed
Average 3

Qualities

The Fury of the Danners
Brings out the Best in People
Natural Born Hero

Knacks

Snap Out of It!

When one of her allies is suffering from a negative quality that impairs their actions, like Controlled, Aurelia can remove that quality with a successful Willpower test. If the target would already get a test to remove the quality, she grants a +2 bonus instead.

Animal Ken

Aurelia has a +2 on Willpower interactions with animals, such as to tame a wild beast.

Tireless

Aurelia has a +2 on Strength tests related to long-term endurance, such as to go for a long period without rest, food, or water.

THE GREEN TURTLE

Minority Hero, Armored Wonder, Descendant

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Good</i>	5+2
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5+2
Strength	<i>Good</i>	5+2
Intellect	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5+2
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 13

Specialties

Power (Force Control)
Technology Expert

Powers

The Shell: Resistance (Damage) Device
Incredible 7

Extras: Ability Increase (Prowess, Coordination, Strength, Awareness), Force Control (Blast, Expanded Field, Forceflight, Force Bubble), Interface

Qualities

Shadowy AI
American Born Chinese
Silicon Valley Superstar

Knacks

Master of Improvisation

The Green Turtle has a +2 on tests to create qualities on the environment using his Force Control power.

Empathize

Danny has a +2 on tests to learn qualities if the target is an outsider or immigrant.

Background: Danny Sun is a third-generation Chinese-American who began a career in electrical engineering while still in high school. In his early twenties he formed a company around his own innovations, and within a few years he was worth millions. The money made life easier, but it didn't make him happy or help him come to terms with his mixed cultural heritage. Danny was raised to believe that wealth, like every other kind of power, only had

real value when it was used to benefit others, and after retreating to the beach for several days of silent contemplation, he decided he would use his wealth to create a symbol, a symbol of his heritage as a Chinese-American. He would take up the mantle of the Green Turtle, a legendary superhero of the 1940s.

The Turtle's Shell is resistant to harm and amplifies Danny's strength. It is equipped with a suite of sensors which allow him to monitor his environment and fight with the benefit of targeting and guidance systems. Danny is assisted by Shadow, an artificial intelligence which usually dwells inside the Shell but which can also accompany Danny by stowing away in simpler devices (like a smartphone or car). The Shell's most powerful weapon, however, is an incredible force field projection array; Danny can not only protect himself with a force field, he can protect others, strike enemies with bolts of force, or fly on a hexagon-shaped projection.

The Green Turtle had a bit of a learning curve; Danny's initial adventures were comical failures, and he was lucky to survive them. But he did survive, gaining valuable experience and contacts. From them, he learned to fight and adapt to the unexpected. He came to understand super-criminals and the way they covered their tracks. And, once or twice, he saved the world. His identity, at first hidden, was revealed to the world after a battle with WMD and he now enjoys celebrity status as a billionaire superhero.

Indeed, the Green Turtle is one of America's foremost superheroes. He has been called upon to represent Chinese-Americans in the media and in diplomacy, and despite the fact that this is exactly why he chose the Green Turtle identity, Danny is nevertheless uncomfortable with the role. Naturally humble, he prefers to spend his time with family and friends; he is very active in charity work, especially when it comes to visiting schools. He has yet to find love and settle down.



The Green Turtle was created by Chu Hing in 1944 and he appeared in five issues of *Blazing Comics*. He battled Japanese invaders in China, and common wisdom has it that Chu wanted the Green Turtle to be Chinese or Chinese-American but his publisher would not permit it. So, instead, the Turtle's features are always concealed. His shadow is an animated turtle with eyes, hands, and a constant smile, but only the audience notices it. In 2014, Gene Yang and Sonny Liew brought back the Green Turtle in a graphic novel entitled *The Shadow Hero*. It tells the origin of the Turtle, and explains all of the character's odd characteristics. The Turtle's original *Blazing Comics* stories are in the public domain, but the origin revealed in *The Shadow Hero* is not; nevertheless, the YOUNiverse assumes that book's contents to be in continuity.

THE GREEN TURTLE IN PLAY

As a hero in the YOUiverse, the Green Turtle is extremely resilient; between his armor and his force fields, it takes a lot to hurt him. He's great at defeating Faceless Minions, low-powered super-criminals, and saving innocent people, but he doesn't hit as hard as other high-flying superheroes. Instead, he has to improvise and plan, creating qualities on the environment and then activating them to give himself an advantage. For this reason, he's a good character for players who know the **ICONS** system well. He's also the foremost representative for Asian-Americans in the setting, and often gets pulled into stories or subplots in which his race and upbringing are more important than his powers. The Green Turtle is the kind of hero who, while everyone else is trying to beat up the alien monster that just landed in Central Park, will instead figure out why it is here and defuse the conflict.

ISIS

Avatar, Magician

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Fair</i>	4
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Intellect	<i>Great</i>	6
Awareness	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Willpower	<i>Fantastic</i>	9

Stamina 16

Specialties

Leadership
Medicine Expert
Occult Master

Powers

Element Control: Weather

Supreme 10

Extras: Affliction (heat), Blast (lightning), Earth Control (Binding, Limit: Sand), Water Control (Tsunami, Limit: Source)

Flight

Great 6

Immortality

Weak 1

Postcognition

Amazing 8

Transformation: Animals

Incredible 7

Qualities

Mighty Isis!

Staff of the Ancients

Protector of the Dead

Goddess of Children

Knacks

Underworld Travel

Isis can use her magic to open a portal to (but not necessarily out of) any underworld. This includes Hell, pagan underworlds like Valhalla or Hades, or even the underworlds of alien cultures and civilizations.

Background: The first appearance of the superhuman woman calling herself Isis was in April of 2013, less than a day after an Islamic militant group proclaimed itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS. This woman, who claims to be the same goddess worshipped by ancient and classical-era Egyptians and by modern pagans, has proclaimed her outrage at the “degradation” inflicted upon her name, ancient history and folklore, and her modern followers. Analysts have been unable to determine the validity of Isis’s claims, if she is in fact the ancient goddess, or what connection she might have to other women who have claimed the name of Isis over the centuries.

In the few years since her appearance, Isis has worked to free journalists and soldiers captured by ISIS and sentenced to execution on live television, fought to preserve archeological and historic sites from destruction by ISIS, and even stood in the path of ISIS military offensives in Iraq and Syria. She has not always been successful; especially at first, she seems to have experienced a very steep learning curve, during which she developed a new appreciation for modern military hardware and the seemingly limitless violence and cruelty which her declared enemies were willing to demonstrate. Since her initial failures, however, Isis has picked her battles more wisely, been more careful in her preparation, and been more successful in her heroic rescue efforts.

Although most of her work takes place in Iraq and Syria, Isis has appeared around the world and has become something of a global hero, especially to children. She can often be found bringing food or medicine to refugee camps or the homes of those who have fled Syria for Europe. While the mystery of her true identity and her claim of divinity makes her controversial among religious figures and in First World nations, her acts of charity and care for the sick, homeless, and injured has won her a positive reputation and a wave of popular support among the poor and desperate, who are willing to overlook her pagan pedigree in favor of her good works. Notably, Isis does not “proselytize” or attempt to spread or rekindle



her ancient cult. Indeed, she repeatedly denies all attempts at worship by those she encounters, and while she never denies her divinity she somehow manages to remain humble, insisting that “there are entities in the cosmos who are like gods even to the gods.” There is a small but highly vocal group of conspiracy theorists who claim that Isis is, in fact, an alien from a world in orbit around the star Sirius.

Isis has worked alongside Muezzin and the Veteran against CALIPH-8, WMD, and the Egyptian priestess known as the Beetle. Ankhesen’sutek, in particular, has sworn her death. She apparently is convinced that Isis is who she says she is, and she desires vengeance for being thrown out of Isis’s favor decades ago.

ISIS IN PLAY

Unlike most super-sorcerers, Isis does not actually have the Magic power. Her powers are presumably magical in origin but not as open-ended as the Magic power encourages. This can make her easier for newcomers to Icons, who can easily be overwhelmed by the many choices available to a character with Magic. If you give Isis to a more experienced player who is comfortable with the many powers in the game, consider revising her powers to include Magic 8, and converting Postcognition and Transformation: Animals into extras.

Isis is well known in mythology and folklore for her healing powers. The superhero Isis, however, does not possess healing powers because such abilities can be problematic in an ongoing campaign. If a character can heal injuries, cure cancer, and bring back the dead virtually at will, then what is she doing stopping bank robberies or even fighting terrorists? She could be doing much more good by giving up a heroic career and healing 24/7. This is exactly why superheroes in the comics so seldom have healing powers. But many players, coming from tabletop or computer RPGs, expect them. If you don't mind healing powers in your game, Isis should definitely have them; add Healing 8 (Cure, Resurrection) to her list of powers (or simply as more extras on a Magic power).

NIGHT BIRD

Dark Avenger, Gadget Guy, Master of the Martial Arts

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Great</i>	6
Coordination	<i>Good</i>	5
Strength	<i>Great</i>	6
Intellect	<i>Good</i>	5
Awareness	<i>Great</i>	6
Willpower	<i>Good</i>	5

Stamina 11

Specialties

Athletics
Investigation Expert
Martial Arts
Stealth
Technology

Powers

Utility Belt: Gadgets Device
Great 6

Helmet: Super-Senses Device
Average 3

Night vision, radio hearing, and infrared tracking

Extra: Resistance (Sensory)

Qualities

The Night Bird Strikes!
I Have Eyes Everywhere
Master of Improvisation

Knacks

Death from Above

Night Bird has a +2 to Prowess when he can leap down on an opponent at least a story beneath him.

Background: Simon Crockett never really knew his grandfather. Thus it was a surprise to him when, going through a box in the attic, he found old photos his father had taken along with newspaper clippings in which the photos appeared. But there was one other clipping as well: the arrest of a criminal fence apprehended by a mysterious vigilante calling himself "the Night Bird." This was at the dawn of the age of

the costumed adventurer, and Simon's curiosity was aroused. He went looking for more on this "Night Bird" character, but found nothing. Catching that fence was the Night Bird's first and only case.

But Simon's grandfather had gotten his job at the local paper with that story, and slowly, methodically, Simon put together the sequence of events. The elder Crockett had found his true calling as a photographer and, while his initial start was shaky, he went on to take some amazing photos both in World War II and later, throughout the 1950s. He never came to national attention and there were no Pulitzers in the attic, but he married his long time partner in journalism and started a family. No one, even Simon's grandmother Dell, seemed to know that it was Crockett himself who had become the Night Bird for one tumultuous hour... an hour never to be repeated.

Inspired by his grandfather and, perhaps, still trying to connect with him, Simon made a vow to bring the Night Bird back to life. He began with photojournalism and found this, too, was in his blood. He put his clever technical mind to work and began to hack into surveillance cameras across the city. Making the costume was a challenge; getting grenades and other weapons would have been easier if he hadn't insisted on the weapons being non-lethal. The piece de resistance was an armored helmet filled with sophisticated sensors and targeting systems that allowed him to fight easily at night.

Now the Night Bird is on the prowl once more, and Simon has found a purpose for his life. He is not the most powerful superhero out there or the most famous, but he may be the most determined. And at last, seventy years later, criminals have learned to fear the Night Bird.

NIGHT BIRD IN PLAY

As one of the Heroes of the YOUiverse, Night Bird makes a good player character for one-shot gaming sessions or other situations in which there is no time or inclination to make a new super hero. He's a capable fighter but his Investigation, Gadgets and Technology may be



more useful to a team. When he is a player character, he has 2 Determination.

If Night Bird is an NPC hero in the setting, he may be the Defender of a particular city or neighborhood. When the heroes chase a fleeing foe to that locale, Night Bird appears to warn them away from his turf. They will need to prove themselves in his eyes, and he's got plenty of eyes to watch them. Alternately, the heroes learn that Simon has trespassed into the lair of a Mastermind with a time machine. They follow him into the past, where Simon tries to restore or prolong his grandfather's crimefighting career, wishing his grandfather to enjoy some of the fame and glory that comes from being a costumed hero — the loss of which Simon considers a tragedy. Of course, the lesson here is that "Lens" Crockett lived a long and contented life full of love and personal accomplishment; he always remembered that

Night Bird is inspired by a public domain hero of the same name who made only a single appearance in Fox Features *Green Mask* #6. His origin story is 6 pages long and that's all there is. The original Night Bird was "Lens" Crockett, whose got his big break in the newspaper business when, on a "try out" for the editor, he stumbled across the crime ring his grandson would later re-discover. His sharp-tongued partner Dell was a blonde reporter in the Lois Lane mode.

hour when he came this close, but he never regretted the decisions he made. Now, if he had only been a photographer for one hour, that would have been a tragedy.

The heroes have to help Simon understand this, and leave his father's legacy in peace.

THE VETERAN

Disabled Hero, Super-Patriot, Minority Hero

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Great</i>	6
Coordination	<i>Fair</i>	4
Strength	<i>Fantastic</i>	9
Intellect	<i>Fair</i>	4
Awareness	<i>Good</i>	5
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 15

Specialties

Athletics
Leadership
Military Expert
Weapons (Guns)

Powers

Flight
Amazing 8
Resistance (Damage)
Amazing 8
Hearing Aid: Super-Senses Device
Fair 4
Communication (radio), Extended Hearing,
Tracking Sense (audio signal triangulation),
Ultrasonic hearing

Qualities

Beloved Patriot
Paraplegic Cyborg
Respect for Authority

Knacks

Strong-Jawed Hero
The Vet can use Strength when trying to persuade, instead of Willpower.

Background: Willard Robalt grew up in Maine, an ordinary kid with big dreams that he wasn't sure how to attain. He came from a patriotic family with a military tradition, but had always considered the Army to be a place for losers who couldn't make it any other way. Then, on a lonely highway, a tight turn and an oncoming semi changed Willard's life forever. His Ford was totaled, but he miraculously survived without a scratch. Willard Robalt was

superhuman. By morning, he knew there was only one right thing to do: he walked into the recruiter's office and volunteered.

The Army was good for Will, but he was also pretty good for the Army. Almost invulnerable and wielding incredible super-strength, Will found himself deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. He tried to stay focused on the mission, but public relations officers were always trying to package and present him as a publicity and recruitment tool. That's why, on the same day he landed on the USS Abraham Lincoln and delivered a speech with the banner "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED" in the background, President George W. Bush awarded a medal to Robalt and dubbed him "Major Victory." That was 2003, but the wars weren't over.

Five years (and countless missions) later, Major Victory was coming to the rescue of a pinned-down squad when he tripped an IED meant just for him. The explosion was catastrophic; hundreds died. Robalt lost both his legs and his hearing. The President visited him in the hospital. His heroic career was done. He was discharged and on disability, but by now the Army was his life. He became a spokesman for veterans of the War on Terror and for the disabled, met a social worker with whom he fell in love, and married.

Then, a few years ago, Danny Sun knocked on his door. A brilliant inventor who wore the armor of the Green Turtle, Sun had a simple question: "What would you do if we could put you back in action?" It was not an idle boast. Sun had researched prosthetics made of super-hard materials that could match Will's strength and durability. In fact, Will could become an even better hero than he had been: jets in the prosthetic legs would make him capable of flight. To help compensate for his hearing loss, Sun brought in the Blue Ear, a young superhero from Salem famous for his super-hearing. Will's new hearing device incorporated the Blue Ear's secret technology and ensured he'd never be lured into another ambush.



By now, Will had left the Major Victory identity behind him and, besides, he had never much liked the name or how he had gotten it. He was a veteran, a spokesman for veteran rights, and so that's what he called himself. The Vet is now one of the world's foremost heroes but also a private citizen. The government and the Army have his admiration and respect, but he follows his conscience. It's worked out pretty well so far.

THE VETERAN IN PLAY

As medical technology has advanced, men and women who might have died from battlefield injuries instead return home with life-changing disabilities. The Vet is a symbol of this challenging reality of 21st century warfare. He is a Disabled Hero and a Super-Patriot, and his struggle to balance these two parts of himself mirror the struggles faced by tens of thousands of Americans.

Major Victory appeared in a few issues of *Dynamic Comics* (1941) and was published by Harry Chestler. His creators are unknown, as is almost everything else about him. The Blue Ear was created by Manny Menderos and Nelson Ribeiro, then an assistant editor at Marvel, for Anthony Smith, a young comics reader in Salem with a hearing disability. He has since appeared alongside Iron Man and Hawkeye.

As a character, the Vet's powers are pretty straight-forward. He's a Superman, a "flying brick" with superhuman strength, invulnerability, and senses. He's a good character for players who like their heroes simple, without a lot of complicated options and flexible powers. The Vet flies up and hits the bad guy in the face; he's very satisfying. As one of the Heroes with Leadership, he often finds himself acting as the spokesman for the heroic community and directing other heroes in battle.

Because he's one of the most powerful Heroes of the YOUNiverse, the fact that the Vet is African-American becomes even more important. We can add Minority Hero to his list of archetypes, and the Vet often finds himself drawn into America's ongoing debate over racial inequality. The military has a long history of leading the way when it comes to the integration of minority groups, and in this sense the Vet demonstrates what is possible.

THE WOMAN IN RED

Decendant, Super-Cop, Minority Hero

Abilities

Prowess	<i>Great</i>	6
Coordination	<i>Great</i>	6
Strength	<i>Average</i>	3
Intellect	<i>Incredible</i>	7
Awareness	<i>Amazing</i>	8
Willpower	<i>Great</i>	6

Stamina 9

Specialties

Athletics
Investigation Master
Stealth
Wrestling

Qualities

Refuses to Use A Gun
Best Officer on the Force
Tear Gas Fountain Pen

Knacks

Fearless
The Woman in Red has a +2 on rolls to resist intimidation and fear.

Background: Since police detective Peggy Allen first donned the costume of the Woman in Red in 1940, she has had two successors. The first, her relative Barbara Allen, was a pistol-toting crimefighter throughout the '80s and '90s. Finally kicked off the force for crossing the line in the pursuit of vigilante justice, this Woman in Red is now wanted by the FBI while she simultaneously prosecutes a one-woman war on crime. Her successor, Tina McDuffie, has taken up the mantle of the Woman in Red and is trying to better its reputation.

Peggy Allen was the best undercover detective in the department, and her use of the Woman in Red disguise was well known to her superiors. She was assigned all the toughest and most impossible mysteries, and usually adopted the identity of a maid or nurse so as to infiltrate the crime scene, gather evidence, and observe suspects. In order to deflect suspicion from "the

new maid,” Peggy would don the concealing garb of the Woman in Red: a distinctive flowing red jacket, hood, gloves, mask, and heels. Peggy was a tough customer, able to run, jump, and swing her way past murderers, thieves, and arsonists. She carried a pistol and wasn’t afraid to use it, or even to threaten a suspect with death if he didn’t cooperate. She always solved the crime, though not always before the killer struck again. But she got results, and the police chief lavished praise upon her. Not bad, for a policewoman in 1940.

Age slowed Peggy down, but it didn’t stop her. She continued to solve cases as the Woman in Red for decades until, now in her ’60s, her leg was broken by a fleeing felon. Forced to seek help, she turned to her grand-niece Barbara, who was then a recent graduate from high school with no real plan for the future. From her wheelchair, crutches, and eventually a cane, Peggy taught Barbara the skills of the Great Detective, training she had received from her mentor, Ethel Boston, who had taught Peggy when she was a young woman and who had herself studied under Sherlock Holmes. Barbara solved the case and apprehended the mysterious Black Death, accepting the identity of the Woman in Red permanently and joining the police force as a young cadet.

Tina McDuffie came to the role much differently. By 2010, Peggy Allen was dead and Barbara was on the run from the FBI. Americans were increasingly aware of the militarization of police forces across the country, and the shocking rate at which young black men were being shot and killed by law enforcement was finally drawing attention. Tina was a young policewoman trying to make an impact in her neighborhood, building relationships and a reputation as a good cop. But when a seemingly-supernatural killer called the Voa returned, Tina went undercover to flush him out. At the conclusion of the case, the chief of police had a bold suggestion. With some guidance from the personal journals and video logs of Peggy Allen, left behind by her for the department, Tina became the new Woman in Red.



Now a costumed police officer, Tina has forsaken firearms. She certainly knows how to use them, thanks to her training, and is a good shot, but she believes that police are too quick to draw weapons and she is trying to provide a better example. Her use of the Woman in Red uniform is known to her supervisors in the department but kept a secret from the general public, who do not even know the Woman is secretly a police officer. Detective McDuffie, as most know her, is a fearless detective and investigator. She respects Peggy Allen’s work and reputation, but cannot bring herself to embrace the original Woman’s methods. Since accepting the mantle of the Woman in Red, she has confronted all manner of bizarre crimes, including occult conspiracies and fantastic creatures she never would have believed existed. But what she really wants, more than anything, is to track down Barbara Allen and restore the legacy of the Woman in Red.

The original Woman in Red was published in *Thrilling Comics* and *America's Best Comics*; her publisher went through several names, the most well known of which today is probably Nedor. Feminist comics historian Trina Robbins has identified her as the first masked female superhero and, as a relatively well-known public domain superheroine, she has been occasionally portrayed in amateur film. She appears as a minor character in Alan Moore's *Terra Obscura* stories, where she gains powers similar to those of Green Lantern except, well, red. Ethel Boston is another character in the public domain, created by Antonin Charles Arnaud. She did indeed study under Sherlock Holmes, whose death she avenged alongside Watson, before going on to star in twenty stories from 1908-1909. Holmes, of course, is also famously in the public domain, though not all of his original stories are considered to be public domain in every country.

THE WOMAN IN RED IN PLAY

As a hero, Tina McDuffie is a symbol of the current debate over police violence and the manner in which America's black population is treated by law enforcement. Tina is a Minority Hero, representing her race and gender, but as an active policewoman she is also an example of the Super-Cop archetype. This is an important contrast to characters who are policemen by day but who moonlight as vigilantes; the Woman in Red was never a vigilante. Her use of the Woman in Red disguise was well known to her superiors. She is also a mystery solver in the best Scooby-Doo tradition. Young, armed with a flashlight instead of a gun, her investigations often end with the revelation that the vampire, African tribal spirit, or sasquatch was actually just a mundane murderer in disguise. But, as with the Scooby Gang's evolving adventures, this is no longer always true. Now, the vampire might actually be a vampire. Note that, although she avoids guns, the Woman in Red is not a pacifist, and she will fight when she must. She prefers soft martial arts techniques that emphasize throws, locks,

and holds, a style she refers to as "Baritsu."

The Woman in Red is an intellectual heavyweight but a super-power lightweight. When world conquerors and cosmic menaces threaten, she retreats to a supporting role. If you are using her in a one-shot game, she is best used by players who don't need to roll big numbers and triumph in battle. Role-players, method actors, and problem solvers will find her rewarding, however. As a PC, she begins with 3 Determination. She also flourishes when teamed with Night Bird and the Black Fury, heroes similar in power level to herself. As an NPC in your game, her lack of super-powers is exactly what makes her useful; she becomes a liaison to the PC team, calling them in for help after she has tracked the villains — who are out of her league — to their lair.

Tina's Dark Mirror is also a Woman in Red; this will seem confusing, but comics are full of example characters who are all known by the same title. Green Lantern may be the best example and, in fact, Green Lantern can serve as something of a role model for the Woman in Red who, like the Lantern, is a Super-Cop. Perhaps there are, in fact, Women in Red. Perhaps, like the Lantern Corps, Women in Red are exemplary policewomen across the country, solving crimes each in their own way, but striving to uphold the legacy of the original. Some may even have superhuman powers.



SUPER VILLAIN GAMING

Sometimes you just want to be the bad guy. While super villain protagonists have been increasingly popular in recent decades, they actually have a long history that stretches at least back to DC's *Secret Society of Super Villains* and Marvel's *Super-Villain Team-Up*. The "dark and gritty" era in the wake of *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight Returns* resulted in a plethora of heroes and villains who were all but indistinguishable. Venom and Harley Quinn both got their own books; the Joker and Lex Luthor told their stories from their own point of view in prestige format. The *Suicide Squad* and then the *Thunderbolts* demonstrated that the all-villain team was alive and well. Magneto got a whole parallel Earth, and Deathstroke became the go-to character whenever DC needed something bad done good. Mark Millar explored the villain protagonist in *Wanted*, *Irredeemable*, and other books while Mark Waid produced *Empire* (a story in which a Dr. Doom style villain has triumphed and now rules the world).

Meanwhile, in gaming, the developers of *City of Heroes*/*City of Villains* realized that players wanted their hero characters to look like villains and their villain characters to look heroic. Green Ronin, publishers of the *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG, provided some advice for villain PCs in their book *Crooks!*. The *Savage Worlds* RPG expanded in two editions of *Necessary Evil*, one of their most popular settings; with all the heroes dead, it was now up to the villains to save the world from alien invasion. DC Universe Online launched with equal content for heroes and villains, and the various *Arkham* games included downloadable content that allowed gamers to play as Harley or Catwoman.

All of this has reached movie theaters as well, with a Sinister Six project in development hell and a *Suicide Squad* film on the way. A tabletop campaign with super villain protagonists can take many forms, and poses some unique challenges. In this section of the ***Super Villain Handbook***, we discuss a number of different frameworks which a super villain game might take, and offer some advice and resources along the way.



EVIL SAVES THE WORLD

One of the immediate challenges in any RPG where the player characters are all super villains is that such characters are infamously anti-social. There are exceptions, but by and large villains don't like each other much, they have disparate goals and motivations, and they cooperate only until one of them stabs the others in the back. Some player groups embrace this tension at the table, but it still poses a real problem for storytelling and adventure design. If the PCs are all pursuing their own agendas, the GM is busy dealing with one or two people at a time while other players have nothing to do. Climaxes turn into anti-climaxes after a villain's sudden but inevitable betrayal. One of the most potent ways to solve this problem, and a method employed by both the comics and game industries, is to unite the villains against an even greater threat. If the

world is about to be conquered or destroyed, even super villains will put down their personal grievances for a little while. Psychopaths like the Joker will have no one to terrorize if humanity is extinct, mercenaries like Deathstroke will have no money (and nowhere to spend it), and conquerors like Doom simply will not allow the planet to be dominated by an inferior intelligence. Threatening the world to bring enemies together worked for Alan Moore and Ozymandius; it can work for you.

Your antagonist needs to be powerful enough to believably eliminate almost all the world's super-heroes in one fell swoop, numerous and diverse enough to present interesting opponents for a campaign of whatever length you're aiming for, and evil enough that they make most super-villains look good by comparison. The first requirement is actually one of the easiest to fulfill, since comics have a long history of unbelievable plot twists which serve as instigators for the story. You can call all the heroes together for a meeting on their satellite ... only to blow it up. You can create invaders whose planning involved the invention of specialized weapons just to defeat all the Earth's heroes. You can even start your game six months after the invasion and declare that, in that time, the heroes all fought and the heroes all died. Now, all of these setups are hard to believe, considering how resourceful and seemingly unkillable super heroes are, but these are the sort of ground rules that Elseworlds and What Ifs are based on, so your players won't bat an eye.

But the specifics of the antagonists will take much more work. This is where game mechanics come into play. Figure out how long you want this game to last, and understand that you will want multiple stat blocks for each of those sessions. A one-night game can get away with minions and a boss, perhaps with a servitor or single super-weapon to provide an additional target. But you should be introducing at least one new kind of antagonist every session, so a four-episode "miniseries" might add a Big Boss, a new breed of servitor, and an extra-strength minion introduced after the PCs have

demonstrated their ability to dominate the regular troops. A 12-session campaign multiplies the work by even more, adding battles in unusual terrain (underwater, for example), specialized soldiers built just to defeat the PCs, and even a second stat block for that boss who is defeated midway through the story then comes back with battle armor. An invader which has a single dominant theme is good for short games, but less so for long games. In other words, if your invading aliens are all aquatic and related to Atlanteans, that's perfectly serviceable for four sessions or six, but for a long game go the "Invasion: Earth" route and have an alliance of a dozen starfaring races; this gives you plenty of variety and ensures that the game is fun even for the player who thinks Atlantis is dumb.

To minimize the work load, look for ways to "reskin" stat blocks to do what you need. This is one reason why an invasion by a mirror world populated by evil versions of super heroes is so enticing; if you already have stat blocks for All-American Girl, Hangman, and Saguaro, you can easily swap out some qualities and make evil versions of them. In the YOUNiverse, this mirror world is called MEarth. See the Evil Twin archetype in this book for much more specific information about changing a hero sheet into that of a villain. *Icons A to Z* has also provided a lot of support in the form of minions and monsters: see "D is for Demons" for a bunch of diabolical bad guys, and "A is for Aliens" for the simple outline of an alien invasion campaign. But you don't have to use Counter-Earth or Earth-3 to reskin stat blocks. **ICONS** villains tend to be, well, iconic, and characters like Count Malocchio, Speed Demon, and Warbride can serve any number of roles in your game if you're willing to first file off their serial numbers.

Finally, you're faced with devising bad guys which make even villains look good. There are some short cuts to this, some buttons you can press which reliably annoy even super villains. Players detest two things above all else: losing their powers and being mind-controlled (these are really just two aspects of the same issue: a loss of player agency). If your invaders have



stripped super-heroes of their powers, the super-villains have the best of motivations; they don't want the same thing to happen to them. Likewise, some kind of worldwide mind control device (such as that in the *Emperor Doom* storyline) not only solves your motivation problem, it gives you a way to use hero stat blocks for your game and provides a clear target for the villains to attack. If they can destroy the mind control machine, the war is mostly won. This is good for a short (even one night) session, but if you want your game to last longer, the mind control device is probably a red herring or even a trap designed to lure the villains into an ambush. (Mind alteration was also an effective way to bring villains together in *Identity Crisis* and its precursor, Gruenwald's *Squadron Supreme* miniseries.) Mind Control is really just a metaphor for the lack of freedom; the original "Days of Future Past" exchanged mind control for slavery and established the Sentinels as far worse than Magneto. Slavery and outright racism are methods so bad that



even super-villains disavow them (see, for example, the Red Skull's contempt for anti-Semitism in *Captain America: The First Avenger*).

Antagonists in a game like this don't need to be subtle. If your invaders are nihilists or a plague of cosmic locusts who just want to pillage the Earth's resources until it's nothing but a lifeless rock, no one is going to relate to them or sympathize with them, which is exactly what you want. Super hero comics are a genre of hyperbole, and when your heroes are villains, it's fair to turn your villains into caricatures. After all, the main source of interpersonal conflict in a game like this isn't, as it is in traditional super hero comics, between the hero and the villain; it is between the various villain PCs, who will quarrel and struggle and try to betray one another. That's your roleplaying goldmine, so it is all right if the antagonists are a bit two-dimensional. They don't need to be more.

Speaking of your PCs, it's best to presume that a good piece of every game session will be taken up with villain plotting or interpersonal rivalries within the group. In the all-villain campaign, this is a feature, not a bug. This works better, however, if you can partner up the villains so that any one scene involves at least two players. If alliances shift based on motivation (all the thieves, for example, avoid the real psychopaths), methods (the technological villains avoid the mystics), and past history (former teammates and relatives stay together), all the better.

Give the players opportunity to feel like villains. If the players spend all their time trying to save the world, they will feel cheated of the villain experience, but be wary of extremes that will alienate other players at the table. For some bad guys, being a villain just means charging a fee, being a jerk, using lethal force, or refusing to wear underwear on the outside of your pants. This level of evil is part and parcel of a super villain game, and if your players get the chance to assassinate a rival, rob that billionaire who had it coming, or just steal a kid's lollipop, that is usually enough.

But for some players, it's not enough. For this reason, it is worth having a frank conversation about the game's portrayal of evil before anyone makes characters. Establish what is and is not off limits. Someone may want to play a psycho; remind them that even the Joker's worst crimes take place off-panel. The page on which Barbara Gordon is shot is among the most controversial in comics, but what the Joker does after she's shot is largely left to the reader's imagination. We're still debating that story today, and not in a good way. Refrigerating a female character is not just evil, it's cheap story telling and we should aspire higher. Admittedly, playing super villains is, like playing super heroes, a time for wish fulfillment and fantasy, but we should ask ourselves what fantasies make us better people and which fantasies make us worse. The point of playing a super villain game is to illustrate that the super villains aren't that different from us. In other words, a super villain PC needs to be someone

with whom others can sympathize. Would an audience watching a movie starring that super villain be able to relate to him? If not, we should rethink the character. (*Savage Worlds* addresses this topic in “Evil, not Psychotic,” *Necessary Evil* p17.)

And finally, remember that gaming is not a solitary activity, it is a social one. The guy sitting next to you is giving you a ride home. The gal across the table is also paying for your share of the pizza. As players, we should consider that before we act. We cannot simply do whatever we want and defend our character’s atrocious and insulting actions with “it’s what my character would do”, because we do not play in a vacuum. Compromise and table rules are what differentiates our hobby from single player console games.

A WORLD WITHOUT HEROES

Mark Millar’s *Wanted* and Mark Waid’s *Empire* both give us campaign settings similar to the Evil Saves the World premise, except that there’s no existential threat to bring the villains together. In Evil Saves the World, interpersonal rivalry between villains is the side dish; in A World Without Heroes, it’s the main course.

Something has happened to remove all, or virtually all, the heroes from Earth. They could have died in war, gone back in time to solve a Crisis and not returned yet, or been killed off by a Twisted Genius whose super weapon finally worked. As in A World Without Heroes, the specifics are not especially important. It will be implausible but accepted because it is necessary for the game to take place. The most important decision may be for you to decide if the victory of the super villains was public or secret. In a secret victory, the world has gone on more or less as we know it (*Wanted*). It doesn’t have any super heroes any more, but that just makes the world more like our own. Villains walk unseen through the mass of humanity, which has now become their buffet table. In a public victory, the villains have more or less taken over the world. They may not

have actually constructed bureaucracies and power structures, but Earth’s population know the villains have won and there is now no one to stop them. Secret victories are good for games in which you want the PCs to walk around in civilian clothes, hiding in plain sight. Public victories are more traditional, and the PCs will be in uniform, putting the fear of an angry super-god into mundane citizens (*Empire*, *Emperor Doom*, *Earth-M*).

The Counter-Earth is a variant of the World Without Heroes. (Technically, the Counter-Earth was here first.) On a Counter-Earth, the world is ruled by super-villains who are Dark Mirrors and Evil Twins of characters your players would otherwise recognize. Traditionally, these rulers are based on famous heroes from Marvel or DC, but it’s really important only that your players recognize them and think they’re cool. The PCs, in contrast, are alternate versions of corresponding super-villains and their goal is to take down the corrupt super-villain government. These PCs are anti-heroes rather than real villains; they believe the ends justify the means and they’re far darker and grittier than the heroes they are mirroring, but they aren’t as bad as the real villains who run things. The big challenge with a Counter-Earth game is that you need to have a well-known superhero universe that already exists for the campaign to make any sense; for this reason, this is a great campaign choice if you are using an RPG which already enjoys a license with Marvel or DC. Green Ronin’s *DC Universe Roleplaying Game*, using *Mutants & Masterminds 3rd edition*, gives you pretty much everything you need. For Marvel, you have several options, none of which are currently in print. You can even adapt this book and set your game on MEarth; Amazing Woman and the Danners are the evil rulers, and your players make heroic versions of Jupiter Queen, Doctor Radium, and the Black Terror!

The common wisdom is that one of the differences between heroes and villains is that villains have more agency. That is, heroes tend to react to the actions which villains take. True or not, A World Without Heroes exploits this

options derived from the particular archetype of the villain. Monstrosities will want to cure their condition, a Twisted Genius will want to prove his superior intellect, and so on.

Ideally, the players provide the impetus for most of the stories in a campaign of this sort, as they make temporary alliances, work towards a shared goal, and then backstab each other when those goals diverge at the last moment. One villain wants to summon the Lovecraftian Horror so it can conquer the world, the other wants to steal its power. For nine-tenths of that story's running time, those two villains can cooperate. It's only at the climactic scene that their paths diverge. The GM, therefore, is tasked with throwing interesting curve balls and plot twists at the PC's carefully prepared master plan. There is a rogue hero still alive and undercover; the PC has been sabotaged by his own men; a rival villain seizes the opportunity to attack while the PC has allocated his resources elsewhere.

Spend some time before the campaign starts creating factions to which the PCs can align or conflict. A faction might be geographic in its scope (all of Australia is run by the same Twisted Genius, for example) or thematic (science, magic, alien, or mutant). It could be a cult of personality focused around a single dominant Mastermind or Ultimate Villain. Each faction should have something they need from the PCs, some kind of goal, and the tools to make a reasonable effort at attaining that goal. The PCs may all belong to a single faction run by an NPC whom you can kill off soon after the campaign starts, thus leaving the PCs to control their own destiny. Alternately, they are fleeing former alliances and are essentially creating their own faction. Factions do not need to be equal in power, and some may be in thrall (knowing or unknowing) to other factions in a sort of Illuminati-style pyramid. Individual PCs will know some facts about specific factions, but gathering intelligence can be a major theme of the game, if you have players who enjoy that sort of thing. If they'd rather just bust down the front door and start shooting, you have different challenges.



assumption and turns it into a campaign premise. As a result, it depends very heavily on PC goals. When a GM and players sit down to launch a campaign of this sort, it is important to stress that the players need to make characters who a) want something, and b) are willing to take the initiative to get it. Heroes stand around the monitor womb and wait for the signal to sound; villains hatch schemes and get stuff done. This does not mean that all the PCs have to be Masterminds, Conquerors and Crime Bosses. Their goals can be small in scale, as long as they have intense personal stakes. For example, if an Assassin wants to get revenge on the US Army General who made him into a monster, that's a perfectly good goal — although the player may need a new one when he kills his target. Rivalries with other villains are especially good alternatives for villains who need an agenda but aren't the world-conquering type, but there are many other

When the PCs are villains, the body count is higher. This is true regardless of the specific campaign framework, but it can be especially noticeable in *A World Without Heroes* because villains can get into a competitive state of mind. Every Psycho and Supremacist has to prove that he's the biggest, baddest, coolest guy on the block, and this leads to "acting out." PCs can move from simply killing their enemies to calculated efforts to kill in dramatic and stylish ways. This is fun because it allows us to indulge our own dark nature, and who doesn't enjoy a little indulgence? But it is a slippery slope that leads to larger and larger body counts, to torture and all kinds of awful activities which roleplaying games make possible, but which do the hobby no favors. As a GM, you have tools to minimize this kind of distraction and keep the focus on the story. As discussed in *Evil Saves the World*, a frank conversation about what is and is not appropriate for the gaming table is a tremendous help, setting expectations for everyone. But you, as GM, also control the actions and reactions of all the NPCs in the setting. When PCs turn killing into a competition, do not engage. Do not create or use NPCs who would respond to that kind of performance, either because they don't care or because they simply acknowledge the PC as the winner. Either way, there's plenty of real rivalry which can be pursued without descending to the lowest common denominator: gory murder.

THE SUICIDE MISSION TEAM

The original *Suicide Squad* series, created by John Ostrander, has been more responsible than anything else for the rise of the super villain protagonist in comics and film. Quite simply, Ostrander showed readers and comics creators that it could be done: you could not only write a comic in which the protagonists were super-villains, you could sustain it month to month for a period of years. Ostrander was inspired by the famous World War II film *The Dirty Dozen*, in which a batch of expendable criminals and misfits are given a deadly mission, one on which many of them perish.



The Suicide Mission Team is designed to solve all the problems of a super villain campaign. The PCs are villains, but they are forced to work together by a higher authority, one which wields the power of life and death over them. They can act out in small ways and are always looking for that moment when the boss's gaze is elsewhere, but major acts of disobedience are punished, perhaps even with execution. There are few ways to motivate super villains, but death works more often than most. The members of the team do not have to "play nice"; they can despise each other, insult each other, and take out their aggression in all kinds of small ways, so the players actually feel like they are playing villains. The GM does not have to worry about getting the PCs together for the first session, because they all start off in prison. Nor must anyone worry about why a group of such



antisocial super villains stay and work together, because they are under constant surveillance from their masters and have been injected with toxic chemicals (*Escape from New York*) or fitted with explosive collars to ensure compliance. The villains rightfully hate these mechanisms and resent their bosses, which leads us to sympathize with them and makes the villains more heroic.

The team is assigned missions which are both too dangerous to be survived and too morally ambiguous for super-heroes. This is enormous fun for players and stokes the pride of their villain characters, who go where angels fear to tread and who have the scars to prove it. This question of PC mortality, however, demands some preparation and forethought. As a GM, you will want to establish the precedent early in the game — indeed, in the very first session — that the members of the team are expendable and can die. At the same time, your campaign may benefit from a small core group of

characters who enjoy a bit more plot immunity than the rest. The logical solution, at least for small groups, is for every player to have two characters, one of which is more explicitly expendable than the other. In this way, you retain a core group around which you can build longer stories, and that core group is surrounded with colorful “third-string” villains who rotate in and out of the series. A small number of guest stars allows you to introduce specific plot obstacles which can only be solved by a villain with a particular power set. Players can create real bad apples who join the team, only for them to suffer a fatal “accident” at the hands of the core members who don’t approve of the new guy’s methods. If this seems an unnecessary wrinkle to you, and your players feel that every character should be killable, then you can dispense with it and use the traditional format in which every player has only one character.

The team often includes one hero who acts as field commander and who answers to a tough-talking, much resented bureaucrat. The interpersonal drama in the campaign comes from the way the members of the team react to this hero and from the hero’s changing attitude towards the team. As with so many narratives, the Suicide Mission Team hinges on building sympathy for the protagonists, and as the team struggles to overcome mortal odds, sometimes even saving the world, they begin to rise in the estimation of the heroes who know them. At the same time, the hero begins to subtly influence the members of the team. There are always some members of the team who are unrepentantly selfish murderers, but they are balanced out by team members who genuinely come to regret the mistakes they have made, the mistakes that got them on the team in the first place. Inevitably, the team comes into conflict with public super heroes who don’t know the team’s true mission or its masters; this forces the team’s field leader to stand up for the villains on his team against super heroes who now consider him a traitorous criminal. In other words, the team members — hero or villain — must choose a side. And the side they pick, to their own surprise, is the team itself. They become loyal to each other, and they fearlessly

face apocalyptic missions not for the sake of their autocratic bosses or even to avoid death, but because the members of the team — whatever colors they wore before — are their friends.

BAIT AND SWITCH

When Marvel sent most of its big-name properties that weren't mutants to Image, they created a temporary window for new titles and experimentation. Kurt Busiek responded with the Thunderbolts, a reversal of Busiek's original idea, which was a team of super-villains led by Captain America. The Thunderbolts were a team of villains with new, heroic, identities; they were led by one of Cap's greatest enemies, Baron Zemo, who also had an especially patriotic disguise. The team was soon joined by a young, naive but heroic, teen in the Kitty Pryde mold.

This campaign model, Bait and Switch, posits super villains disguised as super heroes. There needs to be a reason for this but, like the campaign premise for *A World Without Heroes* or *Evil Saves The World*, it doesn't need to be perfect, just plausible. Perhaps the villains are so well known after their last caper that they've become the target of a worldwide manhunt. Perhaps, like Zemo (or *Diehard's* Hans Gruber), the only way to overcome the perfect security system is for the villains to convince the world they are something that they're not. Or perhaps the superhero career is the scam; after all, successful heroes are showered with fame, and fame can be leveraged into great wealth. It's all a matter of public perception and image. In this version of Bait and Switch, the PCs are a packaged super-team made up of people who aren't in it for heroic reasons, but instead for the sex, the drugs, and the rock'n'roll.

The distinguishing characteristic of the Bait and Switch is that the villainous activities of the PCs are a secret. For some players, this sabotages the whole point. When a player asks to play a villain, he is expecting to be able to do awful things which strike fear into the hearts of his enemies. If forced to keep his evil deeds under wraps, the player can be frustrated. But this

kind of a campaign framework solves many problems. Like the Suicide Mission Team, it tempers the worst excesses of villain roleplay; characters can be mean, violent, and even evil, but they can't go over the top and maintain their cover. Since the cover is part of the campaign framework, the players have a motivation to rein it in, even when the character doesn't. The PCs have a clear mission — fooling the public — and to further that mission they are forced into stories which they otherwise resent. This isn't just crimefighting; heroes are often expected to spend a lot of time gladhanding and accepting awards, for example, activities which a villain masquerading as a hero is going to complain about or even try to sabotage, to humorous effect.

When the players gather to make characters for the Bait and Switch, those characters should be arranged all along the spectrum when it comes to evil and villainy. Some should be real bad guys, unapologetically evil and almost impossible to identify or sympathize with, but others should simply be stuck in a bad choice with no easy way out, good people driven to desperate measures. In the middle are selfish characters with a lifetime of resentment; they're tired of getting the short end of the stick and they're determined to take their share of what the world has to offer — even if they have to do it by force. This diverse set of motivations means that, as the team is forced to perform heroic acts and as they begin to acquire the rewards of heroism, they all have different reactions. Sometimes it can be easy to forget that heroism has rewards at all; we tend to think of our heroes as martyrs because America loves the underdog. But remember that Barry Allen got a whole museum in his honor, and Hollywood has been pretty good at showing how much fun a superhero's life can be. The best reward of being a good guy, however, has always been the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that comes from knowing you have made the world a better place. Super villains don't usually get the chance to see that look in a parent's eye when you rescue her baby from a burning building. Money can't buy that look, and that look is why many super heroes



continue to do what they do even when they get branded a menace by the local paper. What effect does that look have on your PCs? That question is at the heart of the Bait and Switch.

But the opposite can also be true. You can play the Bait and Switch in the opposite direction: as a team of heroes who go undercover as villains. In this version of the game, the heroes have to infiltrate a criminal syndicate, find the location of the martial arts tournament, or locate a key witness who can put the Mastermind away for life. Whatever the premise, the heroes create new identities for themselves as villains, and their lives have suddenly become very complicated. They have to maintain their cover by performing criminal acts but somehow avoid compromising their integrity. In this contest, integrity always loses. The hero is always forced to compromise somehow, though he can expend a lot of energy trying to minimize the damage. And, just as in an ordinary Bait and

Switch where the villain PCs find themselves wooed by the rewards of heroism, heroes masquerading as villains begin to see the allure of the criminal lifestyle. Suddenly, there's no one to tell them what they can't do. If they want something, they can just take it. This self-indulgence is exactly why players ask to make villains in the first place, and some players are going to embrace this path while others will remain heroic both in and out of costume. This is a recipe for conflict inside the player group, so don't wait for that conflict to happen. Talk about it when the campaign starts, when everyone is sitting down to make characters. Once the PCs come to blows, it can be hard for the campaign to be about anything other than that; for this reason, it is often helpful if all the players can agree that, despite all the disagreements and differences the characters will have in the game, they won't get violent about it until all the players agree that the time for that has come.

This highlights one of the other distinguishing characteristics of the Bait and Switch: it can't last forever. A Save The World, Suicide Mission Team, or World Without Heroes can be strung out more or less indefinitely — or at least as long as players these days have time to commit to an RPG. But the Bait and Switch is a good campaign for a clearly defined run, perhaps 3-10 sessions. That's enough time for the characters to get introduced, for the team to participate in multiple adventures that establish their cover, for the members of the team to be wooed by the opposing lifestyle, for their loyalties to each other and the team to be tested, and for a final revelation. The disguises come off or the cover is blown and the original goal of the Bait and Switch comes into play at last.

EVIL GENIUS SCHOOL

There is a long tradition combining super heroes with school, most notably in the X-Men comics and films, but thanks to Harry Potter, everyone in America now recognizes the supernatural school drama. The film *Hero High* depicts the adolescent descendants of famous

super heroes learning to use their powers while also navigating the social pyramid of the school cafeteria, and *M&M* has an entire sourcebook dedicated to the same idea (and with the same name). *Teenagers From Outer Space* (TFOS) may be the best rpg set in high school. The idea of a super villain school has been picked up by a few independent comics publishers, but outside of groups like the Hellions (young rivals to Xavier's students), it has not yet gained mainstream traction.

Which is too bad, because a school populated with the children of super villains is a strong concept which solves many of the most pressing problems of super villain campaigning. The PCs, as teenage super villains in training, are under frequent but not constant supervision from their parents and faculty. This surveillance, not unlike that maintained by the boss of a Suicide Mission Team, moderates the PCs evil activity but also gives the PCs a common enemy they must hide from and outwit. Also, the academic calendar gives the campaign a clear structure. Students at the school have a clear cycle of events, from the first day of class and freshman orientation to homecoming and summer vacation. In between are countless vignettes we all recognize: trying out for a sports team or joining a club, cramming for an exam, passing notes in class, getting stuffed into a locker by the school bully (or being the bully doing the stuffing) and all the drama of crushes and high school romance. There is a reason why school dramas are so successful: they satisfy an audience's desire for a story they recognize while also providing endless opportunity for surprises and plot twists.

As a GM, your preparation time is spent making the faculty and staff of the school. A curriculum devoted to super-villainy is a lucrative source for entertaining classroom scenes and absurd humor. Your teachers might be legendary super villains who teach their specialty, or they may be washed-up has beens who can't make it in the real world any more. You need at least one dean who terrifies disobedient students. Teachers are already intimidating; it will only be worse if the teacher really is a vampire or an



alien. But every student also remembers that teacher who made a special impact on them, who was always there for them, or who gave advice that really stuck. There is a tradition in school drama for a staff member — often the gardener or groundskeeper — who befriends the protagonists and helps them avoid the worst of the faculty. There is a lot of roleplaying fuel in these scenes, as students interact individually or in small groups with a teacher who slowly lowers his shell to reveal the human inside the battle-armor.

As with other games, it is important for your table to have a conversation about how evil these teenagers are going to be. And, as usual, you're likely to get a range of answers, from the good-natured kid who just wants to keep his head down to the half-psycho who thinks his



murderous father has “gone soft.” There is a reason why we treat teenage criminals different than adult ones: they haven’t yet matured enough to really accept consequences, and while they may know the difference between right and wrong, they are more vulnerable to crimes of opportunity. In other words, if a teenager thinks he can get away with something without getting caught, that can easily overwhelm what morality he has. All of this means that villainous kids can do really awful things and get away with it, but the whole point of setting a story at a school is education. When the campaign is set in a school, that means that whatever stance towards evil a PC begins with, it should change by the end. A super-teen who kills someone is killing for the first time; confronted with the terrible-ness of that deed, he must decide how he feels about it. The son of a mass-murdering super villain may decide he doesn’t want to be a killer, and this creates tension between his inner desire and what his society expects of him. Whatever stance towards evil a PC begins with, that

stance should begin to change about halfway through the campaign. Otherwise, there’s not much point in setting the game in a school at all.

If we know one thing about teenagers, it is that they rebel. For some students at Evil Genius School, that will mean a desire to one-up their parents. If dad took over the city, then Junior needs to take over the world. But if we’re talking about super villains, there’s one sure way to rebel in a way that every teacher and parent will absolutely hate. That’s right: hero work. In this version of Evil Genius School, the PCs are the teenage descendants of super villains, but they resent being told what to do. Like kids everywhere, they are sure they’re smarter than their parents, whom they regard as hopelessly square. Everyone at school is pressuring them to be super villains, so the students — perhaps individually at first, but eventually as a small club or clique — decide to rebel by ditching the school uniform and sneaking out to do the one thing guaranteed to annoy every adult they know. The students are already prohibited from using their powers outside of school grounds, so there’s plenty of sneaking around as the students acquire costumes to conceal their identities, find a way to regularly break out of school, and then start coming into conflict with heroes and criminals in the “real world.” These rebellious students have chosen to do heroic deeds, but they’re still the children of super villains with a need to prove themselves as cool as possible, so even when they do stop a kidnapping or a mugging they’ll do it with a certain villainous style.

The *Super Villain Handbook* includes a framework for the Evil Genius School. The school is called the PITT and is run by Principal Peril. You will find Peril as our example of the Crime Boss archetype.

HEIST PICTURE

In a Heist Picture, the PCs are super villains who have come together to deprive some wealthy target of his loot. The thief has been a heroic figure since at least Robin Hood, and

contemporary audiences have responded with enthusiasm to films from *Ocean's Eleven* to *Ant-Man* or the long-running TV show *Leverage*. (There is, in fact, an entire *Leverage* RPG filled with advice on running heist games.)

The Heist Picture is not a game for players who want to revel in their evil; for that, see *World Without Heroes*. Instead, protagonists in the Heist Picture are relatively non-violent. Individuals may have fighting skill, and may even have been recruited for that skill, but the overall goal is to outwit the victim not beat him up. The Heist Picture is all about style; physical violence is cheap and easy and lacks style. In a sense, the Heist Picture is not unlike the schemes of a Twisted Genius in that winning is not, alone, the point. The thieves must win in a way that demonstrates their cleverness. Each PC should have a particular specialty, such as infiltration, impersonation, electronics, or the ability to manipulate others. They will probably know each other by reputation or have worked together individually on previous schemes, and may have rivalries or romantic relationships before the game even starts. They may be actual examples of the Thief archetype, but there is usually at least one team member who is from outside the usual circles and must earn acceptance on the team.

In contrast to other campaign models, the Heist Picture can be very short. In fact, it might be a single session, and is seldom longer than four. This makes it a good choice when you want to test out a new game system, when players are not sure for how long they can commit to a game, or if the regular GM just needs a break. But the game can still be a lot of work for the GM, as you need to figure out the details of the heist: what is being stolen, what kind of security is present, and what will the twist be? All of these things are uniquely challenging when we're dealing with super villains. Super villains seldom desire mere money, and if it is money they're after then it ought to be a lot of money. Fort Knox or the US gold reserve are the traditional targets, but these have both been done many times before (most notably in *Goldfinger* and the third *Die Hard* picture) and

few thieves will lower themselves to a re-run. More often, the money is just a way to really stick it to the mark, the individual who is the real object of the crime. The mark needs to be a bad enough person that the protagonists of the Heist Picture look noble by comparison. Depending on your player makeup, this may not be hard or it could be almost impossible. The short, focused nature of the Heist Picture means that, if a player makes a character who is really psycho, it's actually easier to deal with. After all, we only have to worry about the crazy person for a few sessions, and he's got one job to do. As long as he does it, the rest of the team can probably put up with him.

Security is an interesting challenge because ordinary security measures are simply not enough to challenge super villains. When characters can walk through walls, turn invisible, and mind control guards, it takes something really crazy to slow them down. There are two ways to go here; you can let the players make whatever characters they want, and then let them find a way to use those powers to attack whatever impossible crime you have created for them, or you can design the security first and then let the players make characters whose powers have been chosen to attack that crime. The second method is great for short campaigns and will be a refreshing change for players, but any long-running campaign based on a series of heists will inevitably be forced to use the first method.

Finally, you need a twist. No Heist Picture plan goes down without a hitch. (Except when it does; the apparent twist in *Ocean's Eleven* — Danny's pursuit of Tess despite Rusty's warning to back off — was, in fact, part of the plan all along.) The twist can be the sudden arrival of individuals who were thought to be far away, the involvement of a brilliant detective hero, a rival band of thieves out to beat the protagonists to the mark, the sudden loss of a critical member of the team, or a last-minute change in security systems. The past of one of the team members catches up with him, or the mark recognizes one of the team members and is suddenly suspicious. Depending on your player



group and the length of your Heist Picture, you can throw many of these twists at them, at least one a session, and as they build on each other the tension rises.

Because it can be hard to come up with a suitable challenge, here's an idea to get you thinking about your next Heist Picture: America's Strategic Petroleum Reserve is made up of 700 million barrels of oil kept in a system of caverns 1000 meters beneath the surface of the Gulf of Mexico. This is all the oil the United States consumes in a month; it is worth tens of billions of dollars. Such a heist would require superhuman powers to pull off, probably including at least one individual with aquatic powers and someone with robotic vehicles to carry the oil. You might use shrinking powers to reduce the sheer mass of the oil you are stealing, because transferring 700 million

barrels from storage tanks to your escape vehicle is going to take a lot of time and fill a lot of space. If you can pull it off, you're looking at billions per person, easy, after expenses. Now, that's not as much as the Walton family, but it's not bad.

JAILBREAK

Closely related to the Heist Picture, the Jailbreak is a story in which, instead of trying to get into a super-secure facility, you're trying to get out. Here, we are mostly talking about stories in which the PCs begin the story actually in prison. If they are outside the prison, trying to break out their boss or an ally, it's so closely related to the Heist Picture that we don't have much more to say about it.

While the actual escape is short — a session or two — preparation can take a long time, especially if you want to get into the personal dramas which occur inside a federal super-prison. Once the escape succeeds (presuming it does), the game can continue by telling the story of the fugitives from justice. So the Jailbreak campaign can be of almost any length, and what's most important is that all the players are on board with that length, whatever it is to be. While the prison is the primary set, flashback stories are an important element of this kind of story; in them, we see how each PC came to be in prison, we establish their secrets, and we learn their relationships with other characters who are also (already) there.

The most time intensive part of preparation is detailing the prison itself; indeed, this can become something of a trap if you allow it, because it will be impossible to describe the prison in enough detail to satisfy your most inquisitive players. They will ask endless questions in an attempt to find the prison's weak point and will expect you to know every aspect of the prison's construction, its inmates, and guards, down to their personal habits and private lives. There are a few different ways to handle this; the first is to simply make it up as you go. This is a time-honored GM tradition and if you know your players well, it's perfectly

doable. Alternately, confess the size of the work load with your players and help them understand that you can't prepare everything ahead of time. What you can prepare right away is their immediate surroundings: their cells, the guards they interact with, and some limited outside contacts. For everything else, players signal to you their interest or their plan, and you prepare the answers they need between sessions. If a player wants to get his character transferred to a work program, for example, he has to give you time to prepare that work program — its routine, the other prisoners that are on it, who supervises it — between sessions. Judicious use of flashback scenes can give you additional prep time.

Some games — like **ICONS** and **Fate** — allow players to create aspects of the story. This suggests a third option for Jailbreak stories: allow the players to make the details with you. In a more free-form, storytelling campaign such as this, when a player looks around his cell and asks, “What do I see?”, your answer is, “I don't know. What do you see?” The characters are in a prison, so it is important to have and use some kind of veto or a check-and-balance system to keep a player from just giving himself an easy way out. Since all (or at least most, you may have a PC guard) of the PCs are in similar positions at the start of play, you can delegate this authority: each player details the guard and cell for the player to their right.

A jailbreak game can last a long time if you have the infrastructure in place to make roleplay inside the prison fun. There have been a few influential television dramas which have depicted life in prison, most recently *Orange is the New Black*. In gaming, your best resources are products which depict the super-prison: *Lockdown* and *Escape from Alcatraz!* for **Mutants & Masterminds** and the classic *Stronghold* for **Champions/Hero System**.

THE MOB

A Mob campaign places the player characters as middle-ranking members of an entrenched criminal organization. It does not have to be a



traditional mafia, though this works well. It could just as easily be a street gang or a criminal group of some other ethnicity, such as Russian or Chinese. A criminal super-agency like Hydra, Cobra, VIPER (Champions Universe) or NEST (in this book) is also a possibility, especially if you want everyone to have access to advanced technology.

There's a moment in *Good Fellas* when the mob is described as “the cops for people who can't go to the cops.” This is the heart and soul of a Mob campaign. While the PCs do perform criminal activities — especially ongoing and profitable crimes like drug smuggling and selling, protection rackets, and money laundering — these scenes are incidental to the main tension in the game, which occurs when

the PCs friends, family, and coworkers in the Mob are threatened or come to the PCs for help. Kurt Busiek's *Astro City* arc "Tarnished Angel" is another example; ex-con Steeljack is trying to solve a series of murders on behalf of other criminals, friends and family to the deceased, who would not get a fair shake from law enforcement or super-heroes. Much of the action in *The Sopranos* or *The Wire* fits this basic premise. Sometimes bad things happen to good people, but they also happen to bad people. Some of those bad people are worse than others. If everyone deserves justice, that means bad people deserve it too. So, who is going to get it for them?

While others in the mob call on the PCs for help and favors, the PCs are also trying to stay alive in a cutthroat organization. If a player wants to take over the gang, there's little reason not to let him do it, since this removes a significant burden from your shoulders and allows you to focus on the plots of all the "little people". There will be occasional interaction with super-heroes but those heroes, hardened by a career fighting the mob, will automatically assume the worst and, even if persuaded of the truth, have hearts hardened against super-criminals. As a result, these encounters should mostly serve to remind the players why they have to take care of their own dirty laundry.

A mob campaign really flourishes if you have a long time to commit to it; the PCs need to start with some level of special influence or power — or else other members of the mob would not come to them for help — but their ascent up the pyramid can be slow, if it occurs at all. Rival gangs rise and fall. Interaction with heroes may be so rare that the game begins to feel like a *World Without Heroes*. In time, if a PC mob boss is able to unite other mobs, he might even create such a world!

THE REVENGE SQUAD

In a Revenge Squad campaign, a group of super-villains come together to finally kill their mutual nemesis. Alternately, they have sworn revenge on a team of heroes, each of which is

the nemesis of a different villain PC. The Revenge Squad is a great way to kick off a super villain campaign which then morphs into something else once the initial plot is resolved. A Revenge Squad could fail, leading to a Jailbreak campaign. Or it could succeed and result in a *World Without Heroes*.

The PCs are all constructed as the rogues gallery of a single extremely famous and successful hero or as the arch-rivals of the world's foremost hero team, so it is important to have an idea of who these heroes are when the players sit down to make characters. Give the players a say in the identity and methods of their nemesis. If your players are up for it, figure out who the hero is first. While everyone is chipping in ideas, they will also be thinking of ways to tie their own PC into the history of that character. A single heroic nemesis will be extremely competent; your PCs can each challenge one of his aspects, embody a different opposing symbol, or present a different kind of existential threat to his existence. If you have a team of heroes to make, each rival to a single PC, you can even share that load and ask every player to describe the heroic enemy of a different PC, other than their own. Throughout this stage, your goal is to describe the heroes in an interesting and exciting way which suggests plot hooks; the actual game mechanics of the hero — his skills and the exact range of his powers — is less important. In fact, if you can avoid breaking out the rule book at all, you're better off. As soon as a campaign nemesis gets defined with specific numbers, he becomes less frightening and more predictable. You need the target of the Revenge Squad to be as unpredictable and intimidating as possible, especially if the whole squad is focused on a single super-capable hero.

Not all the PCs will want to kill the hero, and some will have additional goals or ulterior motives. This is all to the good, and these wrinkles will surface over the first few sessions as the squad pursues whatever intermediate steps are required to lure the hero into the trap. The secret of a successful Revenge Squad is that everyone agrees the hero needs to be

defeated — but then they all disagree on what to do next. This keeps the PCs working together up until the final session of the game, when all their secret plots to steal the hero's powers, reveal his identity, humiliate him and let him go, pry that one special secret from him, or simply kill him and be done with it all come into conflict. In fact, if your group has a lot of divergent schemes like this, all being planned at once, it is best to knock a couple of them out of contention midway through your campaign. This sustains the middle narrative with interesting plot developments but also keeps your endgame from being too much of a confused muddle.

If the PCs spend a month or two trying to track down and defeat their nemesis once and for all only to fail, it can be very disappointing. In most cases, they will succeed. The important question is not if the hero will be defeated but, rather, what price will the PCs be willing (or forced) to pay. To make victory over the hero have a real cost, the villains on the squad have to care about something. Perhaps they have family members or friends. Maybe they consider themselves a step above those criminals who

kill. Maybe they just have a soft spot for children. What about their freedom? Are they still eager to defeat the hero once and for all if it means they go to jail or lose their powers when it's over? The PCs who don't care about anything are the ones whose plans to defeat the hero will fail. This forces the successful villains to pay the price, and that's what makes a good story. Perhaps the PC kills his nemesis at last, but in the process he alienates his own daughter; the last scene of the game depicts that daughter taking up the mantle of the dead hero.



EVEN MORE ARCHETYPES ...

If you have the *Field Guide to Super Heroes*, most of the archetypes listed in that book have a villainous version. We haven't gone over them all again here, because that would be really boring for you. However, we have included a line or two about each of the heroic archetypes, where we thought it necessary. The villain version of a heroic archetype usually has the same sort of powers, origin, and plotlines that the hero has, though with variations that explain the villain's life of crime. Villain versions of heroic archetypes are often seen in comics as the Dark Mirror or Evil Twin villain, both of which are discussed in detail in the *Super Villain Handbook*.

Alien Hero: Usually a Conqueror, Cosmic Menace, or Faceless Minion. The Alien Villain is really just an extraterrestrial version of the Foreigner.

Android: Often found as a Servitor.

Animal Hero: Depending on his powers, the Animal Villain could be an Assassin or a Faceless Animal Minion who has been promoted. But because of the occasional tragic lab accident, he might be a Twisted Genius or Monstrosity.

Armored Wonder: Often a Mastermind, Twisted Genius or Conqueror.

Astronaut: Pretty rare as a villain; most Astronaut Heroes encounter Foreigner Alien Villains who want to conquer the Earth. However, Astronaut Villains who return to Earth are probably Twisted Geniuses.

Avatar: A villain who thinks he is a god of the underworld may be a Devil. He may also be an Ultimate Villain.

Comic Relief: The Imp is a Comic Relief villain (as is the Lunatic, a variation of the Psychopath). Sometimes an Evil Twin who isn't really evil — just really silly — can be Comic Relief. Some villains start off quite serious but,

as time passes, come to be seen as useless and weak. They either stay Comic Relief or get reinvented in a more dangerous mode.

Creepy Hero: The Creepy Villain is probably a Psychopath.

Dark Avenger: The evil version of this archetype is the Vigilante. A villainous Dark Avenger may also become a Psychopath.

Descendant: Villains have children too. Daughters of villains are especially likely to become Tempresses or Girlfriends Gone Bad. Sons of villains take up their father's mantle.

Divine Hero: A Divine Villain is probably a Devil or possibly a Fallen Angel Hero.

Embodiment: The Force of Nature is the villain version of the Embodiment, but he is also closely related to the Ultimate Villain or Cosmic Menace.

Femme Feline: Often a Thief or Tempress, the Femme Feline is already a little bit villain.

Feral Hero: A Feral Hero who gives in to the animal side may become a Power Corrupted or Monstrosity.

Focused Hero: Plenty of villains have only one superpower going for them, and not much else. So this archetype is, if anything, more common among villains than heroes.

Gadget Guy: The Twisted Genius is pretty close to a villainous Gadget Guy, though if the Gadget Guy only wants to steal, kills for pay, or has lofty goals then he is a Thief, Assassin or Mastermind, respectively.

Handicapped Hero: The Handicapped Villain usually blames a hero, or society at large, for his handicap and seeks to overcome it through his Twisted Genius. If he takes out his frustration on a particular hero, he may be a Nemesis or Dark Mirror.

Jungle Hero: The Jungle Villain is a Foreigner, a savage who brings his occult traditions to the West. He may be a Gladiator, seeking to test his strength against white heroes.

Magician: The evil versions of the Magician are the Warlock and the Heir to Lovecraft, which are explored in more detail elsewhere.

Man of Tomorrow: An evil Man of Tomorrow a) comes from a dystopian future that he seeks to create; b) was defeated in the future and has returned to the past to destroy his enemies before they have grown powerful; or c) is a hyper-evolved “future man” who represents the threat of genetic manipulation gone wrong. This probably makes him a Supremacist.

Master of the Atom: The villain version of this archetype is the Nuclear Nightmare.

Master of the Elements: This archetype is just as common among villains as it is among heroes. A very powerful Master of the Elements can become a Force of Nature.

Master of the Martial Arts: There are plenty of villain martial artists, most of whom see themselves as Gladiators, Dark Mirrors, or (if they wield a technique which the hero cannot stop) a Nemesis. The Crime Boss, Mastermind, or Foreigner may be served by Faceless Martial Arts Minions.

Minority Heroes: Villains are often minorities, but they do not profess to represent their minority in the way that the Minority Hero does. Instead, an ethnic villain becomes a Foreigner, described elsewhere.

Monstrous Hero: The villain version of the Monstrous Hero is the Monstrosity.

Mythic Hero: Villains may be mythical creatures or beings, or choose to model themselves on such things. If they closely resemble mythic creatures, they may be Monstrosities.

Occult Hero: Before there were vampire and werewolf heroes, there were vampire and

werewolf villains, discussed here in the Supernatural Horror archetype.

Psychic Hero: A Psychic Villain has much the same powers as his heroic rival, but because he is no longer bound by moral codes he can use his powers of mind control to become a Dominator or Temptress.

Sidekick: Villains don't usually have sidekicks, but they do have Servitors and Faceless Minions.

Spin-Off Heroine: Yes, even villains have Spin-Off female versions, usually in the form of daughters, wives, or sisters. If the Spin-Off is a villain version of a male hero, the villain is a Dark Mirror.

Super-Patriot: If the Patriot still loves America, but has twisted that love into a perversion of American values, the villain is probably a Dark Mirror of the Super-Patriot or a Fallen Hero. If, however, the Super-Patriot reveres another country, he's a Foreigner.

Super Weapon: Villainous Super Weapons are quite common; this is a particularly good way to grant instant powers to someone while also ensuring the powers are equally easy to take away. That means the Super Weapon may be a Kid Playing with Fire or a Girlfriend Gone Bad.

Ultimate Hero: The Ultimate Villain is discussed in detail elsewhere.

Undersea Hero: There's no reason a villain can't adopt the ocean as his playground, especially since there are so few heroes there. Many Undersea Villains are Supremacists or Conquerors, surrounded by Faceless Atlantean Minions, Servitors, and undersea Monstrosities.

Woman Warrior: A villain version of the Woman Warrior is probably a Gladiator who happens to be female, and wants to prove herself against men.

Weapon Master: The Assassin is particularly likely to be a villainous Weapon Master.

Young Hero: If a villain is young, he is probably either a Kid Playing with Fire, a Descendant, or else so dangerous that if he grows up he will become a Conqueror or Cosmic Menace. The Young Villain poses particular moral challenges for heroes, because no one likes to beat up on a kid, especially if there is any hope for redemption.

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