



SUPPORTING CAST

Matha Beli

for *GURPS Infinite Worlds*

by Phil Masters

Infinity Unlimited maintains a number of agents on the version of Earth known as "Ezcalli" (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds*, p. 122), most of them working to achieve some kind of long-term suppression of the unpleasant Tenochca Empire. The most promising rival power is the Christian Songhay Empire of Africa, industrialised and fully aware of the threat it faces, and Infinity has a number of offices in Songhay territory, observing and considering options while they conduct a little low-level trade and watch out for Centrum intrusions.

However, one such office, in the city of Carthage, was seriously surprised, and not a little disturbed, to receive a visitor -- a local, who clearly wasn't taken in for a minute by their claims to be a very minor trading-house. Not that she knew what they were, exactly, but she walked through the door, sat down -- and asked.

It turned out that this "Matha Beli," an academic, the widow of a minor mercantile clan leader, had been watching them -- without telling anybody else, thank God -- for some time. She was clearly a very fine scholar and social scientist, but that wasn't what had led her to see right through their carefully-designed camouflage like it was made of gauze. So far as Infinity can tell, with all their careful tests and analyses, and after days of polite interviews, she has one of the most powerful intuitive facilities they've ever met. (Some of them wonder if she's a latent psionic, but the best available tests say no, for what little that's worth.) She can more or less walk into a room, look at a crowd of people, and say who's involved in any kind of deep subterfuge, including especially cross-time operations -- or glance at a news report and assess with uncanny precision whether there's anything worth Infinity's attention in the incident described. She's also plain good with people.

Well, Infinity had two choices there; recruit her or send her to Coventry. And if you think that the Council would waste an intelligence asset with this potential value, you don't know much. So she was taken on board -- exactly as she seems to have anticipated, blast her.

Once given access to Infinity's training facilities, she quickly mastered the technical side of TL8 historical research, and brought her academic knowledge up to Infinity standards in a matter of months, devouring any book that could assist her work. She might subsequently have been kept at HQ, reading papers and filing reports, but she soon became quite insistent that she wanted to see the infinite worlds in person. She claims to work best that way, but actually, she seems to have some kind of academic ambition which calls for a lot of field work. This sometimes annoys those people who've come to regard her as Infinity's best source of information on Ezcalli; they'd

be *really* annoyed to lose her permanently.

(Note; Beli doesn't have the Expert Skill of Cliodynamics, as defined in ***GURPS Infinite Worlds***, for the simple reason that she has studied several more advanced skills which it covers in greater depth. She can perform very effective cliodynamic analysis by Infinity's standards, mostly using Economics, Intelligence Analysis, or Sociology.)

For game purposes, she can in fact have ended up in either of two specific positions:

Patrol Officer: The Patrol doesn't normally recruit out-time staff, and certainly wouldn't put unknown factors in positions of authority, but Beli is *good* -- her threat assessments and local cliodynamic analyses are among the most reliable going. The I-Cops still don't give her a command position as such, but her *advice* tends to end up with some of the force of high-level orders. (This version of the character might lose the Legal Enforcement Powers, though.)

I-Cop PCs may encounter Beli around HQ, in which case, they should quickly learn to respect her situational assessments and background briefings; her tendency to cross-examine them at extreme length during debrief sessions, and to make seemingly arbitrary associations and snap judgments, are small prices to pay. In any case, she has a great deal of rather motherly charm.

She also has a slight tendency to personal bias in her advice, but probably not much that will clash with I-Cops' own preferences too badly. She isn't actually prejudiced against the military as such, but she may show some irritation at individuals who seem too thick that uniforms make them better people. Likewise, she'll usually advise supporting independence movements and decentralized cultures against empires and conquerors, if that position is reasonably justifiable.

She may also insist on joining field operations in person from time to time, claiming that she works better with data that she can collect in person. Given her empathetic talents, this is quite true -- but field missions are also a way of assuaging her intense curiosity. If she comes on a mission, PC I-Cops who are also along will be firmly instructed to keep her safe and secure; failure to obey this instruction would be an extremely career-limiting option.

ISWAT Member: Alternatively, and perhaps more plausibly, given just how good (and worrying) she is, the Council could have snaffled her for its own staff, and ultimately attached her to ISWAT. She could even be used as a PC in an ISWAT campaign, if the player didn't mind a character who is superb in social situations and as a field analyst but much less use in a fight. However, she's more likely to appear as an NPC advisor, analyst, and general plot device. Again, the teams she works with have clear instructions to take care of her - - and to keep a *very* close eye on her. For one of the weakest combatants in ISWAT, she's got a lot of people surprisingly scared.

In either case, if PCs are working with Beli in the field, note that she has basic combat training and a very cool head, but she really isn't a fighter; if shooting starts, it's best to get her into cover as soon as possible. In more peaceful social situations, she can be a real asset to any team, especially if she speaks the local language; her practical "people skills" are almost unmatched. Her ethnicity and sex may represent a problem in some timelines, but she can slip into the role of "quiet servant" with ease, from where she may be even better placed to observe important events. Indeed, she can sometimes act as a very effective infiltrator and spy, if her companions are willing for her to take the risk.

Her Illuminated advantage gives her the very useful instinctive ability to spot out-timer agents and conspirators, but it also makes it possible for other Illuminated characters to spot *her*. This

has never inconvenienced her before now, but if she ever ran into, say, a major Cabal operation, things could rapidly become complicated -- and she might need a lot of protection. (Note; some GMs might not wish to introduce this advantage in an Infinite Worlds campaign -- in which case, it's easy enough to delete it and rely on her exceptional intelligence, perceptiveness, and skills to achieve much the same result with a little more effort and time.)

Matha Beli (250 points)

At first glance, Beli is often taken for an unremarkable, slightly matronly black woman in her early 40s (she's actually 42), although many people notice her habitual thoughtful expression. Her charisma mostly emerges in conversation. For preference, she dresses in a "generic West African" style, with long, colorful dresses incorporating headscarves -- but she is very adaptable when she needs to be.

ST 8 [-20]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 16 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 12 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.

SM 0 (5'3" tall); weight 110 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8.

CF: Songhay/Ezcalli [0]; Cultural Adaptability [10].

Languages: Songhay (Native) [0]; English (Accented) [4]; Hotinohsavannah (Broken/Accented) [3]; Mongol (Broken/Accented) [3]; Nahuatl (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Charisma +2 [10]; Empathy [15]; Illuminated [15]; Indomitable [15]; Intuition [15]; Legal Enforcement Powers [15]; Status +1 (Academic) [5]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages

Curious (9) [-7]; Duty (Almost All the Time, Extremely Hazardous) [-20]; Obsession (Building a Comprehensive Theory of Alternate History) (12) [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Struggling [-10].

Quirks: Dislikes imperialism (-1 or worse reactions to imperialistic characters, tends to advise against helping expanding empires); Much prefers beer to wine (may cause bemusement at posh parties); Responsive; Thinks "military honor" is a delusion (condescends somewhat to career soldiers, reacts badly to idealistic speeches about military chivalry or the like). [-4]

Skills

Acting-17 (IQ+1) [4]

Anthropology-14 (IQ-2) [1]

Archaeology-14 (IQ-2) [1]
Diplomacy-15 (IQ-1) [2]
Economics-14 (IQ-2) [1]
First Aid/TL8-17 (IQ+1) [2]
History (Modern Ezcalli Military)-14 (IQ-2) [1]
History (Modern Homeline Political)-14 (IQ-2) [1]
Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-11 (DX) [1]
Housekeeping-16 (IQ) [1]
Intelligence Analysis/TL8-15 (IQ-1) [2]
Linguistics-15 (IQ-1) [2]
Merchant-15 (IQ-1) [1]
Occultism-16 (IQ) [2]
Politics-16 (IQ) [2]
Psychology (Human)-16 (IQ) [4]
Research/TL8-16 (IQ) [2]
Savoir-Faire (High Society)-17 (IQ+1) [2]
Shadowing-15 (IQ-1) [1]
Sociology-16 (IQ) [4].

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