



SUPPORTING CAST

The Oak Street Club

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

In an unremarkable small town, a suburb of an equally unremarkable city in Michigan, one will find Oak Street. Oak Street is also unremarkable, except for the celebrity who lives in the ranch house at number 441. And the celebrity is not really all that remarkable, either, being a celebrity only because he writes books and sometimes does interviews on talk shows. He is a pleasant fellow in his early sixties who mows his lawn every Tuesday and helps out at the local library book sale every November.

Most people would be surprised to learn that he secretly leads a team of superhuman crime fighters.

The term "superhuman" would probably give pause to the people involved. None of them would consider themselves superhuman, although each of them has a supernatural gift, a *power*. They would be less surprised by the title "crime fighter," although it conjures mental images of people like Batman and the Avengers. They do fight crime. Specifically, they fight crime that has been committed by unusual people. On occasion, they even fight crime that has been committed by unusual things.

Dr. Joseph Eisen, psychologist and psychiatrist, spent 20 years teaching psychology and psychiatric medicine at one of the large state universities in Michigan. Towards the end of his career, he published a self-help book based on his theories about some of the more common forms of mental illness. It was an immediate success and prompted a contract that involved other books and lecture tours.

After a few years, with enough money in the bank and enough money coming in regularly from royalties that he would never have to work again, he retired, and dedicated himself to his other passion.

Dr. Eisen had long suspected that supernatural powers existed. He always got a tingle around certain people, and in certain places, and was not surprised, if he did a little research, that they were often associated with strange things in their communities.

Eisen was too good a scientist to let hope or hunch overpower his demand for scientific rigor. Nor did he think anyone would believe him without irrefutable proof. Whenever he was asked about the paranormal, as he sometimes was during his lecture tours, he never denied his interest in the subject, but also made it very clear that the difference between real science and "ghost

stories" was, in a word, evidence. He often referred to himself as a hopeful skeptic, saying "I hope we will someday have evidence; however, until we do, no amount of hope can justify calling these things science."

But now, at least, he could afford to indulge his hobby. He spent years happily reading obscure books, visiting haunted houses, meeting with others interested in the occult, and so on. His wife, a retired nurse, was not entirely enthusiastic about his new passion, but accepted it with a smile, saying it was cheaper than a sports car and certainly preferable to him having an affair.

Despite his hope, Eisen never abandoned his habit of scientific thinking. He had known for a long time that most strange occurrences were either coincidence or deliberate fraud. This had some benefits. One is that Eisen developed a reputation among those interested in the strange and occult as someone who wanted to believe but who refused to be fooled. People trusted him. On the few occasions when he did encounter something he could not explain, people knew it was probably the real deal. Skeptics refused to believe no matter what, and even Eisen had to admit that the few truly haunted houses he had found had not been willing to give him irrefutable evidence. In time, however, he knew, the evidence would be found.

When Eisen finally got his evidence, he did not even have to go looking for it. It was right in his own backyard, so to speak, and it came to him.

Donna Lewison, a young art teacher Eisen had met on occasion when he came to talk at the local high school about the connections between art and psychology, called him one day, hysterical, saying that everything she was touching was crumbling to dust. She had first seen her ability at work when a boyfriend had called her to break up. At first, she had been heartbroken and furious. Then she had been terrified; her cell phone had gotten warm and then simply disintegrated in her hand.

When she came to his house, she had a plastic bag full of dust exactly the same color as what was left of her cell phone, which looked as if it had been soaked in acid. And as he looked at her, he felt the telltale tingle -- something about Donna was extraordinary. In any event, she was either telling him the truth or she badly needed his help in an entirely different capacity.

Using hypnosis, Eisen was able to recreate the conditions that led to the appearance of Donna's powers and watched with amazement as a new cell phone also disintegrated. He then tested her powers on other objects from metal spoons to flowers. Nothing was immune to her ability. All crumbled to dust.

Eisen and Donna have not been able to determine, so far, why her powers manifested at this particular time. (It was not, after all, the first time she had been angry at a young man. Or, as Donna will sometimes say after yet another failed relationship, "Yeah, I sure know how to pick 'em, don't I?") The next step, however, was to teach Donna how to control her powers. Eisen had never done anything like this, of course, but using hypnosis and other forms of therapy, and learning through trial and error, he was able to show Donna how to use her abilities and how to avoid using them by accident.

It was during one of these sessions that Eisen and Donna realized her ability was not simply limited to destroying matter; she could control molecular structures and cause solid objects to change shape. So far, her ability is limited to manufactured chemical materials, such as paints and plastics, but in time she may be able to bend other forms of matter to her will.

Donna asked that he keep her ability secret, and he agreed, on the condition that he was allowed

to document his research and eventually publish it. And now, with proof that the uncanny really existed, he redoubled his efforts. Slowly, he found others, made contact, and asked them to meet with him on a regular basis to exchange information, share experiences, and so on.

Eisen has sometimes wondered why so few have found any proof of the uncanny. But perhaps, he reasons, it is not so strange. The uncanny is not only rare, but also unpredictable enough to frustrate most attempts at scientific investigation. In addition, those with strange powers often kept their abilities secret because they feared being ostracized or worse. And most people do not expect to experience the uncanny, so if they do, they come up with other explanations for what they have encountered. As Eisen says, "The deadliest phrase in our business is 'I'm sure there is a rational explanation for this.'" He believes he and his colleagues have experienced a kind of mental paradigm shift. Somehow, they have learned how and where to look for the uncanny, so they have less trouble seeing it for what it is and understanding it. (In game terms, this is not the same as the Illuminated advantage; it is simply an explanation of why relatively few people in the campaign setting believe in the paranormal.)

He also learned that some of the rare, gifted people with unusual powers were using them to commit crimes. And there were hints that there were other things out there, too, inhuman things, some of them monstrosly evil. They needed to be stopped. And so he asked people if they would be interested not only in investigating the uncanny but also in investigating crimes and helping the police track down certain special criminals. Some declined, but others said they would be glad to help.

And so, on a warm September evening, Dr. Joseph Eisen sat down at his dining room table with his wife and four extraordinary people. He jokingly apologized that his house was not exactly stately Wayne Manor, and Donna replied that it was still a pretty exclusive club. "Yes," he said, "The Oak Street Club." The name stuck.

The Oak Street Club divides its time between investigating the uncanny and looking into mysteries using their powers and then passing on information to the police or a federal agency like the FBI. (Eisen has a pretty good reputation with the police because of his combined expertise in psychiatric medicine and his well-known debunking of a number of phony haunted houses and other so-called supernatural events.) Sometimes, they end up doing both -- in proving that a house really is haunted, for example, it is sometimes necessary to discover and expose the truth about the crime or tragedy that led it to be haunted in the first place.

They have discovered some unusual things in the last few years. Eisen has found four houses that he believes are genuinely haunted. He has also met at least 11 people who have truly extraordinary powers, including a man who really can find water with old-fashioned dowsing and an old blind woman who can handle objects for a few minutes and know things about the people who have owned them. And a rapist who could take control of someone else's body with his mind. And a murderer who could make victims hallucinate. All of this goes into his notes, notes for a book he will write someday, a book he believes will be the most important thing he has ever written.

All five members have learned how to use firearms, and have appropriate permits. None of them want to have to shoot anyone, but they have dealt with enough bad people over the last few years to understand that going armed is sometimes a necessity. Even if they are not expecting serious trouble, at least one of them will usually have a pistol.

Eisen is not sure, but he thinks other groups like his own may be operating in different parts of the United States and around the world. He is pretty sure there is one group in New England and

another in either Memphis or New Orleans. A third group appears to be operating out of Vienna. His attempts to contact these groups have not yet been successful, which makes him wonder if they have something to hide.

He also thinks he has found a pair of vampires. Two tall, beautiful men, one blonde, and one with dark hair, who look at each other like lovers and who move like music, and they have been seen in six different cities over the years, and wherever they go, people disappear. But he is not sure what they are. Not yet.

These are the current members of the Oak Street Club . . .

Dr. Joseph Eisen

146 points

ST 9 [-10] **DX** 10 [0] **IQ** 13 [60] **HT** 10 [0]

BL 16 [0] **HP** 9 [0] **Will** 13 [0] **Per** 13 [0] **FP** 10 [0] **Basic Speed:** 5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; German (accented) [4]

Advantages: Contact (Police detective, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2]; Detect (Strange Powers; Vague, -50%, Psionic, -10%) [12]; Independent Income [5]; Reputation 1 (Famous author and expert, everyone, sometimes recognized) [3]; Reputation 2 (Sympathetic but rigorous investigator of the occult and uncanny, small group, sometimes recognized) [1]; Status 1 [0]*; Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30]

* One free level for Very Wealthy

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Physician) [-5]; Dependent (Spouse; 75% as powerful; Ally; Loved one; 15-) [-3]*; Obsession (To learn everything he can about those with strange powers, 12-) [-10]; Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

* Eisen's wife, a retired nurse, usually accompanies him on his investigations. She has no unusual powers and so is not described in detail in this article; GMs may assume that she has ST 9, DX 10, IQ 12, HT 10, shares her husband's wealth and social status, has any appropriate IQ-based skills such as First Aid at 12-, and any appropriate DX-based skills such as Guns (Pistol) or Driving (Automobile) or at 10-. A generous GM may also assume she has Common Sense, allowing her to advise her husband and his friends against doing anything dangerously stupid.

Quirks: Always approaches the uncanny with scientific rigor [-1]; Likes to come up with catchy ways of explaining important concepts [-1]; Likes cats [-1]

Skills: Administration-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (Michigan)-13 [1]; Computer Operation-13 [1]; Criminology-13 [4]; Diplomacy-13 [4]; Driving (Automobile)-10 [2]; First Aid-13 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-10 [1]; Hypnotism-15 [12]; Leadership-12 [1]; Law (American Criminal)-11 [1]; Literature-13 [4]; Occultism-14 [4]; Pharmacy (Synthetic)-13 [4]; Physician-13 [4]; Psychology-15 [12]; Public Speaking-13 [2]; Research-14 [4]; Teaching-14 [4]; Writing-15 [8]

Jeffrey Anderson

141 points

Jeffrey Anderson can start fires with his mind. He also gets mystic visions when he stares into a fire for long enough, and can touch burnt objects and learn their histories. He works as an arson investigator for an insurance company. An old buddy of his is an ATF agent and the two keep in touch, and share "war stories" about various cases. Sometimes, he has his friend look into things for him, but he knows not to push their friendship too far.

ST 11 [10] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 10 [0]

BL 24 [0] HP 11 [0] Will 12 [5] Per 12 [5] FP 10 [0] Basic Speed: 6 [15]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; Spanish (accented) [4]

Advantages: Contact (ATF agent, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2]; Create Fire 1 (Psionic, -10%) [9]; Oracle (Visions appear after looking at flames or embers; Psionic, -10%) [14], Psychometry (Only for events related to fire, -40%; Psionic, -10%) [10]

Disadvantages: Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

Quirks: Loves jazz [-1]

Skills: Acting-11 [2]; Administration-10 [1]; Area Knowledge (Michigan)-11 [1]; Brawling-12 [2]; Computer Operation-11 [1]; Criminology-11 [4]; Detect Lies-12 [8]; Driving (Automobile)-11 [2]; Expert (Arson)-12 [8]; Forensics-10 [2], Guns (Pistol)-12 [2]; Intimidation-11 [2]; Observation-11 [2]; Search-12 [4]; Streetwise-11 [2]

Dr. Kyle Barrett

126 points

Dr. Kyle Barrett is a man who can get birds to do his bidding. He can also see and hear what birds see and hear. He works as a veterinarian. An expert on birds and the diseases that can kill them, he has a good working relationship with a physician at the CDC whose specialty is bird-borne diseases like West Nile Virus and Avian Flu. He can, if necessary, check into reports of epidemics, strange outbreaks, etc.

ST 10 [0] **DX** 10 [0] **IQ** 12 [40] **HT** 10 [0]

BL 20 [0] HP 10 [0] Will 12 [0] Per 12 [0] FP 10 [0] Basic Speed: 5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Animal Empathy [5]; Contact (CDC Physician, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2]; Mind Control (Birds only, -50%; Psionic, -10%) [20], Mind Reading (Sensory, +20%; Birds only; -50%; Psionic, -10%) [15]; Status 1 [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]

Disadvantages: Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

Quirks: Enjoys hiking and camping [-1]; Loves birds [-1]

Skills: Administration-11 [1]; Area Knowledge (Michigan)-12 [1]; Biology (Zoology)-13 [8]; Computer Operation-12 [1]; Diagnosis-12 [4]; Driving (Automobile)-10 [2]; Expert (Birds)-13

[8]; First Aid-12 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-10 [1]; Hiking-11 [2]; Mimicry (Bird Calls)-12 [4]; Photography-12 [2]; Poisons-11 [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-11 [1]; Veterinary-13 [8]

Matt Dolan

122 points

Matt is a carpenter and electrician. He is a bit on the rough side, but basically a decent guy who has little patience with real criminals. He can control electricity with his mind and even deliver electrical shocks to people or things if he can touch them. He has a good relationship with his parish priest, who often answers questions about strange occurrences, occultism, and the like.

ST 11 [10] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 10 [0]

BL 20 [0] **HP** 10 [0] **Will** 11 [0] **Per** 11 [0] **FP** 10 [0] **Basic Speed:** 5.25 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Contact (Priest, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2]; Burning Attack 2 (Surge, +20%; Melee attack, C-range only, -30%; Psionic, -10%) [8]; Control Electricity 1 (Psionic, -10%) [18]; DR 3 (Vs. electricity only, -40%) [12]

Disadvantages: Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

Quirks: Avid reader [-1]; Devout Catholic [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Michigan)-11 [1]; Boating (Motorboat)-11 [2]; Brawling-11 [1]; Carousing-11 [4]; Carpentry-13 [4]; Computer Operation-11 [1]; Driving (Automobile)-11 [2]; Driving (Heavy Wheeled)-10 [1]; Electrician-13 [8]; Expert (Military Science)-11 [4]; Forced Entry-11 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-11 [1]; Guns (Rifle)-12 [2]; History (19th Century American)-10 [2]; Lockpicking-11 [2]; Mechanic (Automobile)-10 [1]; Occultism-11 [2]; Stealth-11 [2]; Streetwise-11 [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-11 [2]; Theology (Christian)-10 [2]; Tracking-11 [2]

Total Points: 122

Donna Lewison

125 points

Donna Lewison is a woman who can make things turn to dust by touching them. This is really only one part of her real ability, which is to control the molecular structure of solid matter. She works as a high school art teacher and painter. She has a fairly extensive knowledge of painting and sculpture, and she is friends with the curator of a museum in Detroit; questions about strange artifacts, missing pieces of art, and the like can be directed here.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10]

BL 16 [0] **HP** 9 [0] **Will** 11 [0] **Per** 11 [0] **FP** 11 [0] **Basic Speed:** 5.5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; French (accented) [4]

Advantages: Contact (Museum curator, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-)

[2]; Control Plastics 1 (Ranged, +40%; Psionic, -10%) [26]; Corrosion Attack 2 (Melee attack, C-range only, -30%; Psionic, -10%) [12]; Fashion Sense [5]

Disadvantages: Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

Quirk: Likes flamboyant clothing [-1]; Not the sharpest knife in the drawer when it comes to choosing boyfriends [-1]

Skills: Acting-11 [2]; Area Knowledge (Michigan)-11 [1]; Artist (Painting)-13 [12]; Computer Operation-12 [2]; Connoisseur (Visual Arts)-12 [4]; Current Affairs (Headline News)-12 [2]; Current Affairs (High Culture)-12 [2]; Driving (Automobile)-11 [2]; Expert (Visual Arts)-12 [8]; Guns (Pistol)-11 [1]; Judo-11 [4]; Occultism-10 [1]; Research-12 [4]; Teaching-12 [4]; Writing-12 [4]

Using The Oak Street Club In A Campaign

The Oak Street Club presumes a world where both hauntings and psychic abilities are real, but rare. Perhaps one person in 10,000 has some kind of supernatural ability and perhaps one house in 10,000 is actually haunted (and the haunting might be caused by something other than a ghost). Genuine monsters such as werewolves and vampires, if they exist, are both very rare and very careful to keep their existence secret. This is not a world in which Four Color supers exist . . . or if it is, their activities are covert ("Supers in Black" rather than "Supers in Spandex").

The Oak Street Club operates primarily in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana, although they occasionally investigate things in other areas, simply because they are private citizens with a limited budget. (Even Eisen cannot afford to fly five or six people around the country, pay their bills, and the like on a regular basis.) They usually do their investigating on weekends and in the evenings, driving to the location and doing what they can in a day or two, or using vacation or sick days to extend their visits. Long drives, of course, provide good opportunities for side adventures (or real adventures disguised as side adventures) and roleplaying. To be fair, a GM should try to design the adventures so that the PCs do not have to worry too much about making a choice between saving the day and losing their jobs. By the same token, the time constraints under which the members of the Oak Street Club must operate can be used to create tension and a sense of realism. Of course, the Oak Street Club could be based almost anywhere in America or Canada; GMs should feel free to alter the setting of the campaign as necessary.

All five characters have been designed with Psionic-based powers so that a campaign can be developed with a world where the only powers are psionic, but a GM can modify this as needed if it is desirable to have a wider range of sources for abilities (e.g., Jeffrey Anderson might have Elemental powers rather than Psionic). The existence of haunted houses suggests that there may also be Spirit-based or Magic-based powers, but hauntings might just as easily be explained as manifestations of psychic energies.

There are many possibilities for gaming in a world like this. The first is to treat the Oak Street Club as pre-generated characters and use their adventures as the center of the campaign. This might be a good option for a GM who wishes to run demo games at conventions.

The next option is for player characters to be other members of the Oak Street Club; in this situation, they may replace some or all of the characters who have been described in this article. Characters should be built with between 100 and 150 points, and spend less than 50 points on their special abilities. The inclusion of a contact is not a requirement, but low-level

super-powered individuals probably need some outside assistance once in a while to cover abilities or areas of knowledge that they do not have. Player characters should buy Eisen as an ally, but other members of the Oak Street Club only need to be purchased as allies when they are NPCs who are also fairly regular partners on their missions.

Finally, the Oak Street Club might simply be part of the background of a campaign. They can serve as contacts, allies, or the like for the PCs. This could be useful whether the player characters are mundane adventurers, people with their own psychic or supernatural powers, or visitors from another world, time, or dimension.

The Oak Street Club is, of course, a group of amateurs, rather than professional crime fighters or adventurers. They live in apartments (except for Eisen, who has a very nice four-bedroom ranch house in an upscale neighborhood), have regular day jobs, and so on. All of them live within an hour's drive of Eisen's house, so it does not take very long for them to assemble for a mission, but they are not always instantly available. And their powers, while beyond those of ordinary people, are fairly limited. In fact, the members of the Oak Street Club were deliberately designed, in part, to demonstrate how **GURPS** can handle low-powered superheroes.

Despite their limitations, they are quite capable amateur adventurers. It would probably be a bad idea for any of these characters to try to tackle a villain of the caliber of like Dr. Octopus or the Joker, but there is no need to make their adversaries incompetent. The members of the Oak Street Club have a unique advantage when dealing with supernatural threats. As they are themselves superhuman, they have no trouble believing in the uncanny. And, as a team, they are far more powerful than any one individual operating alone. Between the five of them, they have a wide array of skills, abilities, and contacts. They can handle some genuinely tough opponents, if they are smart and careful.

A typical challenge for the Oak Street Club would be a single criminal, or a small gang, perhaps with special powers, or a monster. A serial killer who destroys crime scenes with fire (perhaps because he is a werewolf) is a good option, as is a drug dealer trying to expand his territory, a murderer who knows exactly why a particular house is haunted and wants to make sure no one else figures it out (or who fakes a haunting to keep people away from something he has hidden there), or some ruthless individual exploiting a child, possibly their own, who has a special talent.

Two other, and possibly related, opportunities for campaigns are worth mentioning. First, one may assume that the world in which the Oak Street Club exists is part of the **Infinite Worlds** setting. A campaign might involve the Oak Street Club somehow stumbling onto an operation managed by Homeline or Centrum. Second, the Oak Street Club might investigate something connected to the Cabal. This could easily be played in a number of different ways. The Oak Street Club might be the heroes, seeking out the truth about some mysterious happenings, and gradually learning that it is part of a vast occult or interdimensional conspiracy. Or, possibly, the heroes are members of the Cabal, working to foil the machinations of one of the more sinister Grand Masters, or deal with an outbreak of Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Gradually, they realize they are also the target of an investigation by the Oak Street Club. Now, they can either try to keep the Oak Street Club from learning the truth about them or join forces with them to defeat a common enemy.

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Article publication date: October 20, 2006

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