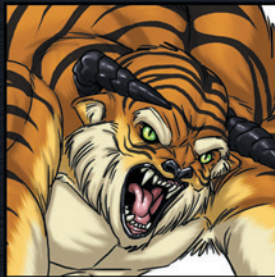
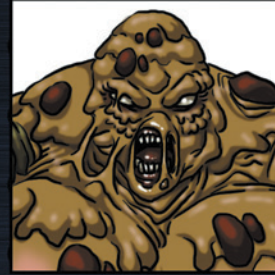




THE SUPER VILLAIN HANDBOOK

ICONS
SUPERPOWERED ROLEPLAYING
COMPATIBLE





THE SUPER VILLAIN HANDBOOK

WRITER

JASON TONDRO

PUBLISHER

MIKE LAFFERTY

LAYOUTS AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

ADE SMITH

EDITOR

KRISTEN PERKINS

ARTISTS

JOE ARNOLD, JACOB BLACKMON,

MOLLY ALICE HOY, DIONYSIA JONES,

AND JOE SINGLETON

WITH HELP FROM

GRAYDON SCHLICHTER, WALT ROBILLARD, JIM SEALS,

GRAHAM SCOTT, MARC SINGER, WARREN BELFIELD,

DIANE SPENCER, MICHAEL KUCHARSKI, RICK JONES,

KANE ANDERSON, JAMES GILLEN, DAN DAVENPORT,

MICHAEL MENDOZA, AND KEITH MULLEN

COMPATIBILITY WITH ICONS REQUIRES ICONS SUPERPOWERED
ROLEPLAYING FROM AD ININITUM ADVENTURES.

AD INFINITUM ADVENTURES DOES NOT GUARANTEE
COMPATIBILITY AND DOES NOT ENDORSE THIS PRODUCT

CONTENTS

3. Introduction
4. Rank X/Y/Z
5. Assassin
7. Conqueror
10. Cosmic Menace
13. Crime Boss
15. Cult Leader
17. Dark Mirror
19. Devil
22. Dominator
24. Doppelganger
27. Evil Twin
30. Faceless Minion
32. Fallen Hero
34. Force of Nature
37. Foreigner
39. Girlfriend Gone Bad
41. Gladiator
43. Heir to Lovecraft
46. Hero in Disguise
48. Imp
50. Kid Playing with Fire
52. Mastermind
54. Monstrosity
56. Nazi
59. Nemesis
61. Nihilist
63. Nuclear Nightmare
65. Power Corrupted
67. Psycho
69. Servitor
71. Supernatural Horror
73. Supremacist
76. Temptress
78. Theme Villain
80. Thief
82. Twisted Genius
83. Ultimate Villain
85. Vigilante
87. Villain with All Your Powers
89. Warlock
92. Wolf in Sheep's Clothing
94. Even More Archetypes ...
97. License



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Super Villain Handbook*! Or, at least, its Basic Edition...

That requires a little explanation.

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 almost 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 SVH describes forty different kinds of antagonists for your super hero RPG. We have used *ICONS* for this edition of the book 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. (We're going a few steps farther this time anyway: with the help of veteran writers, we're doing system conversions for multiple RPGs, each system in its own book.) What kind of story do you use each villain to tell? If super hero stories are basically about symbols, what do these villains represent? Our first question is always, “What does the character mean?” Only then do we move on, to figure out how to make the 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, 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. We have added a stat block for a generic example of each archetype, but this isn't a fully developed character, just an emergency game mechanic.

Each archetype went through extensive crowd-sourcing for ideas and revision; many of you participated in that process through RPG.net or Facebook. I'd like to especially thank Graydon Schlichter, Walt Robillard, Jim Seals, 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 Arnold, Dionysia Jones, and Joe Singleton. Mike Lafferty graciously agreed to publish this book, and 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.

But as big a project as this is – and it's almost 50,000 words – it's really only half the project. The other half will come with the Deluxe Edition. There, we will double the size of this book by adding 40 fully developed bad guys and their own universe to live in. Or, more precisely, we will add the YOUNiverse, a superhero setting that belongs to you, entirely in the public domain. All forty of those villains, along with all their art, will be free for you to use – and perhaps even add to – as you see fit.

I'll meet you there.

Rank X/Y/Z

Some of the archetypes in this book – such as the Cosmic Menace, Imp, or Power Corrupted – are off the chart. Their powers and attributes are greater even than a “godlike” rank 10. In most campaigns, these entities should be handled entirely with qualities and story. In other words, they are precisely as powerful as you, the GM, need them to be.

However, some Game Masters prefer a rating, and even among cosmic beings there is something of a hierarchy. Therefore, a few characters in this book have a power or attribute rated as X, Y or Z.

More complete rules for Rank X/Y/Z will be provided in the Deluxe Edition. But here's enough to get you started:

Abilities of Rank X/Y/Z always win in contests with numerically ranked abilities, even a 10. Further, Rank Y always beats Rank X, and Rank Z always wins all contests, period.

Rank X is for human-like beings who have been gifted or otherwise acquired near-infinite power. Characters like the Silver Surfer, Dark Phoenix, Darkseid's Omega Beams and Mr. Myxztlk are good examples of this. Sometimes a hero will be granted power on this scale (Hal Jordan's decision to wear multiple power rings) but it seldom lasts or ends well. If your GM absolutely, positively needs a number for Rank X, a 25 ought to do it.

Rank Y is for the cosmic and immortal entities who were never human in the first place, and may be the individuals who gave those Rank X characters their powers. They're more powerful than any hero, but they're not omnipotent gods. Galactus and Sandman are good examples of characters at this lower level. An arbitrary 50 should work, if you're in a situation where a number is required.

Finally, Rank Z is for those omnipotent gods. Beings and forces which are absolute in their power fall into Rank Z. Eternity and the Source are Rank Z. 100 is a nice, round, number.

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.

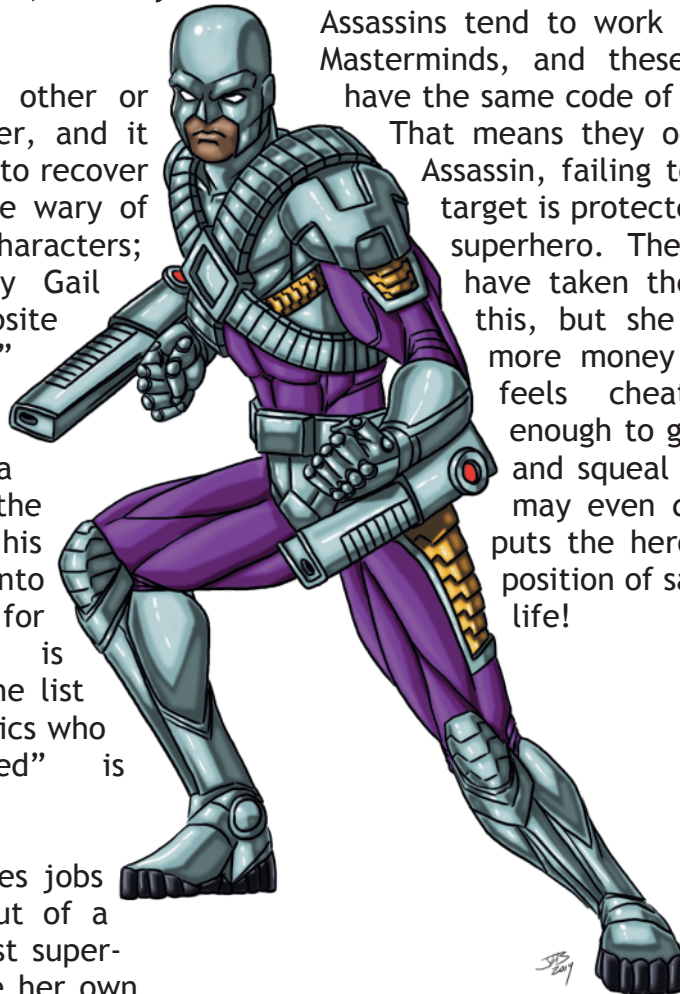
Sometimes the Assassin takes jobs not for the money, but out of a desire to test herself against super-heroes and thereby improve her own

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!



Abilities

Prowess 7
 Coordination 6
 Strength 4
 Intellect 4
 Awareness 6
 Willpower 5

Stamina 10

Specialties

Athletics Expert
 Martial Arts Expert
 Stealth Master
 Weapons Master

Powers

Fast Attack 5
 Strike 4 (Sai)

Qualities

Trained by a Ninja Clan
 Beautiful but Deadly
 Long Lost Love

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.

Abilities

Prowess 1
Coordination 3
Strength 1
Intellect 8
Awareness 4
Willpower 3

Stamina 4

Specialties

Science Expert
Technology Master

Powers

Shrinking 5

Qualities

Lab Rat
Bumblng Assistant
Incredible Arrogance

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. Such beings are not measurable by the ranking system of *ICONS Assembled Edition*, and that's usually for a good reason. You're not going to stop a Cosmic Menace by throwing a boomerang, or even a magic hammer. 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.) Even if this is the direction your story is going, however, Blast 10 isn't really doing the Cosmic Menace justice. 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 at 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.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 4
Strength 10
Intellect 8
Awareness 5
Willpower Y

Stamina Y

Specialties

Power Mastery: Cosmic Power
Technology Mastery

Powers

Cosmic Power (Alteration Ray, Blast, Energy Drain, Resistance, Transmutation) Y
Flight 7
Gadgets 10
Growth Y

Qualities

"I Am The Power!!!"
"I Hunger!"
Beneath My Notice

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: 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 over-sensitive 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.

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 super-villains 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.

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.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 4
Strength 3
Intellect 5
Awareness 3
Willpower 4

Stamina 7

Specialties

Business
Weapons

Powers

Blast 4 (Pistol)

Qualities

Everyone's Afraid'a Me
Out of Town Contacts
This is My Town

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: Mastermind, Tempter, Dominator, Heir to Lovecraft

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. Some Cult Leaders buttress their command of the cult using Mind Control, making them Dominators; others rely on simple Willpower and are more like Tempters. 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.

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.

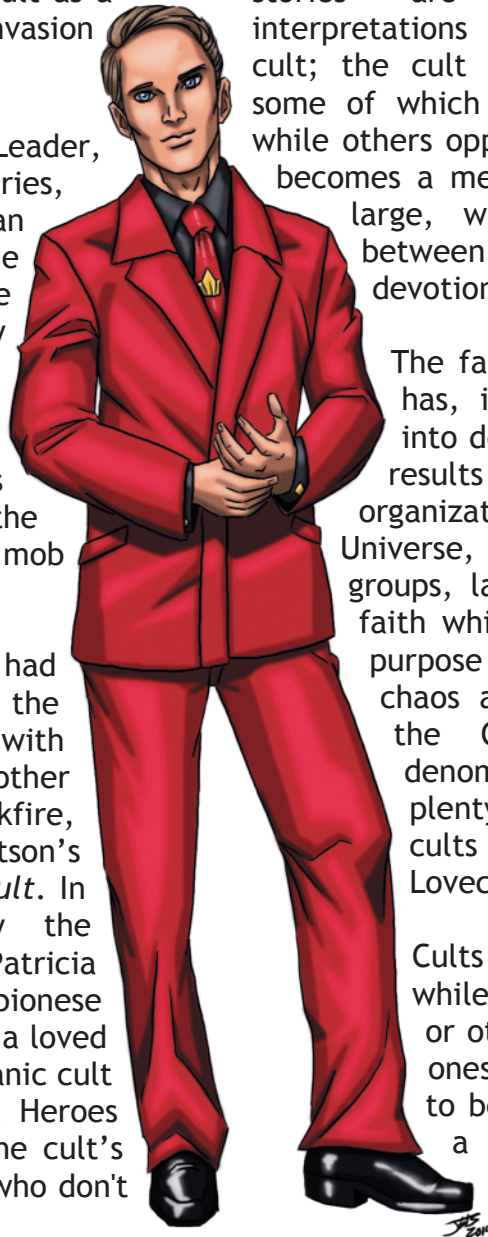
By the early '80s, the Code had weakened enough to permit the appearance of Cult Leaders with overt Christian trappings: Brother Blood and Deacon Blackfire, antagonist of Starlin & Wrightson's memorable Batman book, *The Cult*. In these stories, influenced by the Jonestown massacre and Patricia Hearst's 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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 4
Strength 8
Intellect 6
Awareness 5
Willpower 9

Stamina 17

Specialties

Occult Expert

Powers

Damage Resistance 8
Immortality 1

Qualities

Bloody Cult
Strength From Worship
Unholy Shroud

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 Belloc 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.

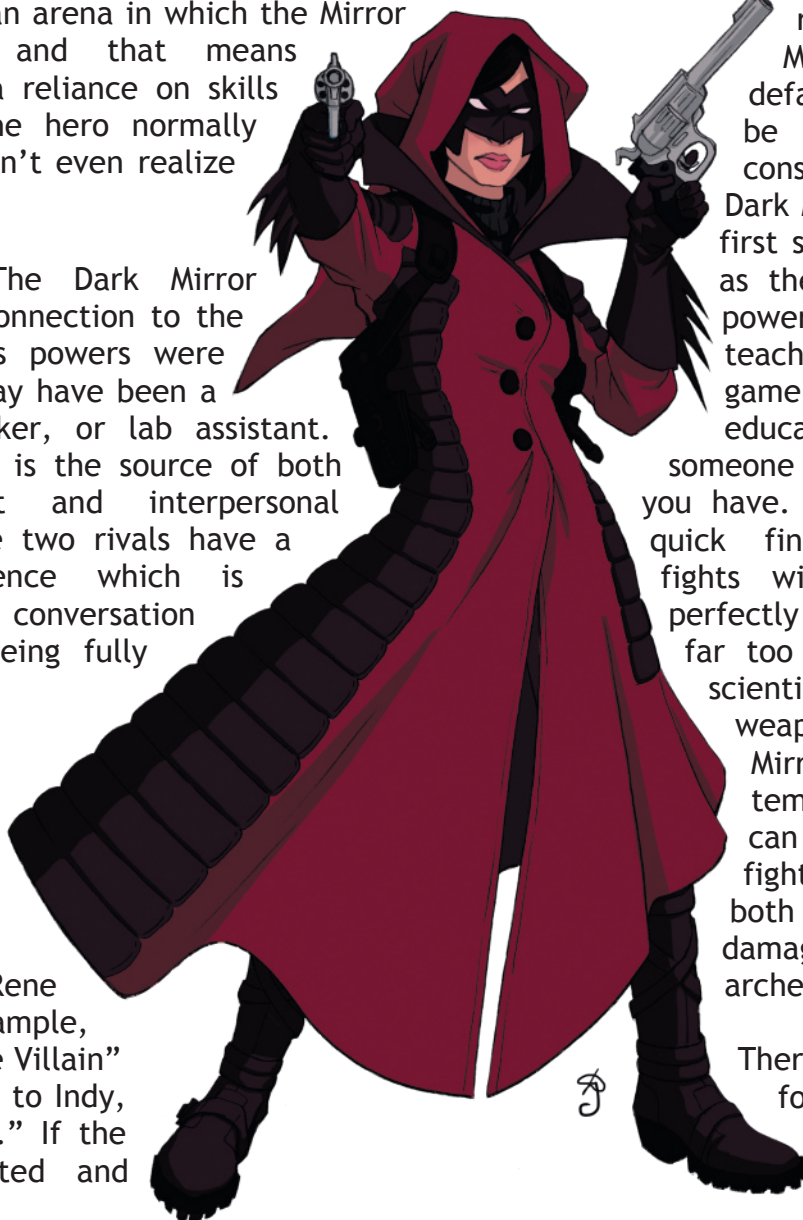
And their methods differ, not just in the superhuman arena but in their personal lives as well; Rene Belloq, for example, is a "Champagne Villain" in vivid contrast to Indy, the "Beer Hero." If the hero is educated and

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.

Abilities

Prowess 3
Coordination 4
Strength 3
Intellect 5
Awareness 4
Willpower 4

Stamina 7

Specialties

Art Expert
Investigation
Languages
Occult

Powers

Blast 4 (Pistol)

Qualities

There Is Nothing You Possess Which I Cannot
Take Away
Family Label
Ladies Man

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. 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, are only “off the chart” 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 Element Control (Fire), 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.

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?

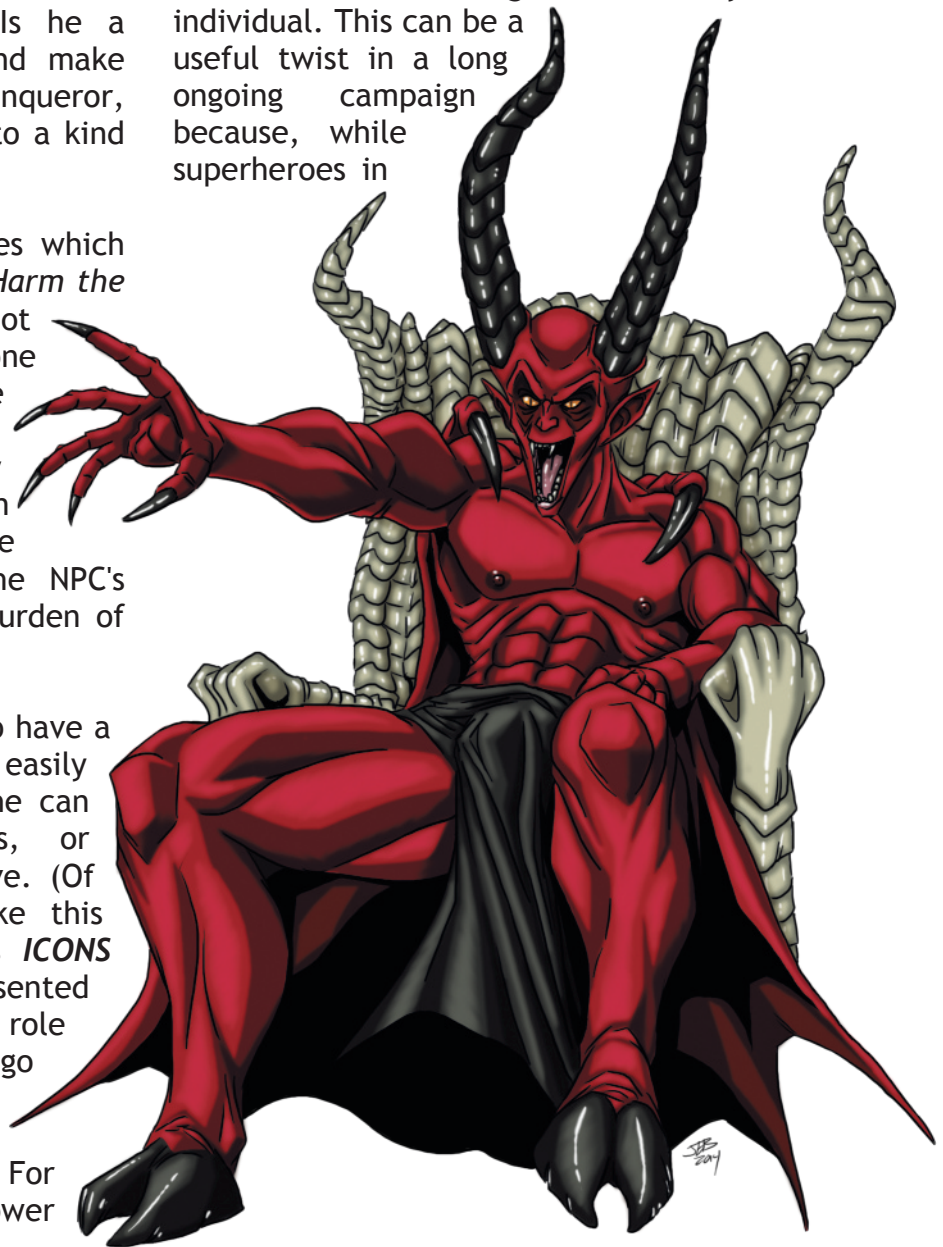
The Devil may have other weaknesses which the heroes can exploit. If he *Cannot Harm the Innocent*, for example, that may not apply to the heroes (who have done questionable things in the name of the greater good, or simply in moments of weakness) but it could certainly apply to particular NPCs the heroes 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. 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.

Abilities

Prowess 7
Coordination 8
Strength 8
Intellect 9
Awareness 8
Willpower Y

Stamina Y

Specialties

Occult Y

Powers

Element Control: Fire Y
Teleport 10

Qualities

The Devil by Another Name
Legions of Hell
Tempting

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 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 charisma, 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 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.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 4
Strength 3
Intellect 4
Awareness 4
Willpower 4

Stamina 7

Specialties

Stealth
Weapons

Powers

Mind Control 10 (Burst, Constant)

Qualities

Hear and Obey
Petty and Selfish
Former Spy

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 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. 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.

Abilities

Prowess 6
Coordination 6
Strength 4
Intellect 5
Awareness 5
Willpower 5

Stamina 9

Specialties

Athletics
Power: Transformation Master
Stealth
Weapons

Powers

Transformation: Humanoids 8

Qualities

Strange but Seductive
Skilled At Hiding Her True Self ...
... But Hates Having To Do It

EVIL TWIN

"There is a difference between you and me. We both looked into the abyss, but when it looked back at us, you blinked."

~ 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

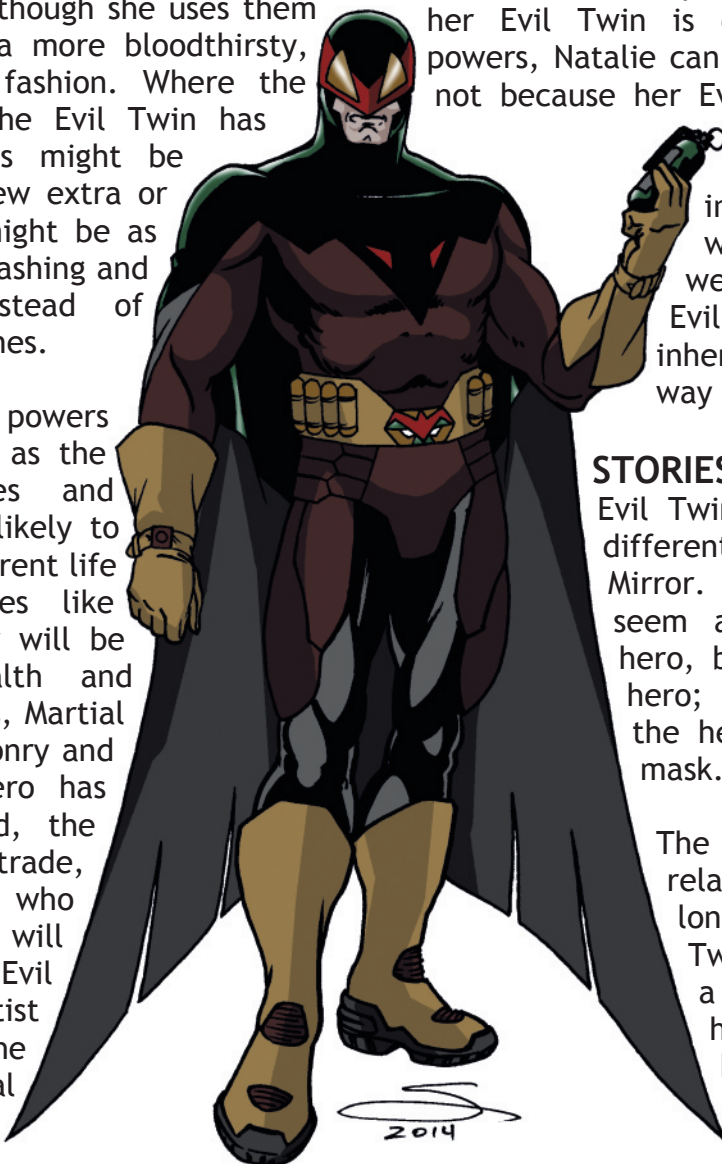
Evil Twin who experiments on helpless human subjects.

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



2014

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.

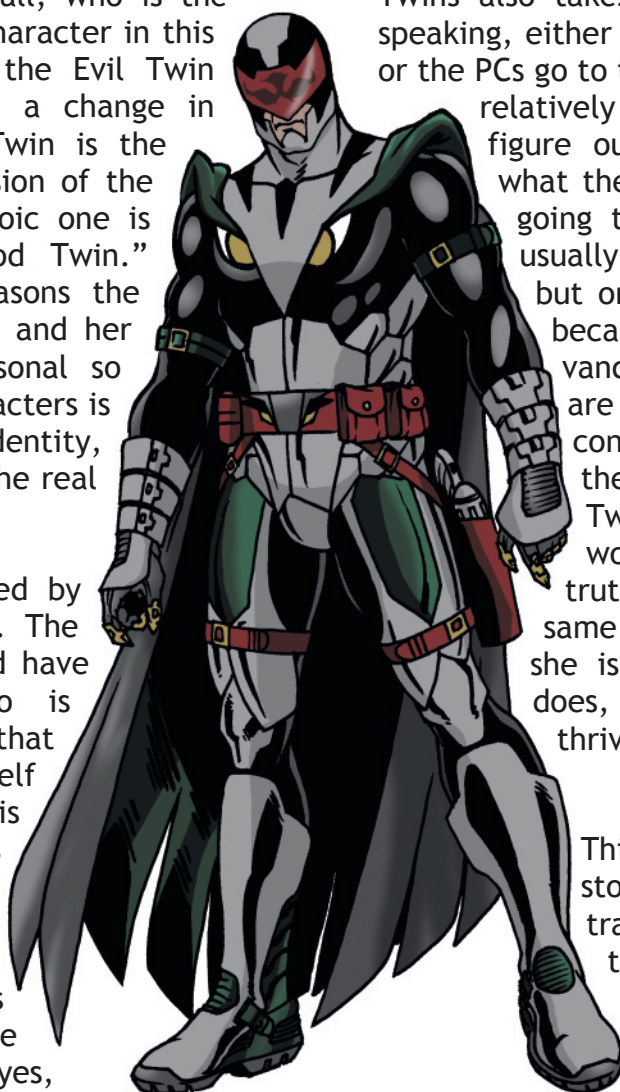
Evil Twins challenge their heroes in a way that goes beyond the physical. In one sense, they are an embodiment of existential fears about the loss of self. After all, who is the "right" version of the character in this scenario? What makes the Evil Twin the inferior one? With a change in perspective, 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



2014

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 mismatches. 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.

Abilities

Prowess 6
Coordination 6
Strength 5
Intellect 8
Awareness 5
Willpower 6

Stamina 11

Specialties

Athletics
Investigation
Martial Arts Expert
Weapons

Powers

Damage Resistance 2 (Body armor)
Gadgets 5
Super-Senses 1 (Dark vision)

Qualities

I’m the Brains of This Outfit
Plans for Every Contingency
Creature of Darkness

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.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 4
Strength 3
Intellect 3
Awareness 3
Willpower 4

Stamina 7

Specialties

Military
Weapons

Powers

Blast 4 (Pistol)
Damage Resistance 1 (Body armor)

Qualities

Fanatical Fascists
We Have Agents Everywhere
Weird Science

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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 5
Strength 4
Intellect 4
Awareness 5
Willpower 10

Stamina 14

Specialties

Pilot Expert

Powers

Energy Control: Force 10
Flight 10
Force Field 10

Qualities

Without Fear?
I Can Do Anything I Imagine
Unrepentant

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

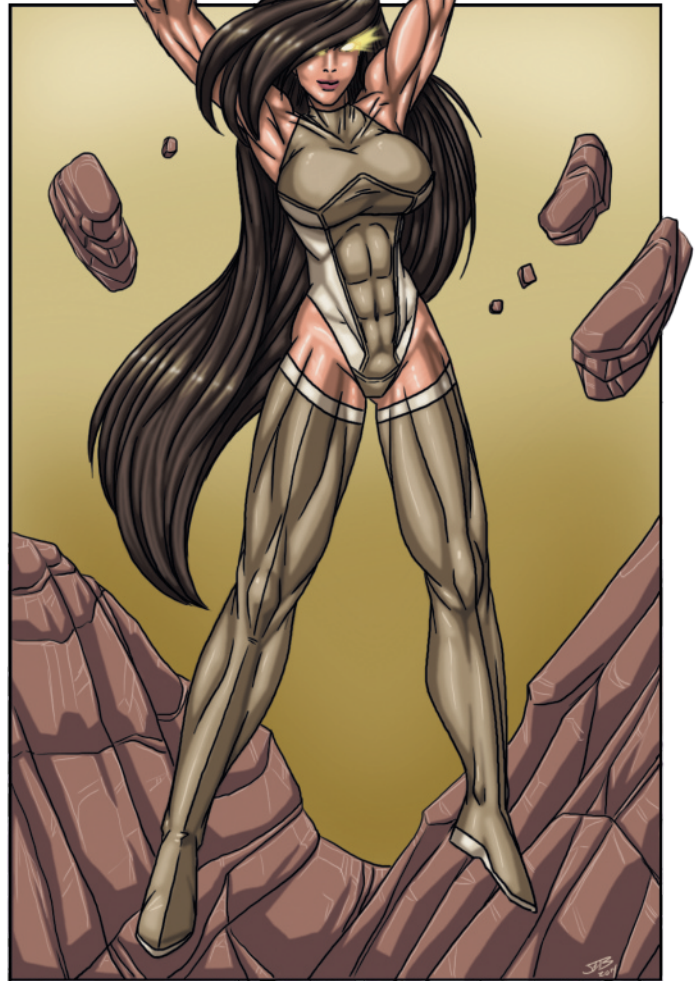
ABILITIES: While the Force of Nature can have Element Control, that's less important than the fact that the Force of Nature is not punchable. This may be because she is impervious to all harm (such as the Juggernaut in his memorable encounter with Spider-Man), because she is too vast in scale (Godzilla, 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 (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. 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.

Abilities

Prowess 3
Coordination 3
Strength 3
Intellect 5
Awareness 4
Willpower 5

Stamina 8

Specialties

Medicine
Science

Powers

Plant Control* 8 (Affliction, Binding, Blast, Plant Growth)

Qualities

Voice of the Green
Delusional
Botanist

*The Plant Control power is fully described in the *Great Power* supplement for *ICONS*.

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.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: 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.

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

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Supremacist, Nazi, Conqueror

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 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

BB

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 superheroes 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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 5
Strength 9
Intellect 4
Awareness 4
Willpower 5

Stamina 13

Specialties

Military

Powers

Binding 8
Blast 8
Damage Resistance 9
Flight 8

Qualities

KGB Officer
Armor Based On Stolen American Designs
The Revolution is Inevitable!

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, 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.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 3
Strength 6
Intellect 3
Awareness 3
Willpower 4

Stamina 10

Specialties

Occult

Powers

Damage Resistance 5
Flight 3

Qualities

Dead Already
Claws and Teeth
Horrifying

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

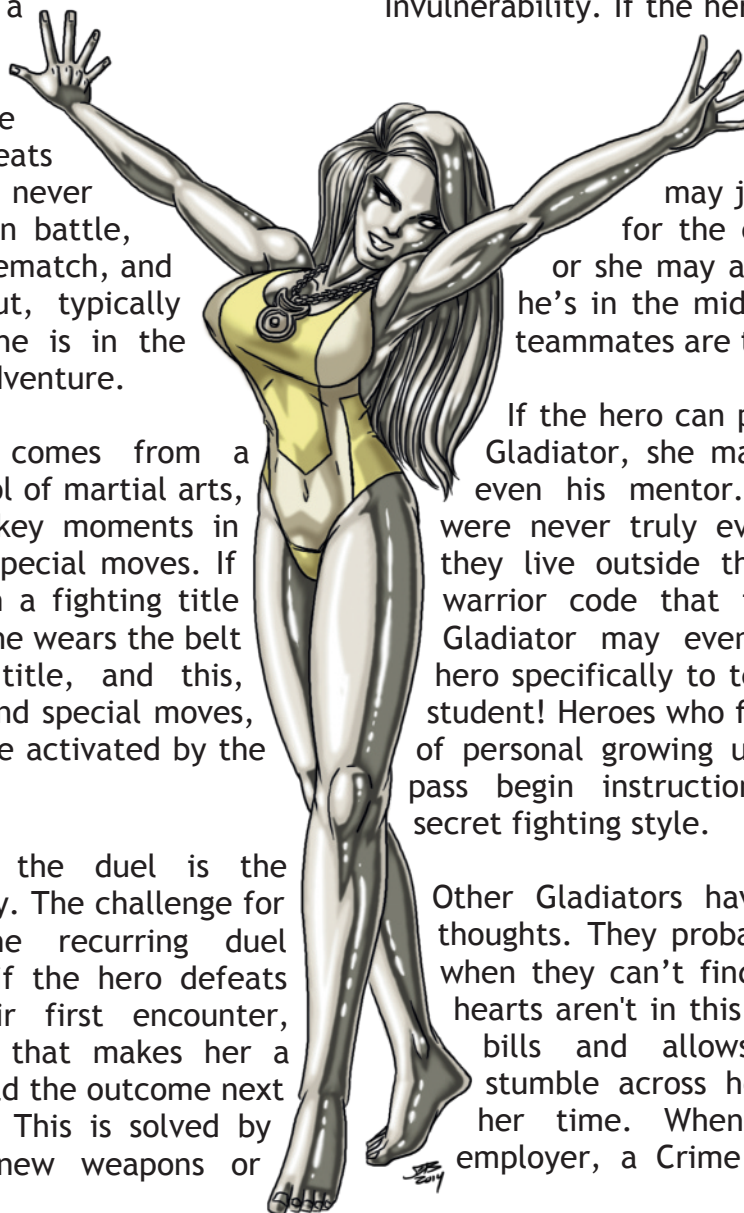
tactics each time. The terrain varies, though it is always dangerous, in order to keep the duel exciting. She may seek out super powers of her own to level the playing field, or develop special weapons just to thwart her rival. This makes her a Nemesis.

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.

Abilities

Prowess 6
Coordination 6
Strength 6
Intellect 4
Awareness 6
Willpower 5

Stamina 11

Specialties

Athletics Expert
Investigation Master
Martial Arts
Medicine
Occult
Stealth Master
Weapons Expert
Wrestling Expert

Powers

Blast 5 (Rifle)
Gadgets 7
Strike 4 (Knife)

Qualities

Most Dangerous Gamer
Herbal Potions
Proud Lineage

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); 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. He 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 Qlippoth ("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.

Abilities

Prowess 3
Coordination 4
Strength 3
Intellect 5
Awareness 4
Willpower 8

Stamina 11

Specialties

Occult
Performance
Weapons

Powers

Blast 4 (Pistol)
Mental Blast 10

Qualities

Servant of Otherworldly Beings
Consumed By Need for Revenge
Promises of Power

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.

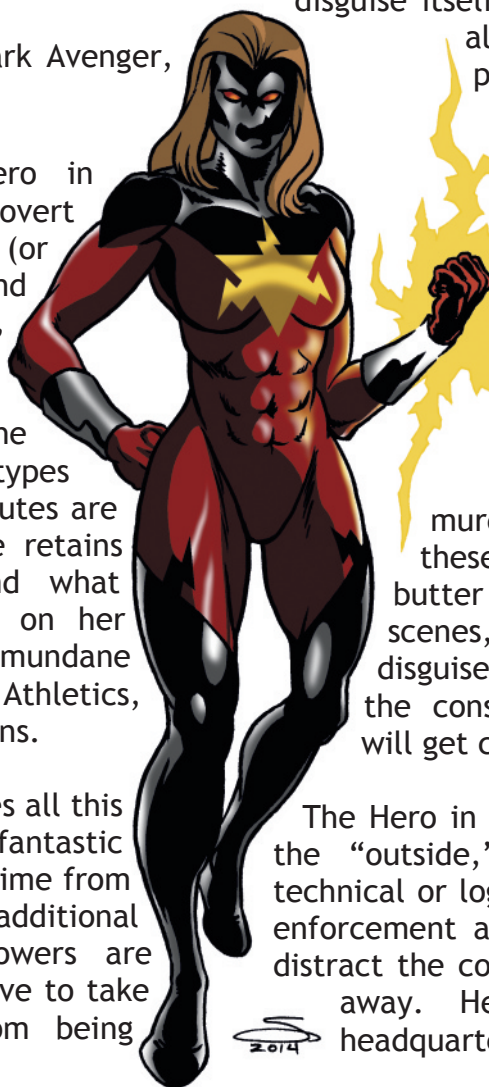
But there's nothing that requires all this to be true. A hero with more fantastic powers can still wage war on crime from within, though there are additional challenges. If the hero's powers are visually distinctive, she may have to take additional steps to keep from being

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



2014

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.

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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 6
Strength 4
Intellect 5
Awareness 6
Willpower 5

Stamina 9

Specialties

Business
Investigation
Stealth
Weapons

Powers

Blast 5 (Knockout gas)

Qualities

Asian Sidekick/Chauffeur
She’s a Black Beauty
City Newspaper

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.

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.

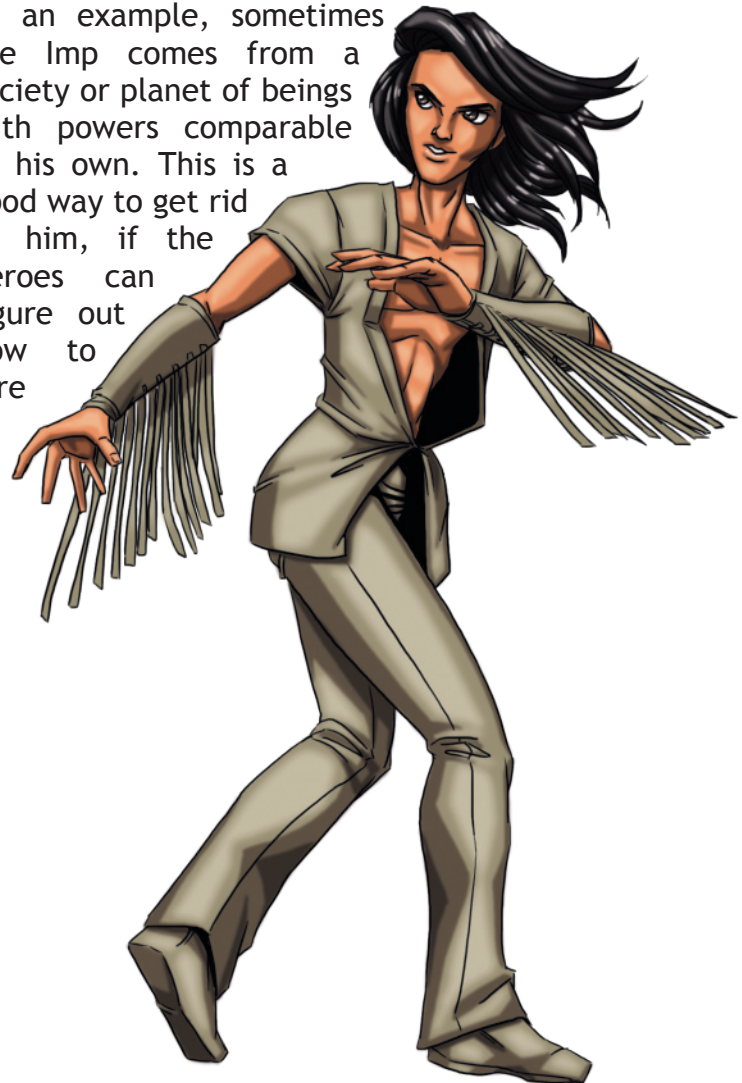
The Imp does, however, have a body and it is not inappropriate to give him Attributes. He is probably ignorant of human ways, scatterbrained, and naive, so his Intellect, Awareness, and Willpower will be average at best. He has no need for physical power or fighting skill because his every wish comes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

Abilities

Prowess 3
Coordination 3
Strength 3
Intellect 3
Awareness Y
Willpower Y

Stamina Y

Specialties

Cosmic Power Expert

Powers

Cosmic Power Y
(Alteration Ray: Transformation,
Extrasensory Perception, Healing,
Resistance, Teleportation, Transmutation)
Immortality 10
Life Support 10

Qualities

Curious
Hopelessly Ignorant
No Sense of Proportion

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

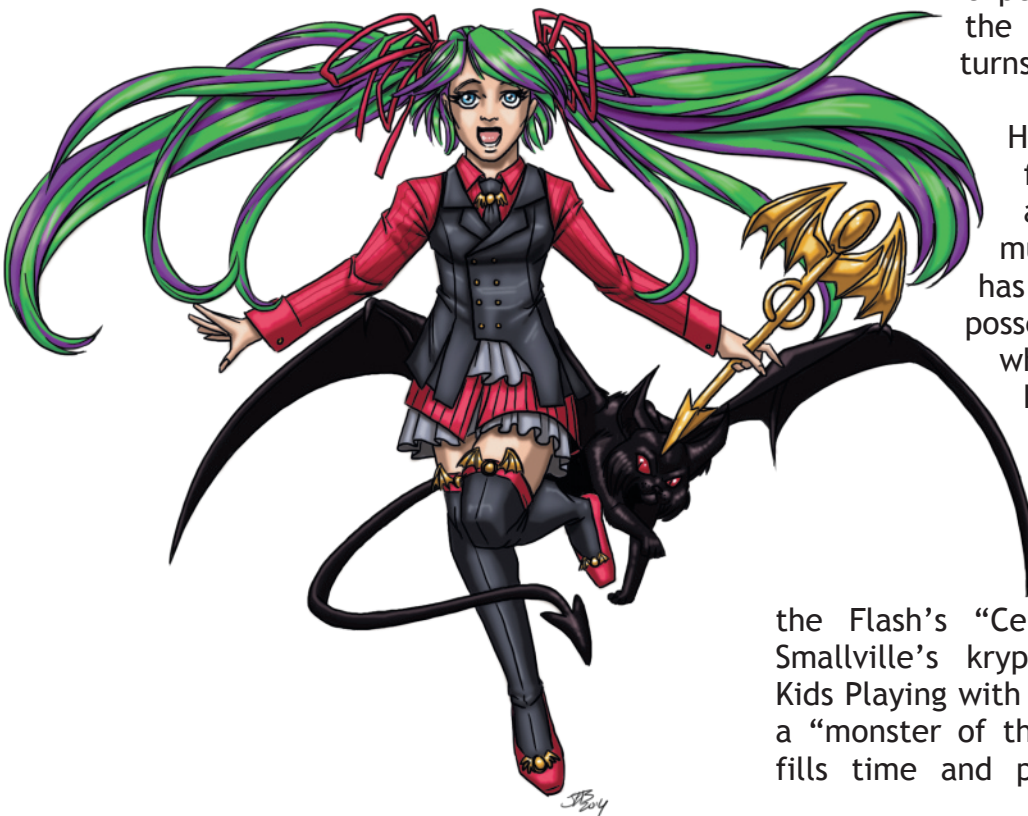
theme and origin, and in fact she probably has only one power with a few additional effects purchased as extras. If you are telling a story in which the Kid is expected to fight an entire team of heroes, this power needs to be of high rank, but if your story is more about the trouble the Kid causes among 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.

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



JB04

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.

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.

Abilities

Prowess 8
Coordination 8
Strength 7
Intellect 4
Awareness 5
Willpower 5

Stamina 12

Specialties

Athletics
Martial Arts
Stealth
Weapons

Powers

Blast 4 (Pistol)
Gadgets 7
Resistance 4 (Body armor)
Strike 4 (Sword)

Qualities

Like Father Like Son
Subject of Mysterious Experiments
Now It's My Turn!

MASTERMIND

"Some people call me a terrorist. I consider myself a teacher. America, ready for another lesson?"

~ the Mandarin

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); John Byrne's version of Lex Luthor, Ra's al Ghul (DC); Cobra Commander (GI Joe)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Twisted Genius, 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.

Abilities

Prowess 1
Coordination 2
Strength 3
Intellect 4
Awareness 2
Willpower 5

Stamina 5

Specialties

Performance Master

Qualities

All of America's Fears
Just an Actor
Criminal Fans

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 alienness 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.

Abilities

Prowess 8
 Coordination 3
 Strength 9
 Intellect 2
 Awareness 2
 Willpower 5

Stamina 14

Powers

Resistance 10

Qualities

Skin Coated In Space-Dust
 Face of Your Best Pal
 "Destroy! Destroy!"



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 can easily persuade 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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
 Coordination 6
 Strength 5
 Intellect 4
 Awareness 5
 Willpower 5

Stamina 10

Specialties

Athletics
 Drive
 Martial Arts
 Mental Resistance Expert
 Military Expert
 Performance Expert
 Stealth Expert
 Weaponry Expert

Qualities

Divided Loyalties
 "I Work Alone."
 Whatever It Takes

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 Mjolnir — 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.

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. Nemesises 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.

Abilities

Prowess 3
Coordination 4
Strength 3
Intellect 8
Awareness 4
Willpower 5

Stamina 8

Specialties

Technology Expert

Powers

Binding 10
Blast 10
Flight 6
Gadgets 8

Qualities

Monologues
Super-Geek
Zero-Point Energy

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).

Abilities

Prowess 7
 Coordination 8
 Strength 7
 Intellect 4
 Awareness 6
 Willpower 8

Stamina 15

Specialties

Technology
 Weaponry Expert

Powers

Blast 5 (firearms)
 Immortality 5
 Life Support 10
 Resistance 5

Qualities

Hyper-Alloy Combat Chassis
 Looks Human
 I’ll Be Back

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, 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.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 3
Strength 3
Intellect 4
Awareness 4
Willpower 5

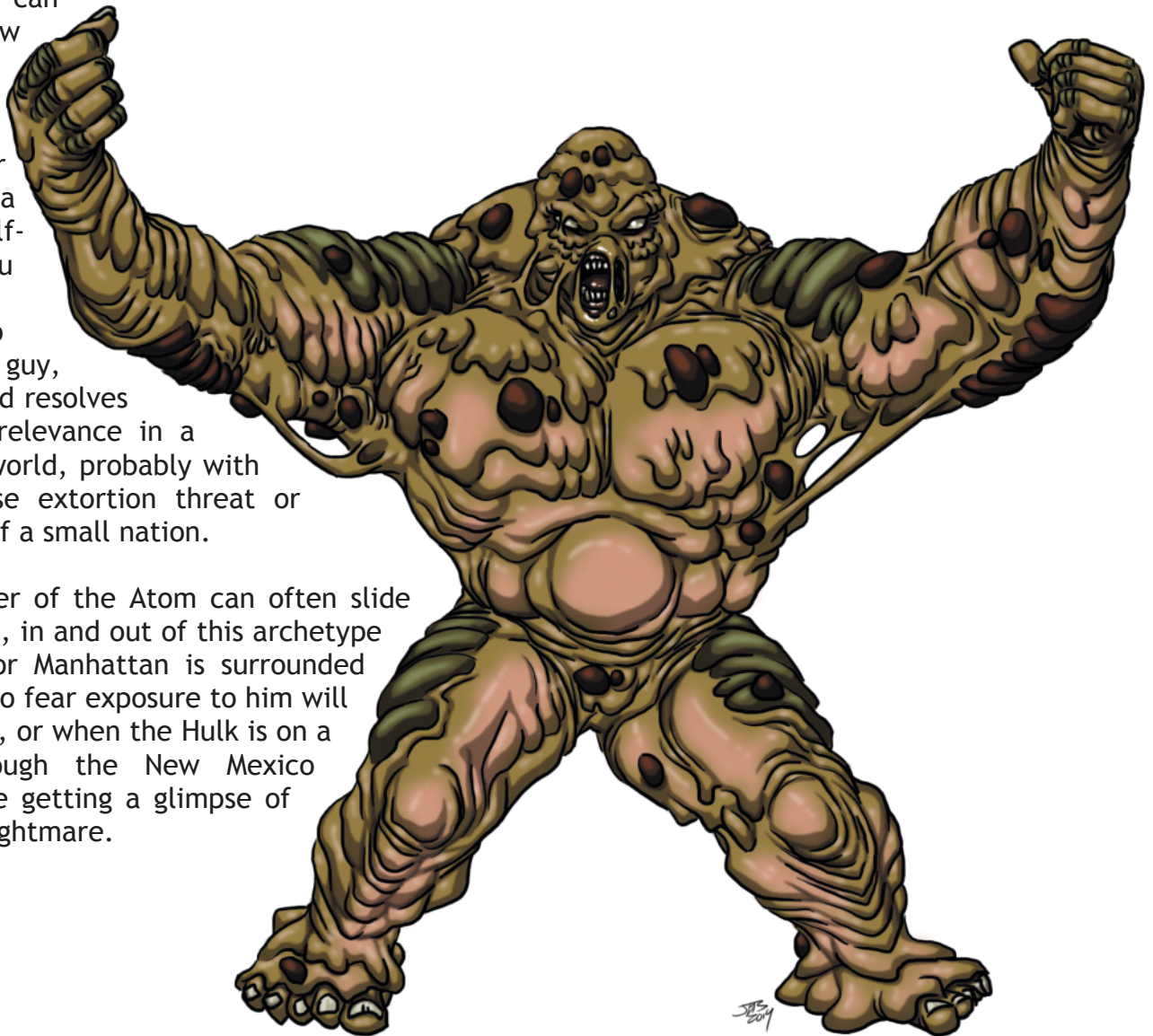
Stamina 8

Powers

Energy Control: Radiation (Affliction, Aura, Burst Blast) X

Qualities

Uncontrollable
Vengeance
Nothing Left To Lose



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 chart.” Any power test using this ability is always resolved in the favor of the Power Corrupted.

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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 7
Strength 4
Intellect 5
Awareness X
Willpower X

Stamina X

Specialties

Power Expert: Telekinesis
Power: Telepathy

Powers

Element Control: Fire X (Blast)
Force Field X
Flight 10
Immortality 1
Life Support 10
Telepathy 10 (Danger Sense, Mental Blast)
Telekinesis 10 (Binding)

Qualities

Fire and Life Incarnate
Hunted Throughout the Galaxy
Struggling to Stay Human

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*.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 5
Strength 4
Intellect 6
Awareness 5
Willpower 8

Stamina 12

Specialties

Mental Resistance Master
Performance
Stealth
Weaponry

Powers

Blast 4 (Pistol)
Gadgets 6

Qualities

Clown King of Crime
Mysterious Past
Gang of Crazy Followers

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: 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. She is tasked with seducing a hero, and sometimes she has fallen far

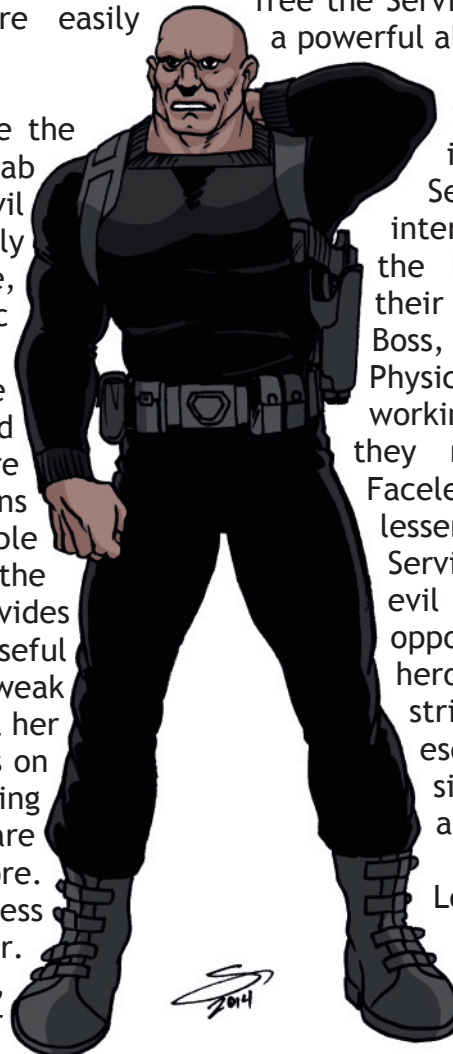
enough from the tree that she loves him instead.

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.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 5
Strength 4
Intellect 3
Awareness 3
Willpower 4

Stamina 8

Specialties

Drive
Stealth
Weaponry

Powers

Blast 4 (Pistol)

Qualities

Number One Guy
Yes, Sir

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

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.

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. 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 people think it does). 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.

Abilities

Prowess 8
Coordination 7
Strength 7
Intellect 8
Awareness 8
Willpower 9

Stamina 16

Specialties

Investigation
Occult Expert
Stealth Expert

Powers

Alter Ego: Bat Form 8
Alternate Form: Gaseous 8
Emotion Control 9
Fast Attack 8
Immortality 2
Life Support 8 (still needs to eat and sleep)
Resistance 5
Servant 9
Super-Senses 1 (darkvision)
Wall Crawling 5

Qualities

Lord of All Vampires
Traditional Vulnerabilities
Black Magic

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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 6
Strength 4
Intellect 7
Awareness 6
Willpower 8

Stamina 12

Specialties

Power Master: Energy Control
Technology

Powers

Energy Control: Magnetism 10 (Binding, Force
Field, Telekinesis)
Flight 5
Mind Shield 10 (Helmet)

Qualities

Master of Magnetism
Victim of Nazi Genocide
Making the World Safe For Mutants

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.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: 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.

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.

Note that there is no listed specialty in *ICONS* that covers seduction or any other kind of

social interaction. (Even Leadership is primarily mechanical in its effects.) When a Temptress is seducing NPCs, she relies on a high Willpower and the plot you have created for her. 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 can 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, 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?

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 5
Strength 3
Intellect 5
Awareness 6
Willpower 8

Stamina 11

Specialties

Power Mastery: Plant Control

Powers

Emotion Control 8
Plant Control* 8 (Affliction, Binding, Plant Growth, Plant Recall, Servant)

Qualities

Former Botanist
Values Plants Over People
Vamp

* The Plant Control power is fully described in the *Great Power* supplement for *ICONS*.

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: Mirror Master, Toyman, Two-Face (DC); Green Goblin (Marvel)

RELATED ARCHETYPES: Thief, Twisted Genius

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 mercenaries or career 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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 6
Strength 5
Intellect 5
Awareness 4
Willpower 6

Stamina 11

Specialties

Investigation
Law Expert
Weapons

Powers

Blast 5 (Firearms)

Qualities

Heads or Tails
Hideously Scarred
Gang of Thugs

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, 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 Performance and a strong Willpower 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.

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.

Abilities

Prowess 4
Coordination 6
Strength 4
Intellect 7
Awareness 6
Willpower 5

Stamina 9

Specialties

Technology

Powers

Dazzle 8
Gadgets 8
Images 8

Qualities

It's All Done With Mirrors
Honorable Rogue
In It for the Money

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.

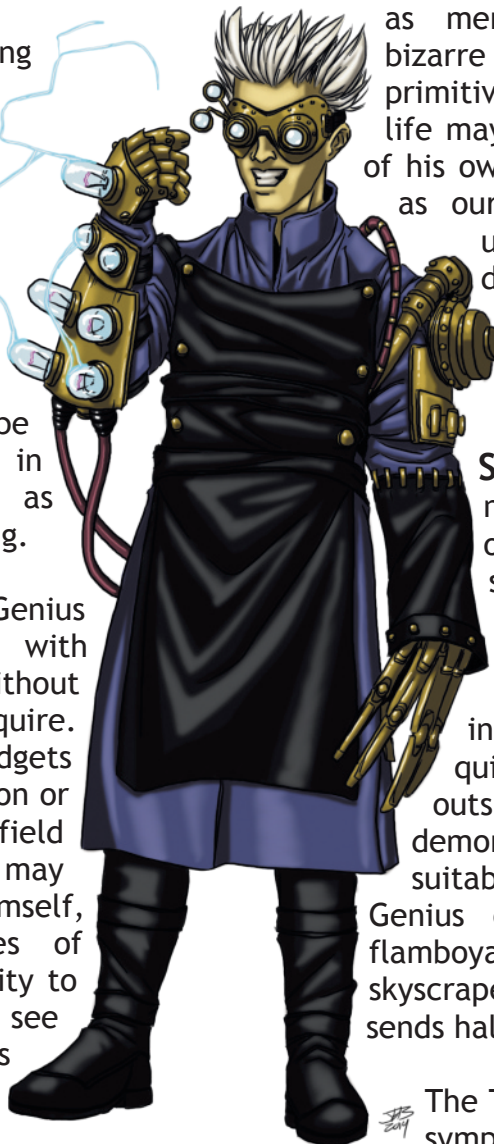
QUALITIES: The Twisted Genius is the old Mad Scientist of the Victorian and Edwardian era with a change of nomenclature. While these villains are always brilliant — and obsessed with proving their own brilliance — they don't always appear to be insane and many aren't even especially interested in science. 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;



JB
2011

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.

Abilities

Prowess 3
Coordination 3
Strength 3
Intellect 9
Awareness 7
Willpower 8

Stamina 11

Specialties

Business
Investigation
Technology

Qualities

The Greatest Criminal Mind of Our Time
Central Park Address
Oafish Assistant

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.

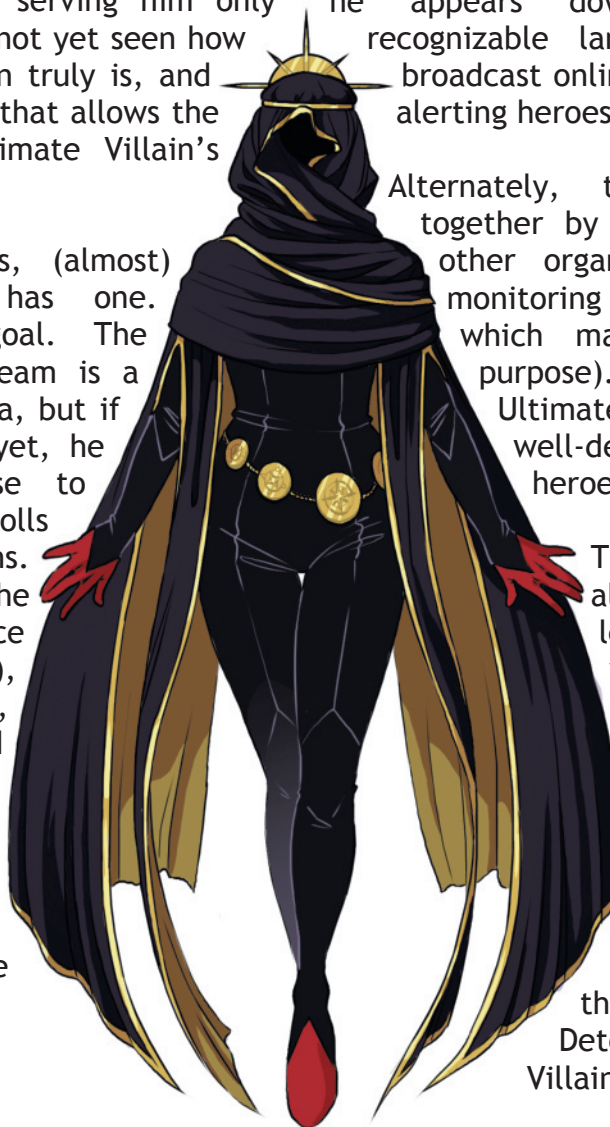
When the climactic battle begins, the action economy of most roleplaying games (including *ICONS*) works against the Ultimate Villain; the heroes each get to attack him when their turn comes up, but he gets only one action in response. It's fairly easy for heroes to avoid that attack or minimize the 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.

Abilities

Prowess 7
Coordination 8
Strength 7
Intellect 9
Awareness 9
Willpower 8

Stamina 15

Specialties

Occult
Pilot
Technology
Weapons

Powers

Blast 10 (Spear)
Images 10
Invisibility 10
Mind Control 10 (Spear)
Strike 4 (Spear)

Qualities

Born To Rule
God of Lies
Familial Love

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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 6
Strength 4
Intellect 4
Awareness 5
Willpower 6

Stamina 10

Specialties

Athletics
Drive
Investigation Master
Martial Arts
Stealth Expert
Weapons Expert

Powers

Blast 5 (Rifle)

Qualities

Thorough Preparation
Master of Disguise
Scourge of the Underworld

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; 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.

Abilities

Prowess 8
 Coordination 7
 Strength 8
 Intellect 4
 Awareness 5
 Willpower 6

Stamina 14

Specialties

Military Expert

Powers

Element Control: Fire 8 (Blast, Flight, Aura)
 Force Field 8
 Invisibility 8
 Mind Control 8
 Resistance 8
 Stretching 8
 Transformation: Humanoids 8

Qualities

Champion of His People
 Soldier in Search of a War
 Powers Augmented by Strange Technology

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.

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."

Abilities

Prowess 3
Coordination 5
Strength 3
Intellect 7
Awareness 5
Willpower 6

Stamina 9

Specialties

Occult

Powers

Magic 8 (Blast, Flight, Force Field, Teleport)

Qualities

Extradimensional Patrons
Stolen Mystic Artifacts

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.

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.

Abilities

Prowess 5
Coordination 5
Strength 3
Intellect 4
Awareness 5
Willpower 6

Stamina 9

Specialties

Power: Element Control
Stealth

Powers

Element Control: Earth 8 (Binding, Blast, Burrowing)
Flight 5

Qualities

Off-Panel Allies
Ingénue
I've Learned All Your Secrets



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 Temptresses 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 Temptress, 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.

Open Game License

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses

and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or

Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0 Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

Fudge System Reference Document, Copyright 2005, Grey Ghost Press, Inc.; Authors Steffan O'Sullivan and Ann Dupuis, with additional material by Peter Bonney, Deirdre Brooks, Reimer Behrends, Shawn Garbett, Steven Hammond, Ed Heil, Bernard Hsiung, Sedge Lewis, Gordon McCormick, Kent Matthewson, Peter Mikelsons, Anthony Roberson, Andy Skinner, Stephan Szabo, John Ughrin, Dmitri Zagidulin.

FATE (Fantastic Adventures in Tabletop Entertainment), Copyright 2003 by Evil Hat Productions LLC; Authors Robert Donoghue and Fred Hicks.

Spirit of the Century, Copyright 2006, Evil Hat Productions LLC. Authors Robert Donoghue, Fred Hicks, and Leonard Balsera.

Icons, Copyright 2010, Steve Kenson, published exclusively by Adamant Entertainment in partnership with Cubicle Seven Entertainment, Ltd.

Super Villain Handbook Copyright Fainting Goat Games 2015

Author Jason Tundro

Stark City Campaign Setting Copyright Fainting Goat Games/ Stark City Games 2013

The following is designated as Product Identity, in accordance with Section 1(e) of the Open Game License, Version 1.0a: All Characters and their associated descriptions, backgrounds, and related information

ICONS Superpowered Roleplaying is a trademark of Steve Kenson, published exclusively by Ad Infinitum Adventures. The ICONS Superpowered Roleplaying Compatibility Logo is a trademark of Ad Infinitum Adventures and is used under the ICONS Superpowered Roleplaying Compatibility License.

ICONS and associated marks and logos are trademarks of Steve Kenson and Ad Infinitum Adventures, and are used under license.

IT'S TRUE, SUPER VILLAINS ARE A SECRETIVE LOT. OTHER THAN THE OCCASIONAL SLIP OF MEGALOMANIA DURING WORLD DOMINATION BROADCASTS, MOST SUPER VILLAINS KEEP THE ESSENCE OF WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY DO UNDER TIGHT WRAPS. DR. COMICS (THAT WOULD BE DR TONDRO... SHH. IT'S A SECRET) HAS TAPPED EVERY INFORMANT, MINION, AND EX-VILLAINOUS LOVE INTEREST HE COULD GET HIS HOOKS INTO TO DIVULGE THE SECRETS OF WHAT MAKES A SUPER VILLAIN TICK.

THE SUPER VILLAIN HANDBOOK COVERS FORTY ARCHETYPES FOR VARIOUS SUPER VILLAINS THAT ONE MIGHT ENCOUNTER THROUGHOUT COMICS. WHILE THE BOOK WAS CREATED WITH ICONS IN MIND, THERE ARE MANY REASONS THAT THIS IS AN ESSENTIAL RESOURCE FOR GMS OF ANY SUPERHERO GAME.

THE BOOK CLASSIFIES SUPER VILLAINS NOT BY WHAT THEY CAN DO (FOR EXAMPLE, "CONTROL MAGNETISM") BUT BY THEIR ROLE IN THE STORY ("I MUST MAKE THE WORLD SAFE FOR MY PEOPLE!"). IN SUCH ROLES, WE SEE EVERYTHING FROM THE LOWLY CRIME BOSS TO THE COSMIC MENACE. THIS ALLOWS VILLAINS OF ALL TYPES AND POWER SETS TO FILL DIFFERENT ROLES AT THE TABLE WITHOUT COMING ACROSS AS POORLY RE-SKINNED CLONES.

