



NEW GODS FOR an OLD Town

**A PLAYSET FOR
JUST HEROES BY
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Sitting Down to Play

In a world where superpowers have been with us for generations, four heroes have risen to the top of the heap in London, acting as its unofficial guardians, but each of the four pursues their own ends through their own means. Being on the same side of the law doesn't always mean working together and when it comes to the crunch, whose vision for the city will prevail?

This is a condensed version of **Just Heroes**, which is itself a hack of **Apocalypse World** by D. Vincent Baker; the purpose of this playset is to provide a short taster of **Just Heroes** for use at conventions and in other one-shot sessions. The playset is designed to accommodate 3 or 4 players plus an MC, whose role it is to organise the game and support the other participants during play. I'll assume the person reading this is the MC, which makes your first job printing out this playset and the four Hero Playbooks that accompany it, these being Dr. Dusk, Lady Smoke, Steel Spring and The Snowdrop: these are the four superheroes who protect London and its citizens from internal & external threats.

In addition, you'll need a few other basic supplies: pencils, erasers, note paper and several six-sided dice: the latter are the only kind of dice used in this game, so wherever I say 'dice', I mean that kind. Before you can start playing though, there are a few more things to check off, the first of which needs to be done before you even find any players, and that is to find players who want to play this particular type of game. **Just Heroes** relies heavily on player input & motivation: you create situations for the PCs to deal with, but the players should also be actively pursuing their PCs' own agendas. Quite often, this can mean providing answers to their own questions: I can't give you a complete

encyclopaedia for the game that you can hide under the table, you'll often have to make things up on the spot. The best way for you to make things up is to ask the players what they were expecting. Get their input & suggestions on what outcome they wanted, don't take on the whole load yourself.

Another important point: the heroes have lives. They don't live in their costumes, they all have a secret identity, one they were born into or have assumed, and a major driving force for the PCs is keeping their two lives separate & balanced. Superheroes aren't exactly embraced by the authorities, but their effectiveness makes them an obvious target for criminals: therefore, to protect their loved ones, the PCs must protect their secrets.

Finally, relax: if you've made your preparations and the players are arriving at the table, greet them, introduce yourself and answer their questions. This is also your final chance to let everyone know what they are in for, so:

- ✦ **Get names:** find out who's playing, write it down if you want.
- ✦ **Describe the setting:** "This is a superhero game set in modern London, in a world that has had superbeings for generations and *you* are considered to be top-tier heroes: you've already made names for yourselves, with the public, with the media, with the authorities *and* with the criminal underground. It's accepted that there are strange powers at work in the world, but they aren't common and don't affect most people's daily routine, except for what they read in the papers."
- ✦ **Describe the theme:** "You are each living two lives: one in the costume and one out of it. You don't want those two to mix, so part of the game is juggling your responsibilities and

keeping your friends & family safe from the consequences of your actions as a superhero, whilst also finding time away from them to *take* those actions."

- ✦ **Describe the style:** "There's no singular, linear story for this session: instead, each of you has hooks in your playbook that will draw your hero into the action. The story will emerge from what choices you make as players, including how your characters go about pursuing their own agendas and how they react to what happens."
- ✦ **Take care of the admin:** if you're playing this at a convention, you might have to check names off a list, take tickets or whatever. Also, explain how you intend to structure the time allocated: how often you intend to take breaks, how long the breaks will be for, and so on. Take time to ask the players if they are comfortable and ready to begin, and to answer any further questions they may have.

Getting into Role

Once everyone is comfortable, you can begin by talking about the characters they will be playing: take a look at them, talk about them and pass them amongst the players. There are no secrets from other players on these sheets, and though each hero won't necessarily know the ins & outs of each other's lives, it's inevitable that the *players* will learn about them during the game anyway. Take some time to choose characters, making sure everyone has a hero they are comfortable playing.

Part of choosing characters is talking about how they feel about each other and what their relationships are like: every playbook has a Status entry, which is used to note whether that hero likes or dislikes each other hero. The Status section gives a one line

description of how the hero's opinions of their peers, but is up to each player to fill in the details here and decide whether their feelings are positive or negative.

For example, in The Snowdrop's Status section, the first entry is "Steel Spring is guilty of pride, the same as me," while Steel Spring has an entry that reads "The Snowdrop relies on force over intellect." They should agree between them what history the two heroes share that has lead to them forming these opinions of each other: perhaps they were both at the scene of an emergency but The Snowdrop refused Steel Spring's offer of a team-up and acted on his own. They can choose to both dislike each other, both like each other or one can like & the other dislike, as long as they are clear with each other why they have formed these opinions.

Choosing characters and discussing their mutual likes & dislikes enables the players to start getting into role: the history shared by any two heroes provides a chance to build on the foundations given in the playbooks. Players should occupy their characters like new tenants moving into a house: the building remains the same, but they bring their own furniture and decorate it to suit their own tastes.

The last step of preparation is highlighting stats: each hero gets two of their four basic stats highlighted, earning experience when they roll for those highlighted stats during the game. Players first highlight a stat for each other using a round-robin method, so for example everyone highlights a stat for the player on their right; after that, the MC highlights a second stat for each hero. Everyone should choose stats based on the type of action they'd like to see, not what is easiest or hardest for that hero.

Knowing the Rules

The core of the game is in the concept of moves, which are simply a way of describing the actions taken in the story by the heroes and their adversaries. If you question someone, that's a move; attack them, that's a move; run away, that's a move too.

Most moves require you to roll 2d6, adding the results together and modifying the total by a stat to get your result.

- 6 or less is a miss: there will be consequences for this.
- 7-9 is a hit, but not a perfect one: the outcome won't be the best.
- 10 or more is a hit and it's usually the best success you can hope for.
- If you have advanced a move, you get a spectacular success on 12 or more.

The Basic Moves are pre-packaged actions which describe what happens on a hit, e.g. if you're **pressing on** towards a destination, then a hit means you arrive there in time, though not necessarily in one piece. A miss means the hero fails at what they were doing, leaving themselves open to a drastic countermove from the MC, though sometimes it just means the villains get to do what they were doing without any interference from the hero.

There are several game terms used throughout the Basic Moves and the hero playbooks, which are explained here:

- ✦ **Now:** an effect that applies to the move you are currently making.
- ✦ **Forward:** an effect that applies to the next move you make, e.g. 'take +1 forward' means you add +1 to your next die roll.

- ✦ **Ongoing:** an effect that persists for some time, e.g. 'take -1 Speed ongoing' means you roll with -1 each time you use Speed, until the condition affecting you wears off.
- ✦ **Push:** any basic move can be pushed, if you have a style move or other advantage that enables you to do so. When you **push** a basic move, you have more chance of success, but a 6 or less means that you fall prey to hubris and go too far.
There are three situations that allow you to push a move:
 - You have a style move that allows it.
 - You are **supported** by another hero.
 - You are using a tool or device to make that move.When you **push** a move, roll 3d6 and take the best two results, then add them and your stat as normal; on a miss though, there are greater consequences to face.
- ✦ **Scene:** the current situation taking place, this is usually tied to a location and a set of characters, but either can change during a scene. What counts is what the scene is about, e.g. investigating the plot, fighting the villains or whatever.
- ✦ **Halted:** an interruption that stops a target from doing what they were doing; this doesn't stop them completely, it just means they don't get to complete that single action.
- ✦ **Defeated:** derailing a plan and taking the target's current goal off the table; they are still active and can do something else, but they can't get what they came for.

- ✦ **Captured:** placed in custody or unfairly imprisoned, the target is incapable of taking any further action in the current scene.
- ✦ **Tag:** a special condition applied to a target that affects what they can do or how others can react to them, e.g. Dr. Dusk can tag himself with *hidden*, meaning he can't be the target of Villain moves, while The Snowdrop can tag a target with *frozen* when she **strikes** them, preventing them from moving from the spot. Tags don't carry over from one scene to the next.
- ✦ **Pain:** a measure of fatigue or harm, when a hero reaches 4 pain, they are out of action and may even die. Pain carries over between scenes, it doesn't reset between them.
- ✦ **Experience:** rolling your highlighted stats or changing your status with another hero allows you to mark experience, which measures how close you are to gaining an advance for your hero; when you reach 5 experience, you reset it to zero and choose one of the advances available to you.
- ✦ **Ace:** one type of advance makes a basic or style move more effective, such as by allowing for a better outcome on a roll of 12+. You can benefit from an advanced move even if you haven't taken that advance yet however; when you **ace** a move, you use it as if you had advanced it. This works in the same way as taking +1: you might take an **ace** now, take it forward or even take it ongoing. Usually you get an **ace** from a style move, but they are rare, so don't expect them to come up as often as getting +1 or pushing.

The third chapter acts as a quick reference guide to all the most common moves in the game: check it out and become familiar with it, so that you can better advise the players on their options. Sometimes, there's no move that clearly applies to a player's stated intent: that's when you should fall back on the principle of **say yes or roll the dice**.

- ✦ **Say Yes:** does it sound like a good idea? Or a bad one with interesting consequences? Is there no real opposition to it? Would failure be dull or halt the story? In any of those cases, consider just saying "Yes" to what the hero is doing and moving on.
- ✦ **Roll the Dice:** is there something at risk here? Would the outcome be uncertain? Does the hero have to make a real effort to do this? In any of those cases, pick a stat and roll, but note it down in case someone wants to do the same kind of thing later: be consistent when judging spot cases, don't adjust the rules to the hero.

MOVE & COUNTERMOVE

The game can be thought of as a series of moves, with the PCs and the MC taking turns to state what they do; these moves come in four types:

- ✦ **Basic Moves:** the essential moves all PCs can make, by rolling the dice.
- ✦ **Peripheral Moves:** automatic moves or less frequent ones.
- ✦ **Style Moves:** superpowers unique to each hero's style.
- ✦ **Villain Moves:** things the MC can do to provoke action.

Basic Moves

All players share the basic moves as their most common way to interact with the game world: these are not just superheroic actions, like stopping a speeding train or throwing bolts of lightning from your hands, they also cover the day-to-day aspects of the characters' lives.

All basic moves are handled in the same way: roll 2d6 and add both results together plus the value of whatever stat is being used for that move. For example, if Lady Smoke races to where she is needed, she rolls and adds her speed stat, which gives her +1; if her dice results are 2 and 4, that gives her a final result of 7, so she just barely succeeds.

As well as the outcomes for a 7-9 and a 10+, each basic move description gives two other pieces of information:

◎ If the move has been advanced for a character, this symbol indicates what happens if they get 12+.

☠ If the move has been pushed when made, this symbol indicates what happens if they miss.

Strike: When you attack people, objects or things, roll+might to **strike**: on a 10+, you choose one; on a 7-9, they choose one:

- ✦ They take pain, unless they halt.

- ✦ They are defeated, but you take pain.
- ✦ They exchange pain and/or tags with you.
- ✦ They temporarily lose an advantage or ability.
 - ◎ The target is immediately captured.
 - ☠ Choose one: the target is killed, the target is crippled or the target is captured at a great cost in innocent lives.

Steel Yourself: When you shake off your injuries or fatigue, roll+might to **steel yourself**: on a hit, remove 1 pain or one tag; on a 7-9, choose one:

- ✦ It's exhausting: you lose the use of one style move for the rest of this scene.
- ✦ It takes you out of the action for a short time.
 - ◎ Remove all your pain and/or tags.
 - ☠ Choose one: retreat from the scene & leave others in danger or it's worse than you thought: take +1 Pain.

Rescue: When you protect or save anyone from danger, including yourself, roll+speed to **rescue**: on a hit, they are safe for now and any threat is halted; when you rescue someone else, you may also remove one tag from them. On a 7-9, choose one:

- ✦ Take the pain or tag meant for them.
- ✦ You cause collateral damage.
- ✦ You lose valuable time.
 - ◎ Whoever you have rescued is delivered to safety outside this scene.
 - ☠ You cause more harm to your target by attempting to rescue them.

Press On: When you need to reach your destination without being stopped, roll+speed to **press on**: on a hit, you arrive in the nick of time. On a 7-9, choose one:

- ✦ Take pain as established.

- ✂ You draw attention to yourself.
- ✂ You're out of range of your support.
- ◎ You may act again immediately upon arrival.
- ☠ Choose one: you are trapped/lost or you virtually destroy your goal in attempting to reach it.

Stand Firm: When you hold your position, physically, socially or emotionally, roll+will to **stand firm**: on a hit you prevent others from passing you or moving you and they are halted. On a 7-9, choose one:

- ✂ Take pain or a tag as established.
- ✂ They distract you from another threat or a target.
- ✂ Give way; they are not halted but you take +1 ongoing against them in this scene.
- ◎ They are defeated and must reconsider their strategy.
- ☠ Your target cannot be halted or defeated for the rest of this scene.

Persuade: When you need someone or something else to take a specific action, roll+will to **persuade**: on a 10+ they take whatever immediate action you suggest, if they can. On a 7-9, they require something of you first; only if you do that will they do as you want.

- ◎ You make them question their fundamental assumptions on this matter and permanently change their outlook.
- ☠ They trick you into thinking they are doing what you want.

Investigate: When you examine places or objects, or question anyone, roll+genius to **investigate**: on a hit, the MC provides the answer you are seeking or invites you to create your own. On a 7-9, choose one:

- ✂ The answer is clear to you but not to others.
- ✂ You give away a secret of your own.

- ✂ You've walked into a trap.
- ◎ You learn all you need to know; the MC provides answers right now to all the follow-up questions you have on this subject or invites you to create your own.
- ☠ You get a false answer which you believe is correct.

Improvise: When you look for a creative solution, roll+genius to **improvise**: on a hit, your plan succeeds and you may halt a mob, ignore a limitation or remove an obstacle. On a 7-9, choose one:

- ✂ It takes time to implement it.
- ✂ It costs you something you value.
- ✂ It puts innocents at risk.
- ◎ Your plan is wildly successful: you may defeat a mob, erase a limitation or remove all obstacles of a single type.
- ☠ Your plan is flawed and makes your foes more powerful.

Peripheral Moves

These are the moves that are triggered automatically by situations; they don't involve rolling dice, just making simple choices or following the consequences of what has happened.

Whenever you roll a highlighted stat, mark experience; only do this once per scene per stat.

You **recover** at the end of each scene, removing any tags you have.

If you like a hero, you can **support** them, meaning they can take a push forward. If they miss while making that move, you may switch to disliking them; if you do so mark experience.

If you dislike a hero, you can **taunt** them: either erase one of their tags or halt them. To erase a tag, you have to make some quip or

insult that riles them up, giving them the little kick they need to overcome a temporary setback. Think of the witty hero who constantly makes fun of the big strong one, making them angry, or the proud hero who doubts his allies' competence, challenging them to prove themselves.

If you choose to halt a hero when you **taunt** them, they choose whether they stop and listen to you or carry on regardless: if they carry on, you are halted instead of them, but if they listen to you and stop what they are doing, you may switch to liking them; if you do so, mark experience.

When your experience reaches 5, reset it to zero and choose an advance from your playbook.

Whenever you fill your last pain shield, you **face death**; choose one:

- ✎ You die, but you foil the villain's master plan or take them with you.
- ✎ You die, but you save someone else's life: remove all their pain and take them out of harm's way.
- ✎ You live, but are defeated and changed: replace your existing style with a different one. You may reselect your beginnings from your origin, but stat bonuses are not reapplied; all advances from your previous style are lost.

Villain Moves

If the game is a conversation, then you need something to say; any of these moves can be used to respond to the players' moves, so that the conversation snowballs forward.

Apply Pressure: the heroes' mundane lives intrude and face them with hard choices.

- ✎ *"Your boss tells you if you screw up one more job, you're fired; do you still patrol tonight?"*
- ✎ *"Your boyfriend got thrown out by his parents; are you going to let him move in with you?"*

Bypass Obstacles: the threat overcomes whatever is currently standing in its way.

- ✎ *"The wall of water hits the temporary dam and sweeps it away; who do you try and save?"*
- ✎ *"An explosion takes the door of the bank vault off; do you guard the vault or tackle the crooks?"*

Capture Goals: have the villains acquire what they set out to claim.

- ✎ *"The thugs have loaded the drums of chemical into the back of their van; what's your first target?"*
- ✎ *"The president is beamed up into the alien spacecraft; do you follow him?"*

Destroy Property: cause collateral damage to the surrounding area.

- ✎ *"The gas main explodes, spraying flames across the street; how are you going to put it out?"*
- ✎ *"Rocks rain from the sky, smashing through buildings; where do you go?"*

Leave Clues: drops hints about what the villains are up to and see if the heroes bite.

- ✎ *"An eyeless corpse washes up on the bank of the Thames; who are you going to ask about it?"*
- ✎ *"There's a story in the papers about a spate of jewel thefts; what's your plan?"*

Make Charges: extract a price from the heroes.

- ✎ *"Your contact will sell you the information; what have you got to offer?"*
- ✎ *"Clearing up this mess will take hours; are you going to stick around and do it?"*

Neutralise Heroes: place a hero in a trap or attack them directly.

- ✎ *"The doors to the bunker slam closed behind you; do you go on or turn back?"*
- ✎ *"The monster stomps its mighty foot down on top of you; are you going to take that?"*

Threaten Bystanders: make a move to place innocents or others in danger.

- ✎ *"The train hits the break in the tracks and begins to tilt over; what do you do?"*
- ✎ *"Your boyfriend is standing in the crowd beneath the falling helicopter; what do you do?"*

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Instead of a fixed plot for the game, there are a number of connected suggestions: the way these develop & integrate into a plot relies entirely on the choices the players make and the resulting actions taken by the heroes.

Each hero gets their own page to expand upon their plot hooks here; first, their heroic & secret identities are split into two main issues. Second, a leading question is asked for each of those issues, with one or two follow up questions. Ask one of the leading questions in the first scene the hero has, relating it to where they are and what they're doing, e.g. if Lady Smoke is patrolling the streets, then ask about **The Treasures of Gossamé**, but if she's dealing with business in her office, then ask about **Argus**.

The follow up questions don't have to be asked literally and with some of them, you might want to provide the answer yourself, if you have an idea you want to put forward. Don't be afraid to ask really obvious questions though, as it will give you a better idea of what sort of story the players are looking for: you can even ask the players what vile plan is afoot, especially if they took the time to **investigate** some random bit of colour you threw in. They probably have a better idea of where that line of questioning should go than you do.

Dr. Dusk

Aka Austin Wells

The Order of Harkeners

They trained him, but they aren't happy with his decision to use that training to be some kind of vigilante.

"You see a Brother from the Order watching you on the street: who is he and what does he owe you?"

There's a really loaded question there that creates a conflict in the NPC between their loyalty to the Order and their debt to Dr. Dusk. The deeper the debt, the more likely he is to betray the Order, so perhaps *what has he come to warn you about?* On the other hand, if his loyalty to the order is strong, he might be trying to hide his debt from them, so *what has he come to threaten you with?*

May Wells

Austin's sister is still furious at him for dropping out and leaving her to take over the family business .

"You see your sister's name in the papers: what's the story?"

Either May is the victim of something or the perpetrator; either way, *are you going to investigate?* If Austin keeps his nose out, things will escalate for May; if he gets involved, May will refuse to co-operate and try to keep secrets from him, so *how far will you go to get the truth? Even if it hurts your family further?*

Lady Smoke

Aka Montserrat Vivaldi

The Treasures of Gossamé

Lady Smoke has come to the Earthly Plane to fulfil her oath: she cannot return home until she has returned the seven treasures.

"Which treasure have you already recovered and what did you do with it?"

The answers will tell you something about how the player imagines the treasures, but more importantly what arrangements have been made for sending them back to Gossamé. Either they are being kept here until all seven have been collected, in which case *where are they being stored?* Or each one gets sent home as it gets recovered, so *who is your contact for returning them?*

Argus

Being CEO of a major provider of security services is no piece of cake, but maintaining effective covers demands it be done professionally.

"What's the most urgent business decision you have to make?"

The answer is likely to involve staffing or new contracts, e.g. who to hire or fire, the best plan to provide security for a major event, etc. Follow up the above question by probing deeper into Lady Smoke's process, by asking *how soon do you have to make a decision?* If it's a short time, keep the clock ticking, apply pressure at every opportunity; if it's a long time, create hurdles, introduce unexpected challenges to the decision or even have it taken out of Lady Smoke's hands altogether.

Steel Spring

Aka Adede Okafor

Suit Technology

There's more to Adede's past with the suit than is clear from her backstory.

"Someone else is using the technology that created your suit; what have they done with it?"

The answer to that question will also indicate who has used the technology: if it's being used to make super soldiers, then it's probably a government department or private industry, for example. Whether the tech is making enemies that Steel Spring must fight or rivals that she must prove herself better than, the follow up question is, *who had the technology first?* In other words, was it stolen from her father? Or did he steal it from them?

Pastor Unathi

A friendly phone call from the Pastor to one of his wayward flock can change the whole situation on its head.

"You get a phone call from the Pastor: why is he worried about your father?"

The response depends on the situation: if her father is ill, then *what wishes does he want you to carry out?* If he's strayed from the True Path, then *what's making him do this?*

The Snowdrop

Aka Corey Elliston

The Curse

So, what exactly is the deal with the curse that gave Corey his powers and what affect does it have on others?

"Who has been hurt the worst by your curse? What happened to them?"

Getting The Snowdrop's player to expand upon the nature of their curse forefronts it for later, as one of the themes of the playset is presenting the heroes with hard choices. If Corey hurt himself or someone close to him, then *how will you make amends?* If he hurt a stranger or bystander, then *how will you make sure that doesn't happen again?*

Mike

With all this drama going on, it's nice if Corey has a change of pace.

"Mike comes up to you at work and says, 'Hey, my brother's band is playing a gig at the pub tonight; wanna come?' What do you say?"

The answer is yes, no or maybe, but can Corey say either of the latter without putting Mike off for good? A date is the best way to find out if he has an agenda; it could also lead to him being frozen solid. If yes, then the gig gets rowdy, so *do you deal with the trouble or leave with Mike?* If not, then *who does Mike take instead?*

Black Box

This chapter is all for you, the MC: it gives you some guidance on running the game, some methods for connecting the heroes' separate stories and a catalogue of NPCs to use in scenes with them.

First up, a little guidance: this is broadly intended for a full campaign of **Just Heroes**, but it also applies specifically to this playset.

Present hard choices

This is the central agenda of the game: the players' characters are trying to live two lives, so that should always be a challenge, but the principle applies beyond that. The question you're asking of the heroes all the time should not be *do you succeed or fail?* It is *what choice do you make?* Is it better to capture the villain now, but let his victims suffer? Or save the victims, allowing the villain to get away yet again?

Bring it on

The heroes are tough, so don't hold back: you can drop a burning building on top of them and expect them to walk away from it with hardly a scratch.

Firstly, though a limit of 4 pain might not seem like much, don't forget that they can **steel themselves** at practically any time, with little penalty other than it taking them away from other, more pressing matters.

Secondly, don't always go for the pain, use tags as well: there's a short list of these alongside the NPCs at the end of this chapter. Hitting a hero for 1 pain probably won't even slow them down, but *blinding* or *burning* them will give them pause for thought.

Allow the awesome

The heroes are the heroes, so enable them to do their thing: if a player comes up with a questionable interpretation of what their character can do, fall back on **say yes or roll the dice**. Don't shut down the things that make them special by telling them they can't do that, but equally, don't elevate them to cosmic levels of power. Judge in favour of the heroes when they use their superpowers, because the more flexible those powers are, the greater the temptation to misuse & abuse them, which is one of the things you want. Making them feel like their powers are second nature encourages them to be used as the first option, instead of the last resort, across a spectrum of everyday situations.

Villains are problems

There aren't many actual villains portrayed in this playset, but the principle remains: the heroes' problems ultimately can't just be resolved by hitting them. Whatever adversity they face, they're not going to overcome it by just smacking them down until they surrender, for some good reasons.

First, they are meant to be the *heroes*: you can't call yourself a good guy if you do bad guy things. This is why Superman doesn't just kill Lex Luthor: he needs to catch him in the act of villainy, then go through legal processes in order to put him away.

Secondly, a villain is just an expression of a plan: the opportunity still exists, even if the villain is KO'ed, and the plan probably has enough momentum to carry on without them. Also, most plans are enacted by low-level henchmen, the mastermind behind them is never there to be caught, so they will continue to be a thorn in the side for many more adventures to come.

Pulling the Threads

This playset includes no plot because it relies on the players to create one: that's why you need to keep asking them questions. Whatever they do, probe for more information: if they're at work, get them to describe their office and where it's located; if they're patrolling the streets, ask them what time it is and what part of London they're in. Use the answers they give and spin them into threads, then weave those threads into a story.

There's a big info dump at the start of the game, when the players discuss the history their heroes share: listen to that, make suggestions and take notes. There are several opportunities for them to name major villains or serious crises that they have been involved with in the past: revisit one of these at the start of the game to get things off with a bang. Did they fight a villain together? They're back for revenge or just busting out of prison. Did they save London from invaders? That was only the first wave: now that the Fifth Column has had time to embed itself, the real fight is on. Listen to what the players say and use it, but don't just repeat it verbatim, put a twist on it.

To get ideas for twists, hit the players with the questions that are tailored for their characters: follow your instinct and go after the hero you feel ought to be facing this crisis or the one who you most want to see dealing with it. For example, if Dr. Dusk saved Steel Spring from The Scrap King's furnace, then that villain could come back to try again, trying to get at Steel Spring with a new technique, trying to get revenge against Dr. Dusk for foiling his plan or even trying to trick another hero into helping him with his plan.

When you ask a player one of their tailored questions, like asking Lady Smoke *what's the most urgent business decision you have to make?*, you're fishing for a connection, not an entirely new plotline. Look for a way to connect their answer to something that has already been said: for example, perhaps The Scrap King is going to target Lady Smoke's business? Or maybe The Scrap King *is* the client, using Argus to spy on his enemies or case his next target for him.

Whatever happens, don't keep it to yourself: if the players need to pick up on subtle clues to find the plot, you're doing everyone a disservice. If you plant a clue, don't rely on a player noticing it, ask them to **investigate** and see if the *hero* makes the connection. The plot is there to be dealt with, not located: if you make it too hard to find the threads, the players will flounder and the story will stall. An aspect of this is that the heroes are never entirely wrong: they might not always have the full picture, but they never go up a total blind alley, so if they decide that The Scrap King's HQ is under Canary Wharf, then he must have some kind of operation based there, even if it's not his main base. No set of circumstances (unlucky rolls, missed opportunities, misunderstood information) should ever put the heroes outside the plot, unable to interact with it or affect it. The heroes are by definition the protagonists: this is their story and it always centres on them.

NPCs & Threats

Any typical, minor character is really just a platform for the Villain Moves that you can use to keep the story moving forward: they're just the people who do those things and they can usually only withstand 1 pain before they fall unconscious or worse. Examples of NPCs at this level include The Snowdrop's parents **Duncan & Eleanor** or his work-colleague/prospective romance **Mike**.

More important characters can withstand more pain and also have their own unique moves, like a dark reflection of the heroes' style moves: a measure of a character's power is how many pain shields and unique moves they have.

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The big bad, whoever that turns out to be: the ultimate villain the heroes must face is defined by the answers they give and the history they create at the start of the game. This might even turn out to be the secret identity of one of the other NPCs!

- **Command:** An ability to control some element or force related to the theme of their powers, such as metal, water, acid, etc.
- **Attack:** either enhanced pain or an automatic tag such as *poisoned*.

The Order of Harkeners

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Though not a large organisation, they are pervasive and have ears everywhere, though they are rarely seen. Anyone who goes head to head with the Order will find them as difficult to uproot as a bed of weeds, but they can be useful if treated respectfully.

- **Isolate:** by subtly redirecting bypassers and other traffic, the Order can cut a target off from support.
- **Congregate:** the Order can converge quickly at any point.

Dodie

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A powerful and nearly immortal witch, she has nevertheless renounced much of her past & powers to atone for her sins.

- **Deceive:** Dodie can create illusions that trick & mislead.
- **Curse:** using a sample of her target's hair or clothing, she can weave a spell to afflict them, given time.

Seth Quinn

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He mostly works through intermediaries, but he is wily enough to run rings around any opponent.

- **Background Check:** he's always fully informed about anyone he meets, though this doesn't include connecting their separate identities.
- **Broker:** he has almost unlimited resources and isn't afraid to offer a tempting bargain to get what he wants.

Amber Croft

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Acting as go-between for those who cannot be seen to be negotiating with each other, most of her work is *sub rosa*.

- **Locate:** her network can find pretty much any mundane thing in a short space of time, but she will always want a favour in return.

Pastor Unathi

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A deeply spiritual man with a profound moral sense, coupled with righteous anger at the divide between the rich and the poor.

- **Preach:** he can make others question their moral choices; he can halt them once per scene in this way and get them to reconsider their current action.

The tags below can be used in almost any confrontation as an alternative to inflicting pain, though some are more specific to certain powers, e.g. frozen only comes up about as a result of ice-related powers.

- *Bleeding*: losing blood, take 1 pain when this tag is removed; you can be bleeding multiple times.
- *Blinded*: unable to see clearly, therefore unable to take any action at range.
- *Burned*: scorched by fire, add 1 to all other pain you take; burned and frozen always cancel each other out.
- *Ensnared*: trapped or tied up, therefore unable to move from your current spot.
- *Frozen*: locked in ice, you are unable to act or react in any way; frozen and burned always cancel each other out.
- *Poisoned*: sick or contaminated, take 1 pain every time you roll dice.
- *Spent*: simply exhausted by overreaching yourself, you can't make style moves.
- *Wounded*: badly injured, you are unable to remove pain while you have this tag.

You can rename a tag to suit the narrative, such as having *Irradiated* instead of *Poisoned* if you've been playing about with nuclear reactors; you can also make up your own tags *ad hoc*, as the story demands them, such as *Hunted by the Police*, *Trapped inside a Mirror*, *Hungry for Human Blood* and so on. These can have narrative effects (you can't effect the outside world while you're in a mirror), mechanical effects (as long as you need blood, you take the lowest two dice when you push any basic move) or of course both.