

MASKS

A NEW GENERATION



**HALCYON CITY
HERALD COLLECTION**
A SETTING SUPPLEMENT FOR MASKS: A NEW GENERATION

MASKS

A NEW GENERATION

HALCYON CITY HERALD COLLECTION



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“Hidden in Plain Sight: An Interview with the Chameleon”, by Elizabeth Chaipraditkul

“The Paranormal Heart of the City”, “Inferna: When Mythology Meets Modernity”, “Broken Atlas: The Fall of the Titan Academy”, “The Shadow of Halcyon”, “The New Trooper Alpha”, “Midnight in Halcyon City”, “The Mole Men: Why Do They Hate Us?”, by Brendan Conway

“Power to the People”, by Mark Diaz Truman

“Who’s Saving Whom? An Op Ed. On Azure Ace”, by Marissa Kelly

“Those You May Not Know: Mr. Krowley and Echidna”, by André La Roche

“The Doctor Is In!”, “Monument Circle Crisis Averted”, “Foresight: Crusader or Criminal?”, “Avarice Across Ages”, by Michael S. Miller

“Dupes & Reboots: The Halcyon Chronicle Post-Catastrophe Survival Guide”, by Ariana Ramos and Seth Harris

“Hiro’s Hot Takes: Idiot Icons”, “Hiro’s Hot Takes: Costumed Tryhards”, “Hiro’s Hot Takes: Saving Lives Not Numbers”, “Hiro’s Hot Takes: Singing the Unsung”, by Justin Rogers

“Healing the Sick – Billing the Rich?”, “Intake’s Motives in Cancer Case”, “Doctor Kim Revealed: His Unbelievable Story”, “Goodbye to HMO’s? What is the Superhero Medical Plan?”, by Brie Sheldon

“Inside the Chrysalis: An Interview with a Monster”, by Kyle Simons

“Change of Heart: The Case Against Roshambo”, by Tara Zuber

The Innocent playbook, by Brendan Conway

The Star playbook, by Brendan Conway

The Newborn playbook, by Tim Franzke and Alberto Muti

The Joined playbook, by Jenn Martin

The Reformed playbook, by June Shores

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TO MY SUCCESSOR:

My name is Keandra Hunt, and I was the editor in chief of the Halcyon City Herald.

I was good at my job. I loved it. I did it well. And now it's time for me to move on.

Halcyon is full of marvels and heroes galore. They rocket through the skies in flashes of color, and at first you feel honored just to live below them.

But if you're like me—and if you're reading this, you better hope you're like me—then that goes away fast, buried beneath mysteries and questions. Everyone who wears a mask is hiding a secret. Everyone with otherworldly powers is a story waiting to be told. That journalist's hunger, it drives you after those mysteries like a junkie, and in no time, that's all you are—a mobile ache for the truth.

You'll never discover better stories than you will here. Grand epics, little personal dramas. Heroes and villains. Hopes and fears.

And you'll never feel the pain worse than when you come this close to finding out the truth, but some last elusive splinter slips away from you. What's more, here, in this city, those splinters can be otherworldly. Weird. Secretive. Deadly.

If you're reading this, then you're going to take on this job—my job—and you better be able to tell when there's more to find, and when it's not worth the risk of the search. You need to know when a story is going to lead you straight into the arms of some costumed maniac, and when it's worth the risk, anyway.

This is a city of heroes, and you get to be a hero, too, if you can find answers to the right questions. But you don't get to be a hero if the guy you're asking turns you into a mutant out of spite.

These are some important stories from throughout the run of the Herald and its subsidiaries—the Chronicle, the Kingfisher, and yes, even that rag, the Trumpet Blast. They're not all modern; they're not all our most popular stories; and to the people of the city, a lot of them would've passed unnoticed. But you're not like them. You can't afford to be. You have to see the shards of truth and danger sticking out of them. Questions left unasked and unanswered, for one reason or another.

I got a portfolio like this when I took the job. Those stories dogged me all the while I was here. Some of them, I uncovered more secrets, answered more questions. Some of them remained mysterious and tantalizing. Some of them I learned to stay away from for my own sake.

So now it's your turn. I'm passing on my own portfolio, sort of my unsolved cases file, if you will. Never quite within reach enough to figure out, never quite worth the risk of pursuing.

Maybe you'll solve them. Maybe you'll figure out the risks worth taking. But one way or another, I hope they prod you onward. Constantly seeking answers. Seeking the new stories, the new mysteries. The treasures this city has to offer up to the people like us.

May Halcyon treat you as well as it did me.

Keandra Hunt

WHAT IS THE HALCYON CITY HERALD COLLECTION?

In any city, there are too many stories to tell. In Halcyon City, even more so. Every single costumed hero and villain has their own story, enough to fill at least a few issues of their own solo comic book series. Every place has seen at least one fight between superhuman forces. Every street, every building, every statue and monument.

At some point or another, the incredible and marvelous elements of Halcyon have carved a story upon every piece of the city. And it's up to the proud, brave, inquisitive, and prodding journalists of that city to share those stories with the rest of its people.

That's what you hold in your hands—a collection of many of Halcyon City's stories, assembled by Keandra Hunt, the (former) editor-in-chief of *The Halcyon City Herald* and its associated publications, including *The Kingfisher*, *The Halcyon Chronicle*, and *The Trumpet Blast*.

The **Halcyon City Herald Collection** is the first supplement for **Masks: A New Generation**, a tabletop roleplaying game all about playing young superheroes in Halcyon City. The stories in these pages are designed to flesh out the goings-on of Halcyon City, and to show off the depth of stories that you can find here, across multiple generations and throughout the city's breadth. Each story comes with its own special, custom moves to bring it to life in your game.

HOW SHOULD I USE THIS BOOK?

The **Halcyon City Herald Collection** is here to help you expand your own game of **Masks**. If you need an idea for a new hero or villain, open up to an article and steal one of those names. If you're interested in a new plot thread, snag one from unanswered questions, or straight up bring the events of that article to life in your game. This book is here to provide inspiration and detail for you to enliven your own game, along with those custom moves for some additional mechanical support. The notes from Keandra Hunt will often point at unsolved mysteries and plot threads to play off of for your own game, and the names of the myriad heroes and villains throughout this book give you plenty of fodder during play.

Use this book to fill your Halcyon City with stories, told and untold, from top to bottom!

NEW PLAYBOOKS

In addition, this book contains five limited edition playbooks to help expand your game of **Masks**. These include:

- **The Innocent** – A time traveling young hero from the past, come forward to a present in which their adult self is a monster.
- **The Joined** – A young superhero heavily connected to a teammate, trying to determine if they are stronger together or apart.
- **The Newborn** – A brand new creation trying to find out who they should be and what they should believe.
- **The Reformed** – A former criminal trying to redeem themselves for their past crimes.
- **The Star** – A celebrity obsessed young superhero juggling the demands of their audience with their own desires.

Each one of these new playbooks comes with its own section of advice for players and GMs. These playbooks aren't core to the game, so each of them is going to skew its direction—adding the Star, for instance, will put a far greater emphasis on celebrity and media attention than you might have in a normal game of **Masks**.

That said, each new playbook adds awesome new options to your game of **Masks**, so if you're looking for new ways to play, look no further!

*IT'S NO WONDER THAT TRUTH
IS STRANGER THAN FICTION.
FICTION HAS TO MAKE SENSE.
- MARK TWAIN*

*WELCOME TO HALCYON CITY.
WAVE 'SENSE' GOODBYE.*

The Paranormal Heart of the City

By Jane Warren

Halcyon City - Recent investigations into unexplained phenomena in Halcyon City suggest that, despite the protestations of the scientific community, the supernatural is alive, well, and powerful. The investigations, conducted by the Mystic Research and Investigation Team (MeRIT), were privately funded with the purpose of identifying and categorizing supernatural anomalies citywide.

"We wanted to provide a service to the city," said Dr. Demetra Vittoria, the leader of the MeRIT expeditions. "For so long, we've all heard stories about sorcerer superheroes, wizard villains, ghost monsters, and vampires and werewolves and everything, all scattered throughout the city. And it's easy to pretend that they're explicable as crazy science or aliens...but we at MeRIT don't think those explanations work across the board. There are elements in our city that are completely beyond science, and we want to shine a light on them."

Demetra Vittoria earned her PhD from Halcyon City University, but was largely discredited as an academic after the publication of a study she had conducted using university resources, claiming that she had discovered localized subjective anomalies that influenced the very laws of physics based on individual belief. She was able to find funding for further research from private sources, forming MeRIT in order to continue her studies.

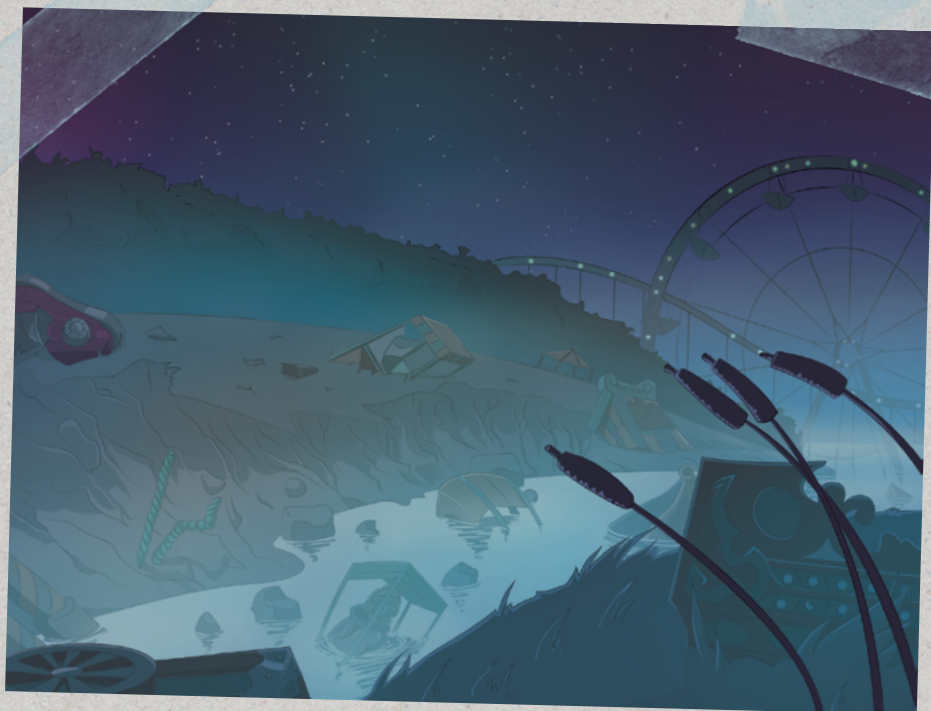
According to Dr. Vittoria's released findings, MeRIT encountered approximately 132 different supernatural phenomena during the course of its investigations, falling into 16 different general categories.

"We've seen everything," Dr. Vittoria continued. "We've seen haunted buildings—there was that one on 23rd and Trellis, an abandoned library, where the building itself seemed to be one gigantic entity. We've seen fae—creatures that only exist when viewed from certain specific perspectives. We've seen dark cults convening in sewers and summoning eldritch monsters. We've seen magical tomes that drove readers insane. We've seen magic. Not just super science. *Magic.*"

The Quintet ^{NO MENTION OF CLARKE'S LAW?}

"The worst thing I remember seeing was the Quintet," said Isaac Bolus, Dr. Vittoria's research assistant and right hand in MeRIT. "These five kids. Or at least they looked like kids. Their eyes glowed, though. They could fade in and out of shadows, appear from out of nowhere, from any direction. And they all shared one mind, talked together."

The Quintet had been previously identified by A.E.G.I.S. and labeled as a dangerous entity, of extradimensional origin. A.E.G.I.S. put the Quintet on the appropriate registries for all law enforcement agencies throughout Halcyon City, though the files remain largely



The remnants of Mr. Amazing's Wonder Walk, reportedly imbued with supernatural essence.

classified from public consumption. They were known to exert telepathic force upon citizens around them, including the creation of intense emotions—specifically dread—and the inducement of intense illusions, both auditory and visual.

“But all that stuff, that was just what was easy,” Bolus continued. “That all made sense, fit the paradigms they had to work with, and made it easy to share. ‘Stay away, they’re dangerous,’ that’s really all A.E.G.I.S. was trying to communicate about the Quintet through those files. The truth is, I wouldn’t be surprised if the full unclassified A.E.G.I.S. file had a lot more unexplained stuff in it.”

MeRIT encountered the Quintet in an abandoned amusement park off the Gillen River on the west side of the city. The carnival, identified as Mr. Amazing’s Wonder Walk, was abandoned 42 years

ago. The incident surrounding the amusement park’s closure is not well documented. Reports indicate something involving inanimate objects coming to life, a strange green light flooding the entire carnival, an indeterminate shape rising from the waters near the carnival, and mass panic descending upon the crowds. By the time superheroes arrived on the scene, the incident had already ended and the park was abandoned. Further investigations later linked the incident to a cross-dimensional rift, ultimately closed by Magus Justinian and the rest of the Arcanites in a city-threatening conflict later that year.

Some reports placed the Quintet at the Wonder Walk shortly after the incident, but in the chaos and confusion, those reports were deemed generally unreliable.

"Yeah, well, whether or not they came through in some rift, they hung around the place all the time," said Bolus. "We were investigating it because it's been a paranormal hotspot ever since the whole rift incident, and we were looking for any residual rift activity—we think the rift was eldritch in origin."

"The Quintet started shadowing us as we moved through the abandoned park," said Dr. Vittoria. "They eventually emerged, as one, from five different abandoned buildings. Their eyes were glowing as they surrounded us. Each and every one of us then reported experiencing telepathic communication from the Quintet, demanding we leave immediately, followed by intense feelings of panic and dread."

"They were nightmares," Bolus said. "Little kids shouldn't look like that."

One of MeRIT's researchers, Niall Connelly, was left debilitated by the incident. MeRIT brought him to the Diadem Facility, a well-accredited rehabilitation facility for those who have directly suffered at the hands of metahuman phenomena. They continue to pay for Niall's treatment to this day.

"What happened to Niall was tragic," said Dr. Vittoria. "But we all knew the risks of dealing directly with the truly paranormal. Niall was as committed to the cause as any of us, and we all wish him a swift recovery."

Mystical Miscellany

MeRIT labeled the Quintet as a "Paranormal Corporeal," a being whose existence was bound in physical form that showed paranormal abilities. Other categories of anomaly include "Paranormal Incorporeal—Post-Death," "Paranormal Incorporeal—Non-Human," "Paranormal Locus—Ideation," and "Paranormal Locus—Artifact."

"The artifacts are some of the craziest things we ever saw," said Rebecca Corgan, a handler and containment expert for MeRIT. "Those're the devices, the magical books, the weird scepters, the blood-stained swords. All the things out of stories."

MeRIT collected several of these artifacts for containment at its facility in Silverside. According to Dr. Vittoria, the group was conducting research on the objects, as well as keeping them safe with patented anti-paranormal technologies.

"This one thing we picked up, it's a cape, right? Looks like it's made of feathers," continued Corgan. "But if you put it on, it turns into a pair of wings on your back, and these feathers spread all over your body, and you grow a beak. Turns out some ancient avian deity is living in the cape, looking for hosts to bond with. Probably a superhero origin story waiting to happen, but to be honest, not many people really want to be connected to a bird god, if you give them the choice."

When you **tap into eldritch powers** (whether through an artifact, a power source, or a spell or ritual), roll + Freak. On a hit, you can craft the eldritch energy into the effect you sought. On a 7-9, the eldritch power you tap into takes Influence over you. Expect it to ask you for something. On a miss, the eldritch energy takes on whatever shape its true source desires.

The cloak was better off with us, where we could keep it safe."

Most of those objects were recently confiscated by A.E.G.I.S., however, upon MeRIT publicly publishing some of their findings. A.E.G.I.S. seized the items under the Metahuman Hazard Act, claiming the items themselves fell into the same category of metahuman hazard as alien technology.

"It's a major legal sinkhole," said Dr. Vittoria. "The objects aren't actually metahuman at all, aside from the incredibly broad and ineffectual application of that term for everything in any way outside of standard human experience. They're magical, paranormal. They don't fall under the same rules as technological items at all.

"A.E.G.I.S. can lock an alien gun in a vault and ensure it won't be used," she continued. "But something like the Bloodsword of Queen Raghazul? It wants to be used, and it has the paranormal capacity to call out to the souls of those nearby. Putting it in the same vault as your alien gun is a recipe for disaster. Not to mention, seizing it under the Hazard Act is therefore illegal."

When asked for comment, A.E.G.I.S. spokesperson Daniel Sayo expressed calm surety in A.E.G.I.S.'s capabilities.

"We have countless facilities, technologies, and techniques, accrued through years and years of comprehensive study," Sayo said. "We are more than capable of both understanding these items and placing them into protective custody, where we can be assured they will not be able to escape or harm anyone.

"We appreciate the interest of MeRIT, but we must reiterate that they are a private research organization, and are not

equipped or legally authorized to hold any such dangerous items," Sayo concluded.

Understanding the Impossible

The conflict between MeRIT and A.E.G.I.S. speaks to a fundamental dispute in understanding, according to Dr. Vittoria.

"The truth is, the paranormal is dangerous, insidious, and tempting," she said. "It seeps around the edges of things, the corners, the places where you don't look. It reaches out to your mind where it's weak, and it beckons you into dark places. It's always there, wherever you go, the whole city over, just...slightly beyond your sight. Treating it the same way you treat more scientific phenomena is a recipe for disaster."

Some superheroes have expressed sentiments similar to those of Dr. Vittoria. Magus Justinian, popularly acknowledged as the leading sorcerer in Halcyon City, remains a proponent of supernatural understanding, even as A.E.G.I.S. classifies him as a metahuman with the same fundamental capabilities as quantum-manipulators such as Forceshaper.

"This city is a nexus of the supernatural," Magus Justinian said when contacted for this article. "Ley lines meet and join. Astral vortices swirl through city thoroughfares. Ethereal confluxes form and dissipate all over the city's limits. Halcyon is connected to forces far beyond simple scientific explanation, and attempting to force such a rigid framework over the world is dangerous. It leads to ignorance and poor decisions."

Magus Justinian, who touts himself as the primary line of defense between

humanity and the supernatural threats beyond human perception, has had a contentious relationship with MeRIT, despite working in similar capacities.

"We were investigating a magical force, a reported pool of energies in the sewers beneath the city," said Rebecca Corgan. "And he shows up in the middle of us trudging through the muck, tells us to turn back, that our mortal minds can't handle it. Like heck we do that, so we keep going, and we wind up seeing him drinking up etheric energy from a pool of glowing blue sewer water."

"MeRIT is an organization of amateurs and novices," said Magus Justinian. "They lack any true understanding of what they would so eagerly handle. They are perhaps even more dangerous than forces like A.E.G.I.S., for they have just enough knowledge to be dangerous to themselves and to others."

MeRIT's funding has recently seen a significant increase, thanks to their discovery of a glowing crystalline idol in the shape of a bear creature hidden beneath the Halcyon Zoo. The incident was covered widely in the media, and since then MeRIT has received significant donations from figures of importance throughout the city.

"Nobody's quite sure that they should bet on us," said Bolus. "But they don't want to miss out in case we do wind up sitting on something valuable, so everybody's trying to buy just a bit into the paranormal game, through us."

With the increase in funding, MeRIT is planning new investigations throughout the city, both to revisit already catalogued locations and look for changes, and to investigate new locations for additional phenomena. But in all such cases, their donors are guaranteed access to their findings and reports, and for particularly large donors, MeRIT's charter obligates them to provide access to collected samples and artifacts for observation.

"Yeah, it seems a bit dodgy," said Corgan. "Giving access to magical artifacts to corporations was never part of our plan. But we can handle it, ensure that no donor does anything untoward with our collection."

For believers like Dr. Vittoria, the reasons and effects of the funding increase are largely irrelevant.

"This city has a rich, beating paranormal heart," she said. "The city's veins pump magic, whether we like it or not. And we ignore that truth at our own risk."

When you **research paranormal phenomena in an appropriate information source**, roll + Superior. On a hit, you may ask one question from below. On a 10+, you may ask a second or ask a follow-up question.

- What causes this phenomenon?
- What are the effects, powers, or abilities of this phenomenon?
- How could I contain this phenomenon?
- How could I destroy this phenomenon?
- How could I profit from this phenomenon?

On a miss, your research unnerves you and you are unwilling to continue; mark Afraid.

HIRO'S HOT TAKES

IDIOT ICONS

When I was a boy, the men and women protecting Halcyon City stood out as heroes. Instantly recognizable, wonderfully stylized, *iconic*. Just think about heroes like The Copper Crusader, Lady December, or Mariposa. Each had a distinct style about them, everything effortlessly in its right place.

Take Mariposa for example: as soon as I mentioned her name, you had a complete image in your mind. The simple but eye-catching color scheme of black, yellow, and orange, the mask with antennae, the perfectly shaped eye spots on her wings, themselves large enough to be functional but not oversized and cartoonish.

Now let's have a look at one of our city's newer entomological avengers, this so-called "Sawfly." You've seen him on the news, right? I'd forgive you if you don't remember. Anyway, this kid apparently goes and gets himself caught up in a radioactive accident, grows some ugly antennae and wings, and basically calls it

a day. There's no costume here! He just wears whatever slovenly outfit he picks up off his bedroom floor that morning and expects us to recognize that he is Sawfly.

That "10 percent inspiration" we've all heard about? It still counts, folks.

You used to be able to tell from eyewitness descriptions—"Oh, a copper winged helmet and matching cape with CC on it? That's the Copper Crusader!"—but nowadays it's more like "Well, there was a girl who flew, and was wearing mostly black, but nothing really distinctive about her otherwise."

You want to be iconic like the legends of years past? Well, let's talk a bit about icons.

Nearly every hero of my age had a distinctive symbol that anyone would recognize instantly. Often just a bordered letter in one or two bold colors.

You see that silver T on a sky blue background *anywhere* and you just know it's the Titanium Avenger.



By Hiro Reckard

How do you even conceptualize a lunchbox design for someone like Interphase? His/her entire shtick is not having a fixed form, color, gender, or anything.

The bottom line is this: when the residents of this fair city get rescued, it sure is nice to feel like that hero cares. That they're not just in it for a paycheck or self-satisfaction, but they have some actual ambition to be remembered longer than the current 15-minute news cycle. If these new heroes want to find their place among the pantheon of past heroes, a little branding and promotion aren't the worst things in the world.

*NOTE SURE I HAD
HEARD ABOUT THE
TITANIUM AVENGER
BEFORE THIS ARTICLE.*

When **you read Hiro's column to see what he thinks of you**, roll + Freak. On a 10+, you're too much—Hiro thinks you're trying too hard, and his opinion is spreading. Shift Freak up and Savior down. On a 7-9, he thinks you're bland. Not interesting enough. Shift Mundane up and Freak down. On a miss, Hiro writes about how you clearly just don't care. Mark a condition, and shift Mundane up twice, and Freak and Savior each down once.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

LA CABECILLA'S REVOLUTION

BY JOSE MARTINEZ

IT WAS 11:27 WHEN LA CABECILLA BROUGHT THE TOWER DOWN. I remember because the clock across the street was stuck right at that moment for days, the hands locked in time and covered in soot. I kept expecting the city to fix it, but it just sat there. Stuck.

Anyone close enough to her battle against Captain Halcyon—the foolish and the brave alike—talks about two things: her absolute unwavering certainty in the righteousness of her cause that led one bystander to claim that he saw “murder in her eyes and ice water in her veins,” and her final words. They remember what she said before she tried to kill Captain Halcyon in broad daylight on an ordinary city street.

“It is better to die on your feet, *el jefe*, than live on your knees.”

* * *

Revolution has always been suspect in Halcyon City. There are those in our political halls who would petulantly call themselves “revolutionaries,” but the act is hard to keep up when you’re glad-handing rich donors and suffering through committee meetings. The rhetoric of revolution is useful for the campaign trail (and social media writ large), but the realities of governing trend toward the status quo.

And nothing supports the status quo quite like our city’s most prominent actors: superheroes.

Heroes are all too happy to oppose the revolutions, large and small, on behalf of the ordinary citizen. The bank robbery that aims to liberate money from the clutches of the rich; the citywide conspiracy that tries to defraud the public and erect a dictatorship; the alien invasion that attempts to upend the food chain of our world and make us all lunch meat for far-off empires. For every plan to disrupt the ordinary, there is a hero ready to restore normalcy.

Much has been written elsewhere about the fundamentally fascist nature of superheroes. After all, what could be more totalitarian than us looking up into the sky for our salvation? What could be more disempowering than knowing that some teenage kid with access to advanced alien tech will do a better job policing the streets than, say, the police themselves? What could be more fascist than an army of heroes, accountable to no one but themselves? Nothing, really.

But the citizens of Halcyon City soldier on. We write laws and rules and establish committees and make the heroes pay for insurance in anticipation of the next time they knock down a

building. We bury our dead after monsters from another dimension rush through the city like locusts, and we establish monuments when the gods who stride among us finally have the grace to die. We are the Greek chorus to their struggles: omniscient, prescient, and powerless.

I say all this not to defend La Cabecilla or validate her viewpoint. She was a villain, through and through. But I feel, in the wake of this week's coverage of the strike (and her battle with Captain Halcyon), that some context is needed. We would be remiss if we judged her without some sense of the world in which she lived, without reference to the world she wanted to build for us, no matter how flawed her methods.

After all, she is the one who left us to live on our knees.

* * *

The morning of Tuesday, June 11th began like any other day in Halcyon City. There were reports of some disruptions in the space-time continuum throughout the city, but no more so than a typical day. A few time travelers isn't exactly a crisis for a city that sees an average of more than 1,000 unique anachronal events on a yearly basis. The city was—by all accounts—peaceful.

The transit strike caught everyone off guard. There were no demands, no negotiations, no opportunity for the powers-that-be to make things right. At exactly 10:30 AM, all the trains, the subways, the trams, the dirigibles...they all just stopped. Their drivers and their crews stowed their gear, turned off the engines, and simply walked away from their jobs.

Later, the transit workers interviewed by the authorities claimed they weren't coerced or threatened. They all noted meeting with someone earlier in the week about the strike, but the people they met with weren't ominous or threatening. A union member, perhaps, or a family friend. All innocuous requests for a civil service

WHO CARED ABOUT A
WOMAN SO ALLERGIC
TO ATTENTION SHE
WOULDN'T EVEN MAKE
HERSELF AVAILABLE
FOR AN INTERVIEW?

workforce to stand up for itself, to assert that it too had power in the face of upcoming contract negotiations. Innocent. Routine. Ordinary.

But by 10:45 AM, chaos reigned in Halcyon City. With no advance warning of the strike, no one—not the city, not the Exemplars, not even the August or the Silver Savior—was prepared for the calamity. Absolute total gridlock. The city, and everything in it, ground to a halt.

Reporters on the scene heard mention of a “ringleader,” a woman who had organized the strike, but no one had any idea where or who she was. Just rumors of *La Cabecilla* (The Ringleader), whispered whenever someone wanted to talk to the person in charge. But it was just a strike, a boring day of municipal politics in a city that was once teleported—however briefly!—to the surface of the moon.

Who cared about a woman so allergic to attention she wouldn't even make herself available for an interview?

* * *

As near as anyone can tell, La Cabecilla's powers didn't make use of mind control or even suggestive hypnosis. Instead, she removed the inhibitions of existing communities, allowing



La Cabecilla calls for action, and the public follows

groups to act *as they already wished to act* even before they realized their own desires. Interestingly, she wasn't required to be present for her powers to have an effect; each person moving through the community acted like an independent vector, carrying forward the idea of a strike, for example, throughout the transit workers' world like a slow-moving bullet.

When the heroes showed up to act as crowd control for the strike, La Cabecilla sprung the trap. In a dispersed community, her powers worked slowly, building over time. But in person, her influence spread like wildfire, leaping from person to person before anyone had time to react. She unleashed the full and direct impulse of a group of transit workers who had gathered in the center of the city: *tear down these obnoxious "heroes."*

The heroes were completely caught off guard. Who expected a middle-aged transit worker to suddenly attack Swingline? Who would have imagined that a group of taxi drivers would try to hold Avian down long enough to clip his wings? It was madness—pure madness—and there seemed to be no end to it. To their credit, the heroes restrained from using lethal force against the strikers...but their very restraint was turned against them, causing them to miss key opportunities to fight back or escape.

In a flash, the mob had accomplished something that few villains ever would: they took control of the city and overwhelmed the heroes who had tried to stop them.

And that's when La Cabecilla took the microphone for the first time. She spoke calmly and eloquently, her blue eyes shining out from beneath her long black hair and her face framed by the mask she wore over the bottom half of her face. Her voice carried a trace of an accent, but it wasn't clear where she was raised. She demanded access to the airwaves and the media

acquiesced, whether from pure submission or from infection by her powers. She drifted in and out of speaking Spanish whenever it suited her.

“¡Atención!” she called out, her voice rising above the crash and roar of the crowd. “We are los ciudadanos de Halcyon. We wait on your tables, and we cut your hair. We drive you to your meetings, and we mow your lawns. We are las raíces de la ciudad, dirty and broken, frágil y esencial. Today, we have your *atención* for the first time.

“When you look upon us, you do not see us; you do not know us. You look past and through us and over us. Somos invisibles para ustedes. Consider today a day in which the invisible becomes visible. Sólo tenemos una demanda. Only one request that must be met before we turn the city back over to its usual masters: *we are done with heroes.*”

“WHEN YOU LOOK
UPON US, YOU DO NOT
SEE US, YOU DO NOT
KNOW US. YOU LOOK
PAST AND THROUGH US
AND OVER US. SOMOS
INVISIBLES PARA
USTEDES.”

Her speech may have been more propaganda than truth, but everyone was clear about what she meant. No more heroes. No more gods. No more monsters. Just people. She imagined a world far different than the one in which we live, a world in which we would manage our own problems, address our own issues, without need for the latest disinterested teen to be bitten by whatever radioactive animal escaped from Rook Industries labs this week.

It was a foolish dream. Fleeting and doomed.

* * *

At any given moment, suprologists estimate that there are only five or so godlike heroes within the city limits. They don't outright coordinate with each other, but they do try to take care of business in an orderly fashion, traveling to lands and realms in which they are needed at the appropriate time. Never more than two or three are gone, one hopes, in the event that they are needed.

On this day, there was only one such hero in Halcyon City: Captain Halcyon.

Enough ink has been spilled about Captain Halcyon—across the pages of this newspaper alone—to fill a library. His powers are known. His enemies are icons in their own rights. He is a living monument, even as he ages toward retirement.

When he landed in the square, his cape flowing behind him, his boots gently touching down on the grass in the middle of the main mass of protestors, it was clear that he planned to address La Cabecilla directly. And so the crowd brought her forward, soaked in sweat and blood and fear, and a very nearly ordinary woman stood face-to-face with a god.

According to all reports, she smiled.

* * *

When you **plead with the regular citizenry of Halcyon City for help by making yourself seem ordinary**, you can provoke them with Mundane instead of Superior. If you do, mark a condition.

When you **attempt to rewire a Keynome**, choose its intended purpose:

- **Energy siphoning:** stealing power from one source and pouring it into another
- **Gating:** ripping open a portal between any two places in existence
- **Devastation:** producing an explosion with the force of several neutron bombs in a limited 1 mile radius
- **Cosmic coding:** creating access to the source code of existence, allowing information gathering for those capable of comprehending the code
- **Empowerment:** providing enough pure cosmic force to power any one effect

Then, roll + Superior. On a hit, you rewire the Keynome. On a 7-9, you also render it unstable—you only have a limited amount of time to use it before it returns to normal. On a miss, the Keynome resists your tampering and absorbs your own energy in retribution.

No one knows who threw the first punch. Captain Halcyon says her people grabbed him first; folks close to the scene will tell you that Captain Halcyon rushed for La Cabecilla, hoping to take her hostage to get a better negotiating position. Either way, hope for a peaceful resolution to the conflict died within those first two minutes.

But the fight wasn't over as quickly as one might expect: La Cabecilla grabbed Captain Halcyon and tossed him across the park, leaping after him to land in the shadow of the Halcyon Tower, a monument to the great deeds of heroes like Captain Halcyon himself. She fought him—punch for punch, blow for blow—in that shadow, her strategy a blend of stolen Rook tech and hard luck, drawing Captain Halcyon closer to the tower, closer to her next trap.

And that's when she activated the Keynome.

No one knows for sure that it was a Keynome—A.E.G.I.S. isn't about to tell the public that a weapon of mass destruction was activated in the center of the city, and the fight was dangerous enough that most individuals steered clear, so there aren't any eye-witnesses—but there's no doubt in my mind. What else could have stolen Captain Halcyon's powers? What else could have given her the power for what came next? Only a Keynome, rewired in some way, makes sense. And after the burning light died down and the cameras refocused in, everything changed.

Her stolen technology exhausted, her body bruised and bleeding, La Cabecilla looked to the heavens at the building that had been evacuated when the strike began. She turned to Captain Halcyon—who was clearly weakened (presumably by the Keynome) and stunned by the sudden turn of events—and uttered the words of a revolutionary, perhaps the first of her kind to stand in Halcyon City:

"It is better to die on your feet, *el jefe*, than live on your knees."

And then, with a clap of her hands, she brought the tower down on him in front of the whole world.

* * *

JOSE MARTINEZ WAS A GOOD REPORTER, BUT NOW—
CONNECTIONS TO EL ANILLO? TRUSTWORTHY? WHERE
DO HIS SYMPATHIES LIE?

I have received death threats for offering a eulogy at her funeral. I was sent messages so foul that I cannot imagine printing them on these pages. And yet...I am struck by her cause, no matter how terrible her strategies or tactics. She has pointed us toward a great sickness in our democracy, a great illness upon our polity, for which there are no easy answers and even fewer thoughtful voices. Such a service demands some acknowledgement of her contribution.

At her funeral, I read a portion of her journal aloud to those who had gathered to pay their respects. I had received the journal from a group calling itself *El Anillo* (The Ring)—they vouched for its authenticity as a document she had left behind for those who would follow in her footsteps. I've taken the liberty of translating it for our readers:

"We are not enslaved by chain or leash, nor broken by whip or harness. No man rules over us as a king, nor are we ground into the dirt by some totalitarian boot. The truth is far worse: we are captive to our own belief in *our betters*. We have signed away that which makes us human—our belief that any of us can do great things, no matter our talents or skills or gifts—for a lie, an idea that quietly worms its way into our lives and convinces us that our petty attempts to build a better future are footnotes to the acts of gods and heroes."

"THE TRUTH IS FAR
WORSE: WE ARE
CAPTIVE TO OUR
OWN BELIEF IN OUR
BETTERS."

They are not. We are not. We are more than victims to be rescued or collateral damage to be mourned. We are *people*, and our lives have the meaning we give them on our own.

Captain Halcyon—teleported off-world by Pulsestar just minutes after the fall—has yet to return to Earth. There is a part of me that wishes he would stay away, but I fear that I am too weak to ask for such a thing. It is terrifying to me to imagine a world in which Halcyon City faces the future...alone.

But such is the hold the heroes have on us. And until we find some way to break it, we will always live in their shadow.

CAPTAIN HALCYON - LIVING IN SECRET IN CITY?
STILL POWERLESS? NOT LIKE A MAJOR
SUPERHERO TO NOT SEEK NEW POWERS.

THE DOCTOR IS IN!

Doctor Foresight Foils Jake Avarice's Museum Misdeeds

by Felicity Finger

Halcyon City, June 6, 1943 - The city awoke to a rosy sunrise and the glad tidings that public enemy number one, convicted crime lord Jake Avarice, was once more safely behind bars, thanks to the tireless efforts of Doctor Foresight!

Avarice and his toadies surrounded the Halcyon City Museum last night during its gala reopening. Holding dozens of our most prominent citizens at gunpoint—including the mayor, chief of police, and siren of the airwaves Mitzi Nightingale—Avarice's men bagged the shocked civilians' wallets and jewels while Avarice himself stripped the museum of its priceless artifacts.

The callous crook had just ushered his hostages into the museum's replica of Pharaoh Vah-Rees-Aten's tomb when Doctor Foresight burst onto the scene, giving the greedy gunmen what for! The bespectacled hero's well-timed blows, brass knuckles, and cutting wit made quick work of the crooks and cornered Avarice himself inside the tomb. Never the type to shrink from hitting a guy with glasses, Avarice gave his all, but fell to the fists of the Man Who Sees Tomorrow. Freeing the hostages, the dapper hero made quite an impression on the well-to-do crowd, particularly on a certain stunning songstress, who left the scene on his arm.

This reporter was covering the gala festivities for the *Chronicle* and found herself an eyewitness to these amazing heroics. Afterward, the generally laconic do-gooder consented to a few questions that may be of interest to the curious reader.

Felicity Finger: So, Dr. Foresight, this was a stunning piece of crimefighting tonight. How'd you manage to single-handedly take down Jake Avarice and a baker's dozen of his burliest thugs?

Dr. Foresight: Well, Felicity, while it's no easy thing to face down an evil man with a gun, it's no less than our boys overseas are doing every day. I may not have my brothers-in-arms at my side, but my Spectacles of Tomorrow give me the edge I need to keep Halcyon City safe from slime like Avarice and his associates. Everyone can be somebody's rescuer, even in small ways. If we all do our part to watch each other's back, we can get through this thing to a better tomorrow. I've seen it.

FF: Right. The Spectacles of Tomorrow. You manage to make wearing glasses look not half-bad. But my readers would love to hear more about those enchanted—and enchanting—eyepieces. Where'd you get them? How do they work? Can I save my rationing coupons for my own set?

*FELICITY CLAIMS SHE NEVER FOUND DOCTOR
FORESIGHT'S SECRET IDENTITY. NOT SURE I BELIEVE
IT—SHE WAS A GOOD JOURNALIST.*

DF: The Spectacles were crafted by an ancient magic, centuries ago. They were worn by Merlin when he helped King Arthur. They were part of Ali-Baba's treasure. Christopher Columbus wore them when he traveled to America. With the glasses on, I can see what the world in front of me will look like at any point in the next twenty-four hours. It is certainly a weird sensation, but with a bit of practice I can focus on seeing how some hoodlum is going to punch me two seconds from now, and dodge the blow. Or I can appreciate some finer things. Make sure you tip your hairdresser tomorrow, Felicity. She's going to do a fine job!

FF: *That's kind of you to say. But my readers want to know more about your heroics, not my beauty secrets. If you can see the future, why don't you play the market, or go to the racetrack, or run for office? You'd never get caught flatfooted by a nosy reporter!*

DF: Sure, I could do any of those things, but that would be using my gift for selfish ends. I'd be a bigger danger to the city than goons like Jake Avarice or those German spies I caught last week. Just because you have the power to do something doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. I may see things that others cannot, but that doesn't mean I'm superior to anyone. We're all in this together. Our boys overseas who are putting everything on the line to stop a madman, they're the real heroes. Next to them, I'm just an ordinary Joe with flat feet!

FF: *I'm sure my readers would love to know more about the ordinary Joe behind those Spectacles.*

DF: Well, I'm not going to divulge my secret identity, if that's what you're asking! Really, there's not much to tell. My life is rather mundane. I go to work. I pay my taxes. I fight crime. I eat dinner alone most nights. There's nothing glamorous beneath this fedora.

FF: *I find that hard to believe. And from the smoldering look you're getting, I'd say Miss Nightingale agrees, Doc. Just what are you a doctor of, anyway?*

DF: Optometry, of course. Remind your readers to get their eyes checked! Until then, I'll see you tomorrow!

*STORY ABOUT SPECTACLES' ORIGIN NEVER CONFIRMED.
NOT EVEN BY LATER FORESIGHTS.*

Monument Circle Crisis Averted

Doctor Foresight Vaccinates City Against Alien Invasion

By: Felix Finger

Halcyon City, November 12, 1974 - The city is never silent. But this day, unlike any other, finds Monument Circle as quiet as the span between heartbeats. Rank upon rank of scintillating forms hang perfectly motionless along the Circle's southern edge, suspended between one footstep and the next. Upon closer inspection, the bizarreness of the scene becomes more acute. Within each corona of light stands a hulking shock trooper, nine feet tall, with sleek ray guns leveled at the historic heart of Halcyon City.

Among these imposing, impossible statues, a lone figure labors. Doctor Foresight walks confidently beside me, an imposing figure clad in a tight azure jumpsuit emblazoned with an hourglass across the chest. Around his head orbits the perfect sphere of the Tempus Auspex. The source of Doctor Foresight's amazing abilities is all but transparent, occasionally catching the light like a halo.

Doctor Foresight attends to each figure in its turn. With his touch, the trooper's corona brightens, and then turns a deeper hue. The massive figure within seems to grow smaller, as if receding in the distance. Within a few moments, it has vanished from view, and the thwarted invading army is another man down.

"It's not precisely accurate to call them 'men,'" Doctor Foresight is quick to point out. "Lord Avarice's shock troopers come from a separate timeline, where Earth never gave rise to mankind. They have already bled their own Earth dry, and wanted to seize our resources for their own ends. They are a serious threat. I've seen these ray guns cut through armor plating like butter."

When pressed on how this disastrous invasion was literally stopped in its tracks: "Each trooper wears a cross-dimensional harness altering their vibrational frequency and allowing them to come here. Using the power of the Tempus Auspex, I was able to set up a counter-frequency so each harness generated its

***WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE BOND BETWEEN THE
FINGERS AND THE FORESIGHTS? DID FELIX EDIT HIS
OWN PIECE TO PROTECT FORESIGHT?***

When you **gaze through the Spectacles of Tomorrow**, you can see the fluidity of time, but you aren't shielded from it like Doctor Foresight; mark a condition and roll + Savior. On a 10+, hold 3. On a 7-9, hold 2. Spend your hold 1 for 1 to declare that you've foreseen something terrible, and take +1 ongoing to prevent it. On a miss, the GM will tell you what terrible future you've foreseen; take -1 ongoing to avert it.

own temporal nullification field. It wasn't easy, but if you don't have a superior understanding of the forces at work, you shouldn't be in this business in the first place."

A car swerves, barely missing a shock trooper holding what looks like a bazooka made of glass rings. Doctor Foresight consults with Halcyon City's finest, delegating the mundane concerns of traffic control to the boys in blue while he grapples with problems of time and space.

"You can never be too careful when dealing with cross-temporal incursions. If it's not the threat of one of Lord Avarice's schemes, then it could be the danger of the Seven Sadistic Sorcerers, or the threat of the Hourglass Bandit, or the inscrutable Immortal Monolith. Most of them know better than to hassle Halcyon City, but that's only because I've shown them that I'm not to be trifled with."

As the Tempus Auspex whirs to life and one more shock trooper is cast back across the cosmos unfathomable, Doctor Foresight takes a moment to reminisce. "It wasn't so long ago that all these things—time travel, alternate Earths, magic—were just theories in a textbook for me. It may have been just by a freak occurrence that I gained the Tempus Auspex, but what truly matters is what I do with it going forward.

"By exploring the timestream, I have seen the way forward for Halcyon City. I know the greatness the future holds for these people. I can see how to save it from its worse tendencies and force this place and these people into the best future in all the cosmos!"

DOCTOR FORESIGHT EXPLORES THE TIMESTREAM, HAS WARNING OF FUTURE ACTION. MUST HAVE SEEN OTHER FORESIGHTS. MUST HAVE SEEN AVARICEAN. MUST HAVE SEEN HIS OWN DEATH.

WHY NO WARNINGS? WHY NO ADDITIONAL ACTION?

Foresight: Crusader or Criminal?

The Halcyon City Chronicle Profile

By Phoebe Finger

Halcyon City, March 19, 1986 - I have never been so grateful to be late to a story. My appointment to tour Avarix Industries' south Halcyon research park was at 9:00 AM sharp. I arrive at 9:02 to find nothing but smoking, shattered rubble.

To my left lies the lifeless, visage-free head of one of the company's cloned SyntheGuards, artificial body slowly melting in the summer sun. To my right are strewn a dozen broken Avarix test tubes, each containing a dose of KEEN, the latest designer drug to sink its fangs into Halcyon City's underclass. Despite my years as a war correspondent, I have never seen destruction like this.

Ahead of me is a massive hole in the ground, light gray smoke still rising from the site where the three-story research facility once stood. The hole is impossibly deep, attesting to numberless undocumented sub-basements. On the lip of the chasm stands the architect of this destruction: A tall woman wearing a black leather duster, a yellow hourglass filling the back of the coat. As the vigilante called Foresight turns toward me, her helmet's protective metal grille conceals the details of her face, but not the emotion burning behind her expression.

"This place was evil. They'll tell you that they were seeking the cure for cancer or something. They'll say that I'm a radical, a terrorist. They'll claim I murdered innocent people." She looks down at a half-melted nametag on a bloody lab coat. With the toe of her black combat boot, she nudges it into the abyss. "No one here was innocent."

I venture closer, my heart racing. "Who made you judge and jury?" I can't bring myself to add "executioner."

"*This* made me!" she cries, leaning close enough for me to see the shimmering, silvered orb where her left eye should be. "I was dying and the only thing that would save me was this *thing* from the future. It's made me a freak who sees how *everything* turns out. Every consequence of every action is blistered on my brain! And let me tell you, the whole world's going straight to hell."

"Some would say you brought your own hell with you," I retort.

"I do what I do to save this city from its worst appetites. If I had ignored this, half of Halcyon would be KEEN addicts in a year's time. They'd do anything Avarix asked of them just to get their next fix. You think problems like drugs and domestic violence and gangs are mundane concerns, garden-variety vices. They may not be plans to blot out the sun or invasions from space, but they build up. They lay the groundwork for the Age of Avarix, when all hope dies."



Foresight, sitting atop a crater of her own creation.

“Some would say that a gift like yours should be used to build a brighter future. Someone like Doctor Foresight—”

“Don’t mention that smug bastard! If he were so much better than the rest of us, he wouldn’t have let Avarix take root in his city. He wouldn’t have shown them what discoveries lay in the future.”

The sound of distant sirens echoes oddly through the rubble. Foresight turns to face the chasm. “Wait!” I call after her. “If you’re doing what’s right, why run from the police?”

“To protect them from the danger. If I saw what their future held, I don’t know what I’d have to do to them.” As she turns away, a slivery ripple crosses her body and just for a moment, I see it, too. I see every possible way that Foresight could leave this place, all at the same time—the warped girders that will give way beneath her boots. The shortcuts that will become dead-ends. The clear paths that will lead to fights with the police. And a hundred more. It is too much!

When my vision clears, Foresight is gone. But the wreckage left by her crusade remains all around me.

Avarice Across Ages

The Final Words of Faux Finger

By Faux Finger

NOTE: It is with great sadness that the staff of the Halcyon Chronicle lays to rest one of its own. Faux Finger was an exceptional journalist, a loving husband and father, and a good friend. His untimely passing is a shock to us all, and we offer our deepest condolences to his family. Several weeks ago, Faux handed me a thumb drive and extracted a promise to publish what was on it if anything should happen to him. Sadly, that day has come. Below is Faux Finger's final article for the Halcyon Chronicle. My promise to my friend is fulfilled. The opinions expressed below do not reflect those of myself, the editorial staff of the Halcyon Chronicle, nor any of its affiliates.

-Editor Keandra Hunt

I've uncovered a conspiracy. You have to believe me.

My editor doesn't believe me. He thinks that I've been working too hard, that I should take some time off. (As if I could afford to take time off!) The police nearly arrested me six times while researching this. And don't get me started about the mayor's office!

You'd think that a city that bears the scars of *multiple* alien invasions would be more open-minded. You'd think that once I connect the dots for them, they would see the big picture of the threat surrounding us all. I guess they are happier to smile in ignorance than scream at the knowledge of what's really going on.

If it can be said to start anywhere, it started in ancient Egypt. Some 3,100 years ago, when Egypt was at its height, its wealth and splendor attracted the attention of *something*—something far more ancient, and far darker, than this world has ever known. This demigod or alien or extradimensional being revealed itself to the conquering pharaoh Vah-Rees-Aten, who, at the height of his reign, built twin pyramids: One of solid gold in celebration of his superiority, one of the decaying bones of those who built the first. No name was more feared in the ancient world.

Vah-Rees-Aten was a butcher and a madman, but he was just a puppet. Something beyond comprehension pulled his strings. It has no name, at least none it has ever shared—sharing is something anathema to its existence. I've taken to calling it "The Avaricean." I know it has lived for millennia. I know it hungers for wealth above all things. I know it works through pawns. And I know it wants nothing less than to *own* all that is ownable.

Through the centuries, whenever a civilization reached its peak of wealth and influence, The Avaricean was there. I'm certain it revealed itself to Nero, to Machiavelli, to Napoleon. Further exposés on these historical cases will follow when my tight-fisted editor sees that this is a story that needs to be told!

The advent of superpowered individuals in Halcyon City marked its arrival on the world stage—and drew the interest of The Avaricean. Its first puppet in the city was crimelord

When you **listen to the whispers of the Avaricean**, roll + Superior. On a 10+, choose two, on a 7-9, choose one:

- Gain significant wealth and take +1 forward when using it
- Increase Superior; the MC chooses what to decrease.
- Your next mention of wealth is not considered **provoking someone**
- The Avaricean does not gain Influence over you

On a miss, the Avaricean is in your mind. It takes Influence over you and shifts your Labels immediately, and you can hear its whispers continuing.

Jake Avarice. The Avaricean's advice enabled a guy with a fourth-grade education to unify a dozen ethnic gangs that had been feuding for decades, repeatedly outwit the HCPD, and bring the city to its knees during the Twelve Days of Danger. If Doctor Foresight (and his ability to see Avarice's schemes before they happened) had not appeared, this paper would be the Avarice Chronicle, without a doubt.

Its first assault repelled, The Avaricean redoubled its efforts. The alien Lord Avarice and his cross-dimensional army of freaks were his next lackeys. Their relentless incursions were intended to leave the city's defenders helpless so that Halcyon's treasures could be plundered. It was only with years of struggle and sacrifice that the second Doctor Foresight was able to pursue the Lord of Greed to his homeworld and end his threat to the cosmos. In his final years, Doctor Foresight began to suspect that there was a power behind his long-time foe and was investigating it when he vanished. The Avaricean may have been stymied, but it was not denied revenge.

Here's where I lost my editor. The third Foresight was *not* a crazy anti-capitalist terrorist. She could actually see the future, and she saw The Avaricean's next plot to own Halcyon City. Facing the failure of both criminal corruption and outright invasion, The Avaricean attempted to cultivate a homegrown, mundane force of greed: Avarix Industries. While Foresight's wild-sounding accusations of patent theft, organ harvesting, cloning, brainwashing, and pan-dimensional energy experiments were never proven, they were never *disproven*, either. All investigation simply stopped when the corporate headquarters, and Foresight herself, were consumed in a nano-black hole manifestation that was never fully explained.

Are you so naïve to think that a force as long-lived, relentless, and evil as The Avaricean could be ended permanently by a simple event horizon? Don't you know it always saves a reserve force to fight another day? I have leads that it is still at work in Halcyon City presently. It has been defeated by superheroes, and now seeks to draw them into its millennia-old web. How many millions of dollars do A-list heroes pull down from endorsements? How much money flows through contracts to rebuild areas leveled by super-powered fisticuffs? The Avaricean has turned its attention to our supposed protectors, using tantalizing promises of undreamt riches to turn heroes into its pawns. In a forthcoming series of articles, I will expose the depth of this corruption among the city's superhero class. Until then, stay honest, and stay safe.

There's this notion that heroes are on the side of truth. They should always want to know the full depths of the story, no holds barred. Truth is the friend of the good. So we of the journalistic persuasion should be their natural allies, right?

What I've found is that there are heroes—and villains, and aliens, and whatever else, for that matter—that want nothing more than for their stories to be told. They want the world to witness their victories and hear their cries of anguish.

And then there are the superhumans who want their stories to stay quiet. Maybe they just want to hide their shame, make sure we don't find out that they received their powers during an accident they caused. Maybe they don't want the attention, because they're trying to keep living their normal lives, no matter the fact that they can lift cars. Or maybe they want to remain free, working in the shadows without any oversight or commentary.

The two kinds—those who want their stories told true and full, and those who want their stories hidden—aren't as easy to tell apart as you might expect.

Every one of the Foresights—from the first two Doctors, to the Foresight of Phoebe Finger's article, to the modern-day Kid Foresight—they all had the ability to see the future, to some extent, right? They all must have seen things coming all the time. They must have known about future threats and dangers. And if Faux's article can be believed, then they've all been fighting this extradimensional Avaricean force...thing...and never really come clean. At least, in public.

That's why I let Faux's words go to print, crazy as they sounded. It's our job to find the truth and share it, whether or not a hero thinks we should. They don't get to make that decision. Chances are, the Foresights would've kept it secret for the best of reasons—safety of innocents and all—but it's still not their choice.

The whole point of Jane Warren's piece on MeRIT was to shine a light on an organization doing the same—an organization not beholden to heroes, or to the still-more-clandestine strictures of A.E.G.I.S., or to whoever else would try to hide the truth. MeRIT is doing our work.

But then I think about freaking Hiro Reckard, “shining the truth” on whatever pays his bills. And I think about Jose Martinez and La Cabecilla. I know Jose. I know what kind of reporter he is. And I *do not buy for an instant* that he didn't figure out who La Cabecilla really was.

So why did he not include it in the article? Did he buy in that it was another truth that needed hiding? Was he just doing what any of these heroes do, making the decision for the city about how best to serve it and save it?

The truth in this city is way more complicated than it has any right to be. And you're going to need to remind yourself of that, over and over and over again. Because sometimes...maybe...you should keep the story under wraps.

But that never means you shouldn't add it to your secret journal. Cough cough.

Keandra Hunt

INFERNA: When Mythology Meets Modernity

By Pierce Bannon

Halcyon City's seen its fair share of gods and monsters, but it's always striking to see an old myth return in a new form—just as we're seeing right now, before our eyes, with Inferna, the teen punk-rock anarchist hero who's been leaving trails of fire over city rooftops for a few months now. Question is, are these figures of modern myth more trouble than they're worth?

Inferna is a young teen in knee-high combat boots, high-waisted denim shorts, a blouse that shows off the scar over her heart, punky hair, and a gas mask. And she has been pretty terse when talking with interviewers—many expletives deleted to protect your innocent sensibilities, readers—but we've pieced together her origins.

She was living on the streets, homeless, when she was captured by cultists worshipping some old fire god, name of Valarakkratu. She was intended to be a sacrifice to reinvigorate that god, stoke its fires, maybe even eventually bring it back into the world. When they cut out her heart and threw it into the fires, though, something else happened, and she was reinvigorated by the flames. She called on the fire, blasted the cultists, escaped, and became a burning crusader for justice on the streets of Halcyon. More or less.



Inferna, spotted at the scene of a fire.

But here's the thing, readers. She's now an empowered teenager driven by hormones and a flame god's whims. Since getting her powers, we've watched her stop Cold Snap, blast Mole Men back into the tunnels, and fight burning sky duels with Aeonicus. And in turn, we've seen her set fire to an abandoned warehouse,

melt the asphalt over an entire street, and send bits of psychokinetic flame raining down on the business district.

The Trumpet Blast would never argue that Inferna hasn't done good. But her behavior is just as much wanton flame goddess as it is superhero. We spoke with mythology expert Dr. Vikram

Inanda on the subject of recurring symbols.

"It is always a question surrounding the more magic or legend-based metahuman figures in our fair city," Dr. Inanda said. "Are they brand new entities? Are they reincarnations of beings that must have existed at some point? Are they just people with spectacular abilities? How worried should we actually be that they repeat the patterns of their predecessors?"

Is she a modern superhero? Is she a teen punk with the powers of a goddess? Or is she a mythic figure reincarnated and trying to play out the same stories—stories of violence and submission and danger?

We can only hope that it's one more than the other.

When you **discover your own mythic background**, choose the one that fits:

- The redeemer (instinct: **make someone repent**)
- The vengeful (instinct: **righteously make someone suffer**)
- The destroyer (instinct: **wreak devastation**)
- The mighty (instinct: **tear down the powerful**)
- The supreme (instinct: **demand submission**)

Your mythic background has Influence over you. You can fulfill your mythic background's story by giving in to its instinct and following through on its desires.

When you **fulfill the story of your mythic background**, mark potential; the GM will shift your Labels accordingly.

When you **resist the story of your mythic background**, you are rejecting its Influence over you. If your mythic background loses its Influence over you, you can no longer mark potential or shift Labels upon fulfilling its story.

WHERE DID PIERCE GET INFORMATION ON HER BACKGROUND? SMELLS LIKE BS.

Change of Heart: By Lydia Cantrip The Case Against Roshambo

On October 13th, Roshambo baffled Halcyon City by joining his long-time rivals, the heroic team known only as the TKs, to defeat his former ally and apparent mentor, Flytrap. In the press conference following the battle, TK leader Thorn Maiden further shocked the city by announcing that the team-up was permanent. The longtime trio of Thorn Maiden, Aerial, and Hickory was now a quartet.

"Roshambo has pledged to uphold the same values that keep our team fighting

day after day: justice for the oppressed, mercy for the misguided, and safety for the endangered," Thorn Maiden explained. "While we cannot divulge our reasons for trusting Roshambo, we hope that you will trust *us* when we say he is and will be an important member of our team."

Over the past few weeks we have learned more about Roshambo's surprise defection. As fitting his nature, his decision was not based on, as the TKs have described it, a "change of heart" or even,



Three TKs, from left to right: Thorn Maiden, Roshambo, and Aerial.

as Roshambo himself has said, “finally seeing the idiocy and consequences of [his] actions.” No, Roshambo defected because he lost a game. Eleven rounds of rock-paper-scissors and one of the city’s great terrors joined the good side.

While some have argued that pushing the game to eleven rounds rather than accepting an earlier victory demonstrates Roshambo’s true feelings and desire to turn away from his villainy, we argue that losing a game is neither a strong foundation for trust nor sufficient cause for avoiding justice.

Thorn Maiden and the rest of the TKs claim to value justice. Where, then, is the justice for Roshambo’s victims? By accepting Roshambo without forcing him to face his crimes, the TKs are implying that those he has hurt matter less than the power he can provide to their team.

His victims deserve the opportunity to face Roshambo and have their complaints heard, weighed, and responded to in a court of law.

We are devoting our weekly long-form editorial to Roshambo and why we at the *Halcyon City Herald* believe that he should face trial just like any other criminal.

The Rise of Roshambo, Villain

Roshambo began terrorizing Halcyon City with his elite computer skills and superhuman strength and agility three years ago, only two years after the young TKs first appeared. His first actions followed a typical villain arc—a bank job for initial funding, a public proclamation or manifesto, and a battle to decide primary rivals.

Roshambo opened his villainous career with a late night hit on the east branch of the Singer Credit Union. Before it cut out, the surveillance video caught the image of a wiry man in a Pierrot mask. When police responded to the silent alarm, they found the night guards bound and gagged behind the front counter. All but one of the guards were undressed. They explained that the man had disarmed them suddenly with great force and then offered a choice: play his game or lose their secrets. They had each lost a round of rock-paper-scissors with their clothes as forfeit. The guard who hadn't followed the rules of the game lost his job in the days following as Roshambo leaked incriminating secrets about the guard's past.

Roshambo spoke publicly for the first time later that week by hacking the *Halcyon City Herald* website and replacing the front page with a photo of himself and a signed manifesto.

"Halcyon City runs on a series of arbitrary rules that divide society up into strict categories. We treat these boxes as sacred, but they only have as much power as we give them. We must overturn the boxes. We must break the rules. I cannot change the world on my own, but I can show you how silly the rules are. If you insist on following the rules of the city, then you'll also follow mine. Would you like to play a game?"

Roshambo then infiltrated the science center at the Halcyon Community College. The TKs—whose area of operation centers around the college, leading many to believe they are students or faculty there—interrupted his heist.

Since that battle, the TKs have always been the first superhero team to respond to Roshambo's crimes.

Since robbing the Singer Credit Union three years ago, Roshambo has proven himself a whimsical and cruel villain who lets games of chance between himself and his prospective victim guide his actions. Roshambo coerced many victims into personal and cruel humiliations with the threat of what secrets his hacking could reveal or manufacture, all leading up to the day that one of his victims, unable to handle the humiliation, took his own life.

Looking to the Past

This is not the first time Halcyon City has faced remorseful villains. Within both the Silver and Bronze Generations, a few villains turned their coats and joined up with the side of good.

Lady Nym laid aside her mask during the Great Battle of Church Street, signaling her changed allegiances by immobilizing three of her former allies with her mental powers. She later joined the Terrific Tribune and eventually became one of their strongest and fairest lieutenants. Lady Nym demonstrates the potential former villains have for turning their coats and becoming good.

The difference between Lady Nym and Roshambo, however, is that between her change of heart and rise in power within the Tribune, Lady Nym turned herself in and submitted herself to the justice system. She served three years in prison before catastrophe demanded her release. Even then, she agreed to have her powers bound for the rest of her sentence, with temporary removal of the limits allowed when her abilities were needed to help the city. Lady Nym also, voluntarily, made reparations to the city by founding the

LADY NYM = RETIRED HER CAPE, STILL ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY.
ALIAS: ALIYAH DODGE.

ASK HER FOR TRUTH ABOUT DARK VENGEANCE AND TRIBUNE.

successful and popular charter school franchise, Elevating Genius.

Where Lady Nym may provide hope for Roshambo's future with the TKs, Dark Vengeance provides a more cautionary tale.

Dark Vengeance claimed to renounce his former villainy in a large press conference and blamed his longtime estrangement with his parents—Silver Shark and Albatross, prominent members of the Tribune—for his misguided ways. While he also turned himself over to the court system, his familial connections to the Tribune saved him from significant repercussions. Dark Vengeance paid a large fine and agreed to participate in a volunteer program to help troubled youths.

Given all the press and assurances around his supposed change of heart, no one suspected that he had been using his time in the volunteer program to recruit a corps of teen villains to carry out his dark plots. The depth of his betrayal was not fully felt until the destruction of the Tribune's headquarters years later. In the subsequent investigations, the city learned how Dark Vengeance had enacted a long and twisted scheme to corrupt the Tribune, strengthen his pack of destructive teens, and exact revenge for childhood slights. The Tribune has never recovered.

Changes of heart may be as genuine as Lady Nym's or merely part of a larger game, as with Dark Vengeance—and which do you think is really more likely in Roshambo's case?

Looking to the Future

Maybe Roshambo will prove to be another Lady Nym. His physical prowess and technical skills would be a great boon to the TKs. The TKs have been shifting from being problem solvers who stop common criminals and tangle with one super rival to being a team that regularly matches up against other supers. As their recent bouts with Flytrap have shown, the TKs need more than Thorn Maiden's plants, Aerial's winds, and Hickory's limited temporal shifting. They need a true heavy hitter and Roshambo could fill that role.

But what if Roshambo is another Dark Vengeance? Allowing Roshambo to infiltrate the TKs could destroy the heroic group just as Dark Vengeance once shattered the Tribune. Or, worse, his influence could corrupt the TKs and draft three more powerful villains against the city.

Maybe he is genuine, but Roshambo has shown, since his first public acts in the city, that games govern his behavior. This time, his games saw him turn his coat. The next game may require him to turn it back. If and when he returns to villainy, he would do so with deeper knowledge of the TKs' strengths and weaknesses.

In his manifesto, Roshambo expressed deep contempt for society's rules. Why should we expect him to follow those rules now? Just because of his word?

When you **play in Roshambo's games**, roll + Superior. On a 10+, you win—and Roshambo will submit. On a 7-9, you win, but you look foolish or suspect for giving in to his demands in the process. The GM will adjust your Labels accordingly. On a miss, you lose, and must either let Roshambo reveal a dark secret of yours, or make a fool of yourself according to his wishes. If you follow his wishes, mark three conditions and give Roshambo Influence over you.

Trust Is Not Enough

However, even if Roshambo's change of heart is genuine, even if he is now trustworthy and will act to uphold the values of the TKs, that is not enough.

Remorse without action is not enough. Being good now does not cancel out every selfish, cruel, and ruthless action Roshambo has taken. Saving someone today does not help those hurt yesterday and all the days before that.

The actual matter of Roshambo's trustworthiness is secondary to the question of the justice.

In May of last year, Roshambo attacked a branch of the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and challenged Lucas Bell, a high school junior taking his driver's license test, to a game of rock-paper-scissors. If Lucas won, Roshambo would leave the DMV and pay for his damages. If Roshambo won, Lucas would complete a dare. When the teen lost, eyewitnesses reported that Roshambo threatened to reveal Lucas's secrets if he did not get on all fours and act like a dog while Roshambo streamed the video online. Lucas, unable to cope with the subsequent bullying his compliance generated, hung himself in his bedroom closet a month later.

Lucas Bell was the captain of his school's basketball team and a favorite for junior prom king before his humiliating

experience. His parents, Murphy and Jesse Bell, still keep his room pristine, as if he is only missing and not lost to them forever.

Roshambo may not have intended to ruin Lucas's life or known the teen was already joking about suicide and engaging in risky behaviors, but that does not absolve him of the crime committed. Lucas's parents have a right to know why Roshambo attacked their son. They have a right to demand he face trial for the consequences of his thoughtless actions.

At the Mercy of Power

Our city is plagued with power. Those with power decide when to interrupt and endanger our lives. We live in fear of their schemes. Those with power also decide when and how to step in and save us. We survive on the strength of their responsibility.

Roshambo has power, but his potential contributions are not a sufficient answer for the suffering he has caused. The people he has hurt are valuable, too, even if they cannot save the city.

If Roshambo were not as powerful as he is, this would not even be a question. Everyday remorseful criminals watch the world through iron bars. Some, such as our colleagues at the *Kingfisher*, have argued that the reformation of criminals

When you **publicly apologize for a mistake**, roll + Mundane. On a hit, the public accepts your apology and you can clear a condition. On a 10+, you come out looking better for it. Say how the public sees you now, and adjust your Labels accordingly. On a miss, the public only becomes more incensed by your apology, and someone digs up and makes public secrets or information you'd prefer to stay secret.

should outweigh the need for punishment and that jailing Roshambo accomplishes nothing. That argument ignores, however, that the prison system is full of people who regret their former crimes and who could be contributing members of society given the chance. They are not receiving the same opportunities as Roshambo. By only offering this freedom to Roshambo, we are setting the precedent that the lives of the powerful are more important than those of normal people.

That is not why heroes like the TKs fight. That is not why the Gold Generation first took up arms. That is neither the city I want to live in nor the legacy I want passed on to future generations.

If Roshambo truly believes in “justice for the oppressed,” let him prove it by submitting himself to the judgment of his peers. If his change of heart is genuine, let him follow Lady Nym’s example and make reparations for his crimes. If he means what he says, he should and must act.

Words without action are meaningless.

Justice for the Oppressed

We at the *Halcyon City Herald* do not advocate for punishment or revenge. We ask only that the TKs follow through on

the promise of their values and demand that Roshambo confess his crimes, submit himself to justice, and serve his time.

The judicial process would also give the citizens of Halcyon City the opportunity to learn more about Roshambo and decide for themselves whether this would-be hero is worthy of their trust. Thorn Maiden, Aerial, and Hickory are poised to be the next great team in Halcyon City. While they have proven themselves to be strong, moral heroes with a tight focus on the day-to-day lives of normal people so far, Roshambo poses the first true test of their professed values. They are at a crossroads and must demonstrate that the people of Halcyon City are right to trust and support them. They must act on the values they claim to uphold.

At the very least, they should reveal their reasons for trusting in Roshambo. Their promises are not enough. Not only do the people of Halcyon City need and deserve more if they are going to support Roshambo’s apparent change of heart, our justice system requires more. No matter how good and noble our heroes may be, true justice demands more than their heroic words and unchecked judgment.

Surprise us again, Roshambo; prove your change of heart is more than a game and do the right thing. Turn yourself in.

Hope Fractured

The Fall of the Titan Academy

By Phoebe Waller

Once upon a time, Genevieve Winters had a good idea: to train new generations of metahuman heroes. She could teach young superhumans how to use their abilities, and instill in them the values and morals that would make them exactly what Halcyon City needed and wanted. She could serve them, help them through the hardest times, and guide them to better themselves.

Fast forward 10 years. The Titan Academy is founded. Housed in a beautiful old mansion, built in the Revolutionary War period, the building's been renovated with new equipment, facilities, and plenty of structural reinforcement. The gleaming sign on the front lawn promises a bright future.

Fast forward another 10 years. The Titan Academy is thriving. Students abound, filling up its halls, walking its lawns. From nearby, you can hear the sounds of superpowered discharge all over campus, accompanied by laughter from the students. It's living up to the dream.

Fast forward still another 10 years. It's all gone. The building is dilapidated and empty. Falling apart. Disintegrating where it stands. The sign has fallen down. The Titan Academy is no more.

So what exactly happened? Why did the Titan Academy fall apart, when it seemed like such a good idea? Is Genevieve Winters, its founder and original headmistress, to blame?

Let's delve into the history of the Titan Academy and talk about what worked, what didn't, and whether there's any hope here.

The Woman Behind the Academy

The first thing you need to understand about the Titan Academy is Genevieve Winters. Genevieve was one of the Elements—a relatively early member, but after the original team of four had already expanded. She was only 16 herself when she joined that team, taking up the role of Ice Maiden before eventually becoming Lady Ice, the superhero moniker for which she is most well-known.

Genevieve was embroiled in the superhero life from an early age, when she was caught up in a quantum-morphic element storm that swept through her neighborhood. It entangled her particles with the ability to manipulate thermodynamics. She could shift heat away, and thereby create cold and ice. It also bleached her hair white and her skin faint blue.

At first, she hid her ability from the world as best she could. Make-up and hair dye were her constant companions. According to those close to the Winters, her parents were fairly closed-minded; discovering the true extent of the changes that had affected their daughter would have led them to disown their child.



The remnants of the Titan Academy.

Which, of course, it did, when Genevieve was inevitably unable to continue to hide her mutations from those in close proximity to her on a daily basis.

Cast out, on her own, Genevieve was adopted into the homes of the other Elements. Flame, Aqua, Geo, Gust, Acid, Iron—they all became her family. They took care of her, fed her, and taught her. That was when she learned what it meant to be a hero, according to her autobiography, *A Life of Winters* (source of much of our information about Genevieve). And that was when the seeds for the Titan Academy were planted in her mind.

What if there was no place for her when her parents cast her out, she wondered. What might she have turned into? Who might she have become?

And how could she save other young metahumans from such a fate?

Building the Academy

She was too young, too inexperienced when the first notion of the Titan Academy came to her mind, but it was there, and it wouldn't go away. She drove her efforts towards making the Academy a reality, earning the necessary degrees, procuring the funding, and leaving the superheroic life to become an administrator for the first privately owned and controlled but publicly accessible young superhero academy.

Before Titan, there were other schools. Most of them were limited, closed-off in some way—a school specifically and only for those whose genes had been

FUNDING—PHOEBE DIDN'T GO INTO IT ENOUGH. WHERE DID IT COME FROM?
TEXPERT DOESN'T ACCOUNT FOR IT, CHARITIES DON'T ACCOUNT FOR IT.
A.E.G.I.S.? SOMEWHERE ELSE?

FOLLOW THE MONEY.

rewritten in 1972's geni-bomb, or a school for the so-called "mystic arts". Many of them were owned and operated directly by the government, and acted more as training facilities for new A.E.G.I.S. operatives or soldiers than they were actual education facilities.

Titan was something else. Genevieve Winters brought in real teachers from around the world, experts in their courses, acclaimed individuals. She made sure the Academy had dorms, science facilities, gymnasiums that catered to metahuman abilities—every possible affordance and facility that the students could need. She set a price for tuition, to keep the Academy funded, but offered extreme tuition assistance for students who couldn't pay, including free-rides more often than not.

Where her funding came from remains a question open to speculation, but most historians assume that she was being funded by contacts she made in the superheroic world—for instance, the Texpert, often hypothesized to have been billionaire Cynthia Quinn, was known as a good friend of Lady Ice, and might have provided funding through charities and other backdoor routes.

Regardless, the Titan Academy that Genevieve Winters built was an impressive sight. Photographer Yong Yi describes it as "...a monument to hope. Yes, it was a school, and had all those hallmarks, but the modern architecture, the glass, the statues, the open spaces, the constant reminders about Halcyon's heroic history—it was designed from the ground up to give students a clear glimpse of their futures. It was beautiful, long before any students were even on campus."

When students filtered into its halls for the first time in approximately 1983, the Titan Academy came to life. News organizations from the time covered it with headlines like, "Titan Academy Promises Better Future For New Generation of Halcyon" and "Titan Academy: The Hope of Halcyon City." In the midst of darker stories of that era, the Titan Academy was a place of hope for the future, and every story that came out of it was a forward-looking ode to progress.

It stood as a bastion in exactly that way for a little over a decade. Halcyon saw many impressive young heroes come out of the Academy's halls—Ibis, and La

IT'S TOO EASY. WINTERS, TOO ALTRUISTIC. THE WHOLE
SCHOOL, JUST TO SAVE PEOPLE FROM WHAT SHE WENT THROUGH?
NO OTHER PURPOSE? DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.

WHAT WAS TITAN REALLY FOR?



Mejor, and Rims, and Gravhack, and more. They weren't exactly what Halcyon had expected or hoped for, with some important political figures in the city criticizing these young heroes for their new ways of doing things, or their ridiculous costumes, but they saved lives, often and undeniably. They were true heroes.

The Firebrand Cometh

But then came Dante Root. A young man from a middle class background, his parents were victims of a superhuman conflict when he was just 8 years old—they were in a building that collapsed. He went to live with his aunt, and in the meantime, according to her, became truly obsessed with the superhuman world. “He would collect every comic book, history book, biology book—whatever,” his aunt, Ida Root, later conveyed. “It was like an obsession, but I figured that it was taking his mind off his parents, so it was only a good thing.”

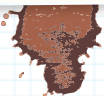
When Root began to evidence superhuman abilities at the age of 12, his aunt said, “It was almost like he just expected them to come in.” Most suprologists theorize that his powers were mutational in origin, but the truth remains unclear to this day.

At the age of 15, Dante decided to apply to Titan Academy. He was accepted almost immediately.

Dante was a promising student, like so many others. His abilities included vast metahuman cognitive abilities, along with pheromonal influencing of those around him, and a hyperactive healing factor. One of his teachers, Mrs. Samantha Tate, spoke about Dante to the press some ten years after the fall of the Academy: “He was charming, and handsome, and so, so smart. You heard him talk, and you liked him. You wanted him to succeed. And we all thought he would. He thought he could become the President, really. Make real change in the world. We never saw it coming.”

Dante Root's attack on the school began on March 13, 1995. It ended three years later.

Genevieve Winters had shifted away from the school. The stress and incredible work involved in administrating the Academy had taken its toll on her, and she left Titan in the hands of a qualified successor, Mr. Carl Eggers. But Mr. Eggers,



DANTE ROOT'S LIMITS UNCLEAR. SOME IMPLICATION OF SUBTLE MANIPULATION IN ADDITION TO OUTRIGHT CONTROL. VICTIMS MIGHT NOT EVEN BE AWARE WHAT HE'S DOING. DID WINTERS MOVE AWAY FROM THE ACADEMY BECAUSE OF HIM? IF SO — IF HE CAN MANIPULATE SO SUBTLY— HE IS STILL A THREAT, WHEREVER HE IS BEING HELD.



while a successful school administrator, was completely unprepared to deal with a student like Dante.

Most historians chart the beginning of the end to a one-on-one meeting between Dante and Eggers. The appointment ledger cited that Dante wanted to talk to Mr. Eggers about the older man's recommendations for Dante's future.

What came out of the meeting was a fully subservient Mr. Eggers, one hundred percent controlled by Dante. It is unclear if Dante had created a device or technique to advance his pheromonal abilities, or to extend his will into the minds of others, or to exert control through some other means. To this day, suprologists remain unsure of the specifics of Dante's growing power over the minds of those around him, and exactly where it came from. But Mr. Eggers, speaking about the incident after the fact, emphasized that it didn't matter.

"He had me under his control, one way or the other," Eggers said. "He could say anything, and I'd do it. Sometimes he could just look at me, and I'd do it. It was...it was terrifying."

Over the course of those three years, Dante Root took control of the school's faculty, one by one. He reshaped the curriculum of the school in an attempt to change who his peers were becoming, and he built for himself an army using the school's resources.

And then, in 1998, he unleashed his army—the Legion of Inferno, he called them, taking his cues from Dante Alighieri—and officially declared that the Titan Academy was under his total control. And that Halcyon itself would be his soon.

The Infernos attacked the city, and though they were all just his fellow students, the training and expertise they'd received from Titan made them far more dangerous than the heroes of the city would have expected. The battle to hold back the Infernos took almost every hero of the era, in a raging battle across the width and breadth of the city. All with Dante at its heart.

The battle has been extensively covered in other articles and pieces. For our purposes, suffice it to say that Dante was ultimately defeated by Artificer, the robotic hero immune to Dante's powers. Then he was placed into A.E.G.I.S. custody, and has been there ever since.

But far more importantly, the city had seen the dark reflection of the Titan Academy. They had seen what could happen if those tools of education and training were turned to creating threats to the city, instead of defenders.



When you **resist Dante's mind control**, treat it as rejecting his Influence. On a hit, you cannot cancel his Influence. On a miss, instead of shifting your Labels and marking a condition, you must either follow Dante's commands or mark a condition (your choice) and take a powerful blow.

When you **explore the ruins of the Titan Academy for useful equipment**, say what you're looking for and roll + Superior. On a hit, you find it. On a 10+, choose one. On a 7-9, choose two.

- The equipment is broken; you need someone's help to fix it.
- The equipment is outdated; it will be less effective than you hoped.
- The equipment is protected; you have to get past a security measure to take it.
- The equipment is dangerous; using it will cause some kind of backfire.

On a miss, something else living in the ruins of the Academy finds you first; prepare for battle!

A Slow Descent

City Councilman Katherine Coor was the first to enunciate what many in the city were already feeling—that the Titan Academy was too dangerous to be allowed to exist without direct government supervision. The campaign she called for was simple: either the Academy would have to close, or it would have to cede all control to Halcyon City itself.

Genevieve Winters, who still held a controlling interest in the Academy even if she did not directly run it, gave voice to the sentiment that would ultimately dictate the future of the Academy: “The Titan Academy was a place that gave form to countless heroes, and one true villain. It works. If the city of Halcyon disagrees, then the city of Halcyon is free to revoke its appropriate licenses. But otherwise, the Titan Academy will continue to transform the young metahumans of this city into its future heroes.”

So Katherine Coor led the campaign to close the Academy, ultimately gathering a massive movement of anti-metahuman-education protesters, and pressuring the city government to revoke the Titan Academy's license. Her campaign garnered her enough support among the fearful, the doubtful, and the concerned to earn her the office of Mayor some years later, as well.

And now, the Titan Academy stands as a ruined wreck. The deed for the land still belongs to Winters, and she refuses to sell or rebuild. Almost as an act of stubbornness or despair, she will only allow the facility to fall apart slowly but surely over time, in the middle of the city it once served. A reminder of this city's hopes for a better future, and fear of what that future might actually bring.

*MAYOR COOR LATER ABDUCTED BY TIME TRAVELING DR. INFINITY.
BLUEPRINTS IN HER OFFICE INDICATED PLANS TO REBUILD A NEW
ACADEMY UNDER CITY CONTROL. COVERED UP BY A.E.G.I.S. WHAT
WOULD COOR HAVE DONE? WHY DID INFINITY TAKE HER? WHAT'S
THE CONNECTION TO TITAN?*

HIRO'S **HOT** TAKES

Costumed Tryhards

A couple of weeks ago, I wrote about the epidemic of under-dressed young superheroes in this city, saying it was the worst thing I could imagine.

Boy, oh boy, was I wrong. There is in fact a sin greater than caring too little about your appearance.

Caring too much.

Look at this new guy Captain Cherry, who was on hand last Sunday at the Electric District Expo to apprehend the Sand Wren Clan ruffians who attempted to kidnap city councilwoman Clarissa Banknotes—and of course, to take credit in front of the media afterwards. The red and navy suit with a luminous, almost neon C on his chest, the polished boots and ironed cape, and of course, the perfectly-coiffed crimson pompadour. But when the television cameras zoomed in on his face and I detected what looked to be blush and red eyeshadow, that was just a little too much. Suddenly the shine of the boots and embedded rubies revealed an unnatural

perfection that shouldn't be there after a tough day of villain fighting.

Note to all other overstyled heroes: you're supposed to be in this business for the populace, not the paparazzi.

"Now Mr. Reckard," you're thinking, "first you complain about heroes not focusing enough on their image, and now you complain about them focusing too much? You can't have it both ways!"

First of all, dear reader, call me Hiro. Secondly, I am making an eminently reasonable request to just the worst offenders on either end of the spectrum. There is a huge middle ground, with not nearly enough heroes in that middle space.

But there's a paragon of fashionable practicality right in front of our eyes: Amanda Lynn Strummer. Consider her cowgirl outfit in pastel colors and tasteful frills, from her braided blonde pigtails to her knee-high leather boots. It says, "I am aware that people want their heroes to be likable, but I'm also ready



By Hiro Reckard

to rumble, tumble, and get dirty in the line of duty." Now, I know that some have their concerns about whether she's truly disavowed the worldview of her uncle, Scarlet Songbird, but you know what? This young lady's got so much of the All-American Girl, "Aw, shucks" charm, that I'm not sure we could stop adoring her even if she turned back to his side.

So that's my humble plea to all the wanna-be heroes out there refining your identity: if you want to be taken seriously, don't be a Sawfly, but don't be a Captain Cherry either. Be like Amanda Lynn. Maybe it's hard to please everyone. But just like with every other aspect of hero-ing, no one said it was going to be easy.

AMANDA LYNN STRUMMER—FRIEND OF HIRO RECKARD? EARNED SEVERAL NEW ENDORSEMENTS AFTER ARTICLE PUBLISHED, INCLUDING ROOK INDUSTRIES. COINCIDENCE?

Healing the Sick - Billing the Rich?

By Quinn
Canton

Last night the central city meeting at the Halcyon City Town Hall was abuzz with controversy. The upper class neighborhoods are in an uproar over what they say is financial discrimination, and their target is one Sehkmnet, the healing superhero who returned to Halcyon City six months ago after a mysterious absence.

Since her arrival, Sehkmnet—a tall, severe figure robed in green and tan linen—has been visiting local homeless shelters and community clinics, healing those with devastating terminal illnesses. When she was sought out by some of the founding families of Halcyon City who were looking for healing for one of their members, she told them that she would heal them—if they donated a generous portion of their wealth to the organizations supporting the poor and sick in Halcyon City.

Many of these scions of Halcyon City, including Richard Wellson, son of Errant Wellson and heir to the Wellson fortune, were enraged. They, too, had family members who suffered, and they felt it was discriminatory against them for Sehkmnet to demand that they pay, while others received Sehkmnet's healing for free.

Sehkmnet spoke at the meeting, saying: "My powers are limited, and there are some in greater need than others. These people I treat cannot find their way into a top-tier hospital with well-recognized doctors. I think that it is reasonable for the rich to rely on modern medicine, or

to enable others access to the same in exchange for my gifts."

After the meeting, the *Herald* received an email concerning Sehkmnet's words. Intake, officially labeled a criminal and vigilante by city law enforcement, confessed in the email that he actually supports what Sehkmnet is doing.

"People might not like the things I do, but I know who the real enemy is. Wellson and his buddies are the kind of people who are either generous or monsters, and too many of them lean towards monster. When I take a life, I do it for a good reason. Sehkmnet is giving life for the same reason, and maybe people should just shut up and let her save people."

Intake is well known for his history of executing corrupt members of high society and is on the run for the murder of Errant Wellson during a home invasion seven years ago. It was a gruesome murder, supposedly detailed in Intake's commentary on the murder released to the police shortly after the event. This commentary may also have revealed more details of Mr. Wellson's potentially devious activity, but this information has not been released by the police.

Intake's support for Sehkmnet's activity is indicative of a larger problem. There are murmurings about the imbalance of wealth in the city, and while Wellson and his family have the market cornered on real estate in many parts of the city, fewer people being out of work due to illness could make their

rent payments a little easier. Economist Trisha Wallace speculated, “Should the wealthy families of Halcyon City donate to this cause, would Wellson see good returns on his rental properties? If so, it may be worth the investment.”

When villains and heroes alike are in agreement that the poor should be

supported freely, and the rich should have to sacrifice to be saved, where should the public turn for answers? Who is in the right? It may not matter at all. Sehkmet is still a human, and cannot be forced to perform services she doesn’t want to do. Many lives are in her healing hands, and the city can only hope that fire does not go out.

STRANGEST VIGILANTE I’VE EVER HEARD OF.

Intake’s Motives in Cancer Case

By Quinn
Canton

Red-shrouded and masked vigilante Intake has been spotted in photographs scaling the facades of hospitals around the city. While the original suspicion was that he was looking for potential victims or targeting family members of prominent city figures, new information suggests that he was in fact visiting cancer wards.

In recent months Halcyon City hospitals have encountered multiple instances of cancer patients coming in for regular appointments only to be found cancer free. Those hospitals undertook copious testing and evaluation of medical technology resources to see if there was a miraculous root cause. The new evidence concerning Intake suggests, however, that this masked man has been selectively healing hospitalized cancer patients by literally absorbing the cancers from their body.

Many experts in superhuman biogenetics and development have been speculating on the nature of Intake’s powers, which have always been a mystery. The typically-villainous vigilante has been

elusive to the piercing eyes and ears of the press, mostly staying to the shadows and avoiding public displays. But Doctor Eliza Hudson—famous for her work with the hero, Chip, to determine the chemical properties of the hero’s flexible marble skin—has her own theories.

“Intake is known for taking only blood from his victims, and leaving behind a messy husk of other fluids and viscera,” she said. Doctor Hudson theorizes that he “...absorbs the blood into his own body, though whether he is able to neutralize the physical matter of the absorbed products is still in question.”

A colleague of Dr. Hudson’s, who preferred to remain anonymous, expressed concern about the larger implications of Intake’s powers. “If Intake’s ability allows him to take in cancerous tumors and neutralize or destroy them, the medical community at large may soon experience upheaval. Medical research and pharmaceutical companies have poured millions into cancer research. The idea that



Intake, prior to flinging himself through a window.

one person could eliminate it completely is disruption on an incredible scale.”

Those in oncological careers in the Halcyon City area have expressed varying hope and personal concern since the news has begun to spread. Dr. Loughlin in St. Agatha’s Clinic said, “Don’t get me wrong, I would gladly go out of work if it meant all my patients were cured...but it’s a strange thought that one guy could do what I’ve spent my whole career and life of study trying to do. It’s another case of a metahuman making regular humans irrelevant.”

There is no clear indication that Intake would have any inclination to share his powers or knowledge of how they work with anyone. His reclusive nature is issue enough, but he also appears to be healing people with a particular goal in mind. All of the people that Intake has healed have been at least loosely tied to the organization of the Five Stars.

The Five Stars is an organization that has existed for an undeterminable period, but members and investigators alike have claimed that it was started by five-star army general Nicholas Hart, now deceased. Hart’s intention was to use government resources and soldiers to impose a certain ideological framework—the goals of which were unclear, save for the condemnation of metahuman action where it interfered with mundane lives.

The Five Stars have been tied to a number of events, including the break-in at the South Central Bank where nothing was stolen except one safety deposit box, contents unknown. Additionally, the Five Stars were linked to the rigged election of multiple police department heads in the suburbs of Halcyon City. It’s believed that the organization intends to realign the political and security structures in the city, and there has been consistent—but

quiet—investigation from this office as well as the HCPD into this matter.

Peter Twile, a deputy in South Central, spoke to us with his concerns. “Is Intake only using his powers to further an

unknown, potentially dangerous ideology? Or would he provide the people of Halcyon City with hope that, at least here, one of the deadliest diseases known to humankind could be eradicated?”

Doctor Kim Revealed: His Unbelievable Story

By Quinn
Canton

Doctor Hyun Kim, a starkly handsome man rarely seen without his lab coat and glasses, has been acknowledged as the stuff of legends since his arrival on the health care scene. His success with curing previously incurable illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder is unprecedented. Every media member has been dying for a story, and right here is where you'll find one—and it's not what you would expect.

A *Halcyon City Herald* reporter recorded a brief interview face-to-face with Dr. Kim, but much of the recording was lost due to technical difficulties. During the lost time, the interviewer Rudy Bells claims they discussed details of Dr. Kim's background, and that is where discrepancies appeared. The interviewer claims that Dr. Kim's account of his educational background and career don't match up with times, dates, and records on file. The interviewer requested to view the next procedure Dr. Kim performed.

Dr. Kim denied the interviewer access to watch the surgery, as all of his work was kept very private. Bells, suspicions aroused,

pulled some favors to view the surgery from the observation room next to the operating room. What she saw was unbelievable—but her photo record shows us concrete evidence.

Dr. Hyun Kim is not a human. His work is no typical surgery, but includes unusual procedures like making small cuts into the brain and—with photo record, we can confirm—he then breathes a blue mist into the incisions. When confronted with evidence of his acts, the investigative reporter claims that the doctor shattered into pieces, which then spun into a tornado and swept through the hospital, presumably out of the building. The patient survived the treatment and it appears their illness was in fact cured.

Dr. Kim is still under investigation, but his only crimes appear to be false representation and operating without a license. Since none of his patients seem to have any issues or recurrences, it remains to be seen what will happen to him beyond fines and potentially a short prison sentence.

Patients of Dr. Kim have spoken out on his behalf, including one of the people

When you **plead with Dr. Kim for help with an extreme medical or health problem**, roll + Savior. On a hit Dr. Kim agrees, and will use his abilities to cure someone who needs help. On a 7-9, Dr. Kim asks for your help in hiding or protecting him before he can help you. On a miss, Dr. Kim is unwilling to help; he fears that his true nature will be exposed to dangerous enemies if he performs the procedure.

treated for bipolar disorder: a retired hero by the name of Polaris. Polaris used her climate-based abilities to support crime-fighting measures in Halcyon City when she was younger and part of a team including the well-known healer Sehkmēt, but as she aged, she found that her illness—which gave her access to her powers—made her more of a risk than an asset. She sought treatment from Dr. Kim after her powers caused an unplanned thunderstorm centralized over an outdoor

concert, where three people were killed by lightning-related injuries. Her words about Dr. Kim were glowing.

“When most people were not aware of Dr. Kim’s abilities, I looked for him specifically to execute this procedure. He is one of the most generous people on the planet, and his treatment has prevented my powers from causing destruction throughout Halcyon City. We have to ask whether saving people is more valuable than pieces of paper.”

Goodbye to HMO’s? What exactly is the Superhero Medical Plan?

By Quinn
Canton

The health insurance head honchos are doubling down on their recent claims that they will not cover follow-up care and prevention measures for conditions healed by superheroes in Halcyon City. While few citizens have been lucky enough to receive treatment for major health conditions such as cancer, asthma, and lupus, health insurance companies are strictly opposed to allowing applicants in their programs to access this preventative care. A spokesman

for HealthLife, Kellan McDearmot, claims, “heroes have eliminated the illness, so continued care is unnecessary. As well, any side effects of the heroes’ work is undetermined, and considered a pre-existing condition.”

“This leaves citizens helpless,” says Bernadette Wilson, who was previously insured by HealthLife before they changed their policy, “since we know so little about the side effects of the heroes’ abilities.

Even the companies that would be willing to accept citizens using metahuman preventative care in their programs are demanding incredibly high copays, that people like me can't afford."

While these kinds of issues may not impact those in the higher income brackets, those relying on self-funded health insurance are cringing. Says one local woman, who recently had her glaucoma healed, "We thought that getting healed would make life easier, because while I was sick, no one would take us into a program without paying more than we have. And now, we can't even get a health insurance company to cover referrals for my eye exams! Without that, what can we do if we have an emergency?"

Many of those healed are having buyer's remorse. Finding their bodies free from sickness does not ease the financial woes facing many people with families to support. There has been a push from many, including the healing heroes themselves, for government legislation supporting the newly-healed citizens. One of the heroes, Soul, is well known for his work in the streets of Halcyon City both before and after he was revealed to be a superhero. He is at the forefront of the march towards better treatment of citizens both ill and healthy, and is particularly concerned with these financial issues.

"I have fought in Halcyon City for people to be treated well, with respect and dignity. Telling someone they're not able to guarantee support for their family because they were given their life back? It isn't right. I want to see action from the people who control the purse-strings in this city to prevent people from being punished because they were among the lucky few to survive the odds."

Ellen Whitmore, a local official, has spoken out against these movements.

"It is not the responsibility of Halcyon City and health insurance companies to take risks for people who involve themselves in superheroic relations. I don't believe that these so-called heroes are the key to being healthy, but if someone takes advantage of super healing, they should know what they're in for. If their 'magical' solutions could fail at any time, making up for that failure is not something to rest on other people's heads."

Leadership of the city and local healthcare companies have kept mum, but community organizers were unafraid to voice their thoughts. Terry Polk said, "When money is in question, everyone comes out of the woodwork to state their case, and most of the time, that case is that money belongs where it is, and some people feel that's not always where it should be."

***WE ACCEPT HEROES WHO CAN PUNCH MONSTERS;
WE FEAR HEROES WHO CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.***

When you **receive any kind of service from HealthLife**, you are in debt to the company; HealthLife and its officers gain Influence over you. If you are indebted to HealthLife, they come to you demanding payment at least once per session. When HealthLife comes to you demanding payment for a service they have performed on you, take a powerful blow and give the company Influence over you. If you have access to excessive wealth, mark a condition to pay the bill outright instead of submitting to their Influence.



Halcyon is full of heroes, villains, time travelers, aliens, mutants, whatever. They're in every nook and cranny. You get teen rebels like Inferna just as much as you get villainous Internet bullies like Roshambo. You get superpowered schools like Titan Academy just as much as you get vigilante healthcare workers like Sekhmet. This one time, I found a robot named Clarion who had shape-shifting powers and could withstand the vacuum of space, and they were working at a grocer's while taking night classes and trying to earn citizenship.

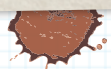
You can never turn the crazy off here. You can't go down the street to pick up some fruit from the market without running into a chase between a guy dressed like a turtle and another guy wearing lighting like a scarf.

When I was younger, I wished that I could just find a normal story here. No supers, no metas, no heroes or villains. Just mundane facts. The regular world. But any time I'd come close, there they'd be again. The strangeness, the anomalies.

And now? Honestly?

That younger version of me would punch me for saying so, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

We're supposed to be able to make facts shine like diamonds and find the extraordinary in the mundane. But here, in this city? You have the privilege of finding the mundane in the extraordinary. You find the woman who uses her



powers to fix cars and the alien who spends his time working as an accountant, and then you just sit there in wonder at the path that led them here.

You look at a figure like Intake, and you wonder not “What crazy accident gave them their powers?” but “Why do they do the things that they do? Who were they? Who *are* they?” And you go and get answers, because that’s where the real truth is.

You find a cloud of nanites going around healing people, pretending to be just a regular doctor, and you wonder whether it’s doing something sinister or if it just wanted to be treated like a person. And you think about how next time, maybe, it deserves more sympathy than suspicion.

You explore the history of a hero who decided the best way to help was to teach, and how all that good will was brought down not by an extradimensional monstrosity or some grandiose mastermind, but by the hubris of youth.

You find villains with fickle, simple, all-too-human motivations, and you see how all it might take is trust and forgiveness to turn them away from their sins.

You never stop looking at the extraordinary. You never stop exploring those secrets, those crazy phenomena.

But you see the mundane beneath it, too, and that makes all the difference.

Keandra Hunt

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CHAMELEON

BY MIS JAIYANA

Walking into the crumbling foyer of the Chameleon's lair, my heart is racing a mile a minute. It's the moment in my career where journalistic and human integrity blur. I've chronicled this villain's life from its murderous beginnings. All journalists have the one case that spoke to them, that told them, "You need to write about this." My case is tinged in tragedy and hung from the rafters of a destroyed building that I promised myself I would never enter. Yet here I am, ready to have a meeting with the arch nemesis I'd believed I was invisible to.

Through the years she's been called many things. The villain that cannot be caught. The face changer. The Chameleon.

As everyone knows, her lair is on the outskirts of Halcyon City in the 5th Street slums. The Chameleon leaves messages to her followers in this hollowed out high-rise building. Her first message was found sprawled on the face of the building with two black eyes spray-painted above it, "I am home." Under the message hung the body of Manic Botanic, a Silver Generation super beloved by many, this reporter included. He was strung up by the very vines he used to save the city on a daily basis. Over the days that followed Manic Botanic's death, rain blanketed the city of Halcyon. The skies, and the people, crying for the loss of one of the greats.

PLAYING WITH FIRE

What type of maniac taunts the police by revealing their lair? The kind that believes she will never be caught. The kind with no past. In the days that followed, letters were sent to the police, "I am the Chameleon. No super is safe." I, like many of our citizenry, believed that the Chameleon would be caught—that her reign of terror would soon be over—but to this day she has eluded all attempts to catch her.

Armed with this knowledge, my stomach sinks deeper into my feet as I call out to the empty room. A pigeon stirs, beating its wings and flying out of the broken window it was resting on, rudely awoken by my call into the darkness. There is much to see in the Chameleon's lair.

The walls are covered in messages and names.

Beth. I am home. Runner Ultra. Get them!

Words that are seemingly meaningless, but hold malice within them. Go to the Chameleon's lair, write a name on the wall, and if you are lucky she will hunt down the person who has

wronged you. If the Chameleon doesn't, one of her "Hatchlings" might. The Hatchlings—a personality cult dedicated to a woman who has never graced them with her presence, a mob garbed in black with green expressionless balaclavas.

The Hatchlings believe that the Chameleon is some sort of savior. Every super's death, they attribute to her. And they say she will bring about "the great equaling"—the death of all supers. Dismissed by many as madmen, the Hatchlings were paid little mind until their mob attack on Paper Girl.

The Hatchlings, though beaten back in the end, left Paper Girl scarred. Many people still expect to see a flurry of black and white tickertape as she zooms by, and are instead met by crimson petals.

THE CHAMELEON REVEALED

Thinking of the Hatchlings and wondering if any are lurking within the abandoned building sends a deep shiver through my bones. Before I can truly acknowledge this fear, delve into thoughts of the unknown, a tapping sound comes from a broken-down escalator to my left. I see a dark silhouette outlined by what daylight manages to creep through the boarded-up windows.

"Hello."

The word hangs in the air, floating through the dust particles from years of neglect and illuminated by light peeping through the windows. The woman who stands before me is everything I imagined. She's dressed in an impeccable black pinstripe suit, her tailored trousers just barely skirting the floor. The points of red patent leather boots peak from underneath her pant legs. She has dark mocha skin and a shaved head. Her green eyes pierce through the darkness and I can feel them follow my every move.

Her voice sounds like dark brewed coffee and jazz. Coming to my senses, I focus on it, stumbling out of my fear and concentrating on the task at hand. I introduce myself as she walks down the escalator. She assumes I know who she is. The air of arrogance surrounding her intensifies as she draws near. Smiling, she hisses out the words we eventually hear from all villains, "I've been expecting you."

I take out my tape recorder and begin my interview.

THOUGHT MIS WAS CRAZY
TO TAKE THIS INTERVIEW.
STILL KIND OF DO.

THE INTERVIEW

Mis Jaiyana (MJ): My name is Mis Jaiyana and I am reporting for the *Kingfisher* and the *Halcyon City Herald*. Today I have an unexpected guest, the Chameleon. Let's start with an easy question. Chameleon, you have remained hidden for so many years. Why reveal yourself now?

Chameleon (C): Am I revealing myself?

MJ: Since your debut ten years ago, aside from the messages you leave after your murders, you've had no contact with the press and the police. One-sided letters are hardly a dialogue. An interview requires that you give something of yourself, at least to a small extent. So my question is still unanswered.

C: You have me there, a brave retort. Very well. I have a message I'd like to deliver to the people of Halcyon.

MJ: Which is?

C: All in good time. I'd like to be interviewed first.

MJ: All right, can you tell us a bit about yourself? Who is the woman behind the many faces, the masks? Where did you grow up?

C: I grew up here, in the slums. I lived a good life and my mother raised me well. There is no tragic childhood that led me to where I am today. That is what you were angling at, isn't it?

MJ: I'm asking questions I would pose to any person in an interview. But since you bring it up, what caused you to take up the life of villainy? Not everyone decides to become a murderer. I've spoken to Lt. Jane Sharpton of Halcyon PD, the lead detective assigned to your case, and she told me she believes Manic Botanic was not your first kill. What do you have to say to this?

C: My first kill. No, she is right. Manic Botanic was not the first victim.

MJ: Would you care to share who *was*?

FRIEND OR FOE?

C: Have you ever heard of Builder Cosmos? I don't suppose you have. She was the first victim. If you can call her that. Like every super she had her vices.

MJ: Vices? The heroes of this city save people and the world on a daily basis. I think they're allowed flaws.

C: You know how I hunt, Mis Jaiyana, it's how I got my name after all. I spend years with my victims. I insert myself into their lives, become their friend, their confidant, and only when I know someone is truly guilty do I strike.

MJ: I doubt you can ever *truly* know someone if they do not know you. You're telling me you've never been caught by a super, not even once?

C: No, because I don't come to them as the Chameleon. I am Suzy serving them their morning coffee, I am Bob the friendly neighbor down the hall. I am the janitor in their building. Each time I change my face, I am the person they least expect. Unless they are paranoid, but we can't all be Counter Cool—can we?

MJ: No, we can't. But for this amount of "perfection," you'd need more powers than just shape changing. Could you tell us about the other powers you possess?

C: I'm no more special than anyone else.

MJ: You mean you have no powers at all—that this is what you really look like?

C: Is that upsetting for some reason?



The Chameleon herself.

MJ: The Chameleon persona is based around the idea that you can shape change. That you possess powers similar to the supers you murder. If you're telling me this isn't true, this is you, and there is nothing more, it just doesn't make sense.

C: You don't believe that a normal human has the ability to defeat a super?

MJ: No, in fact, I don't. Unless you have plenty of money, but you told me you grew up poor. Let's say I do believe you and you have no special powers. There is only one feasible explanation for the access you have. I'm the one who should be asking the questions, so my next one is, how did you come into your money?

C: Fair enough, I got my money from Builder Cosmos.

MJ: This super, who no one has ever heard of, was also insanely wealthy?

C: I would not describe my position as insanely wealthy, but I was and am well off. She gave me the money I have today and I have spent it wisely.

MJ: By gave, you mean you took it after you killed her?

C: No, I mean she gave it to me. I was Cosmos's best friend and she mine. We spent years together travelling the world, seeing the beauty it has to offer. Cosmos was terrified of impacting the world, corrupting it with her money, so everywhere we travelled we also worked. We harvested fruits in Israel, were waitresses on a beach in Thailand, and even beggars in Hong Kong. I never saw a cent of her money until the accident.

When you **try to publicly atone for your mistakes**, roll + Savior. On a hit, you get a chance for redemption; the GM will tell you what the public demands from you to forgive you. On a 10+, take +1 ongoing to pursue redemption. On a miss, admitting your mistakes damns you further in their eyes...and the eyes of Halcyon's vigilantes. Prepare yourself.

MJ: And this accident gave her powers?

C: No, the accident killed her.

MJ: I'm confused. Are you calling yourself an accident? You said Cosmos was your first victim.

C: I said Cosmos was *the* first victim, yes, and you should sharpen your interview skills, my dear. Builder Cosmos died in an accident, when the building we were sleeping in crumbled around us while Manic Botanic fought Timestop.

MJ: So you blamed Manic Botanic for your friend's death? That's why you killed him? He must not have known anyone was in the building.

C: Why do you think that? Isn't a super's job first and foremost to protect the people of this city, of the world?

MJ: No one is perfect and it isn't your right to play judge, jury, and executioner.

C: Now, I'd like to tell you why I asked you here today.

MJ: You should... Fine, go ahead.

C: Listening is a funny thing. It is something that so few of us do well. Through our talk, despite you being a renowned interviewer, you've done a poor job of it. But you can't be blamed. You listened well enough to hear that I have plenty of money at my disposal, but I did not say I didn't have powers. My powers are not what most assume them to be, however. In fact, I only have two powers, simple and morbid ones at that. The first is the ability to manipulate the appearance, the very fiber, of bodies, once they are dead. The second, I'll keep to myself. What's a world without mysteries?

Being a super is a privilege, not a right. I spend years with my "victims" watching them and getting to know them. I wait and, please believe me, I hope they will not mess up. But eventually every super is corrupted; they kill. Whether it is directly, or indirectly as their actions send a villain on a rampage, human lives are lost. And for what? The ego of small petty heroes.

MJ: That isn't true!

C: When Cosmos died I promised myself I would never become what *they* were. I would never be a killer. And to this day I have kept that promise to myself. All the supers I have supposedly murdered are alive. They are here in Halcyon, my own personal prison. The supers who hurt someone wanted a way out and I offered it to them, as long as they stayed where I could keep an eye on them. My message was simple—live a good, mundane life, and you shall be free.

When you **directly engage a group of the Hatchlings**, roll + Mundane instead of + Danger—they're regular people, but they often have means to neutralize your powers.

MJ: You're saying there are hidden supers in the city, people who've killed others...and they're just living under assumed identities?

C: Indeed. Under my protection, as long as they don't use their powers. Yet the agreement has been broken. Powers were used and an innocent life was snuffed out.

MJ: No—

C: You remember those files you received anonymously, Mis Jaiyana? The ones on Josef Fairchild?

MJ: He—

C: Josef Fairchild is dead. He was a journalism student himself, and he was following leads on one of those supers I had hidden, and now he is dead.

MJ: But—

C: It was not a suicide, it was a super. The ME reports say otherwise, but even a cursory glance at actual information contained therein, at the wounds poor Josef suffered, will tell you they were not self inflicted. That Josef did not kill himself. That it was, instead, the act of metahuman abilities—cuts too perfect, too precise, to fit any other description.

MJ: So maybe it was a villain, someone who—

C: No. I know exactly who it was, and they were once a so-called hero.

MJ: No hero would do this.

C: Are you sure? Can you say that without a shred of reasonable doubt? Here is my message to the people of Halcyon. There are murderers among you. The reporter Mis Jaiyana has the proof. I emailed Josef Fairchild's autopsy reports to her. In her own words, I am not judge, jury, or executioner. This city is. Redemption is not bequeathed from up above; it must be earned. And so for the supers I hid with my powers—those who wished to escape, torn and broken from a life of false heroism—the day of reckoning has arrived.

Find them, stop them, and—my dear, sweet city—bring them to justice.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

To secure this interview with the Chameleon, the *Kingfisher* and the *Halcyon City Herald* agreed to print her interview unedited, in its entirety. The *Herald* and all its affiliates side with the opinion of the HCPD and distance themselves from the claims made by the Chameleon. Upon completion of this piece, Mis Jaiyana regrettably left the *Kingfisher* for personal reasons not related to the article above.

WROTE THIS AT THE BEHEST OF GREATER POWERS. BS.

HIRO'S **HOT** TAKES

Saving Lives Not Numbers

On Monday afternoon, I was riding the monorail back to the office from a delicious lunch at Diamond Delilah's Deli when I casually picked up a copy of the *Herald* that was left behind by my seatmate. I found my way to the Hero Reports section just to get a sense of how things are looking this year.

What I found was almost indecipherable.

Page after page of numbers, in columns with arcane acronyms like wDSAA and CIA-. Even the capsules of featured heroes of the week are filled with more than the familiar three or four numbers you and I grew up looking at.

A look into the glossary explains what each one means, but you'd need at minimum a master's degree in statistics to make any sense of it:

wDSAA – *Damage Saved Above Average* – measures how much collateral damage was suffered in a hero's actions compared to a theoretical baseline or "replacement level hero".

CIA- (pronounced "C.I.A. minus") represents the average number of citizens imperiled per incident, with environmental adjustments, scaled to the citywide average such that 100 is average and lower numbers are better.

What in the name of Polygon Pete is this nonsense?

Thinking maybe this is all just a little too much for my old brain to understand, I called up my friend Janelle Goodman over at the hero reports bureau to ask for some explanation. "Look at The Golden Shield," I said. "He has zero civilian deaths in his district this year, yet still has a worse CIA- than Wyldflame, who has lost a number of victims on her watch every month."

"Well," she explained, "it's all about adjusting for context. CIA- measures how she has done versus what is expected. Wyldflame works in a much more dangerous neighborhood. Meanwhile, The Golden Shield has allowed a number of citizens to be put in very dangerous situations."



By Hiro Reckard

She then started talking about three-year weighted averages, regression to the mean, and other nonsense, but five or six minutes into that I admit I began to zone out.

Look, I understand that looking at raw numbers won't tell the whole story. But what we need is a return to good old-fashioned reporting, not more complicated numbers.

At the end of the day, when a hero gets home, brushes the rubble off their boots, and hangs up their uniform, there's only one stat that matters: SALT, or "Saved a Life Today." See, I can make up acronyms too, except mine is something you can actually pronounce and remember.

If they fought off villains, saved the day, and made the world a better place, then they did their job. We don't need any fancy calculus to see that.

**I HAVE NEVER KNOWN IF HIRO IS A FOOL, A GENIUS,
OR A SECRET SUPERVILLAIN PLAYING A DEEPER GAME.
ANY ANSWER WOULD SCARE ME.**

The Shadow of Halcyon

By Eric Chau

The superhero Luminary, a younger superhero and former sidekick of the famous superhero Dee Lux of the Exemplars, ended a recent spate of disappearances throughout the city with a battle against a heretofore unknown mirror universe of Halcyon known as Tempest.

For the past five months, several citizens from throughout the city had gone missing without any warning or reason. Investigations into these disappearances were consistently stymied by the absence of any kind of evidence, and most cases were left unsolved.

This all changed after Molly Crown observed her mother's disappearance. Molly, 15, described what she saw in the initial police report: "She was at her desk, working, and I saw a shape crawl across the wall behind her. The shape was dark, and it took me a second to realize it was her shadow. It crawled up onto the ceiling, and I screamed to her to try to get her to

move, but it dropped on her from above. For a second, the whole room was filled with shadow, and then it was all gone... Mom too."

HCPD referred the case to A.E.G.I.S. after the signs pointed to paranormal umbral incursion—not an unknown in Halcyon City, but certainly a relative rarity. The A.E.G.I.S. investigation and records are sealed.

The public break in the case came when Luminary, clad in her brilliantly glowing white costume emblazoned with an orange flame, investigated the disappearances and the shadows and successfully dove into one of those shadows when it was consuming another citizen, one Mr. Alan Everett.

"I rode the shadow into another world," Luminary told the *Herald*. "It was crazy! A dark inversion of Halcyon, with barely any light at all. The people there were all made of darkness, and I watched them drag Mr. Everett off. I blasted them, and they just

To attempt to crossover into the shadow dimension of Tempest, you will need:

- Enough power to punch through
- A means of piercing dimensions (interdimensional drill, portal powers, etc.)
- A piece of living shadow to follow

When you **assemble the pieces you need and try to cross over**, roll + Freak. On a 10+, you cross over without issue. On a 7-9, you cross over, but the portal allows light into Tempest—you ravage their city and immediately attract attention. On a miss, you cross over, but the portal remains open and unstable. Light and shadow pour through both sides.

melted away beneath my scorch-light, but there were way too many of them!”

Luminary described a massive confrontation against the people of the shadow-Halcyon, before being captured and taken to some sort of holding facility, roughly correlating to Halcyon City’s own Spike prison facility. There, Luminary discovered that all the stolen citizens of Halcyon were being held for crimes against Tempest, the name that the shadow-people gave to their particular mirror of Halcyon.

Luminary broke free from holding and took control of the shadow-people’s crossover technology, leading the other prisoners in an escape from Tempest.

Afterward, the victims provided testimony confirming Luminary’s story. HCPD forces, combined with the efforts of Rook Laboratories and A.E.G.I.S. agents, also corroborated the existence of the shadow world Tempest and officially declared it off-limits to all Halcyon City citizens.

The abductions have ceased, and A.E.G.I.S. reports publicly that they have enacted measures to prevent further crossovers, but many in Halcyon remain wary. “They’re still out there,” says Luminary, “and we still don’t understand why they stole our people in the first place. It’s only a matter of time before they think we’ve committed another crime.”

Dupes & Reboots

The Halcyon Chronicle

Post-Catastrophe Survival Guide

by Barb Jurgens [Draft submitted to Debra Moulton, Lifestyle Editor]

Editor’s Note: *I comprehend that this article might upset some readers after that cosmic reality shift. It’s tough remembering everything that has happened and how deeply upsetting it was for everyone losing Barbara Jurgens the way we did. But we in the Halcyon Chronicle believe in giving the truth to our readers. The truth is the following: citizens’ lives do not get easier each time things change, even disregarding the change in scenery or history. When the universe shifts, the past is rewritten or changed, new universes impress upon our own. It can affect our world, and we need to be prepared for that.*

So another multiversal crisis has come to an end. The skies are no longer a shade of purple and filled with bat-winged wraiths. We mourn our heroes who made the biggest sacrifice in the fight above our city. The rebuilding process has begun and our lives are seemingly getting back to normal. However, there are some tips you should keep in mind to make the transition a little bit easier. Take it from a Halcyon City lifer—these could make your day-to-day life in the coming months just that much easier.

- Make sure you give yourself some extra time at the airport and the DMV. You may think everything has been wrapped up with the defeat of Golgotha from the Dark Star Universe. However, there is always the chance one of your “dupes,” or doubles from another Earth, transferred over to ours. It’s always a good idea to keep an extra eye on your credit card statements and local police blotters. Cross your fingers and hope if your dupe is wandering around the city it’s one of those funny cartoon fellows from Earth Pi and not one of the hyper violent wackos from Earth Xi. Cross-universe identity theft is a serious matter, folks.
- Fretting because your kids brought home history assignments from Gardner Fox High that reference the battle of Mecha Lincoln and the Confederate Kaiju? Don’t worry, you didn’t sleep through a class back in high school. Dr. Conway Claremont of the Department of Temporal Affairs assures us this is a common occurrence after a rift. “Many times innocuous objects pass over the multiversal membrane without much notice until months after the battle. We always notice the dupes first, but it’s good to keep an eye out for the little things.” So don’t start a letter writing campaign, just contact the school board and they’ll help you sort things out.
- Don’t trust that weather report in the morning. One thing you learn from living in Halcyon City is that drastic and unseasonal changes to the weather are commonplace in the weeks following catastrophes. Meteorologists explain that even elements of weather can bleed through from other realities. It’s hard for anyone around at the time to forget the “Mini Ice Age of 1981” when the city was briefly blanketed in a thick covering of snow. Woolly mammoths caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage, and it took the help of Amazona, Huntress of the Lost Valley, to corral those suckers. So my advice is to bring an umbrella, heavy winter coat, some sunscreen, and a sturdy harpoon to work until we get the all clear.
- If a lost friend or family that passed away years ago calls, don’t worry. They are most likely dupes. Often, these end up as ways for the dupes to scam money or aid from parallel reality loved ones by exploiting their emotions. Don’t fall for it! Authorities have advised people to contact the Department of Temporal Affairs’ Identity Theft department if you directly encounter the dupe of a deceased loved one. Protocols are in place so that dupes of the deceased can be processed and they have been advised to NOT make contact with parallel family on our Earth. We all remember the incident involving Arthur Thomas being coerced by a dupe of his late wife into setting off a bomb in Exemplar Tower. Mr. Thomas’ life was ruined by a dupe who sought to exploit his emotions. Although, many people don’t take

When you **meet with a dupe of yourself for the first time**, take a powerful blow. When piercing the mask of your dupe, take +1 ongoing. On a miss, they reveal a terrible secret about their own past and what made them who they are.

into account that dupes are often confused and struggling to comprehend the new worlds they have ended up in... Look at me getting all serious. Keep focus, Barb. Ha!

- For those of you on the flipside, dealing with loved ones who vanished during the catastrophe you need to go to one of the centers for the Department of Temporal Affairs for help. The Department of Temporal Affairs tells us that statistics show your chances of finding your friend or family member are cosmically impossible, so it's important for you to go through the process of reporting the transfer. Dr. Claremont explains, "Do not let your emotions for that loved one keep you from your duty of reporting the displacement. Authorities need to ensure that if their dupe has crossed over they can't steal identities and avoid registration. The government has set aside funds to provide financial compensation to families who have lost their loved ones. I know it won't replace them, but we do want to help with any difficulties that can come up as a result of catastrophes."
- Parking everywhere is becoming a hassle. Please know it's getting a little crowded at the Swan Heights Mall with all those young people in black robes inviting shoppers to their church services. Reports have come in from all neighborhoods that small cells of the Gospel of Golgotha have emerged. But don't start stocking up ammo for a repeat of what went down last month. Authorities say the covens have gone out of their way to emphasize their pacifistic nature by running food drives and offering a free bus services to locals. Silas Simonson, a representative of the Gospel, told us, "Lord Golgotha, may the eternal ice fires of Chthon preserve him, was not a violent god despite the misinterpretations of his word. He simply believed that the true nature of all reality was a black lifeless void absent of light and life. He didn't want to kill anyone." Breathe a little easier and know that if Junior joins up it's probably just a phase. Just try to be understanding! We were all once young and obsessed with our own little missions.

To Keandra Hunt, Herald Editor in Chief:

I don't know if Barb went off her meds or what, but I am really worried about her after reading the draft for this week's piece. I think we should at least contact HR. I am even thinking of calling in a favor from Professor Caras over at Voyagers, Inc. Remember that piece we did on 'Dupe Dementia' from March. Whatever we decide, we need to do it fast. I always sort of knew there was something off about her.

Debra Moulton, Lifestyle Editor of the Chronicle.

MORE AND MORE TIMELINES, MORE AND MORE DUPLICATES, MORE AND MORE ALTERNATE WORLDS. PARANOIA GROWS AS SURETY IN THE TIMELINE'S EVENTS DIMINISHES. WHAT IS DOING THIS?



A citizen of Halcyon City meets her own duplicate.

- Remember to keep a journal or a planner on you! It can be a headache of superheroic proportions to keep up with who of our many heroes and villains are still dead, who died during the catastrophe, and who has been resurrected. It's important to try to keep aware of them for safety's sake, because some have come back with villainous plans. Don't let Grandma cross the street with just any person in a cape! In the coming weeks, the *Chronicle* will have a more comprehensive guide to who's who, but in the meantime I can help those migraines subside. If you find yourself reading about a costumed crusader or masked menace you thought hadn't been around since you were a child, just embrace the nostalgia. In the last few days, I've been delighted to find that Granddaddy Longlegs, the Beatnik Black Widower from my youth, popped back up. Yes, he's just a dupe from Earth Beta, but he has that same groovy style I remember from my childhood. While he doesn't have Swaggy Sunburst and the Plutonian Locust to tussle with any longer, his battles with our chic modern day villains make for some great water cooler conversation. Heck, dust off that old Longlegs lunchbox and bring it in as a great conversation piece.

Editor's Note: *I know that Granddaddy Longlegs wasn't well regarded in our timeline but our investigations indicate that he was a hero in her Earth. This should be noted for us to show tolerance for others who come from other dimensions.*

- Has your home or work place disappeared? Replaced by some alternate building or alien structure? In the Platinum District, a towering business complex bearing the name Crandall Technologies has popped up. The

When you **push yourself to remember a reality that no longer exists**, mark a condition and roll + Freak. On a hit, you remember someone or something crucially important that no longer exists; the GM will tell you exactly who or what you remember. On a 10+, you can ask two follow-up questions; on a 7-9, you can ask one. On a miss, you become aware that your own existence is in jeopardy; it's only a matter of time before reality realigns and you are erased.

monolith takes up the space where a few blocks of small boutiques once stood. To deal with these problems, the Department of Temporal Affairs has teamed up with the Departments of Commerce and Housing to relocate citizens to temporary homes or set up their businesses in temporary storefronts. The process isn't speedy though, so please be patient and bring a book! When you add the chance of cross-universe identity theft, sorting out who actually does own/rent a home or business can be real headache for those hardworking desk jockeys in the Department. Keep in mind that "Please" and "Thank you" can be as good as gold in getting your paperwork processed a tad faster.

- Speaking of Crandall Technologies, Halcyon City PD has let us know some unidentified pieces of technology were stolen from the mysterious building over the last couple weeks! Scandalous and interesting! As you have probably seen on the news, local gangs are touting frighteningly powerful weaponry and making that morning drive time more excruciating than usual. The police ask that if you find any tech or see anyone using tech that looks a bit out of the ordinary to contact them. Now, if you're like me and can't seem to figure out how to even use your qPhone, all technology might look strange to you. The police advise that if the technology has metallic tentacles and seeks to bond to the user's mind, then it probably shouldn't be out there amongst the general populace. Don't let little Timmy play with anything that starts droning the national anthem of another realm entirely, please.
- But no one ever talks about the dupes. We talk about how the natives to Earth should deal with the "intrusion" of dupes. I've never seen an article dealing with the years, the decades, of mental health treatment dupes need to deal with the trauma of crossing over. We never see photos of the camps where dupes...no, people, their fingers threaded through the chainlink, some not even speaking this world's version of English. Orders barked at them, pushed through concrete channels like cattle. Even little kids, little girls. Their parents incinerated in front of their eyes by invaders from Saturn, being cared for over the next few years by the human survivors of their world, only to be snatched away by the cruel hand of the multiverse to a world that is not their own. Little girls who are terrified into being "good" and listening. Little girls who grow up to be women who after they have worked alongside this Earth's natives for 15 years, still getting strange looks when news of a dupe-led terrorist attack comes across the wire. Women

who, when they finally meet someone they have a connection with, find themselves alone again when that special someone catches a glimpse of that “DP” stamp on their driver’s license. Maybe they learn assimilation isn’t something that will ever happen. For all the praise someone like Exemplar or Ms. Astounding gets on this Earth, you remember them on your Earth colluding with the alien invaders that killed your parents. And you start to think that maybe you ended up on this Earth for a reason and that the people around you don’t deserve all the beauty they take for granted.

Editor’s Note: *Our hearts and thoughts go to Barbara’s family who did not have the heroic version of Ms. Astounding we did.*

THE NEW TROOPER ALPHA

By Carol Dworkin

We’ve got a new hero suiting up in the blue and gold, ladies and gentlemen! Will she be up to the task of upholding the Trooper Alpha legacy? Let’s talk about it!

We all know the story of the first Trooper Alpha. Tony Blanchard volunteered for the Armed Services, got sent over to the Special Research and Strategy program, and one experiment with “advanced biology augmentation” later, voila! Our own home grown turbo trooper, the only one those experiments worked on (of course).

Even for all the augs they put into Tony, he couldn’t beat time itself, and eventually he was too old to keep soldiering on. So the SRS, now folded into the young A.E.G.I.S., repeated its experiments with new technologies and techniques. This time, they had success improving a young man named Anton Benjamin, and created a new Trooper Alpha for a new era.



Alima Greer prepares to meet the public as Trooper Alpha.

When you **dig into an existing hero's past through documents and records**, roll + Superior. On a hit, you find revealing information. Choose and ask one. On a 10+, you may ask a follow-up question.

- What crime did they commit?
- What embarrassing secret did they hide?
- How did they blunder early in their career?

On a miss, your investigations tip off someone who'd rather you stopped looking...and they make sure you know that in no uncertain terms.

Anton, too, grew older and eventually wanted to retire, but by this point, the procedure was well-honed and well-publicized. A.E.G.I.S. picked the top soldiers from the Armed Forces, ran them through rigorous testing, and ultimately settled on Luis Fernando, creating the most powerful Trooper Alpha yet.

Sadly, we lost Luis during a major battle against the alien Seviri invaders just a year ago, and while we mourn his loss, we're excited to welcome a new Trooper Alpha to Halcyon City—the first woman Trooper Alpha ever!

Alima Greer is her name—Major Alima Greer, of the Marines, to be exact. Well-decorated, she's served her country nobly for 7 years. She's gone on countless missions, all of them successes, and saved many lives with her heroic actions. She's a shining beacon of everything Trooper Alpha is supposed to be.

Or at least, so she looks on paper. But our investigators have dug up some reports that complicate Alima Greer's story. Seems that she was quite the juvenile delinquent as a young woman—a couple of assaults, a couple of thefts, some vandalism. All from

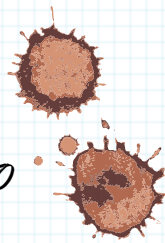
before she was old enough to be tried as an adult.

No question, you ask anyone surrounding Alima today, and she's beyond qualified. You can find hundreds of quotes about how great she is on any news website. But that's the marketing machine at work.

We've got to really wonder—is she going to be a Trooper Alpha who lives up to the legacy of Tony, Anton, and Luis? Is she going to wear that uniform with the same nobility, honor, and strength of spirit?

Guess we'll have to keep our eyes on her to find out!

*PRIVATELY, CAROL CLAIMS COUNCILMAN
BERNARD PRUITT PUT PRESSURE ON HER TO
WRITE THIS. PRUITT'S SON WAS UP FOR
CONSIDERATION AS TROOPER ALPHA, TOO.
OBVIOUS GRUDGE. NOT SURE GREER IS SUITED TO
PRUITT'S STYLE OF FIGHTING—WORDS, LEGAL
ACTIONS, BLACKMAIL.*



WHO'S SAVING WHOM?

An Op-Ed on Azure Ace

By Raina Torres

Azure Ace, the highflying Evel Knievel, celebrated his birthday yesterday. Many were shocked to learn that, at the ripe old age of 75, he gave a statement revealing he would *not* be retiring this year. Instead, Azure Ace is more committed than ever to hitting the streets of Halcyon City in search of crime.

Five years ago, my grandmother retired from *Tough Tile*, the business she nurtured and built from the ground up. Her retirement party was a royal send off honoring her 40 years of dedication and service. There was pie, music, and friends, and although she loved what she had built, she knew she was doing the right thing, passing on her business to the next generation. Everyone shared in something special, a passing of the torch if you will, to keep the business going. She had built something exceptional—it took a lot of blood, sweat, and tears to make it happen—but now, as reluctant as she was to officially move on to the new things in her life, everyone was thrilled to see her finally taking some much deserved time for herself.

Yesterday, I covered Azure Ace's press conference in another article titled "Azure's Birthday Surprise." My nana reads every article I write, so I called to see what she thought. I had expected she would be thrilled to hear about a hero of hers, but instead, we had a long conversation about the



Azure Ace, then and now.

doubts she had herself about retiring. Azure Ace, 5 years my nana's senior, had more than declined retiring; he called it "giving up," revealing something she had struggled with for years. When she read my article, she doubted her own decision to retire. We spent a long time talking her retirement, happy as she was to spend more time with family and friends, and about

how she felt like she had "quit" rather than retired. After all, Azure Ace was still out there on the streets; why wasn't she still working?

And yet, if there is anything my amazing nana has taught me through her actions, it's that retiring is not giving up. She volunteers at the Botanic Gardens, organizes book clubs, and spends

When you **try to look up a retired superhero or supervillain for advice or aid**, name them and roll + Superior. On a hit, you find their information in public or accessible records. On a 10+, they're in a good place and happy to help. On a 7-9, they're facing some problem of their own in their post-retirement life, and they ask for your help in dealing with it. On a miss, you either find no record of them (a very suspicious state), or they are still active in a dangerous way, GM's choice.

**"I'm passionate about helping this city and I still fight for it every day." - Red Bombshell
(on Azure Ace retiring)**

every Sunday teaching my cousins new recipes. She is my hero now more than ever, and she's not alone. Red Bombshell (65), retired and capeless, has been serving this city by investing in new soup kitchens and homeless shelters. Tony Titanic (56) retired and entered politics, trying to get more funding for environmental friendly energy.

But not Azure Ace. Despite being in the same position, Azure Ace remains an active mask in the city. The high-flying hero should retire and find a new way to contribute to Halcyon City's many needs in a new, more practical way. We don't need him to fly around stopping crime.

We all remember the days when Azure Ace's picture was on our walls and we all felt safer just knowing there was someone special out there, looking after our city—and with such style to boot! I remember jumping off the playground swing set, arms crossed, mimicking the infamous Azure Ace Rocket Jump. Back then, kids were allowed to scrape up their knees a bit on the playground.

But that was 35 years ago, and times have changed. Just

as I have outgrown jumping off of playground swing sets, Azure Ace has outgrown his infamous Rocket Jump. It is time for him to put away his spandex pants, scarf, and iconic blue boots. Azure Ace needs to retire, and leave the heavy lifting to someone who is more capable.

Madam Evil, the most memorable of Azure Ace's nemeses and a paroled ex-prisoner of the Spike, gave an interview on the subject, during which she informed me that she now goes by "Madam E." She also said that her time haunting the streets of Halcyon City was over.

"I don't know who Azure Ace thinks will be waiting for him out on the streets, but it certainly won't be me," she said. Being a bit wary of how reformed the Madam could really be, I declined her offer of tea, but she took a long sip and stared at me with those deep dark eyes.

"I am too old to go running around in the sewers plotting

my revenge. Sure,"—Madam E added, setting down the cup with a steady hand—"the time I served at the Spike shaped how I see my place in this city, but even if I was full of just as much venom as I was in my younger days, I couldn't imagine *physically* taking on these young *super-kids*. The city's streets have changed in 35 years, and so should her antagonists..." Since the interview, I received word that Madam E has applied for a legitimate business license in the city, for a consulting firm.

Last week, Azure Ace was caught on camera making a crash landing into Mr. LaBeau's Bakery shop. He caused \$15,000 worth of damages to the mom & pop storefront and his insurance won't cover the damages.

Thankfully, members of that neighborhood have banded together to help keep the family of bakers in business with a fundraiser to help pay for damages and the fine people at Wilsons' Windows have donated the labor and materials to put up a new window. The fundraiser at the Halcyon Farmers' Market this Saturday will help the

"I won't be waiting on the streets for Azure Ace. Stop playing with children and learn to adapt." - Madam E

When you **receive the public support of a legendary figure** (like Azure Ace), take Influence over the public of the city. If you already have Influence over the public of the city, mark potential.

LaBeaus to cover the costs of being closed for almost a week.

While these kind folks have helped out their own, Halcyon City does not operate on charity and damages like this go unanswered every day. It's bad enough when villains or criminals cause damages—it is unacceptable when a "hero" does the same. We need a hero who is quick and responsive to the needs of our citizens, not someone causing more distress for them.

And just last night, Azure Ace visited the hospital with a fractured hip, according to anonymous sources in Saint Dominic's Hospital. He refuses to comment on how he sustained the injury, but this would be his second hip replacement in as many years.

How long can we expect him to keep this up? How can we ask a 75 year old hero with health problems to stop Top Quark's Atomic Punch—the same one that leveled the Steel District courthouse—or Vex's Quantum Disruptor—the same one that put the Halcyon Natural History Museum into a state of temporal flux last year? We can't expect Azure Ace to stand against the city's street criminals, let alone its super villains. He's just too fragile.

"Mark my words, I'll be back with enough power to ionize all of downtown!" - Top Quark (at the courthouse incident)

But isn't Azure Ace a part of Halcyon City's great and proud history? Shouldn't we honor him for that?

Yes! In his youth, Azure Ace single handedly disarmed a nuclear missile in midair. His very distinguished military service record was turned into a popular television series *Azure's Angels*, and every June 12th the South Halcyon City Community Association (SHCCA) has a block party to celebrate the day he saved their neighborhood from being flooded by toxic sludge.

We should never forget Azure Ace and his amazing deeds or feats of heroism that awarded him a key to the city and a key to our hearts. But that should not blind us to the damages he causes today or dangers he poses to himself and others. Azure Ace needs to take responsibility for his limitations and who he is now.

We pinned up posters and went to the movies to honor the heroic exploits of Azure Ace, but that was 35 years ago. Our childhood posters

are taken down; our movies are now on demand; and like the rest of us, Azure Ace has gotten older.

Our hard earned taxpayer dollars shouldn't be spent repairing the damages done by and to this man. Even his nemesis, Madam Evil, has changed her name and left the streets. All Azure Ace is doing now is hurting his legacy by getting in the way of other heroes who are trying to keep us safe.

How ought we honor our childhood hero on his 75th birthday? Would you ask your own father or grandfather to go out on the streets at night to fight crime? No. My grandmother should be proud of what she did and excited about what she can do now that she is retired. We have a responsibility to our elders here in Halcyon City, and that means getting Azure Ace off the streets for his safety and the safety of everyone.

Sign the petition demanding Azure Ace's retirement. Honor his legacy by saving him from himself.

Any city's got history, like catacombs or old buildings. Our city, though, is built on layer upon layer of paranormal cruft. We've got super-science gadgets and lost relics and old villains with grudges.

You learn to live with it. You cope. There's another version of Halcyon City in some kind of parallel shadow dimension? Yes, yes there is. Could creatures from there come over any time? Sure can. What're you going to do, not go to work tomorrow?

There was another massive realignment of the fabric of reality? Yes, yes there was. Do you want to know if your entire life has been changed? Probably not. Because what's the point? You cope. You live.

The city helps itself as best it can, especially by reiterating the patterns and structures that've helped it in the past. Refurbished versions of old heroes, right alongside brand new supers coming to the fore to handle new problems.

But to live—to survive—in Halcyon City, you learn to accept the kind of beast it is. You accept that you're not going to change it. Not really. Even if you work your way up to the top, even if you become one of the greatest heroes in the city, you can't change it. It's too big. Best you can do is shift it a bit, make things better for those you can help.

You'll never undo the existence of a mirror-shadow dimension just below our own. You'll never reset things perfectly to the way they were before time itself got shattered and rebuilt. Heck, you'll never "fix" the world so you don't live in a place with

doppelgangers and living shadows. Instead, you just roll with those punches, reset your idea of the world and your place in it.

This city's an endlessly growing, changing, and mutating beast. Get too hung up on what it was, you miss what it is right now. Get too hung up on what it is right now, you miss what it could be.

We're nearing time for a whole mess of heroes to retire. Between the Golds and the Silvers coming up, the vast majority of those original heroes are done, and with them our old understanding of our world. Where once we asked, "How do we handle a world where mole men could strike from beneath us at any moment?", now we ask, "How do we handle a world with a huge population of retired superheroes, let alone retired super villains?"

But we'll manage. Trooper Alpha dies or retires, and we get a new one. We develop metrics to improve superheroing, until they become outdated and useless and we find a new way to adapt. The city spits out heroes who go too far, and they get taken down by a subtle and quiet force like the Chameleon, and the world balances itself out. For a while, at least.

The city's got history, but it's also always changing, becoming something new, and taking us along with it. In this gig you can't afford to get hung up on what was lost with the most recent change. You've got to roll with the punches, change with the world, and keep pushing forward. Lest the world rolls you into its dust.

Keandra Hunt

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

THOSE YOU MAY NOT KNOW

BY ARCHER A. DELANO

HALCYON CITY WONDER: MR. KROWLEY

Sitting across from me is Halcyon City's newest occult wonder, Mr. Adison Krowley. He's covered head to toe in black clothes, including a long leather jacket. At his side is a guitar, its body sculpted to resemble a grinning imp's face. *So this is the instrument that he uses to channel arcane and mystical forces*, I think to myself.

I adjust my bow tie and apologize to Mr. Krowley for my lateness to our interview. "No worries, mate. And please, call me Adison." His British accent is fake and affected. If it weren't for the imps he publicly summoned with his guitar to save Halcyon City from a tsunami, I'd wonder about his claims of wielding otherworldly powers.

"So, ah, I suppose the best place to start is at the beginning, right?" He wastes no time diving right into the interview—a promising sign.

"Right," I say with a nod.

Adison launches into his story. He tells me that he was always picked on in school. As a child, when other youngsters chose imaginary friends such as giant cartoon rabbits, Adison instead imagined he communed with ancient gods and beings from mythology. The teasing caused him to delve further and further into books on mythology and the occult. He became a complete recluse, devouring stories of gods, heroes, angels, demons, and magic.

All that changed, though when he entered high school and Adison discovered love, music, and loss. "Her name was Carly," he says, with a troubled look. "She was starting a punk rock band. Lead singer. Fantastic voice. Needed a guitar player to help complete the ensemble. I was in love at first sight, but I didn't know how to play."

"So what did you do?"

Adison laughs and slaps the guitar at his side. "I learned, of course! I couldn't say no to Rudy."

But as Adison learned the guitar, he discovered a strange thing. "I always knew I could tune into myths, and legends—they spoke to me in a way that I could never understand. But once I started understanding music, harmony, vibrations—I dunno. The two interests clicked."

Krowley leans in close to me over his coffee and looks from side to side, making sure no one can hear us. "I saw the shape of the universe, mate. I saw the strings that attach all of us together. I saw the ley lines that give and take power from each of us. I learned how to pluck those strings

When you **open a portal to non-terrestrial dimensions through magic or technology**, roll + Freak. On a hit, the portal opens safely, and you can pass through without difficulty. On a 10+, you can name the particulars of where you've traveled. On a 7-9, you can name the place to which you've traveled; the GM will tell you the rest. On a miss, the portal isn't yours to control; Zoltan hijacks it and begins to disgorge Infernites upon you.

the same way I pluck the strings on my guitar. Learned to play chords with the universe. It was awesome, mate." Still, with the fake accent. But I don't call him out on it. Who knows? He could curse me with twenty-six years of bad luck if he felt like it.

The next two years were amazing for Adison, practicing both guitar and the arcane arts in his parents' garage. He quickly learned how to summon helper imps to do his bidding, control elemental forces, and commune with spirits. Mostly he just created illusions at his band's shows to delight and impress the audience. Krowley looks out the window, a wistful smile plays across his face, and his eyeliner-rimmed eyes glimmer for a second. Then he grows serious.

"All that changed though. Rudy and the band were over one day. We'd just finished a long jam session in the garage and came inside to grab some leftover pizza. As we were sitting around the dining room, suddenly the lights flashed. Black and red energies snaked through the air and burrowed into the refrigerator. I knew then that my studies had gained some unwanted attention.

"I KNEW THEN THAT MY STUDIES HAD GAINED SOME UNWANTED ATTENTION."

"The refrigerator just came to life. It grew red eyes, and its door flapped open and shut like a mouth. Inside, instead of milk, eggs, and veggies, we could see the fire-blasted ruins of an Infernal landscape—a portal on the other side. The refrigerator spoke.

"It said, 'Mr. Krowley! It is I, Zoltan, but that name means nothing to you—yet! I have traveled through time to destroy you when you are at your weakest! After today, you will never live long enough to prevent my conquest of this dimension. Farewell, my old enemy!'"

What Adison described next is horrible: the refrigerator leapt from the wall, possessed by this Zoltan. Rudy and the rest of Krowley's bandmates jumped in fright and scrambled. But they were too slow—the Zoltan-possessed refrigerator tromped about the room, flinging wide open its door-mouth and sucking them into the Infernal Dimension on the other side.

"Zoltan almost got me, too," Krowley says softly, his eyes dropping. "At the last minute I grabbed my guitar and plucked a banishing chord. The refrigerator imploded upon itself and was sucked into the Infernal Dimension on the other side. That was the last I ever saw of my band, and of Rudy."

Mr. Krowley continues. "At that moment I realized Dark Things lurk at the edges of the world. Things that would drive most of you lot mad if you had the merest glimpse into their existence. I might have learned magic, but it wasn't all fun and games. It was up to me to defend



Mr. Krowley and Echidna, two wonders of Halcyon City you may not know.

this world from the Terrors of the Night. To this day, I still venture forth to non-Terrestrial dimensions to see if I can find Rudy and my friends.”

A strange silence hangs between us. Mr. Krowley sips his coffee again and looks at the window. What is a reporter to do? What am I to say upon hearing his tale? Out of respect for his loss and his emotions, I decide to conclude our interview.

I nod seriously and thank Mr. Krowley for his time and candor, fumbling through my pocket for a few dollars to cover his coffee and mine. I stand and leave, wishing the best for Krowley on his search for his missing friends.

HALCYON CITY WONDER: ECHIDNA

Doctor Evelyn Kidd walks next to me through Liberty Park. We quietly pass monuments to the original generation of Halcyon City’s heroes, pausing for a moment of silence by the statues of those who fell to save the world from suffering doomsday at the hands of one of its many scoundrels and villains.

I try to be polite and not mention the squirrels and birds that seem to scatter and hide in the trees as we approach. Doctor Kidd seems unphased—almost used to it by this point. She’s much stronger than I would be if I found myself so transfigured. I have no clue on Earth how I would deal with being a giant porcupine-like creature.

Doctor Kidd—better known to Halcyon City as the superhero Echidna—wears a smile. She stands a full eight feet tall, strong as an ox, a mane of deadly quills falling down her back.

After losing her father to the mysterious illness pathositis, Doctor Evelyn Kidd was motivated at an early age to help cure disease and illnesses in the world. Evelyn quickly distinguished herself as a childhood prodigy, earning her PhD in genetics and molecular biology from Halcyon City University at the tender age of 14. Her breakthrough papers earned her a tenured research and teaching position at HCU by the time she was 16. As part of her tenured position, Dr. Kidd was granted directorship over her own full lab and a group of research assistants.

Evelyn found herself on the verge of a breakthrough—a potential gene therapy that could treat, or possibly even cure, pathositis. Evelyn found that the genome of the echidna, an animal native to Australia, was resistant to the ravages of pathositis. She was in the very early stages of engineering a gene therapy when tragedy struck.

“I’ll never forget it,” she says with a wistful smile. “The Metahuman Liberation Front heard a false rumor that my lab was experimenting on metas. They decided to attack and free prisoners that weren’t even there!”

I lean in. “What happened?”

“There were five of them—Class C metas, none with any code names or anything—but they burst in through the walls demanding that we free their brethren. I told them we had no prisoners, but they wouldn’t believe me.” Echidna shakes her head and sighs at this.

She continues. “The metas began to destroy the lab. Ripping equipment and machinery out of the walls and hurling it about. One of my assistants—he had his back turned as the meta threw a one-ton piece of lab equipment at him.”

I gasp and begin to shake, clutching my paper and pencil. “Did he...” I gulp, and try to figure out how to phrase my next question, “Did he make it?”

Echidna smiles. “Yes. I dove at him and pushed him out of the way. But that’s what led to this.” She holds up her clawed hands and shrugs her shoulders; the quills running down her back bob up and down with her shrug. “The

equipment that the meta threw shattered a containment tube. That tube contained gallons of the experimental gene treatment for pathositis. I was drenched in mutagen that I had created. We were nowhere near being able to test it on any animals—let alone humans.”

“Oh,” I say, unsure of how to keep talking about this delicate topic. “What happened next?”

“Well, the gene therapy immediately set to work rewriting my genetic code. The shock caused me to pass out. When I woke up three days later, I looked up to see my family and closest friends gathered around my bedside, looking down at me.”

At this point, Echidna describes events that you, dear reader, are undoubtedly familiar with. A period when the general populace had no clue whether Echidna was friend or foe, monster or marvel. Echidna takes her smartphone from her utility lab belt, and begins to swipe across the phone’s screen; turns out she saved images of all the papers published during her early adventures.

“THAT TUBE
CONTAINED GALLONS
OF THE EXPERIMENTAL
GENE TREATMENT
FOR PATHOSITIS. I
WAS DRENCHED IN
MUTAGEN THAT I HAD
CREATED.”

HOW DID DELANO NEVER GET CAPTURED, RANSOMED, OR KILLED? HE ALWAYS INSERTS HIMSELF INTO STORIES AS CLOSE AND CONNECTED TO SUPERHEROES. SEEMS AN EASY TARGET FOR VILLAINS. HOW DID HE PROTECT HIMSELF??

She hands the phone to me, and I look at the headlines: “Lo! A Beast is Born!”; “The Monster from Planet X!”; “The Strangest Woman of All Time!”

Echidna grins widely. “The media really didn’t know what to make of me once I arrived on the supers scene. But they knew one thing: sensation would sell.”

“THE MEDIA REALLY DIDN’T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF ME ONCE I ARRIVED ON THE SUPERS SCENE.”

I awkwardly adjust my bow tie. “Weren’t you offended and angered by that?”

Echidna shrugs. “Of course I was. But before he died, my father taught me that there will always be fearful people who mistrust what they don’t understand—people who want to paint you as a bad person.”

“Oh,” I say. “Your father sounds like a very insightful man.”

Echidna nods as we walk along the park trail and pass by a lake. “He was. He always told me that in those situations, the worst thing you can do is react explosively with anger and outrage. If you do that, you provide them with the justification and ammunition to keep characterizing you as a villain.”

At that moment a pair of dog walkers come our way along the park path. Their canine companions sniff the air and turn towards Echidna and myself. I expect them to begin growling and barking. To my surprise, they whimper and bolt away from their owners. The walkers run after their dogs, trying to catch up with them.

Echidna grins, “You know, Archer, I wouldn’t have agreed to this interview without having read your other columns, first. You seem like you have a good head for this stuff—superheroing.”

At this point, I straighten my posture and throw back my shoulders, “Ah! That was very astute of you to notice, Doctor Kidd! I have always thought of myself as a superhero-in-training.” I laugh nervously. “Just waiting for the day when I gain powers of my own.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that.”

I arch my eyebrow. “Oh? What do you mean?”

“Well...things are a bit busy at the lab these days. I’m on the verge of reaching a breakthrough for a proper treatment for pathositis. But that means my patrols around Halcyon City are dropping off. Short story is that I’m in the market for a sidekick.”

I puff out my chest. “A sidekick?! I’d be honored, Doctor Kidd!”

When you **imbibe some of Echidna's gene serum**, you gain the abilities of super strength, super toughness, and quill-throwing. Your Freak immediately shifts to +3; adjust your other Labels as you wish to compensate. At the end of every session, roll + Mundane to find out if the serum wears off. On a hit, the serum leaves your system and you return to normal. On a 7-9, it does so with some difficulty; mark a condition. On a miss, the serum stays in your system and causes further mutation; shift Freak up and Mundane down.

Echidna's smile grows. "Oh, good. I still have some of the original gene treatment serum left. It's degraded over time, so it's half as powerful as my dosage. Still..." She reaches out and gently pokes my ribs with one clawed hand. "It should help you bulk up. But the quills would wreak havoc on your coats and jackets."

I stop. "Oh, you mean..."

She nods enthusiastically. "You could become Echid Boy—the Marsupial Wonder! Just think: suddenly your credibility in the super community would skyrocket. You'd be granted unfettered access for your interviews. Heck—you could interview yourself!"

I stutter and stammer. "Oh, my. Oh, I, um...that's very kind of you, Doctor Kidd. But, I, um... how do I say this...oh dear..."

Echidna looks at me. Her smile is positively angelic. "What is it?"

"I fear that I...well, now that you mention it...I suppose I am more comfortable writing from the sidelines than jumping into the fray."

Echidna's smile continues unabated. "Nonsense. I think you'd make an excellent addition to the community."

I nervously reach up, my eyes darting around from side to side. Oh, dear. Is anyone else seeing me make a fool of myself? "Ah, I, may I have some time to think on it?"

Echidna laughs. "Of course, Mr. Delano. Just please, don't take too long. Justice needs all the recruits it can get...unless, that is, you're too afraid to walk a mile in *my* claws." Echidna laughs again, and leaves me with a wink to let me in on her teasing prank.

REALLY? 'TEASING PRANK'? DOES ECHIDNA REALLY HAVE GENE SERUM LEFT? WAS SHE REALLY MAKING THAT OFFER TO ARCHER? THERE ARE PLENTY OF DARK-TECH FIRMS THAT WOULD KILL FOR ECHIDNA'S GENE SERUM—WAS SHE JUST BAITING A TRAP?

Midnight in Halcyon City

By Patricia Colon

A controversial new superhero known as Midnight has established himself in the Redbrick district of Halcyon City. This individual was identified only as a Middle Eastern man with a thin face and hands whose form remained largely obscured by a swirling, cloak-like mass of shadow.

His actions largely fall within the lines of Halcyon City's standard superhero population, slotting nicely into the category of night-time vigilante. But he has become a controversial figure due to speculation on his origins: that he is actually a native of Halcyon City's mirror-shadow, a dimension known as Tempest.

Tempest, first encountered when Halcyon citizens were being stolen from

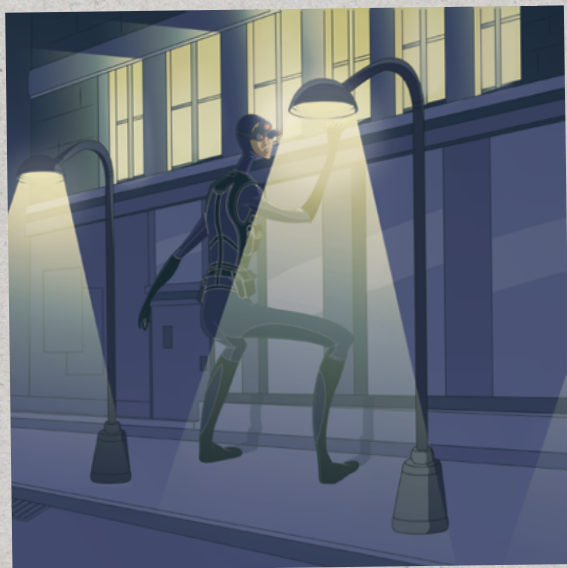
its streets by the shadow dimension for alleged "crimes," has been registered on the public A.E.G.I.S. documentation of alternate dimensions and parallel worlds for some time. But due to those previously hostile interactions, A.E.G.I.S. publicly reported that it set up barriers to any cross-dimensional travel to or from Tempest.

However, Midnight's powers stand in line with the abilities that a native of Tempest would evidence, suggests Doctor Caroline Xi, an expert in transdimensional physics and interactions. "The reports of the shadow dimension were far from scientific, and A.E.G.I.S. locked down any transference before we could study it further," she says. "But based on the hero Luminary's report

and the reports of the victims of those previous abductions, Midnight's abilities to manipulate and pass through shadow do seem to reflect those of the citizens of Tempest.

"There are discrepancies," she continues. "The reported citizens of Tempest were indeterminate shadows, according to those witnesses, while Midnight appears to have actual features. But that could be the result of Midnight's acclimation to our dimension."

Midnight's actions in Halcyon up to the present include rounding up the



Midnight in action.

When you **refuse to speak to the media about a recent caught-on-camera incident**, roll + Mundane. On a 10+, they paint you as a regular person, favorably; clear a condition or mark potential when you read those reports, and expect a request for an interview. On a 7-9, you're largely ignored; shift Mundane up and Danger down. On a miss, the media paints you as a dangerous mystery; shift Danger up and Mundane down, and mark a condition of the GM's choice.

MIDNIGHT SEEMS HARMLESS, BUT IF THEY'RE FROM TEMPEST, THEN THEIR VERY PRESENCE HERE COULD BE DANGEROUS. CROSS-DIMENSIONAL DENIZENS = WEAKENED BOUNDARIES BETWEEN WORLDS. MAYBE MIDNIGHT IS KEEPING THE WALL BETWEEN HALCYON AND TEMPEST WEAK.

members of the Viracuzo criminal organization; defeating the spectral metahuman entity known as Night Terror; preventing the theft of important scientific equipment from the experimental Continuum Research Facility; and numerous additional reported incidents of vigilante activity, including preventing petty thefts, muggings, and other street crimes. In all such cases, only reports of eyewitnesses account for Midnight's involvement, and even then corroboration is difficult. Midnight never leaves evidence, and appears to try to travel in shadow as

much as possible, without ever speaking to citizens or reporters.

Due to Midnight's theorized origins and mysterious manner, many are still skeptical of the shadowy and mysterious hero. "He's a shadow man from another dimension!" says shop owner Aslan Jiveh, who lives in the Redbrick district where Midnight operates. "Of course he would hide his actions and be so secretive. He's clearly planning something, and it's just a matter of time before he acts!"

The HCPD and A.E.G.I.S. have no official statement on Midnight at this time.

WHY NO OFFICIAL STATEMENT FROM A.E.G.I.S.?

WHY NO OPINION, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER?

I DON'T BUY DISINTEREST.



INSIDE THE CHRYSLIS

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE MONARCH

BY BARTHOLOMEW HENDRICKS

The Kingfisher reprinted these excerpts of a journal recovered by one of its reporters, Bartholomew Hendricks, in his investigations of the Chrysalis. As per the contract he signed with the Kingfisher, upon his disappearance his findings were sent to the HCPD, and after review, were released for publication.

A man is lead through the corridors of Mulberry Institution. Any other person would rather be in just about any other place. Any other person would be scared out of their senses to be so close to the darkest heart of the city, the place where Halcyon keeps its most embarrassing secrets and most dangerous criminals. This man though, while scared, is filled more with anticipation than fear.

He finally reaches the cell at the end of the corridor and turns sharply to look inside. The clear window made to look like glass shimmers, temporarily revealing its true nature. The monster inside turns to look at him, the latest in a string of reporters come to wrest the creature's secrets from them. Their eyes darken. The man has been assured that the glass will protect him from anything the monster could possibly do to him. His thoughts dwell on a future Pulitzer and, incomprehensibly, on a summer he spent at a cabin with his family; they spent the summer careening through fields with cheap, flimsy nets, trying to catch butterflies.

A small chamber affords the ability to pass documents and small items (all carefully screened beforehand, of course) from one side of the cell to the other. The small sliding chamber yawns open towards him and the man finds himself moving toward it despite second thoughts trickling down his quivering cheeks.

The glass shimmers across the man's visible spectrum and he is transfixed as the documents slide into the cell. The monster rises. The glass shatters. The man's identity is torn apart, the pieces of it on the floor in front of him. He scrambles to piece together the shards that lie strewn across the uncaring cobblestone. He is found writhing in front of the monster's cell, mumbling incoherently and clawing at the ground, by guards who saw the man inexplicably drop to the floor in front of the cell.

* * *



It all happened the night of June 27th of this year. The man was Victor Wright, one of the greatest reporters the *Halcyon City Herald* has ever seen. The monster was once Steven Monarch, one of the most beloved minds of our fair city.

On my own way down, retracing Victor's footsteps, I had to pass the wing where my mentor and teacher is now housed. I was on my way to meet what we've all taken to calling the Chrysalis, the man who took away my most cherished friend just by looking at him. I know these things because of the notes Victor took the whole way down, and I've been piecing the scribbled notes together ever since.

My name is Bartholomew Hendricks and I, unlike many others, survived my first encounter with the Chrysalis to begin writing in this journal. If you're reading this, though, it means that something has happened to me and the *Herald* or the *Kingfisher* or another affiliate has published what little I had finished on my exposé and, hopefully, choice snippets of my interview transcripts with Steven Monarch as per my final wishes. I am confident that what I have learned will help bring the Chrysalis to justice, bring closure to all those who need it, and provide insight into the molting process. A process I now believe I am in the first stages of.

Bartholomew Hendricks: Tell me about Lifeline.

Steven Monarch: You don't want to talk about your dear mentor? I heard him screaming all through the night, you know. Aren't you worried it might be *you* they're dragging off down this hallway next?

BH: It's part of the job. It's what we do. I can't be out there with the Crimson Crusader, but I can do my part.

SM: I doubt we'll be seeing much of the Crimson Crusader around anymore. If you take my meaning.

[Silence]

SM: Fine, fine. Let's go through the motions and get this over with, shall we? Lifeline was the fountain-of-youth drug my son created. Want those wrinkles gone? Your libido back? Those sacks under your lifeless sheep eyes scrubbed away like they never were? Lifeline did all that and so much more. Not only did it put you back in the prime of your life, but triggered the next step in evolution; it turned those sheep into wolves. It also made my son one of the richest men in the world.

BH: Your son. That would be Christian Monarch. He's the reason you're here now, isn't it? Rumor has it he even designed the cell you're in.

SM: He is. And I wouldn't be surprised. He never did have the willpower to go against the crowd. To do what had to be done. Now look at him. He's nothing. He *has* nothing.

BH: Once he learned what Lifeline was doing to people, he put a stop to it and donated all the money he made from it to figuring out a way to fight the infection. If that didn't make him a hero and earn him a spot with New Exemplars, I don't know what would.

When you **take a dose of Lifeline**, immediately take two advancements and cross off the advancement “Change to another playbook.” You now have a Molt track with five boxes. Whenever you mark potential, fill in one space on your Molt track. Whenever you mark a condition, fill in one space on your Molt track. When your Molt track fills completely, cross off one advancement. If all your advancements are ever taken or crossed off, you become a Molt Man. If you are cured of your affliction, you can take your crossed off advancements again.

SM: Yes well, two sides of the same coin, I suppose, my son and I. Neither of us saw the use in secret codenames. But make no mistake, we both have our secrets. You talk about Lifeline like it's a disease and yet we'd never call something that made us smarter, stronger, and faster a disease. We'd call it a miracle, and we did. Wasn't it you who wrote that column? In any case, you call it a disease because it's hard to watch. Because it makes you uncomfortable and squeamish. All you see is a hardened carapace and the fluids left behind. The so-called Molt Men with thick, hardened skin and eyes that glow with the promise of your species' extinction. You don't feel the sense of purpose it gives you and the connection we all crave; don't understand the feeling of a promise fulfilled when you regain control over your body and realize what it's capable of. You write stories vilifying them because they don't have language when what you don't understand is that language is no longer necessary. It becomes trite. Small.

BH: You don't feel anything about what Lifeline did to people?

SM: Yes, well, Lifeline did...does, work miracles. It changes you, yes, but it changes you into something that is better. Something no longer merely human, yes, but superior. And for that Zeus has burdened me, and his people punish me.

BH: So you see yourself as Prometheus now, and your son, noble hero of the New Exemplars, as your unjust punisher?

SM: Have you found anyone who has gone through their molt that regretted it?

BH: You turned them into animals!

SM: We are all animals, Mr. Hendricks, make no mistake. If you think your species is not, then you are sorely in need of a proper education. I merely strip away the illusion of the stage and remind the actors they need not carry on with their part in the play.

BH: And yet your Molt Men do your bidding. Hardly seems like you've freed them from anything.

SM: You assume too much. To those that require it, I provide purpose. And who among us does not need to belong to something? To be given goals, a family, a common interest. An identity. Imagine never feeling like you don't belong. Imagine not needing to bumble through primitive speech patterns to communicate what you truly want to say. Have you ever wondered why Lifeline doesn't always work? It's a choice, Mr. Hendricks, not an accident. Otherwise



Steven Monarch, aka the Chrysalis.

Halcyon City and the world would be overrun with the Hive. Who didn't take a little Lifeline while it was on the market?

BH: Maybe. But few would say your Molt Men are human anymore.

SM: You would do well to remember that the man who coined that term, Molt Men, is in this very building, desperately clinging to the shreds of what was once called Victor Wright. Even those pieces are there because I graciously left them behind for him to piece together.

And it is true that the Molt Men are not human—but what law prevents one from transcending the limits of petty things like the words and labels we use to organize the world around us and the groups we belong to? Calling them the Molt Men is only more proof of the limitations of these petty categories. We should always be trying to push the limits of what makes us human and Lifeline does that.

The Hive is stronger, faster, smarter, healthier in every aspect than any normal person. They can recover from all but the most serious of wounds and always have a family they are connected to that supports them. Yet because their skin is a different color, is structurally sounder, or they give off a strange smell and have yellow eyes they are so clearly different that they must be monsters.

BH: Yet your son has told us that the very chemical structure of Lifeline itself is not of this world. Lifeline was on the open market for only four months and it's been barely another ten since it was pulled. Who knows what adverse effects it might have on anyone years down the road. Even those that haven't experienced any yet could develop still other conditions. Or the Molt Men could begin to deteriorate even further—



SM: Simply using that term means you haven't been listening. This is a metamorphosis, and it is people who let those questions keep them from pushing limits that hold meaningful science back. That hold mankind back. The Hive flourishes, I assure you. Even in my absence. If alien technology is inherently evil, I suggest you scrutinize some of your very own heroes in Halcyon City—how about Ion, or Atom? If we aren't counting meteorites, then what about Jetstream? They've made their DNA public and, I assure you, they're far from human. The suit that powers my son and that makes him a hero in the eyes of the city derives its power from the very same source as Lifeline and my own powers.

BH: So even in here, locked away, you can feel them? You can connect with them and communicate? You mentioned a power source.

SM: Now that's interesting, isn't it? That my son won't tell anyone what it is, yet I will. The Exocore is an alien artifact Monarch Industries recovered some time ago on a dig in the arctic. I'd even tell you where it is if you asked.

BH: And you'd tell me this why?

SM: Because I helped my son develop Lifeline. Because I was the first to take it. Because its power reverberates inside of me. And I'd tell you because everyone needs a purpose, Mr. Hendricks, and because you'll need to know where it is when I ask you to bring it to me.

BH: I...why would I...

SM: Let's move on, shall we? I'm anxious to do some reading.

BH: All right. This power...your power over other people, it stems from Lifeline?

SM: I am not so limited, as I'm sure you saw with your mentor. I need a connection of some kind in order to exert influence. Lifeline can provide that, but there are other ways.

BH: Such as?

SM: No. No, I don't think I'll be revealing those cards quite yet. That should do it. You can take back the documents your mentor was kind enough to pass on to me now.

[Sound of the metal drawer being opened as the documents are passed through]

BH: One thing I still don't understand. These documents aren't secret, at least the ones that I could get are a matter of public record. You didn't need to strike any sort of deal to get them, so why ask for the plans to Hexagon Tower?

SM: It stands to reason that it wasn't the documents themselves that I was interested in then, doesn't it?

BH: What then?

SM: Goodbye, Mr. Hendricks.

* * *



When you **speak to the Chrysalis**, roll + Superior. On a 7-9, you keep yourself in control. On a 10+, take +1 ongoing to all interactions with him. On a miss, you've been dosed with Lifeline by proximity to him.

After careful review of the of my conversation with the Chrysalis and after going over the tapes of Victor Wright's visit to his cell, I think I have some ideas that could hopefully come in use in the future for anyone else fool enough to get near the monster.

While I know that the Chrysalis feeds on lies and paranoia, and that much of what he said could have been directed untruth, the feeling gnawing at my insides tells me that the New Exemplars, particularly Christian Monarch, may have secrets that could spell ruin for our fair city. It's true that alien life has given us both heroes, some even on the New Exemplars, and villains like the Chrysalis. It therefore stands to reason then that whatever entity or technology has found itself on Earth may be used for both good and evil—but we must seek understanding and certainty concerning this power source at the heart of Monarch Industries' Hexagon Tower.

During our conversation, the Chrysalis said that he needed a connection to exert his influence on others but I still don't know how. According to the findings of Dr. Yerst of Halcyon National University, the Molt Men exhibit insect-like characteristics; when their skin hardens and they enter their cocooning phase, they begin taking in everything from their surroundings—light, sound, particles in the air. Dr. Yerst also has found that Molt Men excrete certain pheromones and posits it may be a method of communication and Chrysalis said the Molt Men communicated without the need for spoken language. Unfortunately, I still do not know how Chrysalis can infect people that haven't taken Lifeline. Information that would prove especially useful given my current predicament.

I began noticing Lifeline-like symptoms by the time I got home from my interview with the monster. I do, however, know one thing—I live less than three blocks away from the Hexagon Tower and I feel a strong compulsion to go there that grows stronger every waking minute. I don't know how he has done this to both myself and Victor. The only connection I could find is that he also requested documents from Victor the day that he was infected. All the scientists I've spoken to are sure that someone cannot be infected through hypnosis or an act of will, but science does not always mesh with the world we live in anymore.

The dreadful thing is that I feel better than ever. Young, strong, happy, energetic. To know that something that could make me feel so right is turning me into something so wrong is difficult to contemplate, but I take solace in some of the things the monster told me. Even though it doesn't feel like it right now, he told me there is always a choice. He told me he feeds on our insecurities and anxieties, our lack of purpose and clarity. It is the product of the way we live in these troubled times, but I will continue to fan the flame of hope inside me that, whatever I change into, I will still be able to choose to come back and find myself. I choose to believe that any other of the so-called Molt Men have that choice within themselves as well. I hope that you, too, will not give up on me or on them.

HIRO'S HOT TAKES

Singing the Unsung

Ah, May 15. Heroes' Day. The time-honored annual celebration of all of the masked, mutated, enhanced, courageous, or just plain gutsy individuals who have acted in defense of Halcyon City over the past century. Protecting us from alien invasions and villainous megalomaniacs, punching thugs and whisking citizens away to safety.

We're all familiar with the yearly ritual by now. Kindergartners know the two Golden Age heroes whose birthdays mark this occasion—Flying Ace and Champion. There's the Halcyon City Marathon in the morning, the Heroes' Day Parade, and then we head to the ballpark to watch the Halcyon Hornets take on one of their divisional rivals. Fun for the whole family.

But I've been thinking.

Do we really need a special day set aside to celebrate heroes?

I don't mean to belittle what they do in the least, but let's admit the obvious: *we are all aware of the constant presence of heroes.* Not just on Heroes' Day, but every day. The news cycle is dominated by their exploits. Just walking around downtown, there's seemingly a plaque on every building: "On this site in 1991, Hero X saved the day from Threat Y. We will never forget this act of courage." Let's not pretend they don't get the recognition they deserve.

Maybe we need a new holiday to celebrate some different people—some other *everyday* heroes—who don't ever get the recognition they deserve. Like Marty Dominguez, the teacher who spends a substantial part of his meager salary making sure his first-graders have classroom supplies. Or Loretta Thomas, in her 23rd year walking the same beat as a police officer.



By Hiro Reckard

There should be a day for these and all the other unsung heroes: firefighters, paramedics, nurses, and, even more than anyone else, the mothers and fathers who do some of the most heroic work of all, by tirelessly toiling to raise the next generation of Halcyon citizens.

So let's try to get that started. Let's declare tomorrow, May 16, the day after Heroes' Day, to be a new holiday. Unsung Heroes' Day, where we sing the praises of all those people in our city, our lives, whose everyday efforts don't get nearly the attention they deserve.

When you **participate in the Heroes' Day parade**, roll + Savior. On a hit, you look like you belong, and it feels good. On a 10+, choose two. On a 7-9, choose one.

- Mark two potential
- Clear all conditions
- Add two Team to the pool

On a miss, you look like a fake or a wannabe, and Hiro excoriates you in the next day's paper—mark a condition and the GM will shift your Labels.

The Mole Men

Why Do They Hate Us?

By Anderson Charles

This article appeared on the online version of the Halcyon Chronicle, part of our special recurring feature “The Secrets of the City,” where our reporters are given the opportunity to write more personalized accounts of their investigations into the stranger parts of Halcyon City.

It's a problematic world in which your neighbors might attack you at any moment. It's even worse when those neighbors live beneath you. Literally. And it's the absolute pits when they might all be kinds of insane.

Homo Fossorialis is the term that scientists have applied to them, and the PC term is Subterranean Humans, or Subterrans, but we all know them by their common name: the Mole Men. And they've never been anything but enemies of the surface dwelling humans, enemies to be fought by Halcyon City's brightest heroes.

The first known instance of a Mole Men uprising was in 1956, when they broke through the surface in massive driller-tanks, spilling out of it in droves, their squat bodies waddling down Halcyon City's streets. We didn't know what to make of them—they bore crystalline spear guns and weren't afraid to use them, but even in those days of flamboyant costumes and bizarre schticks, they looked so *ridiculous*.

Jerome LaFitte, who witnessed their first attack, said: “They were short, and slow, and they talked like they all had to blow their noses, and when they threatened us they could barely point higher than our waists. Of course we didn't take them seriously. Who could?”

Even as they marched on our city hall, demanding sovereignty over the whole city, the people of Halcyon City were snickering behind their backs. Photos of the incident depict some citizens with a bit of apprehension or shock, but many more who are laughing or smiling. Which only makes sense, after all—this city had seen so much, even by that point, that the Mole Men weren't all that upsetting.

And of course, the people knew that their heroes were incoming. It was only a matter of time before the Exemplars came together to beat the Mole Men to a pulp. Headlines the next day featured scenes of Mole Men bodies bouncing through the air, batted around by the likes of Champion and Racer Rocket and Lady Dynamo. They were no more of a threat than anything else that Halcyon City had ever endured before.

Those who didn't escape back into their tunnels were imprisoned, according to the available records from that era, studied and interrogated by the Extraordinary Occurrences Bureau, an early form of A.E.G.I.S. But ultimately, little came of it—loud-mouthed as these creatures were when they were taking over, they were tight-lipped after they'd lost. And that was that. Halcyon City moved on.

Until they attacked again. And again. And again.

1963, 1971, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1996, 2004, 2008, 2014. Over and over and over.



Mole Man leader, the Hierarch, riding a subterranean beast.

They tried everything from crystalline towers piercing the streets beneath us, ripping up into the sky, to enormous tyrannosauric monstrosities stomping down the streets with Overlords ranting from atop their backs. None of it ever worked, but they tried again, and again, and again.

Why? Why did they care so much that they were willing to pour so many resources into trying to conquer the surface over and over, to be foiled each time? Why haven't they tried peace talks, or subversive invasion, or *anything else*? It's mind-boggling.

Finding the Buried Truth

The transcripts from the interrogations were declassified in the 80s, and have been ever since—mostly, it seems, because A.E.G.I.S. decided there was so little of value in their pages, there was no reason to keep them secret. In each and every transcription, the captured leader—bearing a grandiose title like General, Overlord, Sovereign, Warchief, or Imperator—ranted about how the superiority of the Subterranean mind would once and for all be proved by their triumph, or how this world belonged to those who had mastered its every strata, not those pink rats who lived only upon its surface, or some other completely weird justification for battle.

But they never actually *explained themselves*. They never said *why* they were so angry at us, beyond the fact that we were just inferior. They never explained their own culture or history, never pointed at some historic, secret transgression, some instance in which we had wronged them deeply and truly. Never even implied the existence of some event that would explain their actions, and why this was so

important to them. When pressed, they just clammed up, or spewed more insults and exaggerated threats.

The best the transcripts indicate, they were just *angry*, for seemingly *no reason*.

It's bad journalism for a reporter to insert himself into his own story, but I'm writing about Mole Men—it feels like I'm well outside the scope of standard journalistic practice, even for Halcyon City. My fascination with them started during the 2004 invasion. This was the one with the robotic centipedes, snaking up from the sewers, crawling across skyscrapers on metallic legs. They had a new kind of weapon that time, a crystalline ray cannon I heard their ranting leader (this time, a Magistrate) call, "The Aurora Beam!" It gave the New Exemplars a bit of trouble when they swooped in, but by this point, response to the Mole Men had gotten pretty well-honed. The New Exemplars dealt with the centipedes in a couple of hours, collecting a few new trophies for their renovated headquarters.

For my part, I was busy clacking away in the *Halcyon Chronicle* offices, preparing a new piece critiquing the public statements of Devil Dog, when the centipede smashed its way in through the wall. Nothing too outside of the ordinary for the *Chronicle*, honestly—we seem to attract more than our fair share of attention from wall-smashing forces—but it gave me a firsthand perspective as Ferronaut tore into the thing, ripping apart its metal and tossing Mole Men to and fro. One of them fell near me, and I got a good look.

They really aren't actually moles. Their faces are kind of rodent-like, with elongated noses and strange hair kind of like whiskers, but they still look mostly human, beneath their strange atmosphere suits and tubes and plates. And that's what made me want to investigate more—the thought that these were, ultimately, still some form of human. We've seen alien intelligences who follow rules we can't comprehend, and we've seen insane creatures with minds like broken kaleidoscopes, and thinking of these people as Mole Men made it all too easy to emphasize the Mole part, the strange, inhuman part. But they're human, in a way that those alien intelligences and insane creatures aren't—and that means we should be able to comprehend them. There should be a *reason* behind what they're doing, even if it's a bad one.

But after months of poring over those transcripts, reading all the eye-witness accounts, listening to testimony and recordings...I was left exactly where I started. With no clear path to understanding whatever depths they might have, and with countless colleagues around me telling me that their appearances didn't hide depths—that they really were just another of our world's oddities, exactly as strange and simple as they appeared. Megalomaniacal, minute, and troglodytic.

The Mole Woman

I was all but ready to cease investigating when I was contacted by Doctor Elouise Tegan, a renowned exotic anthropologist, with credits including a trip to the peoples of the Infiniverse, a year-long residency in the Machine City, and the discovery of the slow-intelligences in the Birnam Wood. And she wanted to talk to me about the Mole Men.

She'd heard about my investigation through some colleagues, and she was interested in comparing notes, and perhaps even spearheading further study together.

"The Subterrannids are fascinating," she told me. "A subtle enigma, one that's so easy to overlook. How did they come to be? How do they live? What do they eat? How do they keep making these machines? Where do these resources come from? Why haven't we found their dwellings on any subsurface delves?"

"It's easy to dismiss them because they fall into a simple category—they're a threat to this city, just like Mechanoloid, and Duke Destruction, and the more hostile aliens races like the Sevutri. They're just enemies, and people don't care about them past the need to defeat them. There's too much wonder in the world to be awed by the Mole Men."

But she had the same questions I did. She saw the same strangenesses, and she wanted the same answers. So when she suggested that the two of us request an interview with the leader of the most recent Mole Men invasion, I agreed.

Interview with a Mole Man

It took months for A.E.G.I.S. to approve our request, but that seems standard. My impression in speaking to some contacts there was that they had no particular desire to protect or hide any Mole Men-related information, because there was none. So once everything was processed through the correct bureaucratic channels, Dr. Tegan and myself were put in an A.E.G.I.S. hover-car and taken to a facility just outside the city. Officially, it's designated as Enhanced Holding Facility Sigma 5-8. Unofficially, it's called the Burrow.

We were led into a small room with an elevator that took us deep into the underground network of the Burrow. The cells don't start until the rock and pressure are enough to basically make escape impossible, even for those prisoners that might be powerful enough to break through the cell walls.

When I asked about the wisdom of holding a Subterrannid in a subterranean cell, I only received a quizzical look from our escort, one Agent Pedro Correia.

Ultimately, Agent Correia took us to an interrogation room, walls made of a strange geodesic white plastic-steel, no windows, not even a two-way mirror. We sat in strange plastic chairs, and then one wall opened up to reveal the imprisoned Mole Man leader—this time, identified only as the Supreme Commander.

"Humans," they wheezed at us. (On the way down, I had asked what gender the Supreme Commander identified with. Agent Correia shrugged, and Doctor Tegan relayed only that the Subterrannids had never been forthright on any element of their culture at all, had sneered at such questions, and scoffed no matter what they were called. Biological studies of the Subterrannids had been consistently inconclusive, believe it or not—and the result is an official recommendation to treat them as gender neutral. We should probably revise the Mole Man name.)

"Simple, puny-minded humans," they sneered again. "You come before me with questions, I see them, brimming in your wet, watery eyes. Your simple brains

When you **pierce the mask of a Mole Man**, roll + Freak instead of + Mundane. On a 7-9, mark Angry as their sniveling superiority grates on you. On a miss, they say or do something to truly annoy the hell out of you; take a powerful blow in addition to any other hard move the GM makes.

You cannot comfort or support a Mole Man until you have admitted that they are better than you in every way. When you **admit that a Mole Man is better than you in every way**, take Influence over the Mole Man, and shift Superior down and Mundane up.

straining for answers in a universe that doesn't care about your insignificant lives."

Agent Correia coughed. I tilted my head. Doctor Tegan nodded, a look of rapt attention on her face. "Go on," she said.

"You could barely comprehend the simplest truths of the real universe," the Supreme Commander hissed. "So ask your questions, but expect only continued bafflement, fools."

I dove on the opportunity. "Supreme Commander. Why? Why all the anger and the attacks and the fighting? Why do you hate us so much? Wouldn't your people be so much better off if they just reallocated those resources to, I don't know, developing their own society?"

There was a pause.

Then a sound, like a malfunctioning air pump. The Supreme Commander laughing.

"Foolish, foolish human. You ask, but you do not even understand why you ask. The question you ask is, in itself, a sign of your own utter ignorance. You surface dwellers...you are blinded by the very light you live in."

"Okay, then enlighten me," I said, leaning forward, past Agent Correia and Doctor Tegan. "Help me to understand. I admit your superiority, we're all blind and dumb, I just want to understand."

There was another silent pause, and I thought for a minute...maybe...they would answer. Then:

"I...uh...well..."

The Supreme Commander shuffled their little feet.

"It's...in the dark, you know, beneath the earth, with just us amazing superior Mole Men...it's...well, it can get...you know...a little...lonely."

I blinked.

"Lonely? You invade because...you're lonely?"

The Supreme Commander paused, then sneered again. "Of course not! Puny pus-brained ape creature. There is no hope for you, falling for such simple ruse. Of course we do not get lonely. We are superior in every way!"

I leaned back to let Doctor Tegan take over the questioning.

Ultimately, after all the research, the interrogation, the questions—it came down to this: were the Mole Men the equivalent of an entire species of subterranean, immature, lonely children?

I don't know. I honestly don't know.

Okay, so by this point, you should be on the same page as me. I've pretty much said it a dozen different ways before. But just in case you're not, I'm going to be very, very clear.

This city is *strange*.

Heroes who trickle through from alternate dimensions. Immortality drugs that turn you into hive-minded bug monsters. Mole men.

Freaking mole men.

If I give him credit and think of him as an actual journalist, that's what Hiro was really writing about. How the strange can get to be too much, and how we all long for a break sometimes. When he says we need a Hero's Day to celebrate all the "regular" heroes in our city...he's just trying to reclaim some bit of normalcy.

And for all that I've said in these notes, that I love this city, that you've got to embrace the strangeness, that you've got to seek the mundanity in it...

Look, this city can be a bit much. Especially for those like us, the ones who're geared up and interested in plunging into that muck.

The strangeness hides endless depths. You'll never learn enough to know all the answers, but you'll keep plumbing deeper and deeper. And then when you do find some tangible, comprehensible chunk of answers in the muck, you realize those answers are contradictory and confusing. So you dissect the answers to find new questions and you're back in the muck all over again.

And one day you step back and realize you're writing about mole men. Seriously, mole men.

The longer you can keep that wonder and amazement, the longer you can hold onto your pure curiosity for the incredible strangeness of this city, the longer you can hold onto this job. But eventually, the time will come when you either need to come up for air through all this madness...or you go too deep, and clutch onto something you probably shouldn't have.

So pick your battles. Pick your investigations. Pick when you stop probing, and when you're willing to go all the way. You can't fight every fight, you can't find every truth. If you try, you'll go mad or wake up something dangerous. It's not on you to be a hero and right every wrong—it's on you to find the truth. And in this city, it's not enough to just find the truth—you've got to find the *right* truth. The truth that people need to hear.

Sometimes, that's mole men. Sometimes it's health insurance and how it interacts with superhumans. Sometimes it's an interview with a known criminal, and sometimes it's reports on generations of heroes with the same name.

Yeah, with all of them, you're going to have your own questions left over. So you're going to paste the articles into your notebook, and you're going to leave notes scribbled in the margins. And you're going to try to help the next sucker to come along to find the answers on their own. And you're going to tell yourself that it's enough. It has to be enough.

Keandra Hunt



NEW PLAYBOOKS

In this section of the book, you'll find 5 new limited-edition playbooks for your game of **Masks: A New Generation**. Each one adds new and different mechanics, while also pointing the game's focus at different issues.

These limited-edition playbooks are:

- **The Innocent** – a younger version of a modern-day villain, come forward in time.
- **The Joined** – a “second-half” connected to and bonded with another hero.
- **The Newborn** – a brand new entity, just come into existence.
- **The Reformed** – a former villain, attempting to redeem themselves.
- **The Star** – a celebrity with a demanding audience.

Here are some key notes for using these limited-edition playbooks:

- **Take care when using more than one limited-edition playbooks.** Each one skews the game significantly, and having too many limited-edition playbooks and not enough core playbooks can unbalance your game. It's not impossible to play that way, but it certainly will require more work from all players at the table. GMs in particular have to put out extra effort to attend to all the particulars of the limited-edition playbooks at the same time.
- **The new moves are available for any playbook to take with their “take a move from another playbook” advancements.** But the new extras such as the Star's audience are just that—extras. They still remain largely inaccessible through advancement, but if a PC ever earns those extras in the fiction, then they should take those mechanics.
- **The limited-edition playbooks answer their “When our team first came together” questions after every core playbook.** If you're using more than one limited-edition playbook, they answer their questions in clockwise order around your table.

Time travel is great!
Or so you thought,
until you landed in a
strange new world,
with a dark, broken,
damaged, dangerous,
adult version of yourself.
Not what you had
wanted to become.
Question is, what are you
going to do about it?



THE INNOCENT

HERO NAME

REAL NAME

LOOK

- ambiguous, man, shifting, transgressing, woman
- Asian or South Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, White
- smooth-skinned face, chipper face, hopeful face, bright face, handsome face
- old-fashioned clothing, haphazard clothing, well-tailored clothing, safe clothing
- outdated costume, reflective costume, simplistic costume, gaudy costume, unique costume

TIME PERIOD

You traveled from the past to the present. Choose the era you're from:

- ☐ the '40's-'50's: the Gold Generation
- ☐ the '60's-'70's: the Silver Generation
- ☐ the '80's-'90's: the Bronze Generation

ABILITIES

You and your future self have the same core ability, though your future self is better with it. Choose one:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ energy projection | ☐ elemental control |
| ☐ shapeshifting | ☐ super-speed |
| ☐ telepathy | ☐ sound control |

LABELS

(at character creation, add +1 wherever you choose)

DANGER	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
FREAK	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SAVIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SUPERIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
MUNDANE	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

CONDITIONS

- ☐ **Afraid** (-2 to directly engage a threat)
- ☐ **Angry** (-2 to comfort or support or pierce the mask)
- ☐ **Guilty** (-2 to provoke someone or assess the situation)
- ☐ **Hopeless** (-2 to unleash your powers)
- ☐ **Insecure** (-2 to defend someone or reject others' influence)

BACKSTORY

- Who or what brought you to the present?
- When did you first meet your future self?
- How is your future self the embodiment of a future you never wanted?
- What is your favorite part of life in the future? Your least favorite part?
- Why are you determined to stay in the present with this team?

Once you've finished your backstory, introduce your character to the other players, and then determine what happened when your team first came together, the relationships between you and your teammates, and who has Influence over you.

WHEN OUR TEAM FIRST CAME TOGETHER...

My future self was involved, and I tried to stop them. It took the rest of the team to help me succeed. How did we stymie my future self's plans?

RELATIONSHIPS

_____ is helping me understand this weirdo future. I follow their lead.

I saved someone important to _____; they're now my biggest defender.

INFLUENCE

These people are your guides, your friends, and the ones helping you find a better way. But you are careful about whose guidance you follow. Give Influence over you to two teammates.

INNOCENT MOVES

(Choose two)

- ☐ **Making amends:** When you make yourself vulnerable while **comforting or supporting** someone you (or your future self) has fought or hurt, take +2 to the roll. If you miss or they refuse to open up, mark a condition and take a powerful blow.
- ☐ **Growing into power:** When you **unleash your powers** to do something your future self can do, mark a condition to roll + Savior instead of + Freak.
- ☐ **See it their way:** When you **reject someone's Influence** when they equate you with your future self, roll + Savior instead of + nothing. When you accept someone's Influence when they equate you with your future self, mark potential.
- ☐ **What's this thing?:** When you ask for someone else's guidance on the modern world, they must tell you what they think you should do or how you should act. If you act that way, clear a condition and shift Mundane up and any other Label down. If you act that way and it goes poorly, mark potential.
- ☐ **White knight:** When you give a speech on morality and heroism, you can **provoke someone** with Savior instead of Superior.
- ☐ **Martyr:** When you **take a powerful blow** while defending someone or something, you may shift Savior up and any other Label down.

YOUR FUTURE SELF

Your future self is out there, an important figure in Halcyon City and the world beyond—and everything you'd hoped you'd never be. But finding out how they became who they are may be all it takes to push you along a similar path. Pick one step of your future self's path that you already know about, and circle it.

- They lost someone they cared about deeply
- They failed horrifically in a noble pursuit or cause
- They committed a major crime
- They betrayed a close friend or ally
- They won a victory at enormous cost to the world around them
- They killed someone
- They publicly battled another hero
- They injured an innocent

When you **learn of another step of your future self's path**, circle it. You can have at most 5 steps circled. When you undergo an experience that echoes one of the above (your call), strike it out.

When you **strike out a circled step, or circle a struck out step**, choose one of the following:

- ☐ Replace **comfort or support** with the following: When you **coldly dismiss someone**, roll + Mundane. On a hit, they mark a condition or leave you alone, their choice. On a 7-9, they can also choose to inflict a condition on you.
- ☐ Replace **defend someone** with the following: When you **aggressively defend a large group or area**, roll + Savior. On a hit, you create an opportunity for yourself to press the attack, and take +1 forward to pursue it. On a 10+, the collateral damage is minimal.
- ☐ Replace **provoke someone** with the following: When you **threaten someone**, say what you want them to do and roll + Superior. On a hit, they either do it or they are put at a significant disadvantage against you, their choice. On a 10+, either way they mark a condition, your choice.
- ☐ Replace **reject someone's Influence** with the following: When you **spit in the face of guidance or Influence**, roll + 2. On a hit, take away their Influence over you or clear a condition, your choice. On a 7-9, you both take a powerful blow from the intensity of your words.
- ☐ Become an NPC antagonist—your path is irreconcilably set along the same course that your future self followed.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

You've fought, struggled, and worked so hard to figure out who you are, whether you're just the same as your future self or whether you're different...but right now, that's all out the window. The distinction between your future self and your present self vanishes in the face of the trial before you, and you become exactly the powerful, adamant figure that everyone fears or hopes you will one day become. You can do exactly what your future self could do, and everyone around you sees them in you more clearly than ever. Of course, after this it's going to be hard to treat you as two different people...

TEAM MOVES

When you **share a triumphant celebration with someone**, ask whether they think your future self could've won this victory. If they do, mark potential and the GM shifts your Labels. If they do not, clear a condition and they shift your Labels.

When you **share a vulnerability or weakness with someone**, ask them if they think you could turn into your future self. If they do, mark potential and the GM shifts your Labels. If they do not, clear a condition and they shift your Labels.

POTENTIAL



Every time you roll a miss on a move, mark potential.

ADVANCEMENT

When you fill your potential track, you advance. Choose from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Take another move from your playbook | ☐ Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| ☐ Take another move from your playbook | ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | ☐ Choose a mentor for yourself (from the Protégé's playbook) |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | |
| ☐ Someone permanently loses Influence over you; add +1 to a Label | |

When you've taken five advances from the top list, you can take advances from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth after it's been used once | ☐ Lock a Label, and add +1 to a Label of your choice |
| ☐ Change playbooks | ☐ Go back to your own time or become a paragon of the city |
| ☐ Take an adult move | |
| ☐ Take an adult move | |

OTHER MOVES

PLAYING THE INNOCENT

Hopeful, troubled, out of place, noble. The Innocent is the kid version of a dangerous person, in whom anyone else can see the potential for great nobility...and the potential for great horror. Their story is all about simultaneously being an unformed font of possibility while having clear evidence for a particular life path in front of them.

Your future self will be a major character in the story from character creation, but early on, they're liable to be a bit of a flat stereotype. Discovering your future self's path is the means by which you make them more and more sympathetic. Always pursue opportunities to learn about that path. After all, who wouldn't be curious about the events that made their future self into a particular kind of person? If you have the chance to talk to a villain who knew your future self in their early days, do it. If you have the chance to talk directly to your future self, take it. And if ever you feel like something fits one of the steps as listed in **Your Future Self**, don't hesitate to circle it.

Similarly, don't hesitate to strike out a step that your Innocent seems to have encountered, and don't hesitate to push into those situations. Your Innocent is walking a dangerous path; actively avoiding that path can be interesting and save them from villainy, but won't tap the dramatic core of the playbook. Nor will it give you some of those neat additional unique abilities of the playbook. So play into the path. Take actions that seem nasty. A good rate is to circle one step every two sessions, and strike out one step every two or three sessions.

If you need a break from the drama of the Innocent, play into the time-lost Innocent. There's a lot of fun and humor to be had in the Innocent being in a strange world, and it's great for providing an excuse to hang out with your teammates and for getting the Innocent's Labels shifted, as well.

NOTES ON YOUR MOVES AND EXTRAS

- You are the ultimate judge of whether you should strike out or circle one of the steps to your future self, but use the GM to help you make your decisions.
- For **Growing into power**, you explicitly know three things that your future self can do that you can't from your abilities section, but the move also applies to anything else you've seen your future self do over the course of play.
- For **What's this thing?**, the GM is the final arbiter of whether or not it goes poorly when you follow the other person's advice.
- For **Martyr**, you can easily ensure you take a powerful blow while defending someone any time you roll a 7-9 and choose to expose yourself to danger. You should also remind the GM of this move when you roll a miss on defending someone.

- When you replace one of your basic moves with one from **Your Future Self**, it means you no longer have access to that basic move. You cannot trigger it. In any situation when you would, either resort to another move if possible, or the GM says what happens.

INSPIRATION FOR THE INNOCENT

Cyclops, *All-New X-Men*

Iron Lad, *Young Avengers*

Genesis, *Wolverine and the X-Men*

The Hulk/Maestro, *The Incredible Hulk: Future Imperfect*

Blue Beetle (Jaime Reyes), *Young Justice*

INNOCENT GM ADVICE

- Confront them with their future self
- Mirror the steps on their future self's path
- Show them an absurdity of the present (their future)
- Show them an artifact of the past (their present)
- Judge them by their future self's standard

The Innocent is a simultaneously hopeful and dark hero. They are, themselves, hopeful and light, but they are on a path to becoming something much more dangerous, and the drama of the playbook comes from toying with that path. Give the Innocent plenty of reasons and opportunities to venture down that path. Don't let their life be easy, and don't ever let them forget the other person that people see when they look at the Innocent.

Introducing the Innocent into your game immediately creates an important figure in your Halcyon City setting—the Innocent's future self. They need to be someone all of the other characters would recognize and fear. Make sure to integrate the future self into the setting through your questions. Don't let their future self ever appear definitively to be a villain. It's your job to play on their choices and make sure their future self really seems sympathetic, like a future version of them who's been through hell.

You'd be nothing without them—your partner, your sibling, your friend, your rival, your other half. You're tied to their powers and to them, through and through. The rest of the world only ever sees you two as halves of a whole—not as two separate people. And the two of you aren't sure if they're right.



THE JOINED

YOUR OTHER HALF

(CHOOSE ANOTHER PC TO BE YOUR OTHER HALF; CREATE YOUR CHARACTER WITH THEM)

HERO NAME

(CHOOSE YOUR HERO NAME AFTER YOU KNOW THE HERO NAME OF YOUR OTHER HALF)

REAL NAME

LOOK

You look similar to your other half, and your costume choice is always the same as theirs. Choose two other options they have selected that you share; then, choose two options from the lists below.

- ambiguous, man, shifting, transgressing, woman
- Asian or South Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, White
- brooding face, curious face, judging face, unreadable face
- casual clothing, eccentric clothing, dark clothing, light clothing

ABILITIES

Your powers complement your other half's. You have the same abilities they have. At least for now.

/LABELS

Your Labels start off the same as your other half's, but you may shift up any one Label, and shift down any one Label.

DANGER	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
FREAK	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SAVIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SUPERIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
MUNDANE	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

/CONDITIONS

- ☐ **Afraid** (-2 to directly engage a threat)
- ☐ **Angry** (-2 to comfort or support or pierce the mask)
- ☐ **Guilty** (-2 to provoke someone or assess the situation)
- ☐ **Hopeless** (-2 to unleash your powers)
- ☐ **Insecure** (-2 to defend someone or reject others' influence)

/BACKSTORY

- How did you and your other half become connected?
- Who or what did you have to give up because of your connection?
- Apart from your powers, what keeps you together?
- Someone outside the team thinks you'd be better off on your own. Who are they and why do they think that?
- Why do you care about the team?

Once you've finished your backstory, introduce your character to the other players, and then determine what happened when your team first came together, the relationships between you and your teammates, and who has Influence over you.

/WHEN OUR TEAM FIRST CAME TOGETHER...

The connection between our two halves was threatened by the crisis. How? By what?

/RELATIONSHIPS

When you have problems with your other half, you talk to _____.

You are jealous of the relationship between your other half and _____, and you keep trying to interject yourself.

/INFLUENCE

Are you more or less trusting than your other half? If more trusting, give out one more Influence than they did. If less, then give out one less Influence than they did.

If you didn't get Influence over your other half, then take it now. If you didn't give Influence to your other half, then give it now.

YOUR OTHER HALF

You share a deep bond with your other half. You are stronger together than you are apart, for now. If your other half is a Delinquent, Outsider, or Transformed, take two moves from their playbook: one they have and one they don't. Remember that you share much beyond your moves; i.e., if your other half is an Outsider, you both hail from the same dimension/planet/etc. For all other playbooks, you share in the core extras of your other half.

- **Beacon:** Take drives and mark four of your choice. When your other half strikes out a drive, strike it out as well.
- **Bull:** Take **The Bull's Heart** with the same love and rival as your other half. Choose a different role that you commonly fulfill.
- **Janus:** Take **The Mask** and a secret identity. Choose a different Label for your Mask. Take two obligations: one shared, one unique to you.
- **Legacy:** Take a legacy. Your other half fills in as many names in the initial list as they choose; you fill in the rest. You can never answer the questions for your other half's Legacy move.
- **Protégé:** You share a mentor with your other half. When they finish defining your mentor and resources, choose an additional resource.
- **Doomed:** Take a sanctuary, a doom, and a doom track: You and your other half share the conditions that bring your doom closer and a doom track; when it fills, you both choose a new doomsign. You start with the doomsign your other half chose. Your other half picks the initial features and downsides of your shared sanctuary. You choose one more of each.
- **Nova:** Take burn and four flares, two shared and two unique to you.

BONDS AND DISTINCTIONS

At character creation you start with **Two of a kind**, and choose one other bond. When either you or your other half locks a Label, cross off one of your chosen bonds and choose a distinction.

BONDS:

- ☒ **Two of a kind:** When time passes, you and your other half gain Influence over each other. When you or your other half **pierces the other's mask**, mark a condition to take a 10+.
- ☐ **Fastball special:** When you perform a coordinated fighting maneuver with your other half, say who takes the lead and who assists. The leader rolls the adult move **overwhelm a vulnerable foe**. The assistant marks a condition.
- ☐ **Powers, activate!:** When you and your other half pool your powers, say who takes the lead and who assists. The leader **unleashes their powers** with your combined Freak (max+4). The assistant shifts Savior down, Mundane up.
- ☐ **Four eyes are better:** When you and your other half **assess the situation** from two different vantage points, one of you makes the move, and the other may either clear a condition or ask an additional question. You both get +1 when following the answers.

DISTINCTIONS:

- ☐ **Mirror, mirror:** When you **pierce someone's mask**, you can ask them "What are you really feeling right now?", even on a miss. If you do, they can ask you the same question.
- ☐ **Shouldering the burden:** When you push yourself to do something your other half failed at or can't do, mark a condition to use the adult move **wield your powers**.
- ☐ **Going solo:** When you **directly engage a threat** entirely on your own, you can roll + Superior instead of + Danger.
- ☐ **Internal strife:** When you snipe about your other half behind their back, remove one Team from the pool and clear a condition.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

When you trigger your Moment of Truth, choose—are you working with your other half, or are you on your own?

If you're working with your other half, use the text of their Moment of Truth and treat it as if it applies to both of you. Remember to lock your Label and switch a bond to a distinction because you'll probably never reach these heights of perfect connection, of being one, ever again...

If you're on your own, use the following text:

You're on your own. It's like missing an arm. Like fighting naked. Like holding your breath. You're missing something vital...but you're moving faster than ever, thinking faster than ever, doing things you couldn't even do while relying on both of your strength combined. And it's hitting you, hard—you can do this. Without them. And you can win. It's going to be hard to come down off this high and rejoin with them afterwards, isn't it?

Remember to lock a Label and switch a bond to a distinction, afterward.

TEAM MOVES

When one of you **shares moment of vulnerability** or **shares a triumphant celebration** without the other one present, mark a condition to mark a potential.

POTENTIAL



Every time you roll a miss on a move, mark potential.

ADVANCEMENT

When you fill your potential track, you advance. Choose from the list below.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Take one new bond | ☐ Someone permanently loses Influence over you; add +1 to a Label |
| ☐ Take one new distinction | ☐ Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth |
| ☐ Gain two new abilities from any playbook | |
| ☐ Take an advancement from your other half's playbook | |

When you've taken five advances from the top list, you can take advances from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth after it's been used once | ☐ Lock a Label, and add +1 to a Label of your choice |
| ☐ Change playbooks | ☐ Retire from the life or become a paragon of the city |
| ☐ Take an adult move | |
| ☐ Take an adult move | |

OTHER MOVES

PLAYING THE JOINED

Unsure, supportive, jealous, defiant. The Joined is a mix of emotions and ideas, defined more by the hero to whom they are connected than by anything else. The Joined is different from any other playbook in **Masks**, and making it work requires substantial buy-in from all the players involved. Don't play the Joined unless both you and the other player are on-board.

Both the Joined's player and their partner player need to be okay with shared uniqueness. You will share in a lot of the same powers and abilities, and in some ways that diminishes the other character's uniqueness. No one should agree to play your other half if they really want to have sole access to their playbook's cool stuff.

Because of the connection between the two characters, creating the Joined is a much more collaborative process. You can't start the Joined without knowing to whom you are connected, and you should let them finish a lot of the initial steps of their character before you get into the Joined. As such, creating a Joined can't be a "heads-down" kind of thing. Talk to the other player and bounce ideas off each other throughout the process.

During play, you will obviously spend a lot of time with the character to whom you are joined. But make sure your Joined develops relationships with the other PCs, outside of that primary connection. The story of the Joined moves toward separation and distinction, and you can't have that story without the opportunity for each half to define themselves independently.

Use locking a Label to mark the moments when your Joined defines themselves separately from their other half. Most of the time, locking a Label comes after using a Moment of Truth, so watch out for when you or your other half wants to do that. Remember that when either of you locks a Label, a bond switches to a distinction. If you have no more bonds to switch to distinctions, then you're already pretty divided—nothing extra happens.

NOTES ON YOUR MOVES AND EXTRAS

- For **Your other half**, you're probably going to need to borrow your other half's playbook for a bit, to jot down all the relevant information. It may help for you to have a spare copy of their playbook yourself.
- For **Fastball Special** and **Powers, Activate!**, you'll need to say who's in the lead. Go with your gut about which one of you is leading the maneuver. If you and your other half wind up talking too long about it, then that's the equivalent of giving the GM a golden opportunity—instead of doing your cool maneuver, you're bickering.
- For **Going solo**, you really have to engage the threat on your own. If any teammate could potentially spend Team from the pool to help you, then you're not really on your own.

- For **Internal strife**, sniping about your other half behind their back requires you to have an audience—you can't just grumble to yourself, under your breath.

INSPIRATION FOR THE JOINED

The Stepford Cuckoos, *New X-Men*

The Wonder Twins, *Super Friends*

Scylla and Charybdis, *Irredeemable*

Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver, *Avengers*

Cloak and Dagger, *Cloak and Dagger*

JOINED GM ADVICE

- Offer them, and them alone, opportunities for success or fun
- Flaunt the abilities and successes of their other half in front of them
- Mistake them and their other half for being each other, or a single entity
- Express interest in them, and them alone
- Separate them

The Joined is an advanced playbook, and as soon as two players agree to play with it, they're taking on a higher burden than a normal **Masks** playbook. They're agreeing to have their stories deeply entwined, to share a lot of the cool bits of their playbooks, and to bounce off each other for the rest of the story. That can be absolutely amazing, but they will need your help to make it come together.

In general, use the Joined only when you have 4 or more PCs. That way, you'll have at least two other PCs outside of the Joined's core connection. Any fewer, and the game becomes less about the team and more about the Joined.

Keep an eye out for the Joined and their other half becoming too wrapped up in their own world. If the Joined and their other half are barely interacting with any other PCs at all, then there's a problem. Put them in situations where they're forced to act as individuals, with the other PCs around.

Use your NPCs to simultaneously divide them and force them together. Push in the opposite of whichever direction they're already tending. If they're coming together, separate them by having an NPC offer an opportunity to only the Joined and not their other half. If they're separate from each other, smooch them together by having a major hero think of them only as a single unit, or mistake them for each other.

Your job when dealing with the Joined is to make the rest of the world intrude on their relationship. Chances are, the two players involved will already be interested in the drama and stakes of the relationship. You need to make sure neither one forgets that the rest of the world has thoughts about their relationship, as well.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR THE JOINED

In general, we recommend using the Joined with one of the core **Masks** playbooks. The Joined emphasizes the elements of whatever playbook they attach to, so attaching them to a Limited Edition playbook can put an overbearing emphasis on that LE playbook's issues instead of the core themes of **Masks**.

That said, for any of a number of reasons, you may still decide to do just that at your table. So here are rules you can use to play the Joined with any of the other playbooks in this book, along with some additional rules for adjusting the Joined to fit any other playbook you might want to bring in. These rules are all modifications of the Joined's extra, **Your other half**.

- **The Star:** You share an audience with your other half. When they finish defining your audience, choose at least one option different from your other half for why your audience loves you; choose one additional advantage; and choose one additional demand your audience makes on you.
- **The Reformed:** Take **Friends in Low Places**. You share two of the same contacts as your other half, and one different. You track obligations together; any time one of you marks obligation on a contact you share, the other does as well. Any time one of you erases obligation on a contact you share, the other does as well.
- **The Newborn:** Take **A Blank Slate**. At the start of play, you share the same two lessons with your other half. Any time either of you fills in a lesson, the other can mark potential to write the same lesson. Any time either of you rejects a lesson and erases it, the other can mark a condition to do the same.
- **The Innocent:** Take **Your Future Self**. At the start of play, circle the same step of your future self's path as your other half. When either of you strikes out a circled step or circles a struck out step, the other does the same and chooses an option from the list.

RULES FOR ADJUSTING "YOUR OTHER HALF" FOR OTHER PLAYBOOKS

When you want to play a new playbook with the Joined, first identify whether that playbook has any core extras, such as the Nova's burns and flares, or the Beacon's drives. If not, you can use the same rules as for the Delinquent, Outsider, or Transformed: the Joined takes two moves from their other half's playbook, one the other half already has and one they don't.

If the other playbook has its own core extra, the Joined shares in the core rules for that extra, having the same fundamental abilities, advantages, and costs. The two playbooks do not, then, share in any playbook moves—just elements of the core extra.

If there is a core extra to share, **determine if the extra grants special abilities and mechanical advantages, or if it grants elements in the fiction.**

An extra grants special abilities and mechanical advantages when it primarily equips a PC with new mechanical abilities and internal motivations, without giving them new resources outside of themselves. For example, The Bull's Heart grants special abilities and mechanical advantages because it deals with the Bull's internal feelings and gives them mechanical abilities when acting with regard to those feelings.

If an extra grants special abilities and mechanical advantages, then the Joined gets the same number of mechanical advantages, and the two characters share in some element of how those resources operate. For example, the Beacon gets to mark four of their drives as they choose, and so too does a Joined attached to a Beacon. They can choose four totally different drives, but they still share in the same set of drives, because when either of them strikes out a drive, the other must cross off the same drive. Similarly, the Nova gets to choose four flares, and a Joined attached to a Nova also gets four flares. However, they must choose two to share with their other half and two unique, to ensure they share some element of the extra, while also being different in their exact capabilities.

An extra grants elements in the fiction when it grants the character new allies or resources that then exist in the world independent of that character. For example, the Protégé's mentor and resources grant elements in the fiction, things that exist outside of the Protégé and their mechanics.

If the extra grants elements in the fiction, the Joined's other half can still make the core choices for that playbook's extra. The Joined can then add to or embellish upon those initial choices. For example, if a Joined's other half was a Legacy, then the Legacy still makes all the initial name choices for their Legacy extra. The Joined then gets to fill in any other names from their Legacy extra.

If an extra grants elements in the fiction along with lists of choices for those elements, then the Joined chooses one additional option from each list to add to those chosen by their other half. For example, the Protégé gets to choose the resources they receive from their mentor, and then the Joined gets to choose one additional resource.

There will always be some element of judgment and modification necessary in syncing up the Joined with another playbook (just like in creating or tweaking any playbook!), but with these general guidelines, you should have a good place to start!

You're a brand new being, created through scientific inquiry, feat of engineering, or random chance. This world is all new to you, full of wonder and adventure. It's not easy, though—everyone has an opinion about who you are and what you should do. It's time to find out for yourself who you really are.



THE NEWBORN

HERO NAME

REAL NAME

/LOOK

- ambiguous, man, shifting, transgressing, woman
- Asian or South Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, White
- crystal skin, metal skin, green skin, human skin
- mismatched clothing, concealing clothing, immaculate clothing, plain clothing
- prototype uniform, over the top costume, your own skin, unnerving costume, no costume

/ABILITIES

Your powers are based on your unique physical configuration. Choose two and describe how they are part of your body.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| ☐ elemental form | ☐ sonic bursts | ☐ super durability and strength |
| ☐ solid light projection | ☐ fantastic elasticity | ☐ thermal control |

/LABELS

(at character creation, add +1 wherever you choose)

DANGER	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
FREAK	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SAVIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SUPERIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
MUNDANE	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

/CONDITIONS

- ☐ **Afraid** (-2 to directly engage a threat)
- ☐ **Angry** (-2 to comfort or support or pierce the mask)
- ☐ **Guilty** (-2 to provoke someone or assess the situation)
- ☐ **Hopeless** (-2 to unleash your powers)
- ☐ **Insecure** (-2 to defend someone or reject others' influence)

/BACKSTORY

- Who created you, and why?
- How are you different from humans?
- Who, outside of the team, is your caretaker?
- What about humanity fascinates you the most?
- Why do you care about the team?

Once you've finished your backstory, introduce your character to the other players, and then determine what happened when your team first came together, the relationships between you and your teammates, and who has Influence over you.

/WHEN OUR TEAM FIRST CAME TOGETHER...

The team discovered you during the incident; thanks to them, you reached the outside world and helped in the fight. Where and how did they find you? Who gave you your first nickname?

/RELATIONSHIPS

_____ is an exemplary human; they show you around and tell you how things work.

The behavior of _____ confuses you again and again; you're determined to understand humanity better by studying them.

/INFLUENCE

You're receptive to how people think and behave around you. Give Influence to all of your teammates.

NEWBORN MOVES

(Choose two)

- ☐ **Not from around here:** When you act clueless, goofy, or confused to get out of a sticky mundane situation, roll + Freak. On a hit, you create an opportunity, a distraction, or a plausible excuse. On a 7-9, you also feel all the weight of playing the clown and of the people staring at you. The GM shifts one of your Labels up and one down. On a miss, no one is fooled, and you've put yourself in their crosshairs.
- ☐ **Thermodynamic miracle:** When you **comfort or support** someone by telling them what makes them unique, roll + Freak instead of Mundane. If they open up to you, shift Freak up and Mundane down. If they don't, mark a condition.
- ☐ **A mind of their own:** Your powers evolve and mutate. When you are facing an obstacle or threat that your powers would not be able to deal with, you can mark a condition to gain brand new abilities adapted to the situation. You lose these new powers once the danger is gone.
- ☐ **Damage:** You get an additional condition called Damaged. While marked, take +1 to **take a powerful blow**.

To clear the Damaged condition, you need time, external help, or special equipment or abilities.
- ☐ **Regeneration:** When you're taken out, you can trigger an emergency regeneration process. If you do, your body undergoes an unpredictable transformation, and in mere moments, you're back on your feet and ready to fight. Clear three conditions and choose three from the list below:
 - Change your gender identity or presentation
 - Change your physical appearance
 - Forget all your lessons
 - Lose an important memory of a teammate; they lose Influence over you
 - Swap an ability with another one from the Newborn playbook

A BLANK SLATE

You were created with a basic understanding of the world. When you learn something that helps you make sense of the world, write it down as a lesson. Fill in two lessons when you create your character; fill in the other two when you've learned those lessons during play.

- ☐ I am _____
- ☐ A superhero should _____
- ☐ Always _____
- ☐ Never _____

When you **embody one of your lessons**, shift one Label up and one Label down, your choice. If you cause a misunderstanding, collateral damage, or unintended consequences in the process, mark potential. When you **reject one of your lessons**, reject its Influence as if it were an NPC. If you choose to have it lose Influence over you, erase that lesson and write a new one in its stead.

When you **approach your creator or caretakers with a problem**, tell them what obstacle you face or what you need to achieve, and they will offer you something you need. The GM chooses one:

- secret information
- access to instruments, weapons, or resources
- a way to temporarily boost or expand your powers
- official and explicit backing

If you accept their help, they rewrite one of your lessons for you.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Something snaps into focus, and suddenly you're a full thing, true and complete. You'd never have known how fragmented you were before, if not for here, this moment. You're not a series of individual lessons. You're not a series of subroutines and programs. You're...a person. This must be what it's like to be...human. And this fullness? It gives you a control over yourself, a unity of purpose you've never experienced before. Of course, now that you're showing off all your potential, it's only a matter of time before someone comes forward to reduce you to a machine again...

TEAM MOVES

When you **share a triumphant celebration with someone**, ask them what makes them proud or happy about the actions they took and write a lesson based on it, either filling an empty slot or replacing an existing lesson.

When you **share a vulnerability or weakness with someone**, if their response helps you understand human feelings and problems, mark potential. If their response confuses or offends you, shift your Freak up and your Mundane down.

POTENTIAL



Every time you roll a miss on a move, mark potential.

ADVANCEMENT

When you fill your potential track, you advance. Choose from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Take another move from your playbook | ☐ Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| ☐ Take another move from your playbook | ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | ☐ Get burn and three flares (from the Nova's playbook) |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | |
| ☐ Someone permanently loses Influence over you; add +1 to a Label | |

When you've taken five advances from the top list, you can take advances from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth after it's been used once | ☐ Lock a Label, and add +1 to a Label of your choice |
| ☐ Lock down your lessons and change playbooks | ☐ Retire from the life or become a paragon of the city |
| ☐ Take an adult move | |
| ☐ Take an adult move | |

OTHER MOVES

PLAYING THE NEWBORN

Curious, strange, quixotic, dogmatic. The Newborn is a kid trying to figure out how the world works, and clinging to principles in an attempt to impose order on their understanding of it. They don't quite know for sure what their ideals are or should be, but they're testing them out with every action and idea. The rest of the world has a vested interest in reshaping the Newborn, thanks to all of their potential power. Unlike other **Masks** PCs, the Newborn can be reshaped not just in terms of Labels, but in terms of hard-coded pieces of morality.

If you're playing the Newborn, you are in charge of tracking your lessons. They are critical to your character, but they're very internally focused. You need to pay attention to them more than any other player in the game. You are in charge of making them matter at every turn. Remind the other players, GM included, about them and how they're influencing your decisions. Since you're the final arbiter of how you act with regard to the lessons, you are in charge of calling it out and making the other players notice.

That said, be prepared for the flip side situation—when other characters take direct interest in what you believe, the lessons you've internalized. That leads to brilliant drama, which is exactly what you want, but it's a natural tendency to resist such influence and manipulation. Don't—at least not outright. Part of the fun of the Newborn is changing those beliefs in light of others' attentions, and it only benefits you to go through the process of rejecting an existing belief, experimenting with the new one, causing some damage, and then starting all over.

That's an important piece of the Newborn to keep in mind—push your new beliefs to the point where they create fallout and consequences. The Newborn is like a dogmatic philosophy freshman, playing with new forms of morality, pushing them to their extremes...except the Newborn has superpowers, and when they push it to extremes, things get broken. Don't hesitate to go there.

NOTES ON YOUR MOVES AND EXTRAS

- For **A mind of their own**, you gain new abilities, meaning superpowers like telekinesis, elemental control, or whatever else you can come up with.
- For **Damage**, the new condition *Damaged* functions like any other condition, adding to the take a powerful blow move, giving you another possible condition to check off before being taken out, and so on. The only way to clear *Damaged*, however, is through repair. A teammate cannot, for example, comfort or support you and help you clear the *Damaged* condition...unless that comfort or support is explicitly helping you to repair yourself.
- For **Blank slate**, the GM is the final arbiter of whether or not you embody one of your lessons. Never shift Labels for embodying a lesson without calling it out and making sure the GM agrees. The GM is also the final arbiter of whether or not you cause misunderstanding, collateral damage, or unintended consequences

when embodying your lesson. You can always choose to reject one of your lessons at any time, but you must do something to actually trigger the move, the same as the regular reject Influence move.

- For **Regeneration**, being taken out explicitly means needing to mark a condition and being unable to do so because they are all already marked. If you take this move, you should try to rack up those conditions—don't always get rid of them. Otherwise you will never get to play with the move!

INSPIRATION FOR THE NEWBORN

The Vision, *Young Avengers*

Superboy, *Young Justice*

X-23, *X-Men*

Idie Okonkwo, *X-Men*

Victor Mancha, *Runaways*

NEWBORN GM ADVICE

- Teach them a new lesson
- Correct an existing lesson
- Push one of their lessons to the brink
- Remind them of their fundamental inhumanity
- Exert ownership or control over them as a piece of property

The Newborn is a strangely fluid playbook that makes explicit what is implicit in many of the others. For the Newborn, moral lessons are hard-coded, written down on the character sheet, and thereby granted all the more meaning and importance. The player is the most involved with those lessons—monitoring them, watching them, and calling out when they come into play—but that doesn't mean you can ignore them. Pay attention to those lessons as best you can, especially any time the Newborn writes a new one or changes an existing lesson. Those are important moments that tell you a lot about where the character is going...and where to press them dramatically.

Also, you are the final arbiter of whether or not the Newborn embodies lessons, but that doesn't mean you should be stingy. Give them credit where it is due.

A great way to use NPCs around the Newborn is to teach them lessons, whether by outright trying to communicate a new principle or arguing with an existing principle. You can be very explicit with NPCs trying to teach the Newborn lessons, especially if they know the Newborn's true nature—the creator of an android is absolutely going to try to teach the android in a straightforward fashion.

Finally, the Newborn is a surprisingly durable playbook, where conditions matter a great deal. Push them a lot. Make them mark conditions, especially if they've taken **Damage** or **Regeneration**. Those moves signal that the Newborn wants to be punched. So don't back off.

Villainy used to be a way of life for you. Then you saw just what your selfishness and hate created. The supervillain life is a hard one to quit. But you know this best: sometimes the villain needs saving too.



THE REFORMED

HERO NAME

REAL NAME

LOOK

- ambiguous, man, shifting, transgressing, woman
- Asian or South Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, White
- sad eyes, technicolor eyes, shadowy eyes, gorgeous eyes
- conservative clothes, school uniform, concealing fashion, expensive fashion
- tattered costume, normal clothes, sleek costume, regal costume

ABILITIES

You're young, but you've been around for a few years before switching teams. You know how to fight, but you're known for one ability more than any other. Choose one.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ☐ poison, venom, or acid control | ☐ ferrokinesis | ☐ fear manipulation |
| ☐ weapons and martial expertise | ☐ vitality absorption | ☐ geokinesis |

/LABELS

(at character creation, add +1 wherever you choose)

DANGER	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
FREAK	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SAVIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SUPERIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
MUNDANE	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

/CONDITIONS

- ☐ **Afraid** (-2 to directly engage a threat)
- ☐ **Angry** (-2 to comfort or support or pierce the mask)
- ☐ **Guilty** (-2 to provoke someone or assess the situation)
- ☐ **Hopeless** (-2 to unleash your powers)
- ☐ **Insecure** (-2 to defend someone or reject others' influence)

/BACKSTORY

- Who mentored you in supervillainy?
- Who first showed you that you could do good?
- What was your goal as a villain?
- What caused you to switch sides?
- Why do you care about the team?

Once you've finished your backstory, introduce your character to the other players, and then determine what happened when your team first came together, the relationships between you and your teammates, and who has Influence over you.

/WHEN OUR TEAM FIRST CAME TOGETHER...

We fought a terrible enemy from my old life. Who was it and what did they take from me?

/RELATIONSHIPS

I've earned the trust of _____, and I follow their example of what a hero should be.

I did something terrible to _____ once. I hope they can forgive me one day.

/INFLUENCE

Do you talk openly about your days as a villain? If so, give each team member Influence over you. If not, just give Influence to the one teammate whose example you most closely follow.

REFORMED MOVES

(Choose two)

- ☐ **What the hell, hero:** When you call out an injustice that a hero has perpetrated, roll + Danger. On a hit, take Influence over them. On a 7-9, choose one. On a 10+, choose two.

- You get them to admit their wrongdoing
- You win over an onlooker; take Influence over them
- You don't turn their attention and anger onto yourself

On a miss, they dismiss you; mark a condition (their choice), shift Danger up, Savior down.

- ☐ **Wrong side of the tracks:** You always get to ask an additional question when you **pierce the mask** of a villain, even on a miss. When you **pierce the mask** of a hero (your call), add this question to the list:

- what was your darkest moment?

- ☐ **Not so different:** When you **provoke someone** to criminal or villainous action, you can use Danger instead of Superior.

- ☐ **Dark past:** When you confess to a serious crime you committed as a villain while in the presence of someone involved, shift Danger up and any other Label down, say what you did, and choose one.

- No one was hurt badly by the crime
- You aren't in legal danger from the crime
- You aren't being actively pursued for extralegal retribution

- ☐ **Blowing off steam:** When you commit a misdemeanor or small "victimless" crime, you may clear a condition of your choice.

- ☐ **Do me a favor:** When you go to an ordinary civilian you know for a favor, roll + Mundane. On a 10+, they'll lend you a hand. On a 7-9, they need a promise up front. On a miss, you catch them up in your superpowered nonsense, and they suffer for it.

FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES

You have ties to villains from your previous career. Choose three names to fill in:

Finch, Ellen "Devil" Drummond, Mr. Cane, The Mad Magpie, Dr. Cutler, Armorer, Tegan Queen, Lovelace

For each of them, choose a specialty.

_____ **Specialty:** weapons, materials, cosmic artifacts, alien tech, insider info

Obligation: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ **Specialty:** weapons, materials, cosmic artifacts, alien tech, insider info

Obligation: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ **Specialty:** weapons, materials, cosmic artifacts, alien tech, insider info

Obligation: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

When you create your character, mark two obligations on one villain, and mark one obligation on another.

When you **come to them for help with your problems**, mark obligation on them and they'll help out within their specialty. If all their boxes are full, then they won't help you until you help them.

When **time passes**, roll + your highest obligation. On a 10+, they come crashing into your life with a crisis. On a 7-9, they call for a favor. On a miss, they don't come knocking yet, but mark obligation with them—the debts are getting heavier.

When you **help one of these villains with their problems**, erase two obligations on them.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

You've seen your greatest mistakes, and the rest of the world has, too. They're all watching you now, judging every move you make. When everything is on the line and your back is against the wall, though, you'll show them what you're made of—that being a hero is a choice. An act of will. And you've got what it takes to save the day. Of course, afterward, you can expect both sides, hero and villain, to deeply question where your loyalties truly lie...

TEAM MOVES

When you **share a moment of triumph with someone**, ask them what gives them hope for a brighter day and give them Influence.

When you **share a vulnerability or weakness with someone**, ask them what they would do something dark for and gain Influence over them.

POTENTIAL



Every time you roll a miss on a move, mark potential.

ADVANCEMENT

When you fill your potential track, you advance. Choose from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Take another move from your playbook | ☐ Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| ☐ Take another move from your playbook | ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | ☐ Take drives and mark four (from the Beacon's playbook) |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | |
| ☐ Someone permanently loses Influence over you; add +1 to a Label | |

When you've taken five advances from the top list, you can take advances from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth after it's been used once | ☐ Lock a Label, and add +1 to a Label of your choice |
| ☐ Change playbooks | ☐ Retire from the life or become a paragon of the city |
| ☐ Take an adult move | |
| ☐ Take an adult move | |

OTHER MOVES

PLAYING THE REFORMED

Haunted, redemptive, dangerous, tarnished. The Reformed is still young, but even in their short time they've done things—if not quite unforgivable, then pushing the limits. They filled the role of the villain, and they did it willingly and knowingly. And now they're trying to do better, to be better, but redemption doesn't come that easily.

The key to playing the Reformed is to keep in mind that you've already been there. You've already walked on the dark side. You've already done bad things. Not just silly little pranks or tricks, the way the Delinquent might have. You were a *villain*. And you specifically chose to abandon that life to be better. So while you may be drawn to take criminal action, you're also trying not to. You're fighting your base impulses. Your bad habits. Maybe even your *addictions*.

That said, your old life wasn't all bad. Yeah, you aren't going to rob banks or hurt people anymore, but you made friends. You developed relationships. And you got to know those people the other heroes are all too likely to just dismiss as “villains.” It's not so easy to just cut all those people and relationships out of your life, especially when they're trying to pull you back in. Don't hesitate to go to those characters outlined in your **Friends in Low Places** for help, even if you are trying to be as noble as possible. Those people have some hold on you, but also you have relationships with them.

Finally, embrace the conflict likely to come from your teammates mistrusting you, or the world mistrusting you. Don't play the Reformed if you want to be assured that others are going to see you as heroic. Your teammates and the world at large are all likely to come at you harder than they might for any other character, but that's what you signed up for.

NOTES ON YOUR MOVES AND EXTRAS

- For **What the hell, hero**, you get to determine the nature of the injustice you call out. It shouldn't be just a small perceived slight—the point of the move is to let you accuse more heroic types of wrongdoing, forcing them to perk up and listen because it's a former villain doing it. They don't have to agree with you that they committed an injustice, nor does anyone else, when you trigger the move. For “You win over an onlooker,” at the GM's discretion this can be interpreted as a crowd of individuals.
- For **Dark past**, triggering the move allows you to fill in pieces of your past. Don't confess to crimes that it would make absolutely no sense for you to have done—your confession has to be real and true to trigger the move. It also has to be a serious crime. No misdemeanors or small transgressions. Whatever you confess has to have hurt someone in some way.
- For **Blowing off steam**, the GM is the final arbiter of whether or not the crime actually qualifies for the trigger. As long as you're doing something illegal,

something that you shouldn't be doing, but that doesn't directly, obviously, or significantly harm anyone, the move should trigger.

- **Do me a favor** gives you the ability to go to civilian contacts for help. The Reformed is plugged into criminals and villains, and this move may help you ask for favors from those networks. It also allows you to ask for help from people you've met in the civilian world.

INSPIRATION FOR THE REFORMED

Loki, *Young Avengers*

Terra, *Teen Titans*

Quentin Quire, *Wolverine and the X-Men*

Ravager, *Teen Titans*

Hawkeye (Clint Barton), *Avengers*

REFORMED GM ADVICE

- Remind them of what they've done
- Ask them for a criminal or villainous favor
- Doubt them from a position of moral superiority
- Offer them solace with a criminal or villainous source
- Confront them with a nightmare from their past

Introducing the Reformed provides a through-line into the villainous side of Halcyon City. The Reformed was once important in that scene and still has plenty of contacts in that world. That means it's more important than ever for you to portray the villains as full humans, with sympathetic drives and believable personas. The empathy that the Reformed demands makes it tough to also have ridiculous, grandstanding, unsympathetic villains at the same time.

In addition to the increased focus on villains and sympathetic criminals, the Reformed also adds another element to **Masks** that no other playbook focuses on as clearly—the past. Even though the Reformed is young, they've been in the superhero scene for a while, and they've taken many actions in that time. The past of the Reformed is very important for their present, and as a result the Reformed requires you to spend more time asking questions and talking about the past than any other playbook. Don't hesitate to ask questions about what's happened if it ever becomes important to what's going on in the present.

Being a hero isn't just about doing right. It's about being seen doing right. Let them think you're shallow for loving the spotlight and the cameras, for making speeches, for smiling so much. You'll be a hero in all the ways that matter.



THE STAR

HERO NAME

REAL NAME

/LOOK

- ambiguous, man, shifting, transgressing, woman
- Asian or South Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, White
- charming smile, coy smile, broad smile, warm smile, teasing smile
- designer clothing, formal wear, beautiful outfits, preppy clothing, casual clothing
- branded costume, flashy costume, focus-tested costume, stylish costume, ridiculous costume

/ABILITIES

Your powers are flashy and impressive. Choose one.

- ☐ sonic control
☐ electrodynamic control

- ☐ light control
☐ strange wings

- ☐ body plasticity and stretching
☐ flame control

LABELS

(at character creation, add +1 wherever you choose)

DANGER	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
FREAK	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SAVIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
SUPERIOR	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
MUNDANE	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

CONDITIONS

- ☐ **Afraid** (-2 to directly engage a threat)
- ☐ **Angry** (-2 to comfort or support or pierce the mask)
- ☐ **Guilty** (-2 to provoke someone or assess the situation)
- ☐ **Hopeless** (-2 to unleash your powers)
- ☐ **Insecure** (-2 to defend someone or reject others' influence)

BACKSTORY

- When did you first appear onscreen?
- What do you tell people about how you got your powers?
- Who, outside of the team, supports your burgeoning star in every way possible?
- Who, outside of the team, loathes what you represent?
- Why do you care about the team?

Once you've finished your backstory, introduce your character to the other players, and then determine what happened when your team first came together, the relationships between you and your teammates, and who has Influence over you.

WHEN OUR TEAM FIRST CAME TOGETHER...

We, as a team, attracted the attention of a major media outlet within the city, thanks to our efforts. Who are they? Why do they support us?

RELATIONSHIPS

_____ might wind up being more of a star than me some day.
_____ would be a great sidekick; I try to keep them around.

INFLUENCE

Choose how you see the team: as a means to an end, or as something worthwhile on its own.

If you see the team as a means to an end, give no one Influence. If you see the team as something worthwhile, give three teammates Influence.

STAR MOVES

(Choose two)

- ☐ **The gossip mags:** When you tap into the gossip and rumor of the celebrity industry for information on an important city figure, roll + Superior. On a hit, you can ask the GM questions. On a 10+, ask three. On a 7-9, ask one:

- What are they up to?
- What or who do they most care about?
- What allies do they have? Enemies?
- Where and when can I find them?
- How could I make them vulnerable to me?

On a miss, ask one anyway, but they hear about your interest in them.

- ☐ **Stage-fighting:** When you **directly engage a threat** with an audience watching, mark a condition to roll + Superior instead of Danger.

- ☐ **Time for the show:** When you put on a flamboyant display of your powers, roll + Superior. On a 7-9, name one NPC present. On a 10+, name two NPCs present. The named NPCs must either volunteer help or information, express admiration, or ask for your help, GM's choice. On a miss, your display catches someone watching in the wrong way.

- ☐ **Take it from me:** When you **comfort or support** someone who openly admires your celebrity persona, roll + Superior instead of Mundane.

- ☐ **Cold and Cruel:** When you shut someone down, roll + Superior. On a 10+, you either inflict a condition on them, make them lose Influence over you, or take Influence over them, your choice. On a 7-9, you either each inflict a condition on the other, or both lose Influence over each other, your choice. On a miss, they gain Influence over you.

AUDIENCE

You are a celebrity in the city. By default, your audience is a limited group of interested fans, and you speak to them through after-action interviews and infrequent press conferences. Why does your audience love you? Mark all that apply.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You're just like them | ☐ You're stunning, unique, and beautiful |
| ☐ You're a dangerous person, a bad seed | ☐ You're charming, well-spoken, and smart |
| ☐ You're noble warrior for justice | ☐ You're a firebrand, a rabble rouser |

Choose two advantages:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Your audience is utterly devoted to you | ☐ You earn a lot of money from their interest |
| ☐ You can easily speak to them at any time | ☐ You have a major hero's endorsement |
| ☐ You have a PR agent to handle your audience | ☐ You have a much wider audience |

Choose two demands your audience makes on you:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ They require constant stimulation | ☐ They require major acts of heroism |
| ☐ They require perfection—no mistakes | ☐ They require novelty and brand new action |
| ☐ They require frequent bouts of drama | ☐ They require chemistry with your allies |

When you **accept what your audience tells you about yourself**, clear a condition. When you **reject what your audience tells you about yourself**, on a hit mark potential and expect retribution.

When you **seek help from your audience**, roll + Superior. On a hit, someone in your audience can hook you up. On a 10+, they only make a small demand. On a 7-9, their demands are a lot higher. On a miss, you've made a mistake, and your audience won't help you until you've redeemed yourself in their eyes.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Sometimes it can be hard to tell where the show stops and where you begin—but not today. Not now. Because right now, there is no show. Right now, you are the thing you pretend to be—bold and bright and beautiful and amazing and powerful and confident. Right now, you draw strength from your audience, comfort from their belief in you, and you can do anything they think you can. Of course, after such an impassioned performance, your audience will just have even more demands...

TEAM MOVES

When you **share a triumphant celebration with someone**, say whether it's part of the show or not. If it is, then you can shift your Labels as you choose. If it is not, then they shift your Labels, and you can clear a condition or mark potential.

When you **share a vulnerability or weakness with someone**, ask them if they will tell anyone the truth about you. If they agree to keep it a secret, clear a condition or mark potential. If they don't agree, the GM shifts your Labels.

POTENTIAL



Every time you roll a miss on a move, mark potential.

ADVANCEMENT

When you fill your potential track, you advance. Choose from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Take another move from your playbook | ☐ Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| ☐ Take another move from your playbook | ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | ☐ Become part of a larger superhero tradition and take a legacy (from the Legacy playbook) |
| ☐ Take a move from another playbook | |
| ☐ Someone permanently loses influence over you; add +1 to a Label | |

When you've taken five advances from the top list, you can take advances from the list below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Unlock your Moment of Truth after it's been used once | ☐ Take an adult move |
| ☐ Change playbooks | ☐ Lock a Label, and add +1 to a Label of your choice |
| ☐ Take an adult move | ☐ Retire from the life or become a paragon of the city |

OTHER MOVES

PLAYING THE STAR

Arrogant, ambitious, flamboyant, delightful. The Star is a young celebrity, aware of their status and interested in obtaining more of it. They're a showboat, but they're also still a superhero, and those two poles pull them in drastically different directions. Should they make sure they land the last strike on the villain, so they can take the credit? Or should they avoid interfering with their teammate's fight and possibly messing things up?

The questions are complicated by your audience. When you play as the Star, your audience is a constant presence intruding upon your life. They will tell you who you are and, more than anything, they'll try to reshape you into what they want. But they also provide you with help when you need it, when you speak to them or organize them for a particular end. Don't play the Star unless you're already interested in interacting with the audience regularly and juggling their impression of you along with actual heroics.

Remember that your audience is *your* audience and that, while people may be paying attention to you as part of a team, they're also paying attention to you individually. That's another source of fruitful tension for the Star, whether they belong to a team or are an individual celebrity. Play into it, and don't hesitate to be a bit of a heel sometimes, trying to nab all the attention for yourself.

Most importantly, always keep in mind that the Star, while a celebrity, is also still a *hero*. They may be interested in their own popularity quite a bit. They may desperately be trying to stay in the news. But they're also still ultimately interested in helping people, in making things better. If someone is in pain in front of them, they won't just let it keep going. If you veer too much into making decisions purely for the audience, then your character will become unsympathetic fast.

NOTES ON YOUR MOVES AND EXTRAS

- For **Time for the show**, a flamboyant display of your powers needs to primarily be just that—a flamboyant display. It doesn't trigger if you are using another move, but flamboyantly. If you're trying to stop a building from falling down, but you're doing it flamboyantly, the move won't trigger. But if you're standing on a stage juggling fireballs, then you are doing a flamboyant display, and the move will trigger.
- **Stage-fighting** requires you to fight with an audience watching. "An audience" is more than just a couple people. If you're fighting in an abandoned warehouse with five hostages watching, then the move won't trigger. But if you're fighting in the city streets with news choppers following you, it will.
- **Cold and cruel** requires you to shut someone down. That could involve outright telling them to shut up or it could involve a cold look, but it has to be clear to both parties that you are demeaning, insulting, or reducing them.

- Seeking help from your audience is when you are either putting out a general call for aid from your audience, or searching through people you know to be fans to find someone who can help you out. You aren't necessarily speaking to the group, so much as combing through them to see if anyone can give you a hand. It takes some time, so it's unlikely that you can trigger the move in the middle of a fight, unless your audience is right there.

INSPIRATION FOR THE STAR

Striker, *Avengers Academy*

Booster Gold, *Justice League*

Enchantress (Sylvie Lushton), *Young Avengers*

The X-Statix, *X-Statix*

Captain Amazing, *Mystery Men*

STAR GM ADVICE

- Reinterpret their actions in the media
- Make a demand from their audience
- Offer an opportunity for public attention
- Offer an opportunity for quiet heroism
- Demean their superficiality

The Star introduces the need for media attention and public responses into **Masks**. Their audience and celebrity affords the Star some excellent advantages and opportunities, but also puts on them enormous pressure, and provides a clearer source of constant judgment than any other character might have. Don't let up. If the Star wants to call for a public appearance, or if the Star wants to get any kind of attention, they should be able to without any difficulty...but if they ever try to escape the limelight, it should only ever be a temporary reprieve. The demands of the audience always give you an excuse to make them intrude and let the Star know what they think.

On the same note, the offers, opportunities, temptations, and difficult decisions offered to the Star need to almost always be oriented toward popularity and celebrity. The Star's drama isn't served by offers of terrible power or by incredibly difficult moral decisions, but by seemingly innocuous choices between popularity and justice. Taking credit for a friend's good deeds; showing a hard line response to a villain you might actually want to give mercy; focusing on the more publicly disliked threat than the actual threat—these are the decisions the Star's story is made of. Throw them at the Star so they have to deal with the costs of their own celebrity.

So there you are. The portfolio of unsolved mysteries left over for you by the old editor of the Halcyon City Herald and its affiliates. By now, if you did your job, your brain is well and truly baked with the city's heroes and villains and weirdnesses.

And me, I'm gone on my own way. I've been deep into this city's mysteries and craziness for too long, and it hasn't left me untarnished. I have my own mysteries to go look into...and maybe I need some time to catch my breath while I'm at it.

I'm not going to give you some final piece of advice or nugget of wisdom that would throw all of this into context and weave it together into a single story.

That's not how this works, and you know it. Because it's *your* job to make that happen.

So go into the city. Answer your own questions. Weave together a bigger story out of the fragments. Find the truths that need finding, and share them where they need to be heard.

And start prepping your own portfolio early. Never know when you might need it.

Keandra Hunt

Halcyon City has been the epicenter of the earth's superhuman madness for close to a century. The city is built on a history of heroes, villains, and the battles they bring with them. And the Halcyon City Herald has been there since the beginning, your eyes and ears on the ground.

Now Keandra Hunt, editor-in-chief of the Herald, is revealing her personal collection of articles pointing to Halcyon's greatest truths and notorious secrets...

The **Halcyon City Herald Collection** is a sourcebook for the roleplaying game **Masks: A New Generation** that fleshes out Halcyon City with new places, new faces, and new mysteries. Here, you'll find everything you need to spice up your version of Halcyon City at a moment's notice.

In this book, you get:

- A collection of articles detailing many of Halcyon's greatest catastrophes and characters
- A slew of new moves fleshing out those people and places with mechanical weight
- Five new limited edition playbooks to add to your game of **Masks**, along with advice for using them in your game

Does your team of heroes have what it takes to investigate Halcyon's greatest stories? Time to find out.



Players
3-5

Time
2-4 hrs

Rating
Teen

magpie
GAMES



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