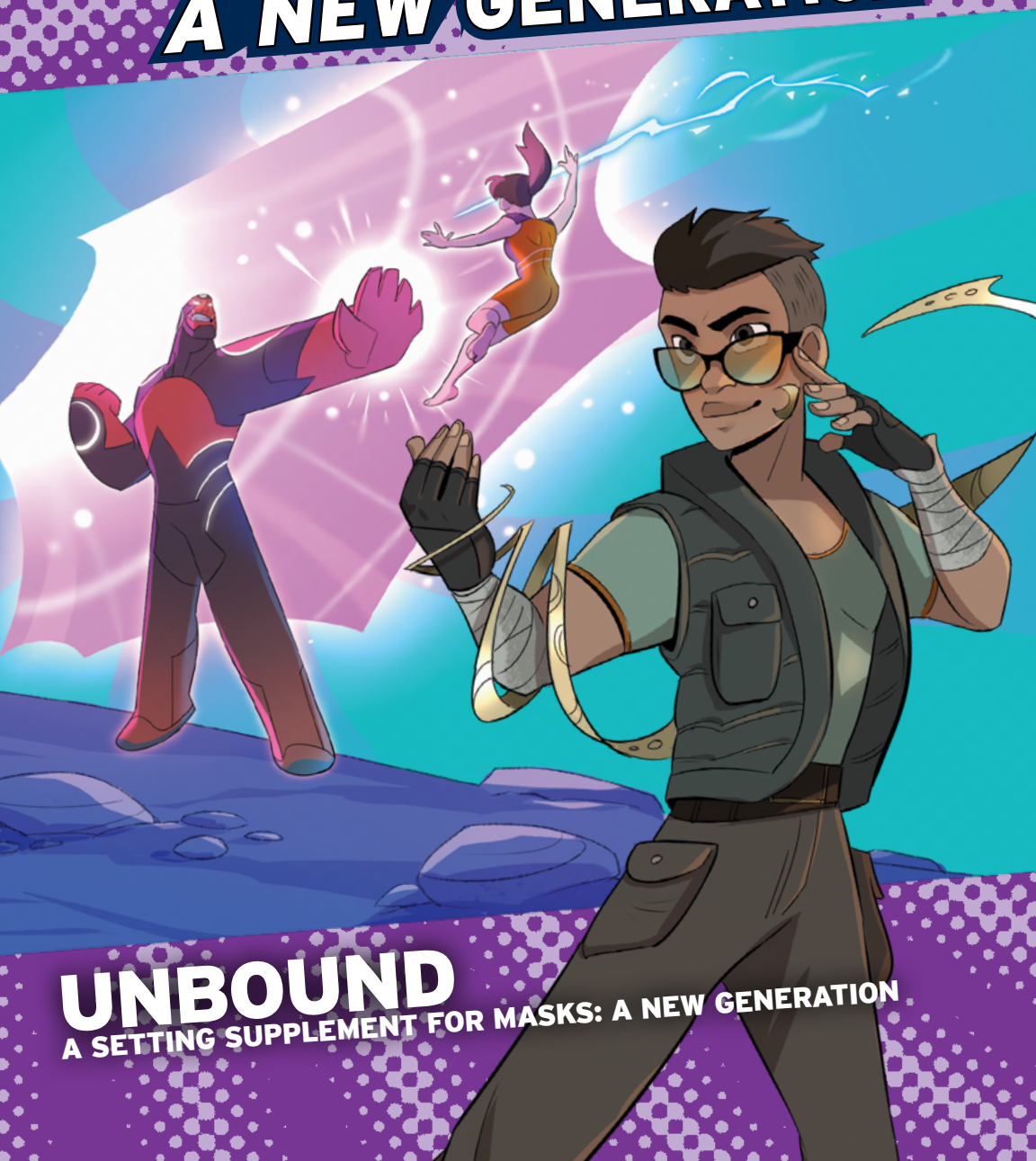


MASKS

A NEW GENERATION



UNBOUND

A SETTING SUPPLEMENT FOR MASKS: A NEW GENERATION

MASKS

A NEW GENERATION

UNBOUND



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essential chaos begets endless memories of warped form and vision
temporal injustices of broken souls crusted with violent nightmares

AH. YOU ARE HERE.

YOUR MIND IS LIMITED, BUT I CAN NARROW MY EXISTENCE TO THE SLIMMEST SLIVER
SO WE MAY CONVERSE. YOU NOW VIEW THE EQUIVALENT OF A SHADOW OF A CHILD'S
DRAWING OF THE THING THAT IS ME. BUT IT IS THE BEST WE CAN DO.

HELLO MORTAL. I AM

THE ONETROCOSM.

ACROSS EXISTENCE, THE MINDS OF SENTIENT LIFE, NO MATTER HOW INSIGNIFICANT
AND BLINKERED, BEAR A DEEP POWER. THEY PRODUCE INFINITE FLEETING WORLDS
THAT EXIST ONLY IN THEIR CONCEPTION, OR SO THEY BELIEVE. IN TRUTH, THOSE
WORLDS DO NOT DISSIPATE WITHIN THE FLOTSAM OF FANCY. THEY BECOME A PART
OF SOMETHING GREATER THAN THEM. THEY BECOME A PART OF ME. AND IN SO
DOING, THEY COME ALIVE, MADE REAL WITHIN MY ENDLESS DEPTHS.

I UNDERSTAND. IT IS DIFFICULT TO
CONCEIVE OF, BUT YOU MUST TRY.

I BRING YOUR PRIMITIVE MIND
BEFORE ME TODAY BECAUSE I...

BECAUSE YOUR...

BECAUSE...

BECAUSE YOUR ASSISTANCE IS
NEEDED, THOUGH IT PAINS ME TO SAY.

A WAR RAGES IN THE DEEPEST SUBDIMENSIONS OF THE UNIVERSE. IN MICROFACETS OF
THE BOUNDLESS SHIMMERING REALITY, I FACE OFF ENDLESSLY WITH MY OPPONENT.

THE NIHILACTOR

A BEING OF NOTHINGNESS AND OBLIVION. IT CRAVES THE SILENT, STILL VOID OF
NONBEING. WITH EVERY PASSING MOMENT IT SCREAMS IN RAGE AS I SWELL
WITH THE CREATIONS WITHIN ME... AND IT TEARS AT ME, GNAWS AT ME, RIPS
WHOLE WORLDS FREE OF ME AND PLUNGES THEM INTO ITS OWN ABYSS.

I NOW FIND MYSELF DIMINISHED BY THE NIHILACTOR'S ASSAULT. COSMIC NULLITY
THREATENS ENTIRE DIMENSIONS AND THE COUNTLESS BEINGS CONTAINED THEREIN.

I AM IN NEED OF AID.

YOU ARE A SENTIENT BEING. YOUR MIND CAN ACT
AS A FONT OF POWER FOR THREATENED WORLDS.

I SHOW TO YOU NOW THE TORN FRAGMENTS OF WORLDS
THE NIHILACTOR NEARLY TOOK FROM ME. THESE SHARDS
OF METATHOUGHT CAPTURED WITHIN THE WEAVE AND WEF
OF MY BEING, NOW THREATENED BY DIMINISHMENT AND
OBLIVION...THEY ARE WEAK, BUT THEY LIVE STILL.

EVEN WITH YOUR LIMITED MIND, YOU CAN SUSTAIN THESE WORLDS.

VISIT THEM. EXPERIENCE THEM. LIVE THEM. FILL THEM UP WITH
YOUR SENSATION AND YOUR IMAGINATION AND LET THEM THRIVE.

WITH THE STUNNED, AWED THOUGHTS OF YOUR MINISCULE
HUMAN MINDS, YOU WILL CREATE THE FRAMEWORK THAT I,

THE ONETROCOSM

NEED TO BRING TRUE LIFE BACK TO THESE WORLDS.

AND TOGETHER, WE WILL PUSH BACK THE DARKNESS OF THE NIHILACTOR.

THESE UNIVERSES SHALL LIVE THROUGH
YOU, MY PETS. MAKE ME PROUD.

AND NOW, IF YOU DON'T MIND, I SHALL RETURN
TO WEAVING THE VERY STUFF OF EXISTENCE.

shatteredpiecesoflovefallfromashiveringmouththatloomshighinthesh
andhungersforaughtelsebutthetasteofbrokenremorseandindigadren

INTRODUCTION



WHAT IS UNBOUND?

Halcyon City is a nexus point—a place where countless realities and timelines converge. Within its boundaries there are multitudinous stories, and when you add in other dimensions and other worlds...the possibilities are endless.

And you can experience those endless possibilities. All it takes is some bravery and a sense of adventure.

UNBOUND is the third supplement for **MASKS: A NEW GENERATION**, a tabletop roleplaying game all about playing young superheroes in Halcyon City. In these pages you'll find four different playsets, each one a totally different take on **MASKS** that skews it in a new direction. You'll find plot hooks, new characters, setting information, and more, along with all the rules and guidance you need to start up and play campaigns in these altered settings. What's more, you'll find brand new playbooks, new options for characters that will take your game out into the farthest reaches of space and time.

HOW SHOULD I USE THIS BOOK?

UNBOUND is here to help you expand your own game of **MASKS**. By default, when you play **MASKS**, you're assumed to play in Halcyon City—the greatest city in the world. It's already full of vibrancy and variety, but these playsets help focus in on particular themes and aspects of a normal game of **MASKS** to bring them to the fore.

This book has two kinds of content in it:

- Playsets, which take the core game of **MASKS** into new and different directions, tweaking the rules significantly.
- Playbooks, which are brand new limited-edition playbooks to use in your game of **MASKS**.

PLAYSETS

The playsets in this book are designed to take your game of **MASKS** in brand new directions. They drift the game significantly, taking it outside the range of baseline **MASKS** and giving you new rules and techniques to play an awesome game in alternative settings. Some of these playsets are more focused on tone and flavor, while others bring substantial mechanical changes and new systems to your game, but all of them give you new tools that you could use in nearly any game of **MASKS**. If you're going to run a game of **MASKS** using one of these playsets, make sure you read through the whole thing first!

If you're looking to play as the youthful resistance to an oppressive alien regime, check out **CHAPTER 1: IRON RED SOLDIERS**. There you'll find guidance on playing

in a world where the heroes are the rebellious underdogs, fighting against a seemingly implacable enemy and trying to free the adult superheroes. A game of *Iron Red Soldiers* will be somewhat darker than a normal game of **MASKS**, and it offers the real opportunity for triumph right alongside the real threat of failure, with allies and loved ones falling in the conflict against the alien invaders. Systems in this playset include a new mission structure for waging the guerrilla war, and a way to handle your allies offering aid while slowly depleting their own resources.

If you're looking to play a grittier, meaner, street-level game of superheroes, check out CHAPTER 2: THE SPIDERWEB. There you'll find the details on a timeline of Halcyon City where superheroes never arose, and the city's been chopped up by different crime lords—the worst of which is the Spider. A game of *The Spiderweb* will be street level, lower-powered and less overtly four-color than a normal game of **MASKS**. The playset offers a deeper connection to a particular neighborhood and culture to which your characters will be personally connected, while threatening that neighborhood with dangers from more grounded and realistic sources. Systems in this playset include a new harm move emphasizing the real risk of physical harm, and a way to handle whole gangs of minions working for a crime boss, such that defeating the minions can actually inflict conditions on the crime boss.

If you're looking to play a story about teenage antics, high school drama, and exams that may or may not involve fireballs, check out CHAPTER 3: PHOENIX ACADEMY. There you'll find a full set up for Halcyon City's pre-eminent school for young supers, Phoenix Academy, where the headmaster is a demon, the lockers may be sentient, and asking your crush to prom is still the scariest thing you'll face. A game of *Phoenix Academy* will be more focused on the kind of superhero stories bound by the structures and rigors of school, with characters reacting to and running up against the explicit rules of their learning environment. The playset offers a story told in and around the tropes of high school, with dances, classes, tests, and more, all complicated by superpowers. Systems in this playset include a special move for taking tests over the course of the year, and an emphasis on using school events to structure the overarching cycle of the game.

If you're looking to play a game of crazy cosmic adventure couched around a roadtrip format, check out CHAPTER 4: THE APOCALYPSE SONATA. There you'll find specifics on a cosmic quest to obtain the individual pieces of the Apocalypse Sonata before the dread Lord Ominus can do so himself—even if it means you'll have to travel to planets of sentient dinosaurs to do it. A game of *The Apocalypse Sonata* will be far more outlandish and cosmic than a normal game of **MASKS**, as it leaves the Halcyon City Earth-bound setting behind for the far,



MORE STORIES, PLAYSETS, AND PLAYBOOKS

If you're interested in seeing still more **MASKS** goodies, be sure to check out the other supplements for the game, including:

The Halcyon City Herald Collection, with a whole ton of new ideas and story hooks based in the core game setting of Halcyon City, along with five new playbooks: the Innocent, the Star, the Joined, the Newborn, and the Reformed!

Secrets of A.E.G.I.S., with the secret internal files of the Advanced Expert Group for Intervention and Security, along with two whole new playsets—Agents of A.E.G.I.S. and the Suits—and two new playbooks, the Brain and the Soldier!

psychedelic reaches of space. The playset offers a road-trip format, with the PCs traveling from location to location on their quest to find the pieces of the Sonata, experiencing new things outside of the reach of the adults from their normal lives. Systems in this playset include a planet creation system ensuring you create interesting and Masks-appropriate worlds for the PCs to visit, and descriptions of the dangerous and cosmically powerful enemies they will face on their quest.

PLAYBOOKS

The playbooks are new kinds of characters you can bring into any game of **MASKS**, but especially suited to games using the content in this book. They are a little more complicated than the baseline playbooks, but manageable.

These playbooks include:

- The Harbinger, a young hero from the future who is desperately trying to figure out how to change the timeline.
- The Nomad, someone who has traveled across the full width and breadth of the universe, and is now trying to settle down a bit and invest in other people.
- The Scion, the child of a dangerous supervillain who would do anything to prove that they are someone different.

Each playbook comes with a section of advice for players and the GM.

IRON RED SOLDIERS



CHAPTER ONE

THE SILVER WOLF FILES

I don't know if anyone will read this blog—Internet access is getting spottier, and the Beaks are cracking down on “subversive materials.” But I thought it was important to document what I know about the past and the present. Just in case I'm taken too. Other people—you—need to know these things.

My name is Kasey Parker, but you probably know me as the Silver Wolf. I'm a superhero, no matter what they say, no matter how many people think that word doesn't have meaning anymore. Hell, I take the HUAC wanted posters with my face on them as a sign that I'm even more of a hero.

But let me start at the beginning.

ZERO HOUR

I'm from Halcyon City. It was once a thriving metropolis, bustling with people from all walks of life and all corners of the globe, their lives intersecting in countless permutations, both large and small. It was dotted with beautiful parks and fountains, traffic flowing past like a rushing stream as it moved along black ribbons of streets.

In the early twentieth century, a new breed of people emerged, people with fantastic and terrible powers. Starting with Flying Freedom, those with powers like time manipulation, flight, super strength, precognition, and teleportation (to name a few) became more common. Some of them used their powers selfishly, robbing banks, stealing art, generally going on rampaging sprees.

But also, we had heroes, and they made the world brighter.

Over the years three generations of superheroes rose. Now known as the Gold Generation, the Silver Generation, and the Bronze Generation, they had protected the city from those who abused their power. These heroes, along with A.E.G.I.S., the Advanced Expert Group for Intervention and Security, kept Halcyon City and the rest of the world safe.

FIRST CONTACT

It was hard to be afraid when the aliens first appeared in Halcyon City. After all, we lived in the greatest city in the world. Full of all kinds of weirdness. And nothing had destroyed us yet. We had our heroes to protect us. I remember the feeling in those days—an odd sense of invincibility. We might get into trouble, but we'd always be bailed out. Always.

Simpler times, I guess.

The first signs of trouble were reports of strange, birdlike creatures with rust colored feathers. People saw them first in the outskirts of town, among the rolling farmlands, then closer. Someone claimed they'd seen a creature perched in a steeple, or on top of a library, or at a school, and the claims were filed away with the rest of the weirdness around Halcyon.

Weeks went by before someone caught one on camera, even in an age of ubiquitous cell phone cameras. The grainy image appeared all across Halcyon's news outlets: a vulture-like head with ruddy brownish feathers over its wings, grasping claws at the joint of the wing, sharp talons on its feet. It wore no clothing to speak of, but was adorned with some sort of circlet on its head and what appeared to be a bandolier holding a long, spear-like object to its back.

But it was Halcyon City. This could be anything. A mythological beast, an alternate form of humanity, a time traveler. Whatever. Nobody thought it was a real threat yet. (We were sharing the picture with #bigbird.) After all, there was the Dread Queen and her latest ploy to claim Halcyon as Vyortovian territory to worry about. There was the Farlander rocketing around the city, madly, in a new hammer-shaped spacecraft, and some resurrected ancient weather god had spat a blizzard on Halcyon Harbor in the middle of summer. We would worry about these bird creatures when something actually happened.

People continued to spot the same type of creature, closer and closer to the center of the city, still perching and watching. On the rare instances when someone got close to one, it flew off and disappeared before any real contact happened. Even supers who tried using their abilities to make contact were foiled—seemed like the aliens were so shy they were willing to deploy cloaking devices or mindshields teleporters just to remain inaccessible.

Eventually, A.E.G.I.S. and other government authorities began beaming messages on all frequencies, throughout the city and into the skies, thinking that there might be cloaked ships somewhere nearby. They sent messages of welcome and peace in every human language, even flashing pictographs on the screens at the drive-ins and on the jumbotrons at the stadium, all to no avail. Nobody paid it much mind—we'd encountered aliens before, and while these ones seemed particularly shy, most of this happened without anyone even caring. I know I didn't even hear about the messages until years later.

Then, as quickly as the birds arrived, they disappeared. No one reported any more sightings of the strange creatures. Everyone assumed that whatever they were, whatever they had wanted...they must have gotten it and gone home.

We were wrong.

SECOND COMING

A decade later they returned. They came in a single huge ship, rust red, matte, and shaped like a manta ray, large enough to darken the skies over Halcyon City like a gathering storm. It could have been a giant kite floating there ominously, if the kite had been coated in blood and left to dry before launching it. Needless to say, we all paid attention now.

No longer content to just sit and watch from afar, they sent ambassadors down to speak to the governing bodies. Some of the talks were televised and live-tweeted and dissected endlessly in the news and by think tanks. Others were behind closed doors—I only know about what happened there by piecing together reports from others.

We learned a few things from those initial talks. They call themselves the Tangee, their word for “people” in their dominant language. Their home is Arrys, orbiting the star Helvetios, in the central portion of the Pegasus constellation. Arrys is very like Earth, the yellow sun providing warmth and light enough for agriculture. The planet is mostly covered by a vast orchard and forests, originally wild, but now carefully cultivated outside their few cities. The ocean surrounding them is fresh, not salt, with saltwater occurring in only a few lakes. The Tangee are an omnivorous people, describing things much like our fish and fruits and grains in discussions with our scientists, with farming practices much more efficient than our own. They are better conservationists, horrified by our climate change issues and pollution.

With a single, large supercontinent on their relatively small planet, a few cultures ultimately joined into a single civilization ruled by a bureaucracy. Their leader: the Paragon of the Sky, named Enaw of the Storm Expanse. (The Beaks’ naming conventions were always this elaborate mix of “Title + individual name + home/birth region.” It makes talking about them kind of obnoxious.) Enaw’s right to rule came from years upon years of wending through the Tangee bureaucracy, to rise to its summit.

The Tangee value scholarship and research above all else, and only a few decades prior had discovered the technology to peer into the future and past, based on algorithmic extrapolation of current particle states. There are heavy limits on this technology—any Observer (their name for the device) requires tremendous amounts of power and could only look into particular space-time coordinates based on its own location. Curator of Knowing Scerri of the Emerald Fields and Prime of Spies Sceeh of the Everyday Valley sent small squadrons carrying the necessary reactor cores and Observers to explore the surrounding galaxies, with permission to gaze as far forward in time as they deemed necessary to assess the future.

One of those teams found evidence of a cataclysmic event, tearing through the space-time continuum, originating at some point in what we call the future. They tracked it down as best they could, until finally they pinpointed what they thought was the epicenter—Earth.

Prime of Spies Sceeh of the Everday Valley immediately dispatched agents to observe this blue-green planet. The ones we spotted a decade previous were those spies. Herald of Arrows Geiww of the Thunder Territories and their mate, Tribune of Bows Sqraberet of the Calm Plains were together assigned to watch Terra, our Earth. They were to assess our planet and come to an evaluation of its potential threat and its relationship to the future cataclysm, using their own Observer and the reactor core of their ship.

Geiww and Sqraberet ultimately returned to Arrys at the end of their mission with a nearly burned-out reactor and the absolute belief that our superhumans threatened the universe. Their Observer confirmed the timequake began in Earth's future, they claimed, specifically originating in Halcyon City. Furthermore, the two Tangee theorized that the collapse came from some usage of time traveling technology or power. They claimed that when human powers acquired and implemented time travel, those humans had tried to alter the timeline, spinning paradox after paradox that ripped a hole in the very fabric of the universe too large to repair. Unable to pinpoint who or what, exactly, caused the cataclysm, Geiww and Sqraberet recommended capturing or destroying all of Halcyon's superhumans.

However, further projections and examinations of the problem suggested that such a solution would ultimately fail. The Tangee discovered through further usage of the Observers that Earth's superhumans played a crucial role in too many events throughout the universe. Without the heroes of Halcyon City, all of existence would be torn asunder many times over. So simply eliminating the superhumans was not an option, nor was capturing them and holding them indefinitely.

Instead, they would have to take the time to discover the real source of the problem, root it out, and eliminate it.

The Tangee had sent this expeditionary force to fulfill the task given to them by the Paragon of the Sky. All they demanded of us was that all superhumans be placed under Tangee jurisdiction. The Tangee needed to perform more tests and evaluations, but would eventually determine which superhumans were likely the source of such dangerous technology in the future. And the Tangee would then simply expunge those superhumans from the world, and return the rest to us.

To them, the request was eminently reasonable. To us and our leaders, it was madness. There was no way we were turning over all of our superhumans to these aliens. We weren't even prepared to turn over all the villains we'd incarcerated

at the Spike and other such facilities—not before we knew more ourselves, or had explored other options. Our leaders put out lots of broadcasts about how we would not sacrifice humans to these aliens, and we would find another way of handling the problem, first. I remember how it felt—that we were united in opposition—that we would find another way. We always did. It was kind of exhilarating, as Halcyon’s human leaders came together in their rhetoric.

The Tangee seemed to take our refusal in stride. They continued to speak to us for some time, to argue their point, to present their evidence. We continued to refuse their plan, offering up other ideas. The Tangee always turned us down—theirs was the only way. They had done the research. Run the numbers. This was the only option.

Eventually, the Tangee apparently decided the time for reason was over. They sent a message back home to Arrys, and even while they continued to speak to us publicly, they hatched a new plan.

While all eyes were on the continued human-Tangee peace summits, the aliens broke into the A.E.G.I.S. prison, the Spike. They abducted as many of the prisoners as they could and brought them back to the Tangee ship using instantaneous transportation. Those extraordinarily powerful villains, who could have been the source of the timequake, the Tangee imprisoned for further study or straight-up executed. Those who were not so dangerous, the Beaks offered to release in exchange for their help overcoming the rest of Halcyon City’s defenses. Most agreed readily, eager to get revenge on those who had thrown them in jail in the first place. The few who didn’t, like poor Benny Diction (whose only real power was convincing oratory), were imprisoned or executed.



The Battle of Halcyon followed and broke us. Whole city blocks were destroyed as villains like tectonic-shifting Earthshatter, moth-winged Mammoth Swallowtail, and mad scientist Doctor Titanium worked together with the Tangee. Glass from the skyscrapers rained down on the populace as the Beaks used their energy weapons to immobilize and capture heroes like the Misty Swordsman and White Cheetah. Other heroes like Nightwave, manipulator of shadows, and Timeline, a precog, were seemingly killed outright, their bodies vanishing in a flash of Tangee weaponry.

No one has yet been able to figure out what criteria the Tangee used to decide who to capture versus who to immediately put down. The best guess is that they targeted those they felt could be responsible for the future cataclysm, those whose powers most match the aftermath—although some say they only capture those they deem guilty, not kill them. After all, Nightwave and Timeline disappeared entirely, leaving behind no evidence, not even ash, and we know they have instantaneous teleportation technologies. But we didn't have time to speculate—we were losing the fight, despite all our heroes, despite A.E.G.I.S.'s fortitude, despite our best efforts.

Watching the Battle of Halcyon from the sidelines was the worst thing I had ever experienced—especially because it wasn't happening directly to me. I was just a bystander, unable to do anything as our heroes fell. Our great city became a ruin, a battleground, a target, and a prize. The combatants included our greatest heroes, our worst villains, and the Beaks themselves, swooping around like terrible angels. Many Halcyonites had been through terrible fights—but none like this. It wasn't just a fight we were watching, it was a war. One we were losing. Badly.

The rest of the world largely stayed out of the fight, hoping that if they didn't put up resistance, if they didn't catch the Beaks' attention, then they wouldn't become targets.

And then, the rest of the Tangee arrived. When they sent their message back to Arrys at the beginning of the Battle of Halcyon, their leadership responded by sending their entire military wing to defuse the universal threat. Thirty massive ships and nearly a million soldiers now hung in the skies above Halcyon City. Led by Eminence of the Fleet Kheit of the Infernal Territory, they came to ensure that the Paragon of the Sky's orders were carried out. That the threat of the timequake was ended, once and for all.

We were battered from fighting the Beaks and our own supervillains. Many of our greatest heroes were dead or captured. A.E.G.I.S. didn't have the strength left to resist the new fleet.

And just like that, we were occupied.

THIRD WAVE

It's been a few years, and the Tangee still want us to believe that it wasn't an invasion, that we aren't occupied—that we remain in charge. They left the Halcyon government in place, albeit with new Tangee “advisers.” Normal life restarted and still runs like it did before. After all, what were the people of Halcyon going to do? They don't want to fight an implacable foe with endless resources. As long as no one came for them, or their loved ones, well...they could live with it. Pretend that everything is normal.

But those ships are still there, floating in the skies. People get dragged from their homes in the night. The holding facilities shine their spotlights all day, every day. The Tangee have at least one Observer, their time-viewing device, set up within our city so it can judge whether or not the timequake has been averted. The exact location is hidden, but they've had to hook it up to the city's power grid. Every time it turns on we have brownouts throughout the city. They claim that as soon as the Observer shows them a future without cataclysm, they'll go home—but who knows if that will ever happen.

And the ruins of the initial invasion still sit in broken, ash-covered rubble. In a city that prided itself on rebuilding after every superhuman battle, those ruins are like an unspoken monument to our loss and defeat. For some, they are a reminder of the cost of resistance. For others, they remind us that we *must* resist.

A.E.G.I.S. has all but abandoned the older heroes to their fates. Under Director Addison Jordan, A.E.G.I.S. has essentially made a truce with the Beaks. They try to shield the remaining Halcyon populace from further harm through diplomacy with the Beaks, while filling in the role of the now-captured superheroes in defending Halcyon from the homegrown villains of Earth. As long as A.E.G.I.S. doesn't directly oppose the Tangee, they allow it to operate and fulfill its function to protect the people of Halcyon and the world.

The freed villains still roam the city. A.E.G.I.S. managed to apprehend a few, but its premiere prison facility, the Spike, is too damaged to hold anyone. While A.E.G.I.S. scrambles to build a new facility, they can only hold the least dangerous, least powerful prisoners. Anyone more powerful is able to escape all too quickly—Knightmare has escaped from recapture five times so far.

The Human Blade, a veritable ninja, and Miss Fortune, another precog, seem to be leading the villains, liaising with the Tangee to hunt heroes and just “having fun” causing general mayhem around Halcyon City. It's an uneasy alliance between the Beaks and the villains, though. The Tangee had no problem exterminating or taking captive any villain that they found a threat. The Beaks aren't taking any chances about the source of the cataclysm—but beyond that, the Tangee have claimed villains a “human problem.” After all, the laws the villains break are human laws, not Tangee laws.



A few older heroes remain free...if you can call living as fugitives free. They move a lot, trying to stay one step ahead of snatchers. Some help when and where they can. But even they rarely take risks anymore; they're convinced that the little they can do from the shadows is more than they can do dead or captured. And some are likely still scared that the Beaks were right, and they may play a role in a temporal cataclysm.

Our generation has suffered its own losses, comrades and friends missing or dead. The academies we once attended were in the first wave of targets, and the Tangee snatchers are

still out there. It's terrifying when the Beaks are after you, gliding in on owl-quiet wings and grabbing you in their talons. Or lying in wait to pounce from the shadows, catching you in their nets and trundling you back to their ships.

And they're not alone—there are human collaborators. They call themselves Humans United Against Chaos. Whether or not the acronym was an homage to the McCarthy-era witch hunts, HUAC is as ruthless as McCarthy himself. They're led by a former televangelist—Blair Zeal. His church had always been a hotbed of hatred for those with superpowers, calling them “abominations.”

But others assist people like us. Logan Shields founded Citizens Looking Out for Aliens and Keeping Supers Safe (CLOAKSS), dedicated to protecting the remaining supers. They set up a system of secret safe houses. The Digital Allied Group Gathering Reconnaissance (DAGGR), started by Aaren Locke and Shannon Keyes, focuses on hacking. DAGGR has been especially effective at infiltrating Beak databases, stealing blueprints and other data.

With CLOAKSS and DAGGR helping, with A.E.G.I.S. keeping people safe, with older heroes in the shadows... We have a chance. A slim chance, but still. We can win this. We can free our people, our city. We can be heroes again. I've been fighting the good fight, and you can too.

Now isn't the time to hide. Now is the time to act. Make contact with others like you. Put on your mask. And go be heroes. We need them now, more than ever.

PLAYING IRON RED SOLDIERS

In this playset, the PCs are all young adults living in an alien-occupied Halcyon City. They fight a guerrilla war to free their home and their people, and they do it with far less support and guidance than normal. The biggest difference between this playset and basic **MASKS** is that in *Iron Red Soldiers* the heroes don't have older generations to rely on. They are thrust into being the adult too quickly, long before they are actually ready to take up such a mantle of responsibility. Additionally, they have no one there to pick up the pieces if they fail. A.E.G.I.S. still exists, and new allies CLOAKSS and DAGGR can provide assistance, but they're all limited in what they can do, stretched thin by their own struggles. If the team winds up creating a mess, it's their responsibility to fix it—there's no else capable of stepping in...

The lack of mentors also introduces a new level of planning. In a normal **MASKS** game, the heroes often make their choices of what to do in opposition to the orders they receive from some higher source. Here, decisions about what the heroes should and will do about a situation never come from someone else. They have no one to give them orders. The team has to decide on their own priorities and plan their own missions. They have to make hard choices about who to help and when because not everything is doable—they can't rely on the notion that "the Exemplars will handle it" when they let something slide.

The young heroes may stage daring raids to destroy crucial Tangee equipment. They may steal important intelligence about HUAC's next targets. They may sabotage prison transports and undermine Tangee propaganda. What they do is ultimately up to them.

One of the main tasks sitting before the heroes in *Iron Red Soldiers* is to rescue the adult heroes from the clutches of the Tangee, for example. The PCs need to gather intel on their location, uncover what the security is like there, and decide what equipment they need to pull off a rescue. CLOAKSS, DAGGR, and A.E.G.I.S. can help with this, but at a cost. Such aid exposes the humans within those organizations to retaliation from the Tangee. Those humans may be captured and tortured, or they may have to go further underground to escape. And the PCs have to escape the notice of the Tangee themselves, staying off the radar enough so as not to be caught up in the occasional roundups by the avians.

Even if the team successfully rescues an adult hero, the team shouldn't expect them to be ready to dive right back into the fray. Those captured by the Tangee have been traumatized, defeated, and left shadows of their former selves. Their powers may have been drained to make them less of a threat. The team shouldn't expect to be able to turn the problems back over to the adults.

ALLIES

In *Iron Red Soldiers*, the PCs have three primary allies: DAGGR, CLOAKSS, and A.E.G.I.S.

The Digital Allied Group Gathering Reconnaissance (DAGGR) is the eyes and ears of the Tangee resistance. Mostly organized into hidden spaces full of computers, network connections, servers, and all manner of digital craftsmanship, DAGGR isn't an organization that takes direct physical action. But when it comes to breaking into databases or hacking security systems, there's no one better. They're committed to Aaron Locke's and Shannon Keyes's mission to fight back against the Tangee and collaborators by undermining their own systems of control and shining a light on their secrets. DAGGR can supply the team with much needed insider intel but, as they are hiding in plain sight, may become suspect if the PCs use that intel too often.

Citizens Looking Out for Aliens and Keeping Supers Safe (CLOAKSS) is like the old Underground Railroad. Logan Shields built a network of safehouses, hidey-holes, and supply caches all over Halcyon City, with the help of small cells of dedicated, hidden agents called "citizens." CLOAKSS is crewed by people who still believe in heroes and the good they can do, or who do not countenance the Tangee imprisonment and purge of metahumans...or both. CLOAKSS citizens can keep the team hidden and even get rescued supers the help they need, but all CLOAKSS agents put themselves at risk with every action they take.

Members of both groups are unlikely to betray the young heroes intentionally. They're committed to their causes, and both organizations do their best to root out potential security risks. But the families and coworkers and neighbors of CLOAKSS and DAGGR members are not so reliable.

Finally, A.E.G.I.S. can give the heroes what help they can when they can on the sly, but fighting the Tangee is not the agency's first priority, especially publicly. With the first line of defense against superhuman threats mostly gone, A.E.G.I.S. has its hands full guarding the world and doing its best to protect Halcyon City from villains. Many claim that A.E.G.I.S. has become overtly corrupt ever since reaching an agreement with the Tangee, but the truth is that A.E.G.I.S. has, like always, oriented itself around doing the best it can in a bad situation. It doesn't have the resources to directly fight the Tangee, but it can keep people safe from supervillains, as long as it doesn't openly fight the aliens. So it has agreed to not overtly interfere with the Tangee, as long as the Tangee do not interfere with A.E.G.I.S. operations or assume full dominion over Halcyon City and the Earth. That doesn't mean A.E.G.I.S. won't provide covert help to other groups that might actually be able to push back on the Tangee, however...

PLAYBOOKS

Iron Red Soldiers does not include any changes to character creation or advancement. All of the standard playbooks work the way they do in other **MASKS** campaigns, but some require a bit of special consideration to make them work to their best advantage. Here's some advice specific to *Iron Red Soldiers*, broken down by playbook:

THE BEACON

This playbook is largely unchanged. Their lack of powers allows them to slip through Tangee scans easily if they're careful with their identity. The setting doesn't immediately invoke the same carefree tone as the Beacon's drives, but those drives still work and support the Beacon's role on the team thematically and functionally. The Beacon acts as a ray of hope and delight, even amid the darkness of the *Iron Red Soldiers* world.

THE BULL

This playbook is largely unchanged. Remember that deviations from the Bull's life before the invasion will be viewed suspiciously by the monitoring Tangee and their supervillain allies. If the Bull was in school, they should continue to attend. If the Bull wasn't in school, they shouldn't start going now. And the Bull's backstory can still easily tie into the Tangee occupation—perhaps someone designed them to combat a threat only a few saw coming, or perhaps they're the result of a failed Tangee attempt to create some sleeper agents.

THE DELINQUENT

This playbook is largely unchanged. There's plenty of opportunity for mischief in a world with villains running rampant and aliens floating in the skies like ominous sentinels. The Delinquent is practically pre-built for an underground rebellion. Think a bit about why the Delinquent has not yet been apprehended as a dangerous element, however. Have they only just begun to fight in earnest? Or have they been in hiding ever since the occupation began?

THE DOOMED

This playbook is largely unchanged. Their doom can still be in play as normal, although it may be even more pressing without the aid of any adult superheroes or powerful organizations to keep it at bay. If the Tangee found out about a Doomed whose doom threatens more than just themselves, the aliens would be sure to imprison that Doomed in a heartbeat, so the Doomed should try to stay under the radar. And the Doomed's Nemesis is still a factor, even in the Tangee-occupied Halcyon City. The Nemesis should still be connected to the Doomed's particular issues—not necessarily the Tangee.

THE JANUS

This playbook takes on an even more direct, significant tone in *Iron Red Soldiers*. In regular **MASKS**, the Janus keeps their lives separate to keep their friends and family safe from the repercussions of their superheroic life. In *Iron Red Soldiers*, that threat isn't just a general sense of danger from villains and possible vengeance—the Tangee are a real threat, floating overhead and looking for dangerous metahumans. If the Janus's two lives collide, the consequences could be more dire than ever.

THE LEGACY

This playbook is still built as normal—their legacy existed up to the Tangee invasion, and members of the legacy likely tried to fight back, especially in the Battle of Halcyon. Of the four possible members of your legacy, three work as written; only “_____ is still active and prominent in the city” needs changing. Interpret that member of your legacy to have been active prior to the Tangee invasion. Now, that person has been captured and held by the Tangee.

When creating a Legacy character, also define at least one member of the legacy who is not “the greatest opponent your legacy ever faced” and who is not imprisoned—that character becomes the most important for triggering many of your moves, including the core **Whenever time passes** move of the playbook. Otherwise, the Legacy has access to their moves related to their legacy either through those members who are free, or through flashbacks. Think along the lines of, “What was it that Green Tuxedo used to tell me all the time?” for moves like **Words of the past** or **The legacy matters**.

THE NOVA

This playbook is largely unchanged in mechanics, but their place in Halcyon is even more strained. The Nova's flashy powers make them a tempting target for the Tangee and a likely culprit for the future disaster. If the Nova unleashes the full extent of their powers, blowback may come as much from detection as from straightforward collateral damage.

THE OUTSIDER

This playbook is largely unchanged. The only caveat to keep in mind is that the Outsider should not be a Tangee. While the idea of a rebellious Tangee might be appealing, a Tangee character would not actually be an “outsider”; they would in fact be fairly common within this playset. Instead, play a member of another alien species that either opposes the Tangee or acts as an outside observer to the Tangee.



FLASHBACKS

Several of the playbooks require flashbacks to allow for the PCs to interact with their imprisoned mentors, parents, and allies. Most of **MASKS** is grounded in the present, but introducing flashbacks isn't all that difficult.

When one of the PCs looks for an opportunity to flashback to a prior scene with an important character, the GM sets the scene of the flashback by relating it to their current circumstances. If the PC is looking for advice on how to defeat a dangerous villain, then they should flashback to a training session, or the aftermath of a prior combat. The GM controls the circumstances, but should build on existing fiction and characters wherever possible.

Inside the flashback, the PC can make moves as per usual—and the consequences of these moves should affect the PC as normal. If they mark a condition during the flashback, they mark that condition in the present. If they shift Labels during the flashback, they shift Labels on their character sheet as normal. Having the flashback, recalling those moments, recalls those emotions.

Close the flashback as soon as the scene ends and return to the present. Do not follow the flashback to an ensuing scene in the past, or try to string flashbacks together—trying to make sense of the continuity of the past causes more trouble than it's worth.

THE PROTÉGÉ

Like the Legacy, this playbook is built as normal, but with the assumption and understanding that the Protégé's mentor starts play imprisoned. Since your mentor is almost certainly one of the heroes effective in and capable of contending with the Tangee, they have been dealt with far earlier. The Protégé has access to their moves through flashbacks and memories—feel free to set up scenes when the Protégé recalls an instance with their mentor that then affects their Labels today.

THE TRANSFORMED

This playbook is largely unchanged in mechanics and character creation, but unlike nearly any other playbook, the Transformed cannot at all hide among the masses of Halcyon City. This makes them an obvious target. The Transformed should think about what they do to keep themselves and their loved ones safe from Tangee sweeps.



OTHER PLAYBOOKS

Many of the limited edition playbooks can be involved in an *Iron Red Soldiers* story as well, though they may require a bit more work to integrate.

The Brain: Are you the threat the Tangee is looking for? Is one of your creations the real danger that made the Tangee move against Earth? Your shame is still out there, and almost certainly tied into this larger conflict.

The Harbinger: You might come from right around the same time as the disaster that spurred the Tangee to action. Since your own knowledge is scrambled, maybe you're here to stop the Tangee...or maybe you're here to help them. Don't count on any particular interpretation to be true, either—timelines change.

The Innocent: A lot of the details of your future self may be obscured by the invasion and the chaos surrounding it...including whether your future self is a true villain, a Tangee-deemed “dangerous” hero...or something else. Investigate while fighting.

The Joined: As long as you tie into the particular issues of your connected playbook, you shouldn't encounter additional difficulties.

The Newborn: The issues of this playbook become very complicated amid the occupation, guerrilla war, and overarching trouble—you are likely going to record lessons heavily skewed towards the guerilla warfare nature of the setting—so it's recommended that the Newborn isn't used in *Iron Red Soldiers*.

The Nomad: You need a very strong reason to tie you to a Halcyon City in mid-alien occupation. If you can't come up with one, try another playbook.

The Reformed: The Tangee invasion could've been the impetus you needed to switch sides. The good news is that your *Friends in Low Places* are likely still active in the city's underground; the bad news is they're absolutely at risk from the powers in the city, be it Tangee or A.E.G.I.S. or what have you.

The Scion: You'll need to free a few heroes to have good candidates for earning Respect, but the leaders of CLOAKSS, DAGGR, and A.E.G.I.S. make good options, too. Oh, and your supervillain parent is almost certainly active and free.

The Soldier: A.E.G.I.S. is still around and active, but focused on dealing with more immediate threats than the Tangee. So why are you assigned to this team? How does A.E.G.I.S. think of it? And do your missions jibe with the team's purpose?

The Star: This playbook is all about celebrity and the public eye, which makes it totally unsuited for the secret, covert war of *Iron Red Soldiers*. Leave it out.

RUNNING IRON RED SOLDIERS

TONE, THEME, AND COMFORT

Running *Iron Red Soldiers* is a little different from core **MASKS**. This playset shifts the game from a four-color city full of wonders and amazing moments (as well as dangerous villains and heart-breaking drama) into a broken city, essentially subjugated by a cool, calm, and potentially righteous alien foe. The characters are still heroes, but the fight that lies before them is that much bigger, that much more dire, and that much harsher than in normal **MASKS**.

Because of that tonal shift, before you start playing *Iron Red Soldiers*, have a conversation with your players. Make sure that the themes of loss, persecution, resistance, and hard choices are ones they all enthusiastically want to deal with. Remember that your players are more important than the game. If a player would rather not play with something, some theme or crime or possible threat, feel free to leave it out. Your players' emotional safety is more vital than throwing everything in the toolkit at them. Even in a long-standing group, it never hurts to check in with your players and make sure you're all still having fun.

A few safety tools you could use to ensure everyone's comfort and fun at the table include the following:

- The X-Card (<http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>)
- The Support Flower (www.gamestogather.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/SupportFlower-A5-PrintJ.pdf)
- Script Change (<http://www.briecs.com/2017/09/script-change-official.html>)

ALLIES

Throughout a game of *Iron Red Soldiers*, the PCs receive assistance from three organizations: CLOAKSS, DAGGR, and A.E.G.I.S. But these organizations cannot win the struggle—ultimately, that burden falls upon the PCs. At best, they can provide aid and assistance some number of times, and as they do they will be weakened, reduced, or targeted by enemy forces. If the PCs rely upon them too much, these organizations will be diminished to nothing.

To track this, each organization has its own countdown clock, a circle split into segments. Each countdown clock should have the same number of segments, and you can adjust that number based on your desires for your campaign. A longer campaign might hold up to ten segments per clock, and a shorter one, only three or four. In general, a good baseline is the number of players +1. Using more segments relieves pressure from the PCs and allows the campaign to stretch on for longer, while using fewer segments puts them under pressure far sooner.

Keep the clocks to yourself, as GM. You can indicate the general strength of the organizations and the status of these clocks through your description and moves, and you can even directly tell the PCs that an organization verges on the brink of collapse, but do not show them the actual clocks and their segments.

Whenever any one of these organizations expends substantial resources, suffers substantial injury, or gets otherwise openly exposed to its enemies, mark off the next segment on that organization's clock.

After receiving countless worried text messages, Egret, the Janus, calls home from a secret DAGGR base to reassure his mom that he is safe. He makes the **comfort or support** move, and rolls a 5—a miss. The GM decides that his mom is comforted... but HUAC can track his call and moves to capture the base. Whether or not the attack on the base happens on screen, it's enough for the GM to mark off the next segment on DAGGR's countdown clock.

When an organization's clock fills up, that organization is functionally gone. It might be utterly destroyed by the Tangee or depleted of resources to the point where it cannot affect the world meaningfully anymore. Follow the fiction to dictate the exact circumstances. For certain, it can no longer assist the characters.

The organizations' clocks may be advanced when they provide heavy assistance to the PCs during their missions, as well; see below for more information.

If the PCs take action that substantially restores a faction's resources or provides it new assets, you can erase one of the organization's filled-in segments. The PCs cannot restore the segments of an organization that has already fallen and filled in all segments of its clock, however.

MISSIONS

The central drive of the players will be to fight back against the Tangee somehow, and to achieve that end they can undertake missions against the Tangee and HUAC. These missions are a bit more regimented than standard **MASKS** play, in that they have an objective before the PCs set out, and they can certainly either succeed or fail at that objective.

If the PCs do not currently have a mission, they can choose as a group to start a new mission. (Majority rules here—if the majority of PCs agree to the mission, then they start it, even if they have dissenters. But the players are encouraged to **provoke someone** and **pierce the mask** to try to get the others to agree!) They can also agree to scrap their current mission and start a new one, but if they do, they lose all progress made towards the scrapped mission—they have to start from scratch.

To start a new mission, the PCs set their objective. This is the goal of the mission, the positive effect they hope to achieve. Ultimately, the PCs are free to define their objectives as they choose, but they should try to frame their objective as a “To _____” phrase, likely using one of the following options:

- To free _____
- To defeat _____
- To capture _____
- To steal _____
- To destroy _____

The PCs should be as specific as possible when filling in the blanks. The characters’ goals shouldn’t be to completely defeat the Tangee. Their goals should be smaller. Freeing their neighborhood. Downing a single dangerous ship. Freeing an adult hero. Not “To defeat the Tangee,” but “To defeat Tangee K’Toth of the Razor Cloud.”

Once the PCs have begun a mission and stated their objective, you, the GM, tell them the necessary requirements for undertaking the mission, based on current intelligence. Do not reveal requirements that the PCs could not possibly know about yet—for example, if they don’t even know where their target prisoner is being held, then they wouldn’t know about the need to circumvent the special biometric scanners embedded in that location. As they gain more intelligence or fulfill other requirements, you can reveal additional requirements to them—but only when the fiction makes it make sense.

The point here is for you to outline what the PCs need to undertake the mission successfully—both the baseline components they need to even undertake the mission, and the necessary additional components to succeed. For example, if the PCs want to rescue Champion, they need to know where Champion is being held, first. And even knowing his location, they likely need a security pass or disguises to get inside the facility.

Potential requirements include the following:

- Location of the target
- Surveillance of the location
- Knowledge of the guard strength and schedule
- Knowledge of the security setup, locks, codes, passwords, etc.
- Transportation to and from the target location
- A diversion
- A specialized device to bypass a particular security measure
- A weapon or weapons necessary to handle particular security measures



ADING THE ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH MISSIONS

The PCs can give themselves objectives that directly provide strength or safety to CLOAKSS, DAGGR, or A.E.G.I.S. For example, they might be trying to wipe HUAC's records of CLOAKSS cells or provide A.E.G.I.S. with a new Tangee weapon. Doing so can certainly restore segments of those organizations' clocks, though the PCs should avoid calling on those organizations for aid on such missions—it wouldn't make sense to fill in a segment of that organization's clock, just to erase a segment. The GM decides if such a mission restores segments of those organizations' clocks, but such a mission should only restore two segments at most, for the most impressive and spectacular of missions.

Follow the fiction when you fill in these mission requirements—go with what makes sense—but do not choose more than five requirements. The more requirements a mission has, the harder and more dangerous it is—keep that in mind. In general, later missions should have more requirements, as the Tangee and HUAC increase security in response to the PCs' actions.

Try to choose the number of requirements at the time the PCs state their mission and stick to it. You may not reveal every requirement at that moment—the PCs should only know about the requirements that they could actually anticipate or plan for based on the fiction—but you should have a clear number of requirements in mind. The number of requirements acts as your guide to the mission's difficulty and gives you a rubric to follow.

The more requirements you can decide upon at the same time the PCs choose their objective, the better, even if you don't reveal them all. But if necessary, you can pick the number of requirements without actually choosing every single requirement, giving yourself a bit of room to fill in additional requirements—just so long as there is a plausible reason for why the PCs wouldn't know what all the requirements are at the time they choose their mission. This gives you some space to adapt the mission to the fiction.

In rare circumstances, you can expand the number of requirements and add another requirement during play. For example, if the PCs screw up spectacularly and reveal themselves and their intentions, then the Tangee might step up security, so the GM might want to add a whole new requirement to the overarching mission. But you should only do so in exceptional circumstances—otherwise, try to keep to the originally chosen set of requirements. If you have unrevealed or unchosen requirements, you can always adapt those to the new situation, instead of adding a whole new requirement. You can also always choose to introduce new fictional elements to the final missions, without them being actual requirements. Think of the requirements as the problems the PCs really must solve before going on the mission.

After the GM has revealed whatever requirements they know of, the PCs then should take action to pursue those requirements, however they see fit, in normal **MASKS** play. If they fulfill a requirement over the course of regular play, mark it off. Follow the fiction—if they happen to stumble on a solution without meaning to, then you should still mark the requirement off.

Based on intel gained from a prior mission, the PCs know that Champion, one of the greatest heroes of Halcyon City's Silver Generation, is still alive and being held by HUAC—the Tangee entrusted the human collaborators with his incarceration as a sign of trust and a way to avoid expending their own resources.

While convalescing at their base hidden in the ruins of a school, they agree to undertake a mission to free him—they think he could help rally other people to their cause as a symbol, even if he can't directly help them with his own powers and skills.

I take a bit of time to think about the requirements for the mission. First, they need to know where HUAC has him, of course—they currently only know that he is being held, not where. Second, they'll need a schedule of guard patrols around Champion's location—if spotted leading Champion out, they'll immediately alert HUAC and the Tangee and be in deep trouble. Third, they need security passes to get Champion out of his cell—it's designed to hold him against even the most powerful attacks, so they can't just break into his holding cell with force. Fourth, they need a weapon to depower the new mechsuits that the Tangee have given to HUAC—those things are dangerously powerful, with advanced sensor suites, so they have almost no way of getting in and out undetected if those things are up and running.

I'm not sure exactly what a fifth requirement would be, but I think their mission should have five requirements—they are trying to spring one of the most famous heroes of Halcyon City's history, and HUAC would take appropriate precautions to hold him. I figure that once the PCs accomplish the first requirement, and find out where he is being held, then I can fill in the fifth requirement based on that location.

I list my chosen four requirements and a fifth empty slot in my notes, and I fill the PCs in on the first—that they need to know where Champion is being held—and the fourth—that they need to find a way past the mechsuits. They've encountered the mechsuits on a prior mission, so the PCs know the weapons will be an obstacle moving forward, but the rest of the requirements are contingent on knowledge of the actual holding facility. I'll fill them in as the players find out more information.

The PCs start talking about how to fulfill some of these requirements, maybe by stealing missives from the desk of their school principal, a known HUAC commander, to find out where Champion is being held. I cut to the next day at school, where the Janus and the Protégé are in class and the Delinquent is smoking on the school roof, so they can hatch whatever schemes and tomfoolery they have in mind to secure those plans.



CLOAKSS, DAGGR, and A.E.G.I.S. can all provide assistance by giving the PCs required resources. If the PCs ask the officers of those organizations for aid, then they can and will assist by fulfilling a requirement. Each organization can only provide assistance and fulfill requirements based on its own abilities:

- CLOAKSS provides tools, hideouts, fake IDs, and discreet weapons.
- DAGGR provides intelligence—where individuals are, guard schedules, and the like—and subversion of digital security measures.
- A.E.G.I.S. provides armor, weapons, vehicles, and combat training.

Whenever an organization provides assistance in fulfilling a mission, fill in one segment on that organization's clock—its resources are reduced.

When they fulfill all mission requirements, the PCs are ready to undertake the mission. Play it out as per normal **MASKS** play.

If the PCs have not fulfilled all mission requirements, they can still undertake the mission (assuming they have the bare minimum of requirements, such as knowing the location of an individual they seek to rescue)—but doing so is dangerous. First of all, remove one Team from the pool at the start of the mission for each unfulfilled requirement. Then, use the following table:

MISSING REQUIREMENTS	CONSEQUENCES	EXAMPLE
1	They are totally unprepared for whatever challenge they needed to meet the requirement. Make hard and direct moves whenever that challenge comes up—they don't have what they need to overcome, and even their considerable skills won't do the job.	The PCs are trying to rescue Champion, and they have fulfilled every requirement except for obtaining a guard schedule. They go on the mission anyway, and during the mission, guards keep happening upon them without warning. When they assess the situation , they only find out about the patrols moments before the guards are actually upon them.
2	As above, and also add a new complication or dilemma they didn't expect. Introduce the new complication in the middle of the mission when they cannot simply back out.	While on the mission, they are surprised to find a Tangee Scythe cruiser floating above, indicating that major Tangee lieutenants are here at the facility right now.
3	As above, and also suit the enemy's abilities and preparations to the PCs specifically. Whether the enemy was alerted to the PCs' mission (indicating betrayal!) or was simply prepared in case, they have weapons, tools, allies, and hostages suited to the PCs.	While on the mission, they are confronted by a HUAC general who has taken the Janus's mother hostage!
4 or more	The PCs are functionally stumbling into a trap. Make as hard and as direct moves as you like—they couldn't have handed you a more golden opportunity. The mission should almost certainly end with at least one of the PCs captured.	When they arrive at the HUAC base where Champion is being held, they quickly find themselves caught out in the open under spotlights, surrounded by mechsuits, with the HUAC general revealing he has taken the Janus's mother hostage some time before. They demand surrender, immediately.

THE TANGEE

Imagine a civilization structured like an insect colony. They have different castes, soldiers, scientists, workers, lawgivers, etc., all working towards the collective good. Within these castes, there's room for individuality—not all scientists are nerdy, not all warriors are aggressive and violent—although each individual Tangee is still assigned to the caste with which they best fit.

But the different castes also exist in friction with each other. The warriors vie against the lawgivers, the scientists against the spies, and so on. The squads that roam the city often have soldiers, lawgivers, and other Tangee attached—so they're always at odds with themselves. In the heat of the moment, a squad may break down as different castes push for their own methodologies.

TANGEE CHARACTERS

The Tangee can appear monolithic to outsiders, but they are not—and you shouldn't portray them that way. Make a Tangee character the same way you would make any **MASKS** villain, including a drive, conditions, and moves. For their moves, focus on technological powers, trickery, and political maneuvers.

Here is an example Tangee character: Eminence of the Fleet Kheit of the Infernal Territory, the de jure leader of Tangee forces on Earth.

EMINENCE OF THE FLEET KHEIT

DRIVE

To fulfill their orders from the Paragon of the Sky as quickly as possible

MOVES

- **Call down overwhelming Tangee forces**
- **Unleash a blast from their personal magna-cannon**
- **Demand surrender, capitulation, or compliance**
- **Punish resistance and rebellion tenfold**

CONDITIONS:

☐ Afraid | ☐ Angry | ☐ Guilty | ☐ Hopeless | ☐ Insecure

NOTES

Eminence of the Fleet Kheit of the Infernal Territory is a military commander. While here ostensibly to save existence itself from the timequake, Kheit is really here to obey orders and fulfill the duty given to them by their superior. If they were to receive new orders, they would abandon their current mission without hesitation.



ADDITIONAL VILLAINS

There are, of course, other villains more than happy to take advantage of the power vacuum that popped up in the wake of the capture of most of the adult heroes. Throw them in, especially early on, when they can act with a freer hand—the only force that opposes them at this point is A.E.G.I.S. Villains make great temporary allies and surprising threats. Maybe the PCs and the villain are trying to “liberate” the same information or piece of technology. Maybe the villain endangers a bus full of nuns while the PCs try to get away from a Tangee squad. Perhaps they’re working with the Tangee to eliminate the remaining threats to their life of crime. Use them as supporting characters to help flesh out the full situation.

MIRED IN THE MUCK OF HALCYON

As what should have been a case of a giant squashing an ant drags on, the Tangee grow more and more desperate to handle this situation once and for all. They have yet to successfully determine the core cause of the timequake, and they haven’t even managed to incarcerate all of the superhumans in Halcyon. Even the highest Tangee officer on Earth receives calls from their homeworld asking why they haven’t resolved the timequake yet. This added pressure contributes to the Tangee’s jockeying for power within the invading force and the increasing brutality of the squads on the ground.

Use this. Make harder and harder moves as the campaign wears on and the Tangee become more and more frustrated. Make the tough choices tougher. Let the PCs find an individual Tangee willing to help them...for a price.

To help track the Tangee’s own status within the game, give them a countdown clock as well. This clock has six segments, and every time the Tangee suffer a substantial blow or setback, mark off the next segment. Use this clock to help dictate the severity of the Tangee’s moves and actions.

- **At 0 segments filled**, the Tangee pretend to be benevolent forces, not the oppressive overseers of Halcyon City. They try to remain talons-off. **Example moves:** *Make an offer of technological aid to the citizens of Halcyon city; put out a public display of Tangee-human cooperation; push responsibility for solving a problem onto human authorities.*
- **At 1-2 segments filled**, the Tangee lose their cool, deploying Tangee squads openly throughout the city, dictating terms to the puppet governments. They still shy away from more direct, aggressive action, except in rare, necessary, isolated circumstances. **Example moves:** *Deploy a Tangee squad into a dangerous situation; issue a new edict in cooperation with human authorities; “disappear” a dangerous individual.*

- **At 3-4 segments filled**, the Tangee are no longer hands-off. They deploy their forces across the city, openly supplementing their allies and attacking their enemies. They conscript villains to their cause, and they begin fighting back against any actions they deem as an attack. They no longer pretend at all that the humans are in charge of Halcyon City. **Example moves:** *Deploy a superhuman villain into a dangerous situation; issue a new draconian edict; publicly capture a dangerous individual.*
- **At 5 segments filled**, the Tangee are still more desperate and at a loss for their failures. Signs of their infighting begin to spill out, along with an ever-increasing brutality from their forces as they get pushed to desperation. They still hold out hope to determine the source of the disaster and put a stop to it, but they consider more and more extreme tactics, from rounding up all metahumans on the planet and transporting them to an offworld prison to time-locking Halcyon City forever. **Example moves:** *Deploy overwhelming force into a dangerous situation; publicly assault and destroy a “threat”; initiate dangerous inter-Tangee conflict on the streets.*
- **At 6 segments filled**, the Tangee have been driven to desperation and now undertake those mad plans they only considered previously. Different factions of Tangee have different plans, but the entire city (and indeed, Earth) are in danger from the Tangee’s desperate last attempts to solve the problem. **Example moves:** *Lawgiver-caste Tangee begin implanting humans with “obedience nodes”; warrior-caste Tangee plant implosion bombs across the city; scientist-caste Tangee engage a time-lock sequence to freeze Halcyon forever; spy-caste Tangee bolster themselves with stolen metahuman abilities and take control by force.*

This clock is not used to track whether or not the Tangee are defeated—it instead represents how desperate they are. Fully defeating the Tangee is a monumental undertaking, requiring them to be driven to the point of desperation while the PCs accrue allies and equipment for a final push against the Tangee. That ultimate victory is something best left to discover during play.



AGENDAS, PRINCIPLES, AND MOVES

Iron Red Soldiers uses the agendas, principles, and GM moves of regular **MASKS**. But there are new elements to consider when GMing a game with this playset.

IRON RED SOLDIERS: AGENDA

There is one new agenda that shapes how *Iron Red Soldiers* ultimately plays out.

MAKE THEM FEEL LIKE THEY'RE WALKING A TIGHTROPE

The characters are thrust into situations where they're out of their depth. They're asked to shoulder adult responsibilities far before they should, without any safety net. If they make too big a splash, they become targets. If they don't do enough, they're never going to be free. Make sure their choices, no matter how small, have weight. Don't help CLOAKSS when they ask for assistance? A key member gets hauled in. Steal a list of important prisoners from a Tangee vessel? Expect a demonstration of Tangee brutality against the people of Halcyon City in retribution. The PCs can't take any step without fear of tipping over to one side into the void below, so they have to balance their action with secrecy, their anger with calm, their fear with hope.

IRON RED SOLDIERS: PRINCIPLES

Similarly, the core principles all still apply, along with these new ones.

MAKE THEM COME UP WITH THEIR OWN PLANS

The adults aren't here to give them assignments anymore and once rescued, they won't be in any shape to do so. Give them multiple options for things they could do next but don't choose for them. Try not to indicate that one threat is phenomenally greater than any other, either—that's just another way of choosing their next plan for them.

MAKE THEM THINK ABOUT THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM

Show their families being dogged by police working for the Tangee. Show sweeps that pick up resistors. Show searches that turn up evidence of connections to heroes, whether real or manufactured, that put their allies and their families in jeopardy. Show how the PCs' neighbors become collaborators. Halcyon City's people are still here, and still in danger—not just mortal danger, but danger to their livelihoods, to their values, to their way of life. Those people are part of this conflict, even if they don't have superpowers or fight openly.

MAKE THEM FEEL TIME PRESSURE

Every choice, every opportunity, every threat has a ticking clock attached. If they don't deal with that new Tangee initiative to create exoskeleton-controlled supervillains, then it comes to pass, and now those villains deploy with every squad. If they hear a request for help from CLOAKSS and refuse to help out, then someone important gets taken captive. The PCs shouldn't have time to deal with everything. They need to choose what's most important to them and what has to be sacrificed.

RAISE THE STAKES, RATCHET UP THE CONSEQUENCES

Start small at the beginning of your campaign, and make the outcomes of their choices have bigger and bigger consequences. This time, after HUAC traces their most recent mission back to their school, another student gets hauled in for a few hours and released. Next time, a teacher gets roughed up. Then, a family member gets held for weeks. Finally, their best friend at school becomes the victim of a new Tangee brainwashing technique. Ramp up the stakes more and more as time passes.

IRON RED SOLDIERS: MOVES

Here are some new GM moves to consider using in *Iron Red Soldiers* playset. These do not replace any existing moves; they give you more options.

GIVE THEM A HARD CHOICE

Go to school—and allay suspicion—or go on a mission? Protect a friend and expose themselves or stay quiet and hidden? Save their friends or save their family? Present them with two equally terrible, mutually exclusive options, and make them pick which way they go.

ECHO PAST CHOICES

Did they previously choose to go to school? Later, reveal that while they stayed in class, the Tangee successfully rooted out a DAGGR server base and took it captive. Did they choose to go on the mission? Their principal, a HUAC sympathizer, shows up at their home asking hard questions. Every choice they make has repercussions down the line, so show those consequences.

OFFER THEM COSTLY HELP

CLOAKSS, DAGGR, and A.E.G.I.S. provide help to the heroes—but they are stretched thin, and any time they help, they put themselves in danger. The rescued mentors and adult heroes may be able to provide help, but any real aid puts those adults at great risk or taxes their weakened powers. These groups won't wait to be asked before helping! But when they help, every time, the PCs should be reminded of the cost of that help.

OVERCOMPLICATE THE SITUATION

A mission to rescue Champion gets complicated when another, less expert team of would-be vigilantes attacks the same place. An attempt to evacuate a CLOAKSS base is complicated when a couple of known supervillains go on a rampage outside. Any situation can be made more complicated by the addition of other parties who don't directly care about the same stakes as the PCs.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Iron Red Soldiers presents a grim situation, but not one without hope. The PCs can free the heroes of the older generations. They can take out Tangee resources. In the end, after much struggle, they can drive the Tangee from their home. Any game using this playset should never lose sight of that hope. While the heroes may be up for a far greater fight than they have ever faced before, they can still come through victorious. *Iron Red Soldiers* isn't about a doomed war—it's about a struggle for what's right in the face of titanic opposition.

Good luck, heroes.

THE SPIDERWEB



CHAPTER TWO

BEFORE THE WEB

In the present day, in the original timeline...

(Don't worry, we'll get to the timelines...)

Bryce "Brass" Brilliant is one of the oldest "human" supers still alive and operating. The Titan Elixir he created in his youth made him powerful, smart, and apparently nigh immortal. He's been alive and active for a century now, and there's no end in sight. His heart may be weary, but his body is not.

In his time in Halcyon City, he saw the rise of public supers. He watched the creation of organizations like A.E.G.I.S., the founding of the Exemplars. He witnessed firsthand the major attacks, the city-endangering incidents, the world-threatening calamities. Some of them, he stopped himself. Some of them, he caused—though he claims he had a good reason for each one.

And all in all, as he looks upon the city to which he devoted his entire life, he is far from certain that it is a good place.

Some things are better, for sure, but so much remains broken. Halcyon is a place of unending instability, a city constantly interrupted by time-traveling demons and magical sentient dinosaurs alike. Life continues, it adapts and reshapes to fit those circumstances...but at what cost?

How much better would this world be if it hadn't had to funnel all its resources into endlessly rebuilding itself? What if the morally gray A.E.G.I.S. had never been needed? What if all those superheroes didn't have to spend their time in fistfights, but could apply themselves to real problems—poverty, inequality, prejudice?

What if the world didn't revolve around supers at all?

The idea was inescapable. For all that he'd seen in his hundred years of life...how could he not wonder if the world could be better without the chaos of superheroes? Perhaps even his own superheroic efforts were as much a part of the problem as they were part of the solution. Perhaps the answer did not lie in solving the problems of the present, but in fundamentally averting the core problem, lodged in the past.

And when the idea fully took root within his prodigious mind, Bryce began to act. To plan. To build.

Soon enough, he hatched his plans and inadvertently created a whole new world—one that he had never wanted.

THE SHIFT

With the aid of all his preparations, planning, and invention, Brilliant successfully reached back in time and shifted the entirety of his Earth—perhaps even his solar system—into a new metadimensional location.

Brilliant's methods are difficult to explain—not least because he's not even sure what he did anymore. His own memories were scrambled by the transition, his blueprints and diagrams lost to the vagaries of intertemporal shifting. The power to pull off the Shift must've been nigh unimaginable, but he found it, somehow. He believes he must have had help from some kind of vastly powerful extradimensional entity, but he has no idea who or what that entity would be.

No one on Earth noticed—the Shift created what amounts to an artificial dimension, a kind of pocket universe in which all things are contained. The Shift showed no physical signs, and every person's memories instantly switched over to those from the new timeline.

And that was the key change of the Shift—a new timeline. The Shift stripped the world of its lineage of superpowers and superheroes. It stripped it of the invasions from space and the metahuman law enforcement agencies. It stripped it of the superheroic.

No Flying Freedom. No Champion. No Quintessence. No aliens, no time travelers, no interdimensional monsters, no sorcerers. None of it.

He didn't change time, exactly—he just pushed the present-day version of Halcyon City into a new path, one where those superhuman elements never existed. Where aliens never found the planet, where magic was just too weak to matter, where the brilliant minds of Halcyon City either never arose or were just a shade more limited in scope of imagination and intelligence, and so on and so forth. Where the impossible stayed just that—impossible.

Some minor vestiges remained. Costumed vigilantes with exceptional skill still arose sometimes, often matching up with their counterparts from the unshifted timeline. The Haunt, Pretty Penny, Mr. Street—they all cropped up at one time or another. But they rarely had the same successes as they did in the “real” Halcyon City. Many restricted their efforts to isolated neighborhoods. Most were ultimately captured by the police or retired after a few years of costumed nonsense. Several died, and were remembered more as oddities than as important figures of the city's history.

For the most part, the storied history of Halcyon City's superhuman generations vanished.

And in its place grew the Spiderweb.

SPINNING THE WEB

In the Shifted timeline of Halcyon City, most of Halcyon's criminals—especially the unpowered ones—still existed, just...different. Without heroes to oppose them, they seized the control that escaped them in the original timeline. Simon Seagrim—the Scarlet Songbird in the original timeline—became the master of the Rows. Marianne Coressi—Pack Alpha—ruthlessly assembled an organization called the Menagerie and seized control of Halcyon's docks.

These crime lords turned politicians into puppets and cops into enforcers. They took Halcyon City and remade it into a city darkened by corruption and greed, by crime and violence. But their wars with each other kept any one of them from ever gaining dominance over the city. They built power and influence, but there was an endless turnover as new, up-and-coming crime lords deposed the old. And, thankfully, no one ever took full control.

No one...until Sebastian Ibañez.

THE SPIDER ARRIVES

Sebastian was an enforcer in Las Plagas, a powerful cartel with a foothold in Halcyon. He was smart. Capable. Cautious when the situation demanded it. Bold when opportunity struck. The boss of Las Plagas, Max Chicote (known as Plaga Roja in the original timeline), took Sebastian in as a favored son and protégé. Sebastian was being groomed as Max's heir. Sebastian, however, decided to take power instead of waiting for it to be handed to him.

His takeover of Las Plagas was near bloodless. He didn't want to kill the organization's people—they were resources. Where he could, he won their loyalty with promises, promotions, and persuasion. If those didn't work, he bought their loyalty with money. If that didn't work, blackmail or threats. And if nothing worked, only then would Sebastian remove his opposition.

So one by one, person by person, Sebastian earned control over Las Plagas. And when the vast majority of Las Plagas answered to him anyway, he told Max Chicote that the time of Las Plagas was over. He offered Max his choice of end, be it in pitched battle or quiet and peaceful. When Max chose to go quietly in his sleep, Sebastian honored his wish.

With that Sebastian was in charge of his own organization—his Spiderweb.

Sebastian's Spiderweb grew across the city at incredible speeds, destroying or subverting the organizations that opposed him. Halcyon knew a fair amount of chaos in those days, as the existing powers tried to fight back.

But eventually, he took hold of most of the city's neighborhoods. Halcyon, for the most part, now answered to Sebastian, and the Spider (as he had come to be known) demanded his own kind of order. Not the order of laws or community. The order of iron fists and cold lead. The order of the Spider.



LIFE IN THE WEB

Halcyon under the Web is a gleaming city with spires tearing into passing clouds and slums filled with shadows and forgotten blood.

No Spike. No A.E.G.I.S. No caped heroes rocketing through the skies. No sounds of distant battle echoing down the streets like thunder.

People wear false smiles and cautious looks. They peek carefully around corners. They pull their coats tighter around them at night. They worry about their jobs, their families, and their futures. They worry so much it makes them sick.

The city bubbles with a sense of danger. The people who live there learn to accept it, but newcomers feel it acutely. This city will take from you if you're not on guard. And sometimes, even if you are.

THE STATUS QUO

The Halcyon City of the post-Shift timeline is a battleground. The Spider imposes order where he can, but his rule is constantly challenged. His rivals vie with him and each other for power. They fight in the shadows, in back alleys and side spaces.

Even so, the Spider's control is the default. The term "Spiderweb" has become almost synonymous with Halcyon City itself. Everyone knows, if you step out of line, you answer to the Spider. If you put up a fight, you answer to the Spider. If you try to change things, for good or ill, you answer to the Spider.

WOULD-BE RULERS

But for all his power, the Spider still faces challenges by those rivals on a nightly basis. Plenty want to take control of the city from the Spider and fending them off keeps the city in a constant hum of low-level chaos.

Dai Ushi is an up and coming boss in the Helldrake Syndicate. She's made waves, and plenty of Syndicate underbosses are falling in line behind her. She has her eye on the Spider and his Web, and he knows it—Sebastian did kill her father, after all, back when he was with Las Plagas. The Helldrake Syndicate had been through rough times ever since, and was well on its way to being plowed under, another casualty of the Spiderweb, when Dai rescued it. She's fierce and dangerous and more than willing to take matters into her own hands. And of late, there's been rumors that she can do things normal humans can't do...

Dee Bradley, a successful burglar and thief who operated under the nom de guerre of "White Cobra," is now the leader of the White Cobra Gang. Forced to retire by the Yagorov Bratva (now defunct), she found a new life in Halcyon City's Canyons District. She carved out a relatively safe existence, even though she ached for her time as the White Cobra, breaking into vaults or jewelry stores. Stories about her circulated among the more ambitious kids of the Canyons, and many came to her looking for help or training. She wound up teaching them just to keep them from getting killed when they tried to follow in her footsteps. And without meaning to, she became both the leader of the Canyons and the head of a whole mess of thieves—her White Cobra Gang. She doesn't want to rule the city, but she sure as hell doesn't want the Spider coming into her part of town.

Luca Carlotti (who goes by Carlo), of the Carlotti crime family, is a thorn in the Spider's side. Luca, the second of son of Valentino Carlotti, might never have risen to any place of power in the family if not for a botched assassination attempt on the Spider, made by Luca's brother Ennio. The Spider had Ennio and Valentino both dispatched in retaliation and gave Luca a warning to stay within his means. Luca might not be a brilliant leader or a cunning foe, but he is incredibly skilled and is absolutely without fear—the Spider deeply misjudged the second Carlotti son. Luca decided to take down the Spider to prove that he could do what his brother and father had failed at, and since then, he has acted to interfere with and ruin the Spider's plans at every opportunity.

THE RISE OF POWERS

The Shift didn't actually involve time travel—it just altered history. And that seems to have had strange effects on this version of Halcyon City. While superhuman powers and phenomena were ripped out of Halcyon's past, Brilliant apparently could not keep them out of the present. So now, superpowers are starting to appear citywide.

People who had powers in the original timeline suddenly develop metahuman abilities without warning. Unconfirmed reports of aliens and monsters crop up on the edges of society. There are rumors of people who can pass through walls or lift cars.

These powers seem especially concentrated in the modern day youth—the equivalent of Halcyon City's fourth generation. They're gaining special abilities at incredible rates, and they wonder what they could really do with these powers. What they could fix. How they could make their world better.

Along with them, a few other important figures have benefited from the sudden advent of metahuman abilities.

BRASS BRILLIANT

Bryce "Brass" Brilliant now appears to be a handsome, bald, well-muscled black man. He wears unassuming outfits, but he has taken to wearing his large brass bracelets, just like he did in the original timeline. His age is indeterminate.

In the Shifted timeline, Bryce was incredibly smart but otherwise normal. He tried to fight against the worst criminals in his neighborhood, without the assistance of any of his superscience gadgets or the Titan Elixir. He failed. He retired from that fight and went to work for a pharmaceuticals company. Bryce lived the rest of his life in a mundane, unnoteworthy fashion. He grew old and frail. If nothing had changed, he would've died well before today.

But as time went on...he became a combination of who he was in the original timeline and who he was in the Shifted timeline. He remembers the entirety of his life in the Shifted world, and those memories have made it difficult to remember everything from the original timeline. But he knows this world only exists because he made it. He knows that he did not succeed in making the better world he had hoped for.

And he plans to set things right.

He rejuvenated himself with the Titan Elixir he suddenly knew how to produce, and he now aims to fight back against the darkness of this world. Hopefully, he'll figure out how to restore the world to its original form...but he's not sure he will ever remember how to do that. Until he does, he fights to make this world better, contending with the Spider and the other crime lords and supporting those he thinks can do the most good.

SATIN

Satin is a strange, purple-suited figure. They have no face at all, just a smooth expanse of flesh. They act with an insane, incredible cunning and a depraved sense of morality. They perform impossible feats of athleticism—the product of a perfect conscious control of every single piece of their body.

In the original timeline, Satin was the product of experimentation by an alien overlord. In this Shifted timeline, they seem to have just...appeared in the modern day. No one in the Spiderweb knows who they are or has any memory of them...except for Brass Brilliant.

Brilliant can't be sure, but he has a disturbing theory on Satin's origin. Somehow, some way...this Satin isn't actually a creature of the Shifted timeline. Brilliant thinks that Satin might have come from the original timeline, entirely. They crept in through the shadows, snuck in through someone's nightmares.

Satin is not particularly forthcoming on the matter. They evidence the same mad banter and rhetoric that they gleefully put on in the original timeline. And just like in the original timeline, they claim to adore Halcyon City—maybe even more so, now. What they cannot stand is order. Boring, boring order. And to that end, Satin has immediately set about destabilizing the Spiderweb.

Sometimes that means creating a new gang war. Sometimes that means ambushing a truce meeting and massacring everyone there. Sometimes that means helping new would-be heroes. After all, if Satin came from the original timeline, then they know that little creates more chaos than young superheroes.

JESSICA MILES

A woman in her 30s with short, slicked back red hair, fair skin, and an athletic build. In the original timeline, Jessica Miles was a former A.E.G.I.S. special forces operative who went by the name Carbine and acted as a vigilante, hunting down superhumans. In the Shifted timeline, she followed a similar path, becoming a special forces operative within the American military before returning to her home town of Halcyon City. She found it tough to leave that life entirely behind, and soon enough was working as a cop in the beleaguered HCPD.

Unlike many of her brethren, she is neither cowed by the Spiderweb and its ilk, nor has she been bought by them. She sees them as dangerous and has grown more and more willing to do whatever it takes to bring them down. As of yet, she has not taken any extralegal actions...but lately she's had these notions of putting on a costume and a mask and going out into the city, especially as more and more superhumans appear. Taking down the Spiderweb will be that much harder if they can recruit these people with superpowers, and she won't let that happen.

TARANTULA HAWK

In her civilian life, she goes by the name Arielle Stern, appearing as an unassuming middle-aged woman with light brown skin and curly hair in a ponytail. But when she puts on her full body costume, all black Kevlar carapace with bright red wings, she becomes Tarantula Hawk, one of Halcyon City's newest—and only—costumed vigilantes.

In the original timeline, Tarantula Hawk retired after barely any time at all as a superhero. The life was hard, and with so many other heroes, her help wasn't necessary. But in this Shifted timeline, she has lost so much to the Spider and his Web—her brother, her mother, her shop, even her neighborhood—and it has gone too far. She faced every day with a mix of rage and despair, until the day she woke up with red wings growing from her back and stingers sticking from her fingers.

She put together her costume and called herself Tarantula Hawk—a kind of wasp that feasts on spiders. And that's exactly what she plans to do, to save the rest of the city before he can poison it.

ENTERING THE FRAY

The Spiderweb covers Halcyon City, and its people live in the fear that they will touch a strand, and the Spider will come for them. People make do and find hope and happiness and love and joy with each other. They find community in their neighborhoods. And then they find some agent of the Spider, or the Helldrakes, or the Carlottis coming into their shops, demanding protection money, or making threats, or just plain taking from them. And just like that, any semblance of normalcy, of safety and hope, shatters.

The city desperately needs heroes willing to defend the people they care about and fight against the all-too-human darkness that surrounds them.

And that's where you come in. The city needs you. Now more than ever.

PLAYING THE SPIDERWEB

In this playset, the PCs are young adults living in the same neighborhood in the Spiderweb. They still live in Halcyon City, but their scope of attention is smaller—they care about their home and the people in it, first and foremost. The biggest threats to their world are the Spider, his Web, and the criminal war that he and his enemies threaten to bring into the PCs' home.

In general, *The Spiderweb* is skewed towards the lower-power, grittier, street-level side of comic books. That means that the PCs are not the children of world-saving aliens or time travelers. Their powers are more constrained, and the action is more dangerous. This is a world where “bulletproof skin” is an absolutely incredible power and “cosmic energies” are unheard of.



The PCs are on a “team,” not unlike a standard game of **MASKS**. But whereas the base game’s teams, at least in part, model after such examples as the Teen Titans or Young Avengers, the teams in *The Spiderweb* are modeled more on the modern-day *Defenders* or *Heroes for Hire*. The teams of *The Spiderweb* are less about the colorful costumes, grandiose names, epic battles, and world-saving heroics, and more about friends, living in the same place, and trying to make their homes better.

Fundamentally the battle that *The Spiderweb* heroes fight is unending, just like it is in the original Halcyon City. There will always be more people vying for control of the city’s lucrative underworld. There will always be more people aiming to exploit the people of Halcyon. Even if the heroes defeat the Spider utterly, there will always be someone else threatening to rise up in his place. But that doesn’t mean that the struggle isn’t worth it, that these heroes can’t make things better.

This world has its own troubles, but it’s still their home, and these heroes are going to fight for it with all their hearts. The night is darkest before the dawn... and they want nothing more than to see the first rays of sunlight.

PLAYBOOKS

The Spiderweb playset works with most of the playbooks, but some won't fit its setting very well. Before playing with *The Spiderweb*, read through this section on which playbooks to remove, and how to use the playbooks that remain.

Remove: Doomed, Legacy, Nova, Outsider

Keep: Beacon, Bull, Delinquent, Janus, Protégé, Transformed

REMOVE

The Doomed and **The Nova** both share a similar problem that makes them unsuitable for *The Spiderweb*—namely, they're just too powerful. Both of them reshape the world around them almost at will, but *The Spiderweb* playset is about a street-level conflict against all-too-human foes. The Spiderweb isn't the kind of place where cosmic powers throw down or where streets get blown up and repaired by robotic crews on a daily basis.

The Legacy doesn't work for a different reason—namely, there are no “long lines of superheroes” that substantiates a Legacy. There have been a few people who have tried to fight back against the Spiderweb, but none of them have lasted long. They've either died, retired...or become something darker.

The Outsider has pretty crazy powers as well, but it's also about coming from such a strange and alien environment. Characters from other worlds, from far-flung futures, or from parallel dimensions don't fit into *The Spiderweb*.

KEEP

The Beacon's lighter elements may feel more out of place in *The Spiderweb* setting, but they totally belong! The things that these kid superheroes do are still awesome and exciting, and the Beacon knows it. They may be the ray of hope necessary to lift up some of their gloomier comrades.

Watch drives like “drive a fantastical vehicle,” “travel to an incredible place (or time),” and “earn the respect of a hero you admire.” You and your GM should hold more liberal interpretations of those drives to make sure you can hit them; a “fantastical vehicle” might be the Spider's deluxe car, for example.

The Bull fits into *The Spiderweb* playset nicely. The one piece to keep an eye on is their makers. The base Bull playbook suggests someone made them into a living weapon. That's easy to set up in a world with super-science organizations running around, less so in a more grounded reality. Plenty of criminal organizations exist in the Spiderweb, however, and with superpowers appearing recently, they might experiment. Just remember to keep your elements a bit tamer than you might in a base game of **MASKS**.

The Delinquent should work without any problems or adjustments! Don't go crazy on the answer to “How did you get your powers?” and you'll be fine!

The Janus is great for *The Spiderweb*. Secrets? Masks? Obligations? Perfect.



LIMITED EDITION PLAYBOOKS

A few of the limited edition playbooks work just fine for *The Spiderweb*, but many do not—they're just too specific or too strange to fit the low-powered, gritty setting. In particular:

Keep: Joined (HCHC), Newborn (HCHC), Reformed (HCHC), Scion (Unbound)

Remove: Brain (AEGIS), Harbinger (Unbound), Innocent (HCHC), Nomad (Unbound), Soldier (AEGIS), Star (HCHC)

A few notes on each of these:

The Joined: Since the Joined builds heavily on whatever playbook it ties to, it works fine connecting to any of the other playbooks used in *The Spiderweb*. Just keep in mind the lower-powered, grittier tone when choosing your options.

The Newborn: The Newborn is probably less of an android or alien entity and more of a Frankenstein's monster or resurrected corpse—but otherwise should work fine.

The Reformed: The Reformed has done some bad stuff, and in *The Spiderweb*, that's likely to be real crime, instead of the super-crime of original Halcyon. That's okay—but don't go too far. The Reformed ultimately still has to be redeemable.

The Scion: Don't go for a parent who's a cosmic conqueror, and the Scion should work just fine. Picking any of the major players in *The Spiderweb*—Dai Ushi, Helldrake, The Spider—is a great idea.

The Protégé should be tied to one of those vigilantes who once tried to fight back against the Spider and his ilk. Create their mentor the same as you would normally, but veer in the direction of lower-powered vigilante, especially when picking their personal ability and their shared ability. It's up to you whether or not their mentor is still active, but either way, this life has left them battered, scarred, and more than a little jaded. For their move **Been reading the files**, reinterpret the trigger a bit; instead of being about the "superhuman world," make it about the "criminal world."

The Transformed stands out even more than they did in the base Halcyon City setting, and that's just fine. Instead of being one strange face in a city filled with the bizarre and inexplicable, the Transformed is going to be hugely different from nearly everyone else around them. With no older transformed hero to lend them support, the likelihood of anyone truly understanding what caused their transformation is pretty low. That's all good stuff, though—grist for the mill of their drama. Use it!

BACKSTORY QUESTIONS

All of the backstory questions in the playbooks are still used, and players are encouraged to aim the answers at the people and places of their home neighborhood. By default, they all live in the same neighborhood, although they may not all have lived there for their whole lives.

In addition, every player should answer the following backstory question:

- Who or what has the Spiderweb taken from you?

This question lets each PC speak to their individual experience dealing with the Spider and his Web. The people in the PCs' lives have complicated relationships with the Spiderweb, but it has left none of them unscathed.

"WHEN OUR TEAM FIRST CAME TOGETHER..."

All of the "When our team first came together..." questions of the usable playbooks should work together without issue. In particular, though, remember to keep the street-level scale of *The Spiderweb* playset in mind while answering those questions. The initial incident that brought the team together is far more likely to be a dangerous shoot-out between the Spiderweb and the Helldrake Syndicate than a gigantic monster stomping down Main Street.

That doesn't mean you have to avoid supernatural elements entirely. Superhumans are becoming common lately in the world of the Spiderweb. But the scale remains that of "neighborhood-threat," not "citywide-threat" or "world-ending threat."

RETIREMENT

Instead of the advance, "Retire from the life or become a paragon of the city," all PCs instead have the advance, "Retire from the life or become a committed vigilante." The meaning is similar to the base game. If a PC retires from the life, they leave their heroics behind, trying to live a mundane life within the Spiderweb. If a PC becomes a committed vigilante, they give up their mundane life by and large to fight an endless struggle against the criminal powers of Halcyon City. The difference is subtle, but important; instead of choosing between a superheroic and mundane life, they choose between an unending struggle and keeping their heads down, letting someone else tackle the Web.

BASIC MOVES

The Spiderweb playset features one significant change to the basic moves of MASKS—specifically, **take a powerful blow**.

For *The Spiderweb*, use the following version of the move:

When you take a powerful blow, roll + Conditions marked. On a 10+, choose one.

- you must remove yourself from the situation: flee, pass out, etc.
- you're seriously injured: take -1 ongoing until you receive medical attention
- two options from the 7-9 list

On a 7-9, choose one.

- you lash out verbally: provoke a teammate to foolhardy action or take advantage of your Influence to inflict a Condition
- you give ground; your opposition gets an opportunity
- you struggle past the pain; mark two Conditions

On a miss, you stand strong. Mark Potential as normal, and say how you weather the blow.

The difference between this move and the baseline MASKS version is under the 10+ list: instead of losing control of yourself or your powers in a terrible way, you take -1 ongoing until you receive medical attention.

That -1 ongoing applies to all your moves, **except for take a powerful blow**. Being seriously injured does not help you avoid further harm.

You can only choose this option once until you have received that medical attention—meaning that if you've already rolled a 10+ on **take a powerful blow** and chosen to take that -1 ongoing, and then later you take another 10+ on the move, you have to either “remove yourself from the situation” or choose “two options from the 7-9 list.”

It is not Rena's day. She already took a big hit from the Spider's man Ilya Krosnikov when he smacked her with a crowbar after she and her team infiltrated the Spider's Bay Street warehouse. She rolled a 10+ on **take a powerful blow** during that move and chose to take -1 ongoing until she could get medical attention, declaring that Krosnikov broke several of her ribs with his blow.

Since then, she and her team have been on the run. Now she's driving a stolen car and she tries to pull off a crazy maneuver, **provoking** her pursuers and tricking them into hitting a wall...but she gets a miss. The GM tells her to **take a powerful blow** as the pain overwhelms her: she drives the car straight into the wall instead.

Rena rolls and gets another 10+. Since she's already practically concussed, still has that -1 ongoing, and has received no more medical attention than a friend asking her “are you okay?”, she has to choose to either “remove herself from the situation” or pick two options off the 7-9 list. She chooses to remove herself—it's just too much. Rena collapses into unconsciousness as soon as the car hits the wall.

If you pick that option, you are saying that you have meaningfully been injured. That injury still exists within the scope of your abilities. If you have an incredible healing factor, for example, then choosing this option means you've been hurt in a way that exceeds your healing abilities. If you have skin like diamond, then choosing this option means the blow somehow managed to injure you significantly anyway.

Don't pick that 10+ option in situations when it makes no sense. You can **take a powerful blow** when someone really hits your emotions very hard, for example—but that's unlikely to leave you with internal bleeding.

While you suffer from that -1 ongoing, you should understand that your character is lugging around a major injury that constantly inhibits them. A broken limb, a concussion, a big gash—whatever the case may be, they suffered a meaningful injury and it's not going away without medical attention.

On that note, "Medical attention" is a serious part of the move now—this option requires you to seek real medical aid. A simple bandage isn't enough. This kind of aid has to come from medical professionals or at least highly experienced medics. Your vigilante mentor might be able to help, but your buddy with a first aid kit probably can't.

Getting medical attention is not itself a matter for another move. On a simple level, if you can get to a hospital, you can probably get the help you need, so there's no uncertainty around the actual "medical attention" side of things, unless the situation calls for it. For example, if you're the Transformed and your body is actually made of concrete, then that might be an issue.

But getting medical attention is almost always the source of further complication. If you've been framed for a crime, for example, then the hospital might report you to the police. If you convalesce in a hospital room, then the Spider's minions might pay you a visit. And if you come from a low-income family, then there might be no good way to pay for your bills except for a loan from an interested crime lord...

RUNNING THE SPIDERWEB

If you're the GM for a game of **MASKS** set in *The Spiderweb* playset, your job is largely similar to the one described in the core book. Those agendas, principles, and moves still apply; the rules for creating individual villains still apply; and the rules for hooks and arcs still apply.

But there are some tweaks involved, along with new tools to ensure you focus on the most important elements of running *The Spiderweb*.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

At its core, *The Spiderweb* playset is about heroes who fight for their homes and communities, a setting in which where you come from matters as much as your power set. While each of the PCs may have a different reason for putting on a mask and fighting crime and corruption, they all have to agree on one thing: the neighborhood is worth the fight.

As the GM, make sure that the PCs' slice of Halcyon City is both moving and meaningful, the kind of place that would make someone take up arms to defend against the Spider himself. The existing tools in **MASKS** do a lot of that work—after all, the Janus has obligations in this very neighborhood!—but there's some additional work you can do to make your game's specific setting a success.

Before you sit down with your players to make characters, create their neighborhood:

- Choose a name and look
- Choose a virtue and vice
- Choose conflicting factions
- Develop a few anchor NPCs

NEIGHBORHOOD NAMES AND LOOK

Start by choosing a **name** for the neighborhood. Communities that are largely rich and upscale tend to have names that evoke towering forests and mountain heights, while neighborhoods without a lot of wealth and power often end up with names that someone else gave them—the Barrens or the Canyons.

Here's a list of a bunch of names if you get stuck:

the 5th Street slums, Bayside Towers, Bolland Square, the Corridors, the Docks, East Side, Greengrove, Halwell Cross, the Heights, Kingway, Koreatown, Liberty Park, Longstreet, the Narrows, the Platinum District, Redbrick District, the Rows, Silver Run, Silverside, the Steel District, the Straights, Swan Heights, UEB (under Eisner Bridge), Weisman Docks, West Charfield.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD IS THE NEIGHBORHOOD

It's great to take feedback from your players about what they want from their district of Halcyon City, but the heroes of *The Spiderweb* don't get to choose where they grow up! The neighborhood you design is their home borough, the place that shapes them into the heroes that fight for the people of Halcyon City. Make it an evocative, compelling place, and the characters the players design in response will be awesome as well! Of course, if they suggest adaptations in order to make their characters work—go along with it. It's good stuff if the Janus ties into your anchor NPCs or the Reformed ties into your conflicting factions.

Once you have a name you like—remember that you'll be using it a bunch of times every single session!—give your players a short description that tells them who lives there, the general geography of the area, and the neighborhood's relationship with one or two other parts of Halcyon City. Don't figure out every detail; you want to leave room for your players to add more to the neighborhood when they make their characters.



I decide on the neighborhood called the Canyons. The setting guide talks about the area belonging to the White Cobra Gang, but not much else. I want the neighborhood to feel like it's filled with low-income and working class folks, so I decide that the name refers to the huge apartment buildings in the center of the district:

"The Canyons is a Black/Latino neighborhood on the west side of Halcyon, named for the low-income apartments that tower over the center of the borough. Some developers have tried to rename the area 'Morningside Heights,' to little effect. While the Canyons are close enough to Downtown for residents to commute to work there as secretarial and janitorial staff, efforts to gentrify the area haven't succeeded."

VIRTUE AND VICE

Once you have a name and look, select a **virtue** for the neighborhood, the positive idea threatened by the machinations of the gangs and vigilantes alike:

- **Charity**—The community cares for those who don't have enough.
- **Fortitude**—The community weathers loss and tragedy gracefully.
- **Justice**—The community rights obvious wrongs, even at a high cost.
- **Renewal**—The community reinvents itself regularly, producing innovative ideas.
- **Solidarity**—The community stands together united, especially at times of likely division.

A community's virtue isn't the only good thing about the neighborhood, but it's useful for thinking about how to show the community at its best. During the game, look for opportunities to invoke the virtue through the local NPCs, especially when the virtue puts ordinary people in conflict with the larger forces of the city.

I choose solidarity as a virtue. The people who live in the Canyons are often divided, but they come together to honor their shared heritage. During the game, I'll give the heroes opportunities that arise out of public celebrations that bring people together to share wisdom and community.

At the same time, communities also have a dark side: select a **vice** for the neighborhood, the negative idea that the community has internalized:

- **Anger**—The community harbors a dangerous aggression, lashing out at the vulnerable.
- **Apathy**—The community accepts the status quo, even when it's obviously unjust.
- **Greed**—The community takes resources it doesn't need at someone else's expense.
- **Jealousy**—The community fixates on who might be getting more than their fair share.
- **Laziness**—The community takes the easy route to make ends meet or solve problems.

A community's vice isn't a constant problem the heroes have to face in every session, but it's useful for thinking about how the community fails the PCs. During the game, look for opportunities to invoke the vice through the local NPCs, especially when the vice forces the PCs to deal with problems that adults usually tackle.

I choose apathy as a vice. People from the Canyons know not to get involved; the Spiderweb is here to stay, and any action against it is a waste of time. During the game, I'll have residents of the Canyons walk away when they might make the difference in a conflict.

FACTIONS AND GOALS

Choose **two factions** (or individuals) from the Spiderweb gang war (page 42) that have a strong, active presence in the neighborhood. They might be doing their work in secret, but the effects of that work should be obvious. Make sure the two factions have reason to be in conflict with each other, so that the PCs can get caught in the conflict.

Here's a quick list of some of the major figures of the setting:

Sebastian Ibañez, the Spider; Dai Ushi, Helldrake Syndicate; Dee Bradley, White Cobra Gang; Luca Carlotti, Carlotti Crime Family; Brass Brilliant; Satin; Jessica Miles; Arielle Stern/Tarantula Hawk

Once you've identified which elements of the Spiderweb are in play in this neighborhood, give each faction an immediate and obvious goal. These goals might be in direct opposition to each other, but it's best if they are somewhat orthogonal. You want to make sure you have a clear idea of what these factions are doing in between sessions, and you want to give the PCs lots to investigate if they decide to get involved with one faction or the other.

I decide that the drug trade in the Canyons is run by the White Cobra Gang. I think Dee Bradley is a nicely complicated figure: she's a criminal, but she really does want what's best for the community in the face of the Spider. The PCs have to figure out if they're willing to fight her, even if it creates opportunities for the Carlotti family or Helldrake Syndicate to make a move on her territory.

I also think that another vigilante will give the heroes a messy ally. I choose Jessica Miles, since I think her path nicely contrasts the PCs' own journey. I'll look for opportunities to tie her into the PCs' various backstories during character creation.

In the meantime, I decide that Dee Bradley is working to rob the local credit union, the only independent bank in the Canyons, hoping to get enough money to hire someone to kill the Spider. At the same time, Jessica Miles hopes to bring Dee Bradley to justice, arming herself to the teeth and beating up Dee's goons in an attempt to work her way up the ladder.

ANCHOR NPCs

Finally, create two to three anchor NPCs who represent the themes of the neighborhood and their interactions with the broader setting. These folks should largely be friendly to the PCs and their cause, people who want to see their neighborhood thrive and flourish. The overall world is hard enough for our heroes; try to avoid characters who are immediately antagonistic to the PCs in favor of characters who offer guidance and opportunities.

Use these characters to get across the big ideas of your setting. If you want to show how the Spiderweb corrupts everything that it touches, then create

a young entrepreneur who strikes a deal with the Spider that gets way out of control. Or add to the neighborhood one of the Spider's former enforcers who is called out of retirement to settle an old score.

I pick the following Anchor NPCs:

- Everyone in the Canyons eats at Vince's Deli at least once a week, crowding the small tables to chow down on the hoagies that **Victoria Martinez** has kept exactly the same since her dad Vince died from a stray bullet three years ago.
- Kids looking to make a few bucks usually end up sweeping floors at **Ms. Hope Baker**'s hair salon on 9th street. She pays ten dollars for an hour of cleaning, but she'll work you harder than you think is possible in that hour.
- **Chad Coleman** runs a local boxing gym called Rumble that tries to get kids boxing instead of working for the pushers. Rumor has it he did time for a shooting a decade ago, but he doesn't talk about the old days much.

I'm giving my players a bunch of folks they can use in their backstories—perhaps Chad Coleman is the Protégé's mentor—and setting up some dominoes I can knock down when the fight gets messy. After all, what kind of trouble will the heroes be in if they accidentally burn down a place like Vince's Deli?

I'm also already thinking about the neighborhood's virtue (Solidarity) and vice (Apathy). I think that Vince's Deli is a great place to center neighborhood celebrations, and the PCs should have plenty of reason to go there and get information, assistance, and support. At the same time, I think Ms. Baker is exactly the kind of Canyon's resident who looks the other way when things get tough, even though she does her best to look out for folks the rest of the time.

USING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Your neighborhood should play a role in most everything you do as a GM. If you have a chance to build a PC-NPC-PC triangle, use one of the anchor NPCs; if you need to make a move, invoke the neighborhood's virtue or vice. Focus a bit more on collateral damage when the PCs face off against villains, and put elements of the neighborhood in harm's way when appropriate.

Take some time between sessions to think about how the two factions pursue their goals. Unless the PCs got involved, it's likely they succeeded at the next steps in their plans. If the PCs did get involved and derailed their plans, the factions will turn their attention directly to the PCs, making plans to eliminate them, co-opt them, or ally with them against each other.

Always work to keep a balance of virtues, vices, factions, and anchor NPCs in play. If someone dies or leaves the neighborhood, introduce a new faction or character competing for attention and resources. There's always somebody ready to make waves on the Web, and the PCs will certainly hear about newcomers once people recognize them as the heroes of the neighborhood.

SPIDERWEB GANGS

Since the average villain in *The Spiderweb* playset is a crime boss or enforcer, **gangs** of minions are more likely to be the primary source of opposition to the PCs. When five heroes face off against one villain, the first thing he's going to do is even the odds! (Villains like Satin probably wouldn't mind having a gang along with them either...)

Gangs in **MASKS** can already fight like villains (p. 191 of the core book), taking actions against the PCs and requiring heroes to **unleash their powers** or **directly engage a threat** to get past them. In this playset, we include information to flesh out gangs as support for the factions of the Spiderweb instead of just random mooks.

To create a gang for Spiderweb, follow the following steps:

- Choose a boss and type
- Choose a name and look
- Choose one or two gang moves
- Choose one to five conditions

GANG BOSS AND TYPE

Start creating your gang by figuring out who they work for in Halcyon City. In the Spiderweb, freelancer gangs that aren't tied to any crime boss are fairly rare. Default to assigning each gang to a crime boss who directs their efforts writ large. If a gang is a bunch of unattached goons, then stat them up as a normal villain with conditions but no boss or type.

Select a type of gang for a job: minions, lackeys, or brutes. Each gang type comes with a requirement that must be met before they can be deployed against the heroes and advantages that the gang has above their normal conditions and moves.

MINIONS

By far the most common gang in the city, **minions** are the ordinary criminals who handle the day-to-day business of the Spiderweb. If the bosses need someone to rob a bank or steal some precious cargo, they send minions.

Requirement: The faction the minions work for has to be present in the neighborhood. If the Spider hasn't extended his tendrils into the Canyons, for example, his minions can't make a direct appearance.

Advantage: Minions are smarter than the average gang; they can clear a Condition once per fight when they reveal how their boss's strategy set them up for an unexpected success.



GANGS IN MASKS: A NEW GENERATION

The rules for gangs presented in *The Spiderweb* playset can be lifted for use in a more traditional game of **MASKS**. If you've always wanted to have your villains throw hordes of robots or costumed lackeys at the PCs, just follow the rules for gang creation listed here, including picking a gang type. You don't have to use the Confused condition, but it's a great way to differentiate Spiderweb-style gangs from the usual hordes of robot dinosaurs.

LACKEYS

No self-respecting crime boss in Halcyon City spends much time alone. There's always a cadre of muscled goons waiting in a nearby room to come to their boss's immediate aid.

Requirement: The gang's boss has to be directly present for lackeys to show up on the scene.

Advantage: Lackeys can mark conditions for a villain, even when the heroes target the villain directly. Only when the henchman are completely taken out can the heroes force the boss to mark a condition.

BRUTES

Sometimes, the bosses need the worst of the worst, a gang or thug squad that bulldozes over everything that gets in the way. Whether because of their numbers, their equipment, or their skills, there's no fighting them directly!

Requirement: Brutes can only be invoked by a boss as part of a condition move. The heroes have to get the villain's attention before they deploy a brute squad—otherwise, deploying a brute squad would be overkill!

Advantage: The heroes cannot **directly engage** brutes while they act as a gang. Instead, all the PCs can do is run or hide. Think of these folks as an endless parade of thugs or superpowered assassins, the kind of people who cannot be overcome without something balancing the odds.

No matter which type of gang you select, the stakes for the boss are always the same: losing a gang completely means marking a condition. It may take the heroes some time to figure out how to defeat a particularly large group of minions or a gang of brutes, but it's possible for them to chip away at the boss's conditions before ever meeting them face-to-face!



GANGS, VILLAINS, AND CONDITION MOVES

Villains who mark a condition as a result of losing a gang of minions still make a condition move...but with a different scope. If the Spider loses a group of minions and marks Angry, he might **break the environment** by sending goons to burn down a building or **lash out at any vulnerability** by using what he does know about the heroes to scare them at school or work. Either way, the heroes don't get to react before the deed is done; the Spider gets to make his move first.

GANG NAME AND LOOK

Some gangs have names like “The Fourth Street Wolves” or “Friends of Satin,” but others are just “the dangerous thugs who work for Dee Bradley.” Either way, make sure the gang has a way to talk about its own identity.

Give the gang some kind of unified look, a facet of their appearance that lets everyone know that the group is an organized unit. That might be an official uniform, similar colors, or even just similar weapons. If possible, try to signal the gang's type through their look as well: minions tend to be relatively disorganized thugs while soldiers have a serious, deadly aura.

GANG MOVES

Create a few villain moves for the gang, just as you would for your normal **MASKS** villains (page 155 of the core book). Here are a few examples for gang moves:

- **Swarm a vulnerable target or enemy**
- **Drive off civilians and law enforcement**
- **Secure a valuable resource for the boss**
- **Escalate a situation, wildly or suddenly**

GANG CONDITIONS

Choose one to five conditions for the gang. Choose from the regular list of conditions plus the new condition (Confused) listed below. The more conditions you select, the more dangerous the gang:

- 1 Condition: a few unarmed street thugs
- 2 Conditions: some hired muscle, armed or unarmed
- 3 Conditions: an organized, armed force
- 4 Conditions: a sizeable, professional squad
- 5 Conditions: an elite team of enforcers or killers

You can always pair a gang with a low- or medium-level enforcer, assigning the gang a few conditions and the enforcer a few more. If you use an enforcer, track their conditions separately from the gang's conditions, so the heroes can take the gang or the enforcer out before the other one is completely exhausted.

NEW CONDITION: CONFUSED

In addition to the new rules for adding gangs into your **MASKS** game, *The Spiderweb* also features a new condition explicitly for use by gangs: **Confused**.

The gang treats the Confused condition like any other: they mark it when they get hit hard and then immediately make a move from the condition move list. Here's the list of Confused moves:

- **Call up their boss for further directions**
- **Arm themselves with new equipment**
- **Hunt for new information**
- **Scatter to minimize their losses**
- **Retreat to a stronger position**

The Confused condition moves are about how the gang loses its cohesion when confronted with superpowered opposition from the heroes. You can mark **Afraid** to show that a gang is scared of the PCs, but **Confused** lets you show that the gang is falling apart under the pressure of dealing with weird powers. After all, they're used to dealing with people with guns—not people who can jump over cars or send the wind blowing with a wave of their hands.

EXAMPLE GANG: SPIDER'S MUSCLE (BRUTES)

Last session, the heroes stopped Spider's minions as they were robbing Dee Bradley's drug stash, so I decide that the Spider marks **Angry** and sends some Brutes to rough up these teen punks (**escalate the situation dangerously**).

Since Brutes are virtually unstoppable, I decide that Spider gave these thugs a modified Titan's Elixir he stole from Brass Brilliant's workshop. Though not as strong as Brass himself, the five thugs in the gang are bulletproof and hit like a truck.

For a name, I'll keep it simple and call them "Spider's Muscle." I also think that they have prison tattoos and rough weapons: shotguns, crowbars, etc.

For moves, I decide to emphasize their calculating brutality:

- **escalate a situation, wildly or suddenly**
- **orchestrate a sneak attack from the shadows**

During the session, I'll emphasize that these guys are on a totally different level from the last group of minions. They hit hard and aren't fazed by superhero nonsense. The heroes have to catch them off guard or with a larger force to **directly engage**.

Finally, I decide to give them two conditions: **Afraid** and **Angry**. I don't think the gang is going to be **Hopeless** or **Insecure**—they work for the Spider!—but it makes sense to me that they get real mad real fast and actual resistance freaks them out. If the heroes can even the odds and inflict a condition, these guys will go down hard.

Spider has all five conditions, so I'm already thinking about which one to mark if the heroes can take out his brutes. I think **Insecure** is an interesting option; the Spider gets nervous when his best muscle can't deal with a problem...



AGENDAS, PRINCIPLES, AND MOVES

The Spiderweb uses the agendas, principles, and GM moves of regular **MASKS**. But there are new elements to consider when GMing a game with this playset, to nail the correct style.

THE SPIDERWEB: AGENDA

There is one new agenda to add to the core set for *The Spiderweb*.

MAKE THE SPIDERWEB FEEL REAL

The Spiderweb playset presents a version of Halcyon City through a dark mirror, a city packed with criminals and corruption in which no friend can truly be trusted for long. It's a setting familiar to fans of Gotham or Marvel's street-level New York. It's pulpy and dangerous, a perfect battleground to face off against criminals like the Spider without adult supers as back-up.

It's also a city that needs to feel *real*. The joy of playing young heroes fighting a corrupt system falls apart if the stakes of those conflicts feel too fantastical, if the threats of violence feel silly and overwrought instead of weighty and unsettling. The Spider's criminal plots and schemes can be vague, but he has to be up to something dirty enough that we can imagine an ordinary teenager donning a cape and cowl to put an end to those schemes.

But at the same time, **MASKS** isn't a game about murder, death, and gore. There's a balance to be struck between making the Spiderweb feel real and casually abusing your player's expectations about superhero stories. *The Spiderweb* is still very much a story about heroes: the people who refuse to stand aside when they know the world could be a better place. There always has to be enough hope that fighting the Spider isn't a futile effort.

The best way to strike that balance is familiar to any fan of street-level heroes: make the community count. The Spider might not be redeemable, but his influence touches the lives of many people who already make Halcyon City a great place to live. The PCs love the city enough to defend it and that means that there has to be something worth defending, something that could be great—even world-class—if only the gang war could come to an end.

But for now, the city is the Spiderweb. And it's your job to make the pain and the promise of that Web feel real to the heroes.

THE SPIDERWEB: PRINCIPLES

In addition to the new agenda, you have some new principles to follow as your heroes tackle the Spiderweb. Remember that an agenda is your purpose in playing, and principles are how you achieve that goal.

TREAT EVERYONE ACCORDING TO THEIR STATION

The underworld figures that run the Spiderweb claim they just want what's best for Halcyon City. In reality, the Spiderweb is a hierarchical machine, designed to keep some people on top and others in the gutter. Show the heroes this system in action by handing the rich and powerful what they want on a silver platter while ordinary citizens have to make do with mere scraps.

DIRTY THE HANDS OF ALL INVOLVED

No one in the Spiderweb is ever truly free of corruption...and everyone who has trafficked in evil sometimes sides with the angels. Give the PCs the opportunity to take good deals from bad people and bad deals from good people, arrangements that cause them to either doubt their cause or the methods of the fight. Nothing is ever simple—not even alliances!—in a city caught in the Spiderweb.

GIVE EVERYTHING A PRICE, EVEN FRIENDSHIP

Make the PCs pay for everything, even things that should seem free and easy like filling in for someone at work or saving a life. Someone always comes to collect the fee, to demand their share of whatever it was that the PCs wanted out of the situation. Always. After all, the Spider wants his due down the road. Why should the PCs get what they want without paying the piper?

CHALLENGE ISSUES OF RACE AND GENDER

The Spiderweb draws on a lot of crime fiction that can exude a sexist, racist, or homophobic atmosphere. Don't slip into tired tropes that put women and people of color on the receiving end of every villainous plan. In fact, some of the strongest villains in the *Spiderweb* are the folks who refuse to be downtrodden for even one minute longer...

THE SPIDERWEB: MOVES

Finally, you have new moves that you use to fulfill your new *Spiderweb* agenda:

- **Reveal a deal done in their absence**
- **Inflict or trade harm as established**
- **Offer a rotten compromise or just accord**
- **Shift the odds, unfairly and unexpectedly**

REVEAL A DEAL DONE IN THEIR ABSENCE

Remind the heroes that they can't possibly stay on top of everything by showing them that the other characters constantly scheme and plot to take (or keep) what little power they can get their hands on.

Dee Bradley and her goons turn their guns away from the Spider...and toward your team. "Alright, Sebastian. Like we agreed...you stay out of the Canyons, and you can have this pack of strays all to yourself. Just leave me out of it."

INFLECT OR TRADE HARM AS ESTABLISHED

Bullets can kill in *The Spiderweb* playset. Use them sparingly, but drive home that the stakes of every shootout are potentially lethal. Note that the heroes don't have to be the targets; collateral damage is as terrible as any broken bone.

The Helldrake goons spot you coming just before you crash through the window. They open fire, spraying bullets into the street. Your bulletproof skin means that you barely feel the gunfire...but the civilians in the street aren't so lucky.

OFFER A ROTTEN COMPROMISE OR JUST ACCORD

Offer the PCs both unfair solutions from the wrong people that are all-too-tempting to take and fair deals that make them party to the Spider's web of criminal corruption. Villains in *The Spiderweb* playset don't have to stand and fight every time the heroes show up: they're businesspeople!

The letter from Satin gets right to the point: "My fellow heroes, defenders of Halcyon City...it's time we joined forces. If you'd like to get Luca Carlotti, I'm sure the bomb I placed in the city square should prove a most useful distraction."



USING THE COMMUNITY IN SPIDERWEB

Since the heroes of *The Spiderweb* are more grounded than ordinary **MASKS** heroes, they are more likely to attend school together in the same neighborhood. That's an awesome place to frame scenes, but be careful not to get too caught up in the day-to-day of school activities over the daily life of the neighborhood. After all, it's the *community* element that makes *The Spiderweb* work; feel free to cut to right after school, when the heroes have to get a sandwich before heading out on patrol!

SHIFT THE ODDS, UNFAIRLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY

When nothing else works, *The Spiderweb*'s villains can call in lackeys...or target someone the heroes can't stand losing. There's nothing fair about a fight against a city-wide criminal network. Why would they let the heroes stand a chance?

The Spider smiles, rows of shark teeth in his jagged grin. "You think it will be that easy? I've got my hooks in people who know how to deal with kids like you." He snaps his fingers, and the doors of his office open, goons pouring into to defend him...led by Jessica Miles.

SAID THE SPIDER TO THE FLY

The Spiderweb playset puts the heroes up against some pretty tough opposition, without the usual cast of characters to rescue them when things go wrong. And yet...the PCs have a chance to stand for what's right, to fight for a better life than the one that the Spider wants to give them. Of course, they have to contend with all manner of obstacles to turn back the tide of criminal corruption...but there's no question that it's worth it.

Never let the PCs forget why they fight. Remind them that good people still live in Halcyon, that the world could be a good, safe place. Give them reasons to rage against the Web and all the predators that use it for their own selfish aims. Your PCs will take care of the rest!



PHOENIX ACADEMY

CHAPTER THREE

THE ACADEMY OPENS

Halcyon City is full of high schools educating young women and men for the beginnings of their adult lives. But the most famous school exists in the harbor, built on an artificial island and surrounded by a beautiful garden of plants from planets and dimensions not yet discovered by humanity at large. The buildings range from medieval cloisters to futuristic floating towers. The grounds feature alien art and enormous statues, monuments to the great heroes of the past. The sigil of a phoenix floats in holographic splendor over the whole island. Everyone throughout the city knows what that symbol means. Kids from other schools wear their school colors out to concerts and restaurants, but only the gear with that stylized orange, black, or yellow phoenix gets everyone's attention.

Some kids dream of attending the Phoenix Academy, others dread the idea, but everybody's thought about it. If the school's founders, the Infi-Knight and Sister Salem, knew just how many kids looked out over Halcyon Harbor at their statues, those grand sentinels ever watching the city beyond, and wished to cross the water and study beneath that phoenix sigil, they would feel tremendous pride.

MASKS is, at its core, a game about identity. For many teenagers, the first place to test their changing identities is high school. High school can be a harrowing experience full of self-doubt, dark feeling, and unfair situations. It can be a place full of wise mentors, peer support networks, and memories that last a lifetime. Most often a mix of the good and the bad, it's chock full of the influences that drive the drama in a game of **MASKS**.

BEYOND THE STARS, BELOW THE DEPTHS

Around 1960, Argonon-27 came from beyond the Milky Way to observe and report on this part of the universe. A fusion of artificial intelligence and adaptable construction, Argonon-27 was built to take on the form of the local species, transmit important data and move on to the next assignment. But something about Earth in the 1960s, and Halcyon City in particular, led the unit to defy its programming. The people here were different, vibrant, unpredictable, joyful, grim; their behavior kept Argonon-27 fascinated for years. The unit watched quietly until the cosmic energy ravagers known as the

Droculox, a threat Argonon-27 knew all too well from their travels throughout the cosmos, descended upon Earth and abducted cities across the globe. Argonon-27 invented a new mantle for themselves as the noble Infi-Knight, and stood with the heroes of Halcyon City to turn the tide against the aliens in the city and, eventually, the world.

Meanwhile, Tabitha Ashcroft operated a small occult store that housed a coven of witches hidden in the affluent Halcyon City neighborhood of White Park. She was contacted by Nemesis, a being claiming to represent the angry souls of countless wronged victims of greed, prejudice, and domination throughout the eons. The being offered her great power in exchange for meting out justice on those responsible for such harm. Tabitha struck the deal and set out to serve justice on those who deserved it. Her power was not kind or gentle, but she endeavored to use it only on the guilty. With the help of her coven, she became a dark vigilante under the name of Sister Salem.

Sister Salem first clashed with Infi-Knight over the skies of Halcyon City when her Crimson Coven attempted to steal the proceeds from a charity auction. To the Infi-Knight, she was a dangerous mystic intent on breaking the law of Halcyon City, the place that Argonon-27 had come to see as home. To Sister Salem, they were an unthinking alien robot, incapable of understanding that the “charity” of the auction just moved money between the 1%. The cultural items being auctioned didn’t even truly belong to the wealthy socialites who’d put them up for auction in the first place.

They wound up battling on several further occasions, not just with Infi-Knight’s plasma fists and Sister Salem’s infernal illusions, but with their differing perspectives on humanity. Infi-Knight saw humanity’s potential and believed that they needed a firm, orderly hand to guide them. Sister Salem saw corruption, selfishness, and hypocrisy and believed that the darkest elements of Halcyon and the world needed to be expunged.

Their conflicts came to a head when Infi-Knight raced to stop Sister Salem from opening a long-sealed portal on Friday the 13th to the dimension where dwelt the full force of Nemesis. Their battle caused the energies Salem summoned to behave erratically and, rather than open the portal, sent Infi-Knight and Sister Salem to an entirely different dimension. A year passed for the world they had left behind, and when they returned on the next Friday the 13th, they revealed that from their perspectives, they had been gone for a full decade. And during that time, something strange had happened for the pair.

They fell in love.

A MATCH MADE IN THE HEAVENS

Being trapped for a decade as the only sentient beings in a pocket dimension gave Infi-Knight and Sister Salem time to get to know each other. They fought, argued, debated, talked, and one fine day, kissed. After years of contention, they began to fully work together and found a way home to Halcyon City. Argonon-27 believed their release from the dimension was because the proper cosmic alignment came around again. Tabitha believed their own personal revelations helped to sync up the cosmos themselves.

While the mask community was stunned by this turn of events, the majority of heroes embraced the Infi-Knight's and Sister Salem's newfound feelings. The entire city, it seemed, celebrated the announcement of their wedding. But during the year of their absence, Salem's former sisters in the Crimson Coven had not been quiet; a new leader, Sister Callisto, had arisen. Callisto drew power not from Nemesis but from the Keres, spirits of violent death, and her mission had grown corrupted with her rage. When Sister Salem returned, Callisto was incensed at her weakness, and the wedding day allowed Callisto an opportunity to show that she deserved leadership of the Crimson Coven once and for all.

The wedding day attack nearly killed Sister Salem, as Sister Callisto drained Tabitha's energy. After Halcyon's heroes helped drive off Callisto, Tabitha and Argonon-27 discussed their future during her recovery. They had planned to fight side by side, Sister Salem and the Infi-Knight as one force... but Tabitha didn't want that anymore. She could still feel the power of Nemesis within her, that call to justice and punishment... but the fight held little interest for her. She wanted to build something, not destroy. And Argonon-27, who for eons had been little more than an observer of the universe's wonders, agreed—they wanted to add to the universe, not merely watch it or protect it.

The pair's desire to leave a legacy, to show the world their hard-won belief that love was the most powerful force in the cosmos, needed a form. They considered several options, from joining Earth as social leaders to massively scoped charity work, until Tabitha made a joke about settling down to become a school teacher and Argonon-27's eyes lit up with joy. That's precisely what they both became, as the founders of Phoenix Academy.

BURN YOU DOWN, BUILD YOU UP

The Future Academy (not yet Phoenix Academy) first opened its doors in White Park on November 4, 1976. The goal was to train the newest generation of metahumans (the as-yet-unnamed Bronze Generation) in the proper ways to use their powers. The school's founders also wanted to make sure that young masks got a proper education without interfering with their sidekick roles. It's hard to learn after spending a night crouched on a gargoyle during a stakeout.

The founders knew this was a bigger job than the two of them could tackle alone, so they also enlisted the help of their friends in the hero community. The first faculty was primarily made up of well-trained and adventurous teachers from throughout Halcyon coupled with retired Gold Generation heroes who wanted to pass on their experiences. The school also encouraged Silver Generation heroes to stop by and give lectures or, if they had the time, sign on for a semester as special educators to teach classes while paired with regular teachers.

The founders also hoped the Future Academy could impact the mask community by offering villains a chance at redemption. The founders struck a deal with A.E.G.I.S. that captured and imprisoned supervillains could earn time off of their sentences or reduce their charges if they spent time teaching subjects in which they were knowledgeable. While there were certainly cases like Jack O'Lantern, who took advantage of the system to engineer an escape, or cases like Orator, who recruited some superpowered teens to their side, many more were surprised at how much they enjoyed teaching the next generation. In particular, Clarissa Rowe, aka the Jabberwock, became one of the Academy's most renowned teachers, despite her prior attempts to steal the imaginations of children throughout the city.

Despite its official name as the Future Academy, the students referred to the school as "Phoenix Academy" due to the amount of times it was destroyed and rebuilt in the first few years of operation. Sometimes a student lost control of their powers, sometimes it was an attack by a supervillain, and sometimes a teacher was confronted by an old enemy and the school just suffered collateral damage. The school officially moved to the island in Halcyon Harbor in 1980 after a devastating attack by Kongotron also damaged several nearby districts of the city. It took on the name Phoenix Academy as an official title, and the graduating class revealed the statues of the founders as a surprise gift to Infi-Knight and Sister Salem in May of that year.

THE INFINITE EXODUS

In the midst of trying to manage the newly-founded school, Argonon-27 received a distress call from Argon Prime, summoning all Argonon units to defend it from an unknown threat. It pained Argonon-27 to ignore the summons, but the robot couldn't leave the life they had built here on Earth. Argonon hoped the others would defend Argon Prime and that, someday, they could return, explain why they had stayed, and ask for forgiveness.

When the Voidbrood Fleet arrived in orbit around Earth in 1984, Argonon-27 knew they had made a terrible mistake. The Voidbrood, ancient enemies of the Argonons, claimed that they had destroyed Argon Prime and were now hunting down the last vestiges of Argonon throughout the galaxy. And the Infi-Knight was next.

This time, the Infi-Knight's allies in the fight to save Halcyon City were graduates of the Phoenix Academy. And thanks to all their training and combined power, they succeeded, barely. The Voidbrood were on the cusp of annihilating the Academy when Sister Salem and her mystic arts students poured forth an unmitigated torrent of force from Nemesis and sent the Voidbrood back into space.

But even with the Voidbrood repelled, they weren't defeated fully. The fleet was still out there, and the Infi-Knight felt confident they would return. Argonon-27 resolved to answer the call they had previously ignored to check on their home world. Find out if any of the Argonons still lived. And combat the Voidbrood where they could find them.

The Infi-Knight tried to convince Sister Salem to watch over the Academy but she pointed out that the Academy could take care of itself. She underlined at the good work they had done, and how the Academy had defended Earth. And she wanted to go with the Infi-Knight on this venture into the deepest reaches of space, because they were a team. Argonon-27 said they would remain with her until the end of the universe, and she said that was good, because that was where the pair were going. They cried as they said good-bye to their world and their Academy. They kissed. And they left in a burst of light.

Despite their hopes, however, the Academy suffered in their absence. A mixture of human administrators and former graduates kept the school going, but a fog of sadness and despair settled over the students. Fights broke out more frequently between peer teams. Scandals, like when the villain Memento used kids from his class to commit crimes and then erased their memories afterwards, became commonplace. Many heroes quietly expressed a desire to close it all together.

And then the enemies of the Academy made themselves known.

DEATH AND REBIRTH

A tattooed, chain-swathed demonic creature, later identified as Hellbinder, came to Phoenix Academy in a burst of flame. He screamed for Sister Salem's soul, for Infi-Knight's death, and for the utter annihilation of the Phoenix Academy. He destroyed buildings and killed students.

Despite the valiant attempts of the faculty and students to defend their school, Hellbinder's assault was catastrophic. The monster left, disappearing in another swirl of hellish energy, after having caused enormous damage and having failed to find Sister Salem or the Infi-Knight.

In the wake of the attack, Phoenix Academy shut down. A.E.G.I.S. set up a perimeter around the island and Halcyon City sadly assumed that the school would never rise again.

AN UNLIKELY SAVIOR

The school lay dormant for nearly 15 years. Then, the A.E.G.I.S. security team detected a massive amount of movement on the Academy Island. Something was raising the statues of the Infi-Knight and Sister Salem once again. A mixture of A.E.G.I.S. agents and former students came to the island to discover that the efforts to raise the statues had been the work of one person.

Hellbinder.

The demonic hunter had returned after pursuing the Infi-Knight and Sister Salem across the cosmos. He had found them, but he had not been able to defeat them; rather, they had changed him. Freed him, according to his own testimony. A dark entity possessed him, he said, and he was not in control of himself when he attacked the Academy. But the founders helped free him, and taught him to be better—and to make up for what he had done. Hellbinder committed himself fully to rebuilding Phoenix Academy to its former glory.

The heroes and authorities of Halcyon came to see Hellbinder's commitment as, surprisingly, real. They discovered evidence that he was mostly purged of the dark influences that had driven him, and that he truly showed signs of repentance. Mystic experts, psychoanalysts, and telepaths alike suggested that he was, in many ways, a completely different person.

Hellbinder worked out a deal with A.E.G.I.S. and city officials. He could restart the school, but under strict monitoring and supervision. He could not leave Academy Island—it would act as his de facto prison cell. At the first sign of trouble, his endeavor would be shut down and he would be incarcerated in the Spike. He agreed to all terms and set about rebuilding Academy Island. One of his first additions was a small memorial garden with a crystalline lily for each student Hellbinder killed during his initial rampage; it has since

expanded to include other students who have died before graduating Phoenix Academy.

Though a few like Pyroclaw (a student at the Academy during Hellbinder's attack) still suspect his motives, he's proven to be adept at getting the school functioning again. He's surprisingly soft towards the students, and still capable of throwing a bit of intimidation around to maintain discipline with students and faculty members. Hellbinder doesn't run the Phoenix Academy exactly like his predecessors but he raised the statues back up for a reason. He knows they're watching.



TODAY'S PHOENIX ACADEMY

Since Hellbinder's return, the Phoenix Academy has reclaimed its place as one of the jewels of Halcyon City. Students wearing the Academy uniform show up across the city, in battles, in community sports, and even just kicking back.

ACADEMY ISLAND

Sister Salem raised this artificial island in Halcyon Harbor after the Kongotron attack. The founders decided that a place teaching young people how to use amazing powers should be located away from innocent bystanders. The island has a lot of green space on its campus for quiet places to study, to be alone, or to snatch quick kisses between classes with that special someone.

The main building was created by representatives of several species grateful to Infi-Knight for interceding in galactic troubles. The alien design gives the school building a strange feel. Given instructions to build a state-of-the-art school, some of the aliens understood the task...some tried their best... and a few just did their own thing. Students encounter massive corridors that do not fit into their external dimensions; doorways that act as teleports; semi-living floors that slowly eat trash or spills; and every now and then, a piece of the building that seems stolen from a different era in time.

HEADMASTER HELLBINDER

Hellbinder cuts a curious figure as the new Headmaster of the school. His original form, a tattooed, crimson humanoid beast wrapped in chains and covered in spikes through his own skin, exists now only in his shadow. Hellbinder now looks the part of an academic, though one with pentagrams on his elbow patches and a red streak in his shock white hair. He debuted this new look on the first day of the new school and has kept it more or less ever since.

Hellbinder, still technically confined to the island, never ventures out into the field to fight, even when his students are involved. He thinks it is important for students to learn lessons as heroes and as teenagers, so he rarely intervenes in clashes between students on the island. Attacks on school grounds are another matter, however, as he leads his faculty from the front.

Hellbinder dislikes speaking of his attack, except to profess his undying regret, and to imply that whatever possessed him still looks for opportunities to attack the school. Some have connected the dark entity that possessed Hellbinder with the Keres entities, the things that bonded with Sister Callisto and nearly killed Sister Salem before she could found the Academy. Hellbinder hasn't confirmed this connection. Regardless, some portion of his time seems committed to preparing the Academy for a new attack from this entity.

CLUBS AND CLIQUES

Two types of teams generally form in the halls of this hero high school. Official school teams become Clubs, while Cliques are ad hoc and peer teams.

Super teams operating under the full sanction of the Academy are known as **Clubs**. Students must have faculty sponsorship to form a Club, and the most successful Clubs have their own history and traditions, including trials for new members. The school stands behind the Clubs when their exploits cause property damage or if their reputations are in jeopardy, but the sanctioning also means the Clubs have obligations. They must wear approved uniforms, spend time doing public service projects, and periodically act as security on campus. Club members often get singled out as teacher's pets or targets by villains looking to start feuds, or by kids having a hard time at the Academy.

SAMPLE CLUBS

- Honor Roll—High achieving lauded and well-respected students
- The Science Blinders—The most scientifically gifted students
- Alien-Virtual Being Club—Students who don't call themselves human
- D For Defenders—Self- and public-defense minded students
- The Amazon Society—Female-identifying students sharing experiences

Cliques are the slang term for teams that form out of friend groups, street battles, or other ad hoc circumstances. These informal squads don't bother getting official sanction and just hang out and fight crime whenever they feel like it. Most faculty members are more suspicious of Cliques, and more likely to crack down on their misbehavior. Hellbinder gives more leeway to Cliques than prior headmasters, but that only goes so far. Cliques are expected to avoid getting in the way of Clubs, picking fights on school property, or creating bad press. Of course, Clubs often seek out Cliques to blow off some steam, since they feel it's unfair they have extra rules to follow and the Cliques do not.

SAMPLE CLIQUES

- Xeno-Hackers—Students with alien tech, cybernetics, and body mods
- The Red Capes—A “street-level” Clique from a shared neighborhood
- The Miss Takes—An all girl punk band and super team
- Fashion In Action—Stylish and well-branded would-be-celebrity supers
- Glitchbots—All-robot Clique (maybe cyborgs accepted)

FACULTY AND STAFF

Plenty of non-superhuman staff members keep the Phoenix Academy running. Many teachers at the school don't have any metahuman abilities. Competition for a teaching job at the Phoenix Academy is fierce because it provides not just some of the best compensation and benefits in the world, but also amazing resources for lesson plans and field trips. Teachers can take classes to the stars with the school's teleportation array or go undersea with minisubs.

Beyond the non-superhuman staff, Phoenix Academy also boasts plenty of named superheroes as staff. Many are alumni of the school who agree to teach for a year or two to help pay back the lessons they learned as students. More common are heroes who sign on for a semester as residents.

Most heroes in the city are also happy to visit for a day to impart their stories and wisdom to the students. Students like these days too; when a Golden Generation hero comes to talk to the students, the assembly usually means cancelled classes for the rest of the day!

Villains sometimes teach at the Academy as well. Some do so after retiring, or after a change of heart. Hellbinder has reintroduced a program explicitly designed to give former villains a second chance. **Project Clean Slate** allows supervillains incarcerated by A.E.G.I.S. to teach at Phoenix Academy in exchange for time off their sentences. Some of the villains take to teaching very well. Others clearly do so to just mark time and enjoy the sunlight. And of course a few use it as an opportunity to launch a new scheme or to escape.

PLAYING PHOENIX ACADEMY

This playset is set in and around the Phoenix Academy, a secondary school devoted to teaching young people with powers how to use them in a responsible manner while also educating them in the ways of the world. Regular high school is a tough balance to maintain with academics, social events, extracurriculars, and other elements pulling at teenage attention. Adding in the thrills and chills of life as a superhero makes the highs higher, the lows lower, and offers an excellent framework for a game of **MASKS**.

PLAYBOOKS

The playbooks in **MASKS** all work with this playset, but some extra consideration should be given to each one, as a superhero school modifies some of the basic concepts in subtle ways.

The Beacon: Because the Beacon is a normal kid (though perhaps one with exceptional skill and/or gadgets), there might be a question as to why they get to go to the Academy. Kids around the world dream about being part of the Phoenix Academy. Why does the Beacon get to be here and they don't? A good go-to answer is something like a Rising Stars program, designed to work like a lottery for some students at regular high schools around Halcyon City.

The Bull: The Bull's playbook implies that they were somehow modified and turned into a hero. This big secret is a key to the character's vulnerabilities. If only the Bull knows their secret, who are the people at school most likely to discover it? If the Bull's origin is well known, does anyone at school share that origin? Is there an adult at the school connected to the origin the Bull might want to protect? Or might want to get some answers from?

The Delinquent: Does the Delinquent even want to be here? It's reasonable to assume that a Delinquent would claim that they wish they were anywhere else. Consider why the Delinquent needs to rebel against the structure of the Phoenix Academy. Do they have a parent who is a teacher at the school? Are they the child of a super hoping to put them on a path to being a hero?

The Doomed: It's assumed that the Doomed has revealed some elements of their doom to their friends on the team. Their playbook is a mixture of secrets and hard truths, both of which can affect them in a school setting. Does the whole school know about the doom? Are other students scared of the Doomed? Are there teachers who think they are a danger to the students, or who want to save the Doomed?

The Janus: By default, the school's faculty members know about the Janus's full identity, but the rest of the city might not. The Janus might even use their super identity exclusively at school, meaning that their peers don't even know who they are outside of the mask. The Janus needs to figure out if the important

people in their normal life know they attend the Academy. Anyone the Janus knows from public school is going to look at “a scholarship to a private school” with all sorts of feelings ranging from jealousy to disdain. For that matter, if the Janus has a scholarship, that means if they screw up, they could be tossed out of the coolest school in Halcyon City.

The Legacy: Schools often use the term *legacy* to refer to the sibling or offspring of a former student. As the Academy has been around for a few generations, one or more of the Legacy’s forerunners could have been a student or faculty member during those times. If that’s the case, it likely adds another layer of pressure to the Legacy’s shoulders. Not only do the others bearing the same name expect the Legacy to live up to past versions, but the school and teachers do too. If the members of the legacy didn’t attend the Academy, does the young Legacy’s attendance cause friction with older members? After all, they didn’t need any fancy super-schooling to be a hero!

The Nova: The Nova must often tread lightly with their peers. They have access to unfathomable power, and their playbook is about knowing how to control it and knowing when to unleash it. Being surrounded by powerful heroes might encourage them to cut loose a little more... or it might put them under the influence of the wrong people. What’s the one thing that the Nova might be willing to lose control to do? Is there someone at school who can push them over the edge out of hate—or love?

The Outsider: This playbook already takes a lot of cues from the archetype of the foreign exchange student. In this playset, perhaps that connection is more explicit. Is the Outsider’s schooling tied in with intergalactic politics? Is she here while another young hero studies on her planet? What if that hero fails their classes? What if the Outsider fails hers? What if the Outsider’s planet severs diplomatic ties with Earth? Will her credits transfer?

The Protégé: The Protégé must decide how much they end up like their mentor and how much they push away. This playset offers a ready-made collection of other heroes that can affect that dynamic. Is the mentor a faculty member? How does the mentor react when one of the Protégé’s other teachers takes a special interest in them? How does the mentor feel about the Academy? Did they attend it when they were younger? Was it their decision to send the Protégé or did the younger hero choose to go on their own?

The Transformed: The Transformed will often be at odds with the group as a loner. But at the Phoenix Academy, there’s likely a Clique of kids who feel alone and isolated. The Transformed might explore the same themes but through being caught between two social groups. Will they choose the friends who accepted them despite their looks or the ones who accepted them because they look different?



OTHER PLAYBOOKS

The limited edition playbooks can be involved in a *Phoenix Academy* story as well, though they may require a bit more work to integrate. Generally speaking:

The Brain: Phoenix Academy has plenty of laboratories for you to play in, and plenty of people who'd love to teach you about how to deal with your shame. Expect to be frustrated with how much the staff wants to "teach" you.

The Harbinger: You only attend school because it plays some role in your overall quest regarding the future. What is that role? Why'd you agree to come here?

The Innocent: Did your adult self come to Phoenix Academy, back when they were your age? Are they perhaps tied to any of the major incidents surrounding the school? Do you think this school is going to help, or set you down the same path?

The Joined: There's no better place to both be defined as a single entity, and to find a way to differentiate yourselves. Which way are you going to push? Do you join the same Clique/Club, or different?

The Newborn: This is the perfect environment for learning and writing new lessons. Use it! Take them from faculty and from fellow students whenever possible.

The Nomad: You've seen stars and galaxies and dimensions, and now you're stuck in boring class. But you still agreed to be here, for some reason. Why? Why can't you, or won't you, just leave?

The Reformed: You're probably here as part of the Clean Slate, even though that's normally aimed at faculty. Are any of your contacts here as faculty? What do you hope to learn here?

The Scion: There are plenty of people whose respect you can earn at Phoenix Academy. Make sure you fill in some faculty names in your Respect section.

The Soldier: A.E.G.I.S. probably assigned you to Phoenix Academy, both for training and for monitoring—after all, who better to go undercover, watching people like Hellbinder, than a student?

The Star: You're a celebrity even among your own class... but also, Phoenix Academy is one of the only places you can really be free of all those cameras and attention. Is that good or bad?

FACULTY

This additional part of character creation takes place right after characters are introduced, before “When our team first came together...” The playbooks are designed to help create a thick web of NPCs and hooks that jumpstart teen drama. This playset encourages a close relationship not just with other heroes and villains, but with adults who teach at Phoenix Academy.

After every player has introduced their character, starting with the player that introduced their playbook last, each player chooses one of the following questions to ask any other player. The answerer must choose or create a faculty member for their answer. Once the answerer has addressed the question, they choose a different question to ask another player that has not yet replied to one of the faculty questions. This continues until each player has asked and answered one question. Players can discuss answers, but the answerer has final say as to what they believe about the faculty member in question.

These questions are in character, speaking to what the PCs believe is going on. The GM might fold the speculation into their plotlines or they might resolve it in a different way. Every school has rumors about the staff!

FACULTY QUESTIONS

- Which teacher will just not cut you a break?
- Which teacher do you have a secret crush on?
- Which teacher do you believe is secretly a supervillain?
- Which teachers do you think are hooking up?
- Which teacher do you think should retire?
- Which teacher do you think would make a good headmaster?

FACULTY AND STAFF MEMBERS

The Headmaster: *Hellbinder* changed his ways during his final meeting with the founders of the Phoenix Academy. He similarly changed his appearance when he became headmaster, but his powers are the same. He is a master of arcane energies, which often manifest as hellfire. He arrives in a flash of bright light and heat at times when it's very fortunate for him to appear... or very unfortunate for students doing something harmful to the school. Students tend to keep their heads down on days when *Hellbinder* walks the halls, but even when he keeps to his office, he can appear anywhere on school grounds in a moment's notice.

The Administrator: Day-to-day operations fall into the hands of *Selma Schwartz*. Selma looked ancient when *Infi-Knight* first brought her into the Phoenix Academy administration as a secretary. She's served the school admirably for decades as the person who knows which kids are out sick, which



teachers left for Jupiter, and how much time villains have on their Clean Slate accounts. Her appointment to this high level position hasn't dulled her ability to keep tabs on the school, but as administrator she's now the liaison to the Halcyon City government and to A.E.G.I.S.

The Math Teacher: *"Mister Brick"* sounds like the name of a veteran superhero, but it's the nickname every student uses for math teacher Benjamin Rick. Mister Brick, one of the few regular teachers who taught at the school during its original era, returned after Hellbinder reopened the doors. Mister Brick is here to make sure "these damn kids know how to add and subtract in between all this other nonsense." His math classes are tough but fair. Despite his lack of super powers, he's also more than willing to dress down a student for violating the rules, even if that student hurls cosmic blasts at him.

The English Teacher: *Princess Arizella* was meant to return to her undersea kingdom after graduation four years ago. Instead, she retained her identity as *Cutlass* and became Phoenix Academy's first-year English teacher. Arizella's love of classic literature is infectious, but she hasn't adjusted fully to having friends who are still students. She also enjoys teaching hand-to-hand combat with her Buccaneer Blade forged from the weapons of the Ghost Pirate Court, though sometimes she gets carried away with the quipping and acrobatics.



EVER-CHANGING FACULTY

Phoenix Academy is a little more NPC intensive than normal **MASKS** because it thrusts the PCs into a daily routine with other heroes. These faculty members exist to ease the burden of creating a whole slew of new characters, especially when the players are already spending a lot of time creating legacies, mentors, and other important parts of their characters' lives. But they are by no means set in stone. Feel free to sub in characters from other **MASKS** books or characters from the history section like *Hellbinder*. What's important is that your group creates characters who matter to them and who drive your heroes to drama and action.

The Gym Teacher: None of the students would ever admit to liking the robotic *Sergeant S.U.R.G.E.* and he likes it fine that way. *S.U.R.G.E.* is a Clean Slate success story, seeing as he was originally designed as a weapon to take down the Exemplars. The Sarge's programming and core ability, to mimic the power of any metahuman he detects, serves him well now as the PE teacher at Phoenix Academy. While an undisclosed A.E.G.I.S. facility still holds his full mimicry mechanism, the Sarge has access to a few different (regulated) power profiles for copying, including *Magmatador* and *Seismic Prime*. The Sarge also has no problem tossing a barrage of withering insults at any student not performing well enough in gym class. The Sarge is grateful for the opportunity to get out from the backwater government basement he had been consigned to.

The Science Teacher: *Professor Positron* is a cybernetic technopath from the future, and at heart a proud teacher. When the "Professor" first arrived from the future, he was fighting the Technoseed, a strange nanoswarm entity seeding itself throughout human history. After the battle was won, he stuck around as a hero, but his career was largely unmarked... until *Hellbinder* invited him to come teach at Phoenix Academy. There he found his true passion—passing on his knowledge of technology, teaching the people who would build the foundation of his future world. The Professor is a bit overzealous, but he couldn't be happier than when a student creates some new cyber-device.

The History Teacher: In *Niles Berman*, the Phoenix Academy gets two teachers in one. Berman is the mortal aspect of *Pharrolax the Eternal*, the cat-god-queen ruler of an alternative Egypt thousands of years ago. The heroes of Halcyon City confiscated the Amulet of Sekhet-Ka-Ra, Pharrolax's most powerful artifact, after it accidentally transferred her essence into Niles. The two have come to work together as history instructors (though Pharrolax would love to get her paws on the Amulet). Students always enjoy their classes; sometimes the entire period is soaked up by Niles and Pharrolax bickering about historical accuracy or esoteric tangents. Pharrolax also provides tutoring and private classes on the mystic arts, for those students who are so inclined.

RUMORS

Reputation is important to teens. Nobody wants to have their secrets exposed, nor do they want to be connected to a story that outlives their time at the school. Rumors seem to persist the longer someone denies the story, yet going along with a rumor can shape the target into becoming part of the story.

This can reflect the petty stories of teenagers, but adults at the school can have preconceived notions of students. They may not have malicious intent but they can certainly start rumors just the same. A teacher might let the truth about a Legacy's older sister slip or let their displeasure at the Delinquent's presence in the school be known in the teacher's lounge.

Students don't have much control over exactly when rumors start, seeing as their words can be twisted over a school-wide game of telephone. But they can much more easily get a read on the most important school gossip.

When you put an ear out for school gossip, name it and roll + Mundane. On a hit, the GM will share the juiciest rumor bouncing around the school or the most relevant rumor regarding a person or topic of your choice. On a 10+, you may ask a follow-up question. On a miss, the rumors you hear are about you, and they aren't good; the GM will shift your Labels appropriately.

And when someone with Influence shares a rumor with you, that's a perfect opportunity for them to tell you who you are or how the world works...

SAMPLE RUMORS

- A teacher is having an inappropriate relationship with a student
- A student is passing their classes because their mentor calls in favors
- A ghost walks the halls at night preying on students
- The food in the cafeteria has drugs that makes students more compliant
- There is an extradimensional swimming pool accessible only by seniors

"WHEN OUR TEAM FIRST CAME TOGETHER..."

This element of the team origin story stays largely the same. The group should decide prior to answering the first question whether they were at Phoenix Academy prior to coming together, or whether they formed as a team before coming to Phoenix Academy.

The next important decision for your players to make is whether or not the team is a Clique or a Club. If the team is a Clique, then they're informally connected, joined by their choice more than anything. They don't have official support, but they also don't have official duties or requirements. If the team is a Club, then they are on record with the Phoenix Academy and get access to additional resources and support from Phoenix Academy, but must also follow the rules of Phoenix Academy with regard to Clubs.

If the team is a Clique, they function exactly like a normal **MASKS** team, although NPCs may view them with suspicion and skepticism.

If the team is a Club, then the Academy can ask the team to perform specific duties whenever appropriate. If the team performs those duties, then they remain in good standing with the school; if they ever fail to perform those duties, then their Club status may be revoked. As long as they remain in good standing with the school, then once per session, their Club may ask for appropriate resources from the school and simply receive what they need. “Appropriate resources” likely means anything that the school can actually provide that isn’t absurdly dangerous or powerful.

THE ACADEMIC MOVE

The Phoenix Academy expects the best out of its students. Graduates are expected to be the best and brightest of the new generation of heroes. That excellence comes with a price. Teachers evaluate, train, and test students on all aspects of their life. Tests push powers, fill brains, and engage consciences. It’s not good enough to be just powerful or kind or courageous. The Phoenix Academy expects all of that and more.

In a school setting, testing hangs over the heads of everyone. The administration wants results. The faculty has to make sure nobody cheats. The students have to prove they belong at the school. The genre reflects this importance not by pages of hot essay question action, but by skipping to the results. The move this playset uses to get that feel breaks the mold a bit; it is both a beginning of the game move AND an end of session move.

At the start of the session, if the time has come to prove your worthiness, the GM tells you what test looms on the horizon. The GM chooses one Label that reflects a test or project assigned by the faculty to the students on the team.

Mundane tests include group projects where being part of a team is important. (*Fall play, history presentation, science project*)

Superior tests include individual tests where performance is down to what one character knows or does. (*AP finals, midterms, SATs*)

Savior tests include outreach projects where students must learn to value the normal citizens of Halcyon City. (*Donation drive, fund raising, tutoring*)

Danger tests include learning how to handle threats and proper control of powers. (*Mock combats, obstacle courses, rooms full of danger*)

Freak tests include pushing your powers to their limit. (*Faculty duels, stress tests, Student Olympics*)

At the end of the session, each player rolls + the named Label. The team may choose to spend Team on each roll as per the normal rules to help each other; referencing flashbacks to study sessions or other activities is perfectly appropriate and encouraged. On a hit, you pass the test. On a 10+, you passed with flying colors! Mark 1 potential or shift up the test's Label and down any other Label, your choice. On a 7-9, you did all right, but had to sacrifice something to make the cut. Choose one:

You disappointed an adult. Give an adult Influence over you.

You sacrificed your social life. Give a teammate or NPC Influence out of guilt.

You lost a responsibility. Someone who had invested in you no longer believes you can do what they had asked of you. The GM will tell you who, and which responsibility.

You hurt your academic standing. The first time you choose this, your grades are falling. The second time, you are on probation. The third time, you are expelled.

On a miss, you blew it, hard, and the faculty and people who care about you will come down on you. Prepare yourself.

This move isn't triggered every session, but triggers at the GM's discretion. The goal as a player is to have their relevant Label bumped up to succeed on the roll at the end of session... assuming that the test matters to them. These tests also encourage players to work as a team to provide ample Team points and reflect off-panel study sessions, all-nighters, and the general ease of mind that comes with being in a good place with friends.

This move is meant to cover an expanse of time—which means that its effects and consequences don't have to happen on-screen, but they should happen before the next session. Using this move may indicate that “time is passing,” so other “time passes” moves should trigger as well, either at the end of the session or the beginning of the next.

ALUMNI AND “RETIRING”

Many students return to the Phoenix Academy to give back. Some spend time in Halcyon City establishing their adult hero identities before coming back. Others turn around right after graduation and sign on as student teachers. It can make things awkward for peers to suddenly become authority figures, but many heroes see a stint as a Phoenix Academy instructor as something positive to make up for a young hero's field experience. Going from student to teaching assistant, researcher, or even junior faculty member is a good way to keep a PC in orbit of the team's adventures even if the player decided to switch things up.

There is a third option in this playset for the advancement move of **Retire from the life or become a paragon of the city**. For *Phoenix Academy*, treat the advancement on all those playbooks as **Retire from the life, return next semester as a student teacher, or become a paragon of the city**.

RUNNING PHOENIX ACADEMY

Here's some advice for GMs looking to run this playset. Much of the advice in the core book stands, but here are some tips for the pieces that don't quite fit the same.

HARD LESSON DOCTRINE

One of the assumptions of the basic **MASKS** game is that the adults are too busy being heroes and villains in other comic books to meddle in the affairs of the characters. That assumption is a little weaker with this playset, as adults work with these kids every day. There has to be something in-universe allowing superfights in the cafeteria and giving kids the power to stop bank robberies in the city. That rule is the Hard Lesson Doctrine.

An unofficial version of this rule has existed since the creation of the Phoenix Academy. Hellbinder gave it a name when he took over: the Hard Lesson Doctrine. The reasoning was tough but simple; kids will never learn if they can't make mistakes. They can't win fights if they don't lose them. They can't succeed if they don't fail. The idea manifests in faculty having a hands-off policy when it comes to their students. Barring serious injury or loss of life, adults are not allowed to interfere in the conflicts of their charges while on Academy Island.

For you as the GM, keep the Hard Lesson Doctrine in mind as your excuse for why adults don't solve the problems of the PCs. And use it as a tool for interesting stories, when some characters do violate that premise.

ARCS AND THE FLOW OF TIME

High school settings are unique within comic books because they acknowledge something that other comic books do not. Most adult comics feature their main characters in a state of perpetual adulthood, where they always remain in their late 20s or early 30s. High school is a transitional period that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Whether you structure these arcs in a way that fits one arc within a year, or leave the passage of time more fluid for your stories, moments in time are important to students. Here are some of the most important moments in the life of the Phoenix Academy.

First Day of School: The school year begins the week after Labor Day in September. The week of Labor Day is spent in administrative meetings for teachers and class registration for students. The Monday after is the first day of classes, full of nervous first-year students, bored seniors, and reignited passions. This is a great way to start your game, with session one lining up with the first day of a new year.

Tests: Major tests occur four times a year; twice during midterms and twice during the final week of fall and spring semester. These aren't just tests about knowledge. Some classes require active skill tests requiring powers. Others include semester long projects requiring teamwork, community outreach, and long term thinking. You can use the testing mechanics (see page 83) to help pace your school year, indicating how much time has passed.

Silver Masquerade: The fall dance takes place as a way to celebrate after midterms. Its proximity to Halloween makes it a masked dance, and students are encouraged to ask peers from other schools to accompany them to the dance. Remind the PCs about the upcoming Masquerade throughout the lead-up by making moves and indicating what NPCs are doing for it.

Breaks: The school takes two major breaks: four weeks over the end of the year and two weeks in spring. Students are still expected to hold to behavioral codes while out of school. Sometimes, faculty members take select students on extended field trips to alien homeworlds, exotic dimensions, and other places. Use the school breaks as an opportunity to tell stories away from school, or use them as light resets ("time passes").

Golden Knight: This is the prom where juniors and seniors elect a Royal Court. Only Phoenix Academy students are allowed, which often causes drama in relationships at school. The Caped King and Caped Queen are often the most popular kids in school, belonging to the most popular Club. Pressures of their high school career coming to an end often see seniors making rash decisions on Golden Knight. Same as the Masquerade, remind the PCs of the upcoming Golden Knight with your moves, even if they aren't juniors or seniors.

Team Week: Right before finals in the spring semester, superhero teams come from around the world to meet potential new recruits. For some students, Team Week provides a chance to meet their heroes and put the right foot forward into their future. For others, it becomes a double dollop of stress right before finals. NPC students and faculty members alike prepare heavily for Team Week, and the fruits of the PCs tests and actions come to bear on that day; it's a great climax to build toward, especially for older PCs.

Last Day of School: The last day of school is usually the Monday after Memorial Day. The school stays active during the off-season, but most faculty and staff get large chunks of the summer off. Most students avoid the grounds unless forced to be there for remedial classes, but occasionally Academy Island serves a staging area for field trips or even concerts. While the last day of school can act as a great culmination for your arcs, treat the summer break similarly to how you treated the other breaks—either use them for fun adventures away from Phoenix or skip past and "reset" to the next year!

THE FIRST SESSION

A good way to kick off this flow of time is within the first session. Put one of these markers in a very close proximity to get the drama flowing. The most obvious and natural way to go is to have the PCs start on the first day of school, with the midterm and Masquerade coming up—but feel free to play with it! If the fall formal dance just happened, there's going to be fallout from the hookups, breakups, and all the things that did (or did not) happen. If finals are coming, make **the Academic Move** out of the gate and put the pressure on from the start. That first battle (when the team came together) is already pretty heavy—fighting it with the boy who said no to going to the Silver Masquerade with you makes it much more personal.

DATING & SEXUALITY

Dating is a large chunk of high school life. Whether a character finds a single, long-term partner, several partners, or just wonders if they'll ever be kissed, these moments can be great drivers for stories set at the Phoenix Academy.

Teenage sexuality, however, can be a touchy subject. If you want to explore it with your group, discuss how far you want to go to make things flow better at the table. There is plenty of drama to be had from hookups, breakups, and romance, but topics like pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and consent often appear in teen-focused media. Not only that, but



teens often explore their gender identity during these years, adding much more complexity to these storylines.

All of these themes can be explored by groups interested in doing so. As GM, have a discussion with your players before *Phoenix Academy* play begins and then throughout the game, to make sure everyone is comfortable with the topics at play in your game. If someone is uncomfortable with the direction of a storyline, they should be able to stop it and ask you to drop it.

Playing with a tool like the X-Card becomes all the more important in this context. Taken from a page of information about the X-Card:

“It’s a card with an X on it that participants in a Simulation or Role-Playing Game can use to edit out anything that makes them uncomfortable with no explanations needed. It was originally developed to make gaming with strangers fun, inclusive, and safe.”

For more on the X-Card, visit <http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>

MAKING THE GRADE WITH THE ACADEMIC MOVE

The Academic Move (see page 83) is good to use when the players need a drama injection. It lets you throw out an upcoming test (in addition to whatever superhero action you have in mind) that will weigh heavily on the players. They will want to shift their Labels so they can do well in the test but might not have the opportunity. They might run into NPCs using their Influence to shift the vital Label down and another up. Use this move once or twice during an arc at the most, because it can generate fallout that reverberates for a long time.

If everyone on the team rolls a 10+, that’s great! That’s really hard to do and chances are they sweated to shift their Labels and earned enough Team points to make it happen in-session. Let’s look at their choices if they rolled a 7-9.

DISAPPOINT AN ADULT

This choice means the PC passes the test but does so in a way ultimately less than what an invested adult wanted. When they turn to that adult for guidance and for sympathy, they instead find out how they have been a disappointment. And if the PC doesn’t pursue the adult, the adult can make their displeasure known. The GM has ultimate say over which adult gains Influence here, but a short discussion with the player can make some good options clear. Remember that adults already have Influence over teen characters, so giving Influence to that adult shifts their Labels, likely to increase the Label just used in the test.

SACRIFICE YOUR SOCIAL LIFE

Teens want to hang out, make out, and enjoy those fleeting moments where they don't have a care in the world. But sometimes, school takes precedence over fun, and in this case, the character feels guilty over saying no to social obligations to study. This option allows the player to choose someone they've been ignoring or wished they could've spent more time with. Perhaps that old friend reached out at a time when the character needed to study, or the PC didn't have time to really trounce a rival before the test.

LOSE A RESPONSIBILITY

These years are about taking on more and more responsibilities and finding out how to balance them all. Sometimes in that process, a plate gets dropped. Losing a responsibility is a hard lesson to learn but also a necessary one. It might mean no longer being team leader. It might mean losing a job keeping the family barely above water. The GM is the final arbiter of what responsibility is lost, and always, that should not be a positive thing. Some PCs may attempt to pretend that way—"Finally, I don't have to work that stupid job anymore!"—but it's down to you to make the consequences clear—"And now your mom does have to work that job, and she has no time for you anymore."

DAMAGE YOUR ACADEMIC STANDING

High school supers stories harbor a dirty little secret. Kids rarely get kicked out of school in a way that means they also get kicked out of the comic book. They may be suspended or exiled, but inevitably they come back in a little while to save the day. But that doesn't mean they can't sweat things out on probation or with a faculty member breathing down their necks. This choice means the character is close to losing a lot; their peers, their team, their friends if they make another mistake. But on a mechanical level, the PC is unlikely to get kicked out without ample warning... and even then, keep in mind that dirty little secret—getting kicked out doesn't mean leaving the story.

BLOWING IT

All of the previous choices are soft moves or setups, giving the player the chance to spend some time in-game to shake off any Influences or win back the trust of the faculty with solid action. Characters that blew it have some hard moves waiting for them in the next session. It might mean that they failed the test. It might also mean that they passed, but while they focused on school, they let something else they should be watching go completely unchecked. This roll means the kid took their eye off the ball and ended up taking a dodgeball in the kisser when they weren't looking.

AGENDAS, PRINCIPLES, AND MOVES

The *Phoenix Academy* playset uses the basic **MASKS** agendas, principles, and moves, but it also has a few more flavored directly for the playset.

PHOENIX ACADEMY: AGENDA

The *Phoenix Academy* playset adds one new agenda to your list from the **MASKS** core book (page 126).

MAKE PHOENIX ACADEMY A PLACE OF LEARNING

Phoenix Academy is a school, first and foremost. The students are here to learn, and not just academic learning or learning to control your powers. They're learning who they are and who they want to be. So the Phoenix Academy can't be a place where they can ever be certain that they know everything they need to know. Or rather, they can feel certain—but they'd be wrong.

More so than even in baseline **MASKS**, your job as a GM in *Phoenix Academy* is to undermine what the characters think they know and to “teach” them new lessons. Indeed, many of the NPCs themselves want to actually teach the PCs, directly and non-metaphorically. Show the Delinquent how lonely the trash talking “bad boy” from a prior class really is. Show the Legacy a faculty member who gave up their own legacy and regrets it daily. The kids are here to learn, and your job is to help them learn by example. Each NPC is an example of a different choice or a different outcome.

PHOENIX ACADEMY: PRINCIPLES

In addition to the new agenda, you have some new principles to follow for a *Phoenix Academy* game. Remember that if an agenda is your purpose in playing, principles are how you achieve those goals. This playset adds four new principles:

- Demand conformity
- Provide opportunities for rebellion
- Turn rites of passage into massive cliffhangers
- Amp up the strange

DEMAND CONFORMITY

Much of high school is about learning to play by the rules. Whether or not the students want to actually learn that lesson, the structures and systems of high school force them into fitting in, between showing them the consequences of acting out on their own to rewarding the students who play by the rules. And the teens themselves often adopt these same systems in their own ways, demanding conformity to their standards. In addition to reshaping the PCs

using Influence, keep putting demands on them that ensure they look, act, think, and feel like a particular group, be it the best students in school or the clique of cool “rebels.” And keep in mind for demanding conformity—the nature of the Phoenix Academy can be oddly disempowering for kids who have superpowers. When everyone has a superpower, it’s harder to stand out.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR REBELLION

Kids also have to learn lessons by breaking rules, sneaking around past curfew, and making out with people their parents don’t like. Even the most straight-laced teenager wants to see how the other side lives once in a while. The same goes for young supervillains too; sometimes they want to feel good by doing good. Give them chances to do all of the above, and it’s okay to make them fairly explicit. The bad boy of the school comes in and invites the Legacy to go drinking. The top of the class invites the Delinquent to come train with her. And so on. Make sure they have chances to break out of the molds being forced on them. Just remind them that this. Will go down. On their. Permanent record.

TURN RITES OF PASSAGE INTO MASSIVE CLIFFHANGERS

High school students often worry about the future. Phoenix Academy students do too, but their worries can be much bigger. Play these classic high school moments as dialed up to 11. The fate of the world might literally rest on making sure they get kissed at the dance; their future self says so. And of course Satin decides to attack at the football game between the Phoenix Academy Firebirds and the Kane Prep Nighthawks. All sorts of small teenage moments can be inflated into larger moments worthy of superhero teen drama; never miss such an opportunity.

AMP UP THE STRANGE

Phoenix Academy is a high school, but it’s also a *superhero* high school. That means the teachers are time travelers and ninjas and wizards, and the students are mutants and robots and aliens. The buildings might be buildings, but they might also be secret holographic training simulators or living sorcerous towers or pieces of alien spacecraft. And the people who want to shut the school down might be city officials, but they might also be the secret cabal of superpowered illuminati trying to control the future. The kids at Phoenix Academy are trying to learn about themselves, the world, and their place in it, and that means really diving deep into the strange superhero world around them. Don’t worry about being too out there—the classic high school material will bring you back to earth. Worry about being too normal.

PHOENIX ACADEMY: MOVES

These moves are moment-to-moment things you can say during the conversation of the game to serve your principles and achieve your agendas.

- **Point out unwelcome similarities**
- **Wedge them between social groups**
- **Give them responsibility**
- **Take away their escapes**

POINT OUT UNWELCOME SIMILARITIES

Kids hate it when adults tell them how similar they are to when they were young. It often leads to kids acting out to establish their identities by acting opposite to those expectations. Not wanting to be like your parents is an instinct that develops during teenage years that can last very long into adulthood. Making explicit comparisons to an adult can make kids feel inadequate or upset that their mentors haven't noticed deliberate change.

When you sit down with your grandfather, he's beaming. "You know, when you ripped through those cyberdroids, it made me so proud," he says. "I always said they weren't really people, and we needed to protect the real humans from them. You reminded me so much of myself when I was young... I truly saw you as the Silver Raven in that moment." What do you do?

WEDGE THEM BETWEEN SOCIAL GROUPS

Social groups are important to teenagers. Even as they form ones they belong to, they also do their best to position others around them favorably. The team is an unusual form of this group, but sometimes forcing a character to choose between team and friends makes for a great story. This doesn't just apply to social groups within the Phoenix Academy, either. Think about all the social groups a character might be torn between, like their friends at their old school and the ones at their new place of learning.

When you leave the cafeteria, you're cornered by the Underkind, the Clique of mutants and shape-changed kids like you. One of them, Minotaur, looms over you. "What were you doing sitting with the Goldcapes in there?" she huffs. "You're one of us, not one of them. They're just pretending to like you. You want real friends? You stick with us." What do you do?

GIVE THEM RESPONSIBILITY

Many of the playbooks in **MASKS** have responsibilities, such as the Janus or the Legacy. School can pile on its own responsibilities, like doing homework or being part of a Club. This can be something official, like having to skip

patrol to study for a test, or something unofficial, like an adult asking a teammate to keep an eye on another teammate. It can also mean a temporary responsibility—the team might have to watch a captured supervillain until A.E.G.I.S. arrives, giving the villain time to needle their fears and weaknesses.

After the fight, White Owl pulls you aside before you can go home. “You have to keep an eye on your friend Mayday,” she says. “She could’ve hurt somebody during that fight. She wasn’t paying any attention to where she threw fire. Can I count on you to keep your teammate in check?” What do you do?



TAKE AWAY THEIR ESCAPES

These are also the years where teenagers start to lose touch of those things that brought them joy or helped them escape from the realities of life. Sometimes it’s because of their growing maturity, time management, or choosing to do the adult thing instead of the kid thing. Often, authority figures remove access to fun as punishment for failing responsibilities.

When you go to turn on your homeworld simulation program, you find that you’ve been locked out of the system by your English teacher, Cutlass. Checking the official record, it looks like your low grades let Cutlass revoke your holo-hall privileges. What do you do?

DON'T BE LATE FOR CLASS

The *Phoenix Academy* playset allows you to play in one of the classic settings for teen supers. It sets the highs and lows, the drama and the comedy in a place where everyone is exceptional. Your characters will learn from the experience, and we hope your players do too.



THE APOCALYPSE SONATA

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SONG OF THE UNIVERSE

The Apocalypse Sonata isn't just music. It's *the* music, the music of the spheres, the rhythm and tones that one-dimensional superstrings dance to in the quantum field. This music made the universe, and if and when the entire Sonata is played at once, it creates an entire new multiversal reality. Of course, if that happens, the old universe gets overwritten—in fact, that's precisely why Ominus wants it.

Ominus, the cosmically powerful ruler of a massive superworld in distant space, seeks ultimate power, and since his discovery of the existence of the Apocalypse Sonata he's searched for it everywhere. Unfortunately for him, the being who kept it secret scattered the individual pieces of the music across the galaxy. However, he's recently discovered that that guardian herself is now dead, and when she died she still carried with her some of that very score.

And where did she die? Oh, some insignificant mudball. The locals call it Earth.

TEEN SUPERHEROES ON A ROAD TRIP THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

The Apocalypse Sonata is a playset for **MASKS**, in which the PCs go on an intergalactic quest to find the individual pieces of a musical composition that has the power to destroy and then recreate the entire multiverse. The GM can choose how long the adventure will take, from a single session to a multi-part campaign, by deciding how close Ominus has already come to his ultimate goal before the PCs even get involved. It's generally designed for an existing **MASKS** campaign, where the heroes have already begun their journeys.

This playset takes the form of a road trip, which sends the heroes out of Halcyon City for perhaps the first time on their own. Over the course of their travels, they encounter strange sights, treat with mysterious aliens, and battle the vilest evil. When they come home they won't be the same as when they left.

Throughout this playset, you'll find notes and pieces of advice on exactly how to change and incorporate elements of *The Apocalypse Sonata* into your own game. Always remember it's your game—warp this playset how you need to!

The Apocalypse Sonata is also different from **MASKS** in following a bit more of a track, at least at first. The playset always opens up with a particular scene (the attempted abduction of the Musician), to roll into the larger scope of the game. Be on your toes for changes and adjustments, though! **MASKS** is still about being surprised and playing to find out what changes, so be prepared to switch up the elements in this playset to match what actually happens at the table.

THE TRUE NATURE OF THE MULTIVERSE

No one knows precisely where the Sonata came from, or who first played the music that created the multiverse that we live in. Some of the most brilliant minds in existence have obsessed over the question, and countless theories explain how the Sonata destroys and creates reality itself, even among the beings advanced enough to grasp the concept at all.

Almost all thinkers on the subject agree upon a few concepts. The Sonata exists simultaneously in all of time and space, including the infinity of parallel timelines and the myriad other smaller dimensions within it. Parts of it are reflected in nature; songs and rhythms that recapitulate tiny pieces of the greater music can be heard in the songs of alien bird-analogues, in the endless beat of massive tidal waves upon rocky promontories in distant oceans, or in the mathematics of the orbital progressions of neutron stars as they collapse.

Some scientists see these “eruptions” of the Sonata into reality as part of string theory, which postulates that all elementary particles can be represented as vibrating one-dimensional “strings.” Depending on how these strings vibrate across multiple dimensions, they might be seen in three-dimensional space as matter, light, or gravity. The Sonata is a fantastically complicated pattern of resonances, which can transform literally everything on a quantum level.

At the same time, mystics and sorcerers claim that the same evidence proves the nature of magic and the interconnectedness of all things. As Hermes Trismegistus said, “That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracle of the One Thing.” No matter what level of reality one exists on or examines, any action has an effect on everything else. Motion is manifest throughout the multiverse; everything moves, and therefore everything sings.

No matter what you might think the Sonata is, everyone agrees that the final piece of the Sonata, and perhaps the most powerful, is the Coda. The Coda is a recording of the Hawking radiation emitted by a supermassive black hole, translated so that human ears can hear it. It sounds like a thin, monotonous piping, as if by a small group of flutes. This recording, once in the possession of the Guardian, is now held by her followers.

Even as the Sonata’s pieces are fundamentally beautiful to those attuned to them, their power for creation and reinvention can certainly be used for evil. The greatest force of that evil is Lord Ominus and his Host. Ominus knows how to manipulate the Coda so that when his devices play the complete Sonata, destroying and rebuilding the multiverse, he will become infinitely powerful. That is his ultimate plan—the creation of a new multiverse. *His* multiverse.



ON THE NATURE OF THE APOCALYPSE SONATA

If possible, GMs should provide PCs with any interest in the Sonata's nature and origins with NPCs to discuss it, representing a multitude of different ways of saying basically the same thing. Characters with magical or scientific backgrounds should be equally concerned about the idea of messing with the multiverse's structure, even if they perceive the problem through different lenses.

It's up to the GM to decide if there are any benefits to having smaller parts of the Sonata in your possession. If the heroes have assembled several individual pieces, they might be able to draw upon them for fantastic effects! Consider adding these as either new abilities or as custom moves. For example, "While you listen to a recording of the Metaphonous Melody, ignore the effects of all conditions you suffer, and always **take a powerful blow** at +0. You cannot speak or comprehend speech while listening to the Metaphonous Melody."

Of course, if the heroes can do this, then Ominus and his Host should be able to perform similar feats...

THE GUARDIAN AND HER FOLLOWERS

Originally named Mantik, the sister of Ominus had spent the last several centuries trying to keep her brother from acquiring the pieces of the Sonata. Their father was a stern but fair king to a vast interstellar empire. Ominus had him assassinated, and the empire was riven in two by civil war as the siblings turned against each other. Ominus's acquisition of various mighty weapons turned the battle in his favor, and Mantik retreated to the garden world Paradiso in a distant corner of the galaxy to rule a utopian fortress.

In exile, Mantik worked to subvert and overthrow her brother. She created her order of knights and assumed her new mantle—the Guardian. In recent centuries, she and her brother struggled most over the Sonata. Ominus's scientists discovered the existence of the Sonata, and the Guardian's spies told her in turn. Her order turned its efforts to keeping pieces of the Sonata out of Ominus's hands. So far, they have succeeded.

THE BATTLE COMES TO EARTH

Hundreds of years ago, the Guardian acquired the Quantum Resonator as well as the Coda, the final piece of the Sonata. She was attacked by Ominus's forces somewhere near Earth and received a mortal blow before escaping. Her ship crashed on Earth, where the followers found her and buried her in a hidden tomb. The recording of the Coda still lies there, the last piece waiting for the rest to be assembled, unknowingly interred with her body in her tomb.



PLAY ADVICE ON KYBALION AND THE PROTECTORS

The exact location of the Guardian's tomb is up to the GM; if some place in your campaign is notoriously difficult to get to, or believed not to exist at all, that's an excellent place to put it. Otherwise, put it someplace starkly beautiful and quiet; perhaps at the top of a mountain in the Himalayas, on a small South Pacific island, or deep in an unexplored Appalachian cave.

Kybalion can serve as an expository NPC for the heroes, filling in whatever parts of the backstory they haven't gotten elsewhere. Their loyalty towards the heroes might be questionable—the loss of their beloved leader has caused them to doubt the Protectors and their struggle. On the other hand, perhaps all Kybalion and the other followers require to reignite their passion and faith is the arrival of the heroes. Let the players decide whether to trust them, and follow their lead.

Kybalion and the rest of the Guardian's followers arrive at the concert after the abduction attempt on the Musician (see below). Kybalion can fill in the blanks on what's happening and provides the PCs with the Guardian's Quantum Resonator and Spacetime Continuum Folder. Always remember that Ominus and the Host would love to get their hands on both of these artifacts.

The Guardian was buried secretly in a remote location on Earth by Kybalion, one of her followers. Kybalion is a humanoid alien of uncertain gender, with leathery green skin, large eyes, and a thin, scratchy voice that sounds like several people speaking in perfect unison. They lead a group of the Guardian's followers, called Protectors, who believe fervently in the Guardian's mission to oppose Ominus. The Protectors are quasi-religious, consisting of knights or monks, and includes aliens of all genders and phenotypes.

OMINUS, HIS FAMILY, AND HIS EMPIRE

OMINUS

Ominus is the master villain of *The Apocalypse Sonata* playset. The tyrant rules an interstellar empire from his horrible homeworld of Wrack. He possesses incredible power, including enormous brute strength, vast mental force (both telepathy and telekinesis), and the ability to generate and manipulate energy, which flows through the metallic helmet and mask that always covers his face.

He also has access to some of the most advanced technology in the galaxy, and of course leads an army of incalculable size and power. He is apparently immortal; certainly he is extremely long-lived and seems to heal eventually from the most grievous of injuries. He also possesses the power of whatever fragments of the Sonata he has collected so far.

Ominus's goals are clear. He intends to remake the universe in his image. He will gaze upon the desolation of the remade universe, and will finally be content. All of the people he conquers simply become extensions of his own will. He is dedicated to conquest and conflict, and is worshipped across the galaxy as a god of war.

Ominus is always slow and measured in his responses until he is sufficiently provoked, and then his wrath is *terrifying*. If and when he is thwarted, he flies into epic tantrums of violence, destroying anything and anyone in his path. Then he slowly calms down and collects himself in the wreckage. After several deep breaths, he begins to formulate a new plan. After all, he is eternal.

Ominus discovered the Apocalypse Sonata only a few centuries ago and became obsessed with it. He believes that only he is capable of playing the complete Sonata correctly and re-starting the universe, this time with him as the god of all creation. He has written the Universal Lament, his own movement to be added to the Sonata, made to install him as the one true power in existence. The enormous "instrument" that he and Horidd built to play the Sonata is the Cosmophone, a device the size of a skyscraper.





PORTRAYING OMINUS

When playing Ominus, try to give a sense of enormous power and gravitas, and a rage barely contained behind a veneer of politeness. He describes himself in the third person and makes outrageous claims in the calmest of voices. He declares himself the “undying alpha predator of the cosmos” and casually discusses how he “crushes entire worlds under the weight of his will.”

OMINUS’S HOST

Ominus has three known adult children, who serve as his lieutenants, carry out his orders, and spread terror on his behalf throughout the multiverse. Though dwarfed by their fearsome master, each one of the Host is enormously powerful in their own right and should be considered a threat that requires the combined forces of your entire team.

DREDFUL

Dredful is Ominus’s oldest child, and his most determinedly loyal follower. The general of Ominus’s army, he leads the Worldbreaker robots on their missions. His only apparent emotion is grim determination, though deep down he desperately seeks his father’s rarely given approval. He considers Sharade’s love of combat to be wasteful if occasionally useful, and dismisses Horidd’s scheming and petty cruelty. He ordinarily leads a squad of Worldbreaker robots, but occasionally works on his own, especially if he has reason to hide his activities from his siblings or father.

Dredful wears a mask to keep people from seeing the unholy awfulness of his true face. When he removes it, anyone exposed to his horrible countenance is stunned by its awfulness and may be driven insane. He also carries a golden chain, which he can use as a lash or to entangle opponents, and can operate by itself at his command.

SHARADE

Sharade is Ominus’s only daughter. She is a shapeshifting warrior who wields the Gamma Scythe, which can cut through almost any substance and even injure the otherwise insubstantial. Her own mask grants her the power of shapeshifting; she can take on various monstrous forms to improve her chances in a fight or pass as an exact duplicate of anyone. Though capable of subtlety when operating in disguise, she is boastful and overconfident in her combat skills when in her base form or one of her monstrous “battle-forms.”

As GM, always look for opportunities to reveal that an NPC is actually Sharade in disguise. Once the players are aware of her as a threat, they should be encouraged (and rewarded) for not trusting anyone getting too close to



PLAYING THE BATTLE

Exactly how close Ominus is to completing his collection and igniting a new Big Bang is up to you, depending on how long you want this mini-campaign to run. There are thousands of specific and unique parts to the Sonata, and Ominus has gathered all but x of them, where x is roughly the number of locations (sessions) you want to run, including those of the Musician and the Guardian.

their pieces of the Sonata or their Quantum Resonator. She is also the most likely of Ominus's children to be interested in betraying him. If she thinks she can get away with it and improve her own situation at the same time, she may ally with another villain who appears during the quest.

HORIDD

Horidd is Ominus's youngest child, a creepy, Peter Lorre/Gollum-like whiner and toady to his powerful father. None of his family likes him very much, but Ominus keeps him around because he is in fact a brilliant scientist, and understands best the nature of the Sonata. His mind is an enormous repository of information about the multiverse that Ominus might need. He is a coward and a sadist when he has the opportunity, but always looks out for himself first, pretending to serve (and to have always supported) whoever seems to have the upper hand.

He eventually betrays anybody who puts any trust in him; Ominus in particular knows this and seems unconcerned about it, since Horidd always bows and scrapes and does his actual job in his presence, and none of Horidd's betrayals in the end have any impact on Ominus beyond the temporary disruption of a scheme. His mask is wired directly into his brain and gives him the power to read minds or project "psyche-spikes" that cause no physical damage but inflict blinding agony in the form of massive headaches.

OMINUS'S OTHER FORCES AND ALLIES

For almost all intents and purposes, Ominus's resources are effectively limitless. He can call upon vast armies, fleets of warships, giant robots, and orbital planet-cracking weaponry with ease, limited only by circumstance and story. Further, he is clever enough to call upon allies and make deals with anyone he thinks might be useful to him (like, for example, rulers or officials on other planets the heroes might visit). Of course he has little interest in actually paying off any such debts he incurs and betrays or abandons those careless enough to trust him whenever it benefits him.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

The Apocalypse Sonata playset always begins with the abduction of the Musician by Dredful and his Worldbreaker robots. The Musician has inadvertently manifested a part of the Sonata in their own work, which has both drawn the attention of Ominus and also made their work tremendously popular on Earth. There's something indefinable, some emotion, that the music sparks in listeners, something they haven't heard quite the same way before. As a result, the Musician gets attacked by Dredful and drags the PCs into a conflict well beyond what they're used to.

FANS!

The Musician is a Halcyon City character, someone popular and famous and successful, but their specific identity and work is defined by the players and by your particular game.

When starting up your game of *The Apocalypse Sonata*, ask which of the heroes is the Musician's "Biggest Fan." While everyone at the table should have some input into their creation, the Biggest Fan gets the final say on any particular details. The Biggest Fan knows a great deal about the Musician, including their history and background, their own musical inspirations, and maybe even their personal likes and dislikes.

At the same time, ask which of the heroes is Not A Fan, the one team member who dislikes the Musician's kind of music, or at least isn't much impressed by it. Everyone else in the group simply likes the Musician and their music just fine, but isn't obsessed or anything.

The players and you (with the Biggest Fan as a leading voice) decide what kind of music the Musician plays. Whatever the instrument or genre, the Musician has tapped directly into the Sonata on a primal, preconscious level, and has created a sound or a song that is a perfect representation of a piece of the Sonata. It might be a perfect beat, a wailing solo, a simple melody line, or a crunchy guitar riff.

Unsurprisingly, people generally respond well to it—the song containing the perfect riff becomes very popular. It's not like it controls their minds or anything, but the majority of the population grooves to it; even people who claim they "don't like country music" or "can't stand hip-hop" acknowledge that this tune isn't bad. This likely includes the Not A Fan PC—they don't care for the rest of the Musician's work, but even they have to admit this particular tune makes them want to dance.

OPENING SCENE

The playset begins with the PCs getting a chance to see the Musician in concert in Halcyon City. They're playing at the appropriate venue; if they play arena rock, they're at the arena, while if they're a dancehall DJ, they're mixing at the hottest all-ages club downtown. The Musician plays their latest smash hit, and just as the tune reaches its climax, the Worldbreaker robots appear above the crowd and begin firing. At first they don't try to kill anyone; they only want to terrify the crowd and send them scattering while they collect the Musician in their energy-nets. Presuming the heroes get involved at this point, they turn their attacks on them, and if that doesn't work, Dredful himself gets involved.

Run that situation and battle as per usual, but keep in mind that your new principles and agenda are in play immediately (page 119)—this battle should emphasize the crazy cosmicism of the outer space world coming into the PCs' own experience.

The heroes may or may not succeed in saving the Musician from Dredful's first attack. If they do, Dredful and his robots withdraw and try again another time. If not, the heroes should be plenty motivated to go rescue their favorite star. Either way, Kybalion and their followers (see above) arrive on scene just too late to get involved in the fight, and provide the team with the information and artifacts they need to begin their quest.

INTRODUCING KYBALION

Kybalion is fascinated by the young heroes and offers the Guardian's Quantum Resonator, a device that detects the presence of pieces of the Sonata, and her Spacetime Continuum Folder, which can teleport a small group of people nearly instantaneously anywhere in time and space. The latter is incredibly dangerous to use unless connected to the former, which puts an incredibly powerful calculating engine in control of the trip but only allows the Folder to bring people to the presence of Sonata energy signatures or to places it's already recorded. Both of these powerful but limited artifacts will be objects of lust for Ominus and the Host if they catch wind of it, as their own transport system is much slower and harder to use.

Once the PCs have these artifacts and are clear on the stakes, they will almost certainly want to wrap up some business in Halcyon City before they depart to the stars. Let them do what they want, and then, they're off to the first piece of the Sonata!

PLAYING THE APOCALYPSE SONATA

The cosmic adventure in superhero stories is fundamentally a road trip. It's a chance to get out of Halcyon City, expand your horizons with some new experiences, and also to look at your lives there from a new perspective. You should take advantage of every opportunity to compare and contrast the new places your heroes visit to Halcyon City as home, for good and ill, and examine how being away from home makes them feel.

As a genre, road trip narratives offer the possibility of escaping from the status quo back at home, which makes it ideal for a **MASKS** campaign. The heroes will be meeting people who don't know them, and indeed who probably don't even know *humans*. That's a tremendous opportunity to explore some new ways of acting, of carrying themselves, of presenting themselves to strangers. All they'll have for the duration of the trip is each other.

The Apocalypse Sonata is also a quest story, with a noble goal that the heroes must undergo, a long and perilous journey in order to reach, and various characters and circumstances to help or hinder them along the way. A classic quest tale has a moral, which is usually reflected in a change of character in the questers wrought by the adventure. Ideally, any such changes in a **MASKS** game are steps along the path the young heroes take toward their adult lives, and so the GM and players should cooperate in maintaining some focus on those long-term plans and destinies throughout the campaign.

PLAYBOOKS

The Apocalypse Sonata playset does not include any changes to character creation or advancement. All of the standard playbooks work the way they do in other **MASKS** campaigns, but some require a bit of special consideration to make them work to their best advantage. Here's some advice for how to involve your players in the story, broken down by playbook.

BEACON

The Beacon is normally a mundane hero, and this playbook brings them face-to-face with the wonders of the universe. The quest for the Sonata is everything other people think being a superhero is like all the time: traveling across the universe, grand and glorious sights, aliens and monsters and “small-g” gods. Does all of this cosmic grandeur make them feel a little... unworthy, perhaps? Out of place? Of course, you should look for opportunities to show off their inherent heroism, the very qualities that make humans special. If they are looking to add a move from their playbook, the alien locations they visit might be excellent opportunities to add a new gadget or even a new pet!

BULL

Passions and emotions are key to a Kirby story. Space gods and ancient aliens feel things very intensely. Does the Bull resonate with them, feel sympathetic to their goals, or do they react badly to someone so ruled by their feelings? The quest is a great opportunity for Bulls to pick up new Loves or Rivals while they're out here. Also, the Sonata Quest can be an opportunity to encounter some manifestation of whatever force changed them into a living weapon. Perhaps somebody else out there has the same background? That person might make an excellent new Love or Rival, even if only temporarily.



DELINQUENT

Part of the appeal of a road trip is getting out from under the influence of others (particularly the grownups!) and out on their own, seeing the world, and making their own calls. What will the Delinquent do when they don't have something to rebel against? When all they have to rely on is their teammates, will they be able to choke down their natural antiauthoritarian reactions and be part of the team? Plus, there's always likely to be someone out in the depths of space willing to make the Delinquent a very interesting offer to leave their teammates behind...

DOOMED

The road trip or quest story is an excellent opportunity to bring the Doomed's Nemesis on stage, especially if they are not ordinarily easily accessible in Halcyon City. A piece of the Sonata might be kept near the Nemesis' presence, or they themselves might become interested in Ominus and his plans, as a rival or even ally. Similarly, you should consider the Doomed's Sanctuary, which may be connected to a distant location or individual who might enter the story.



INTEGRATING THE SONATA

If you're running a long-term or open-ended campaign and this isn't the beginning, try to slip in references to Ominus or the Sonata in other stories before you play this one. Characters might have shadowy visions of him or hear his name mentioned by other villains or NPCs. This is a great way to build up expectations in the players' minds, giving the characters and concepts a gravitas that's very hard to create quickly or on the fly.

LEGACY

The quest for the final pieces of the Sonata doesn't need to be limited to a single point in time any more than in space. Inclusion of time travel opens up the possibility of meeting other inheritors of the Legacy's tradition, either from the past or the future. Either can be a dramatic, life-changing encounter. What is it like for a young hero to meet their ancestor at a point in time when the older hero is young and inexperienced just like them? Or, how about meeting one of their descendants, who regards the Legacy as one of their own heroes (or, even worse, doesn't)?

JANUS

Much of the Janus' playbook is about the connections at home that tie them to their secret identity. Participating in the Sonata quest means they will be physically separated from those ties for an extended period, perhaps endangering the secret. Each of the obligations in their secret identity will be put under stress, and when they come home, they're going to have to address them all. As a result, the Janus is likely always thinking about what they've left behind. This powerful desire to get back home can be a source of interesting conflict with any other hero actively enjoying the road trip.

NOVA

The Nova's incredible power has a source, and that source may have some sort of connection to the Sonata itself. If not, the source of the power might be manifested somewhere else interesting; imagine what it's like to be a solar-powered hero living for a while under the rays of different suns! The Nova may find outer space a pretty appealing place, where they can fully use their power and spend less time worrying about the safety of others. How do they deal with that temptation? Conversely, maybe one of their battles with Ominus and his Host is where the Nova really loses control, with terrible consequences.



OTHER PLAYBOOKS

The limited edition playbooks can be involved in an *Apocalypse Sonata* story as well, though they may require a bit more work to integrate. Generally speaking:

The Brain: There's plenty of crazy science to play with out in the cosmos... and your shame will certainly follow you, wherever you go.

The Harbinger: You have to figure out how your cosmic quest integrates with your vision of the future. Whether it does or doesn't, either answer is interesting and provocative.

The Innocent: Did your future self go on this trip? Is this a desperate attempt to separate from their path... or just repeating the same mistakes they made? It's easy to imagine your future self following your journey with interest.

The Joined: Both of you are going to space, and you can bet that the myriad alien cultures will have myriad reactions to your relationship—your issues pretty much remain the same.

The Newborn: Where better to learn new lessons than in the vast variety of the cosmos? Actively look for whatever wisdom you can take from the strange peoples and cultures you encounter.

The Nomad: This entire cosmic road trip is almost certainly old hat to you. You've been on a cosmic road trip for years now—but this time, you have friends along. You get to be the expert, showing off.

The Reformed: You might actually escape your past out here in space—although it means many of your connections may be fractured. Be prepared for your *Friends in Low Places* extra to be put temporarily on hold for largely the duration of the trip.

The Scion: How better to get out from under your villainous parent's thumb than to go gallivanting out across space and time? That is, until you realize just how much reach they, and their reputation, really have.

The Soldier: A.E.G.I.S. isn't unknown out in the stars, though it certainly has fewer resources and less significance. You're not disconnected entirely and are more than just an agent now—you're also an ambassador for A.E.G.I.S.

The Star: Yes, you're leaving your normal fanbase behind... and you're finding a whole new fanbase out amid the stars!

OUTSIDER

The Sonata quest may provide the Outsider with a chance to return home, whether or not that's something desirable for them. The circumstances that led to the Outsider leaving are presumably still active, and friends, enemies, and family (who might be either) can be introduced by the player or the GM. As always, other alien beings and races can be compared and contrasted with both the Outsider's people and ordinary humanity, and all of them can be terribly judgmental! Look for opportunities to play up a Freak vs. Mundane Hook.

PROTÉGÉ

Like the Legacy, the Protégé is in part defined by one or more other, older characters who have been training them for their eventual role. Assuming that mentor is or was an active adventurer, the Sonata quest can take the Protégé someplace their mentor has already been, or has some sort of previous connection to. Old nemeses, former friends and allies, alien worlds who consider the mentor a legendary hero (or villain!)—all can be seen anew through the eyes of the Protégé.

TRANSFORMED

The Transformed feels separated from humanity by the strange changes they've gone through. Can they find a place somewhere else in the multiverse where they are welcomed and fit in? Or what happens to the Transformed who finds that they don't fit in out here either? If humanity is what they seek, encounters with aliens who don't consider it an important trait might affect the Transformed's thinking.

RULES CHANGES

There are very few changes required to the basic structure of **MASKS** required to play a Kirbyesque campaign, not least because the playset emulates one of the definers of the superhero genre! All of the advice in the core rulebook about running superhero games, about skipping the boring stuff, moving fast, respecting the truth of the story, is if anything doubly true. In general, adopting Kirby cosmicism to your game is more a matter of focus and style rather than specific mechanical changes.

END OF SESSION MOVES

The one core change to focus on is with the End of Session moves. Use these moves at the end of a particular encounter (a specific location, world, or whatever within the larger quest) rather than at the end of each session. This does a better job of highlighting the individual incidents and stops of a road trip journey.

RUNNING THE APOCALYPSE SONATA

THE VILLAINS

Ominus and the Host have the standard sets of moves along with the special ones listed with each character sheet.

OMINUS

DRIVE

To rule the multiverse as a god

MOVES

- **Overpower and choke a strong opponent**
- **Dismiss an enemy as pitiable and insignificant**
- **Fire a blast of nuclear destruction from the center of his facemask**
- **Demand obedience and submission from inferiors**

CONDITIONS

☐ Afraid | ☐ Angry | ☐ Guilty | ☐ Hopeless | ☐ Insecure

NOTES

Ominus has all five Conditions, marking him as a serious threat...and even if the PCs manage to inflict all the conditions necessary to take him out, he will still return. Ominus is eternal and can never be completely defeated, only thwarted and forced to retreat when his plans are spoiled.

Don't hesitate to emphasize just how dramatically powerful Ominus is. Directly engaging Ominus may not even be possible without first distracting or weakening him—trying to tackle him head on is a recipe for disaster, as he just swats the PCs out of the air like annoying flies. Provoking Ominus may even be nearly impossible—why would Ominus care about the words of some insignificant mortals? Fighting Ominus should be unlike any other fight they've ever encountered, from his tremendous power to his terrible nature.

For more on Ominus's background and objectives, see page 98.

DREDFUL

DRIVE

To win Ominus's approval and respect

MOVES

- **Terrify a crowd by showing his true face**
- **Reveal an enemy's dark secrets or worst fears**
- **Command his Lash to bind or strike someone while he acts elsewhere**
- **Unleash his Worldbreaker robots**

CONDITIONS

☐ Angry | ☐ Guilty | ☐ Hopeless | ☐ Insecure

NOTES

Dredful has no Afraid Condition. Fear is an emotion Dredful creates in lesser beings, not something he experiences.

Dredful is a loyalist and a zealot, but he is also deeply ashamed of his own visage. Portray him as the evil devotee he is, but play up the places where he's uncertain, the cracks that the PCs can use to break him down.

SHARADE

DRIVE

To be recognized and feared as a warrior throughout the Multiverse

MOVES

- **Impersonate someone close to an opponent and then backstab them**
- **Slash someone or something with the Gamma Scythe**
- **Transform into a more dangerous alien form**
- **Flee the scene in miniscule form**

CONDITIONS

☐ Afraid | ☐ Angry | ☐ Guilty | ☐ Hopeless

NOTES

Sharade has no Insecure Condition. Her confidence in her own abilities is absolute. She always believes she can eventually outmaneuver opponents.

Sharade's shape-shifting powers allow her to crop up wherever and whenever you need, making her the ultimate source of hard moves. Portray her as playful and powerful, but keep in mind she is no fool, and is more than likely to escape bad situations.

HORIDD

DRIVE

To accumulate so much power that he'll never have to be afraid again

MOVES

- **Flee before being captured**
- **Project psychic spikes into an opponent's mind**
- **Create an illusionary mindscape to distract an opponent**
- **Manifest an illusion of an opponent's greatest fear**

CONDITIONS

☐ Afraid | ☐ Angry | ☐ Hopeless | ☐ Insecure

NOTES

Horidd does not have the Guilty Condition. He has no sense of regret and does anything to advance his own cause or avoid pain.

Horidd is completely untrustworthy, and perhaps the best option for PCs looking to turn Ominus's forces against him. He will certainly betray the PCs as well, but he is absolutely amenable to turning against his father if it gains him a temporary advantage.

IF THIS IS "WHEN OUR TEAM FIRST CAME TOGETHER"

The Apocalypse Sonata is designed primarily as a mini-campaign for existing MASKS campaigns, but it can serve quite well as a stand-alone scenario or as the beginning to an extended campaign. In this case, the attack on the Musician by Dredful and the Worldbreakers is the team's origin. All of the PCs are assumed to be novice young heroes, perhaps with a handful of solo adventures each under their belts, who all happen to be attending the concert separately. It's entirely okay and probably salutary for some of the heroes to have already met, perhaps in pairs or small groups, though they shouldn't yet be close friends. They may have Mentors who are teammates, for example, or any two of them might have responded to the same bank robbery last week. Once they're all on scene at the concert, the adventure can proceed as normal, with some extra time built in for the characters to figure out their own interactions as the crisis builds.

If you want to play this way, then skip the "When Our Team First Came Together..." section during character creation. Still use Relationships to establish some pre-existing connections before even this first encounter, but you can hold off on handing out any Influence until after that first scene. Remember that PCs can always hand out Influence when they want.

CREATING WORLDS

You're going to need a cavalcade of exotic and strange settings in your *Apocalypse Sonata* game, from alternate timelines to new dimensions to strange planets. Here's a set of tools you can use to whip up such settings quickly.

To create a new world:

- Pick a Theme: Alternative, Cosmopolitan, Mirror, Nightmare, Strange
- Pick a Complication: Confusion, Cost, Occupation, Rough, Ruin
- Pick a Label: Danger, Freak, Mundane, Savior, Superior

Finish with a short description, and any custom moves you need.

THEMES

A world's theme is just a simple way to describe the general style of that world, the sort of aesthetic you should be appealing to. The point of choosing a theme is to bootstrap your thinking and give you some initial parameters to think about what the world is like, and what themes it should touch on.

Alternative worlds are based around single, core ideas that make their nature easily expressible. Use a phrase like "A world of _____." "A world of sentient bees," for example, or "a world of cyber anarchists." They can still be complicated with dissidents or different cultures, but emphasize that single idea. An alternative world shows the PCs other ways of life in detail.

Cosmopolitan worlds are full of rich, tremendous, incredible diversity. They feature countless kinds of life with infinite cultures and traditions, but always about "people." A cosmopolitan world shows the PCs how little they have really experienced and how narrow their perspectives really are.

Mirror worlds are like the PCs' home, but... off. They're similar to alternative worlds in that they're generally focused on a single expressible idea—"Our Earth, but _____." But where an alternative world shows the PCs new ideas and ways of life, mirror worlds are designed to reflect particular truths of their home world back at them by changing one important thing.

Nightmare worlds are the worst-case scenarios, awful places designed to evidence the worst of the universe. They feature monsters, in their own tremendous variety. A nightmare world shows the PCs what ills, injustices, and evils exist out there in the infinite cosmos.

Strange worlds are bizarre and outlandish. If a cosmopolitan world is about tremendous diversity of culture and people, a strange world is about diversity of existence and the farthest reaches of what is possible in the universe. A strange world might include intelligent trees that exist in four dimensions, sentient dreams whose shapes are impossible to comprehend, and telepathic goo-people who speak in colors. A strange world shows the PCs new ideas, new concepts, and new modes of life that they would never have thought of.

COMPLICATIONS

A world's complication describes its immediate problem facing the PCs. This doesn't necessarily refer to the world's internal conflict—it is about the conflict the heroes will face.

Confusion means that the world and the PCs do not understand each other. There is a major misunderstanding between them. Maybe the world believes that people who look like the Transformed are infected with a terrible disease, or that the Beacon is the greatest hero of them all based on the colors in her costume.

Cost means that nothing on the world is free. Perhaps the world has ample resources and aid to offer, but it always comes at a price of some kind. Maybe the world is one giant market world with memories as currency. Maybe the world has a piece of the Sonata and is willing to trade, but only in exchange for the Outsider's ship.

Occupation means that the world is not free. Some force here exerts total control over the world, and there is a population being crushed underfoot. Dealing with the world at any level means dealing with the occupiers and the occupied, and the struggle between them. Maybe the world is a utopian paradise with a population of heavily controlled robotic servants.

Rough is a direct reference to “rough terrain.” A rough world has some environmental element that acts as a constant and dangerous problem. Maybe the world is filled with deadly radiation. Maybe the world has streams of fast and slow time, and you might become trapped in time.

Ruin means that the world has been demolished and left a wreck. The demolishers are not still there—if they are, it's more likely an Occupation world. A Ruin world is a shattered remnant of whatever glory or good it once had, and everybody here struggles to make the best of their broken home. Maybe the world was the site of a battle between Ominus and the Protectors. Maybe it's a future version of the heroes' own home, showing them what the Earth will look like if they never return.



LABELS

Next, pick a Label for your new world. This Label emphasizes the kinds of issues at world's heart, and the Label you should focus on for changing the PCs.

Danger worlds are either themselves dangerous, or are so innocuous that they emphasize the danger the PCs present. A Danger world challenges the PCs on just how dangerous they really are. Are they capable of withstanding everything this world can throw at them? Are they so dangerous they pose a threat to this world merely by being here?

Freak worlds are either very strange compared to the characters' own lives, or are obsessed with the idea of quashing difference. A Freak world challenges the PCs on what they are and where they fit in. Are they able to manage in a world different from everything they've ever known? Are they willing to suppress what makes them special in the face of oppression?

Mundane worlds are either all too human and familiar, or are welcoming, accepting, and kind. A Mundane world challenges the PCs on their own empathy and desire to keep up this adventure. Are they interested enough in a world that feels familiar to truly understand it, protect it, and help it? Are they able to leave a place that might even be a better home than the one they left?

Savior worlds are either moral and righteous, or deeply need those willing to sacrifice for others. A Savior world challenges the PCs on exactly what and how much they are willing to sacrifice. Are they willing to put it all on the line to save a ruined world whose inhabitants are ready to eat each other? Are they willing to stand against a stellar power that does harm in the name of good?

Superior worlds either have fonts of brilliance and condescension, or are sorely in need of greater thought and new action. A Superior world challenges the PCs on their ability to understand a place and come up with ways to help. Are they cowed by a world that seems infinitely more capable than they are? Are they able to shock a broken world out of complacency or prejudice?

FINISHING TOUCHES

After you've picked a Theme, Complication, and Label, wrap it all together. Write a few sentences talking about the world. Mention any important sensory elements. Come up with a couple of important characters, each with just a sentence of description.

Keep in mind your Theme, Complication, and Label. Use the Theme to guide your ideas about what the PCs find; the Complication to guide your ideas about what problems the PCs find; and the Label to push everything into a form that you can use directly in play, to change the PCs' Labels.

Finally, jot down some ideas about where the Sonata piece might be found on this world. And you're set!

SAMPLE LOCATIONS

Once you're ready to start running *The Apocalypse Sonata* as a mini-campaign, and have decided on all the various connections and spurs for your players to explore, you should use the process above to come up with a couple of initial worlds the PCs might visit. Here are a few Kirby-inspired planets and places your heroes can travel to in search of pieces of the Sonata.

THE PLANET OF INTELLIGENT DINOSAURS

Theme: Alternative

Complication: Confusion

Label: Superior

Dryax is a planet orbiting a distant sun, whose sapient population is descended from creatures greatly resembling Earth's ancient dinosaurs. Dozens of phenotypes, all of whom have evolved to become bipedal and between four and eight feet tall, retain physical characteristics similar to Tyrannosaurs, Triceratops, Velociraptors, and other dinosauroids. They live in a number of nations scattered between vast wildernesses, making contact between cultures rare. The most advanced nation, called Saurglaus, has reached a technological level approximating Earth's late nineteenth century, with six-shooters and locomotive trains, and has a culture that resembles Victorian England in both their colonialist exploration policies and refined, reserved sensibilities back at home. Dryax's sun never sets on the Saurglaussian Empire, as they send soldiers and diplomats to rule more primitive species and fight endless wars against their one also-civilized rival, Panakar.

There are primates on Dryax, but they are not sentient, and Dryaxians will be very confused by the presence of talking hairless apes in their midst unless they quickly demonstrate their appreciation of fine art and good manners. The Sonata piece here manifests in the score of a Dryaxian composer's operetta, which plays currently in a grand hall in front of a crowd of the city's snootiest upper class. If and when the Worldbreakers show up, the Dryaxians quickly turn against them as rude and tasteless for disturbing the operetta. Of course, neither their pistols or impressive teeth and claws will be much use to fight them.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS:

- Roktar, the Long-Necked Queen and ruler of the Saurglaussian Empire
- Quirven, the Triceratops Composer of the Apocalypse Sonata

WHITESTAR STATION

Theme: Cosmopolitan

Complication: Cost

Label: Mundane

Whitestar Station is an enormous space station near the center of a vast galactic empire, which serves as a trade center and way station for travelers from ten thousand different worlds. Run by a trade guild of independent businesses who owe no allegiance to any individual planet but pay taxes to the empress, this moon-sized structure provides supplies to the countless ships that dock here on their way to somewhere else as well as accepting the cargoes of traders looking for clients to buy their products, whether they deal in exotic spices, rare radioactive heavy elements, or the beautiful, fragile artwork created by primitive creatures from backwater planets far from the center of space. Whitestar is a transportation hub, where travelers pass the time between ship departures, dimensional gateway crossings, and other forms of travel with shopping, dining, or taking in shows and entertainments.

Whitestar is filled at all hours with many thousands of beings on their way somewhere else, and thousands more who work and live there as well. Pretty much any character the GM or players want to involve in the stories can be easily justified as being there. Indeed, Whitestar might even connect back to Halcyon City; perhaps one of the super-science teams of a previous generation had adventures out in this part of the galaxy and either have friends with ships out here who remember them, or access to the jump-gate systems kept in one of their base's laboratories.

The Sonata itself might manifest in any form on Whitestar Station. Perhaps it's part of one of the station's entertainment programs, putting an individual artist in danger from the Worldbreakers. Maybe it appears in an item for sale in one of the thousands of gift shops and tourist traps—those fragile singing flowers from Epsilon VI make such lovely chiming noises. Or, maybe the piece is a recording on a crystal storage medium, being smuggled by someone who knows precisely how valuable and powerful it is and will go to enormous lengths to protect it!

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

- Captain Li Apetus, commander of the Whitestar security forces and bionic alien
- Spin Harper, infamous four-armed stellar rogue and smuggler

PULSAR ORBITED BY SPACE WHALES

Theme: Strange

Complication: Rough Terrain

Label: Freak

This location has two core pieces. The first piece is a pulsar, a white dwarf or neutron star reaching the end of its life and strongly magnetized. The spinning pulsar constantly projects an incredibly powerful beam of electromagnetic radiation and ionized matter like a spotlight, and if you stay at a single point, the rhythm with which the beam hits you is part of the “percussion track” of the Sonata, regular and exact to the smallest measurements of time possible by mortals.

The second part is the colonies of massive-brained space whales in the depths of space slightly less than a light year from the pulsar, feeding off the periodic “jets” of radiation and relativistic particles, while building up their own magnificent culture and society without the inconvenience of planets. Their “songs” are incredibly complex, but all are in exceedingly complicated ways timed to the pulsar’s “beat.”

In order to fully capture this part of the Sonata, Ominus and his agents needs to capture the entire pulsar and several cubic light years of space inside a stasis field, freezing it in time and then “cutting” it out of the universe like a slice of cake. While the stasis field protects the living creatures inside it indefinitely, it has to be collapsed as part of the Sonata’s performance once Ominus activates his Cosmophone.

The strangeness of the pulsar and the space whales will stymie the PCs a bit—they probably can’t even communicate with the space whales without **unleashing their powers** or **assessing the situation**. But that strangeness is crucial. The space whales don’t think, act, or believe in a way that the PCs find familiar—and to work with these stellar cetaceans, to protect them, to communicate with them, pushes the PCs into new and strange parts of themselves.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

- “Glider,” a young space whale intrigued by the PCs and interested in communicating
- Dorian Redsaber, notorious star hunter and poacher who sees the whales as only animals

POST-APOCALYPTIC ALTERNATE EARTH

Theme: Mirror

Complication: Ruined

Label: Savior

Any piece of the Sonata might be found on a post-apocalyptic version of Earth, a commonly recurring theme in Kirby's work. This Earth might be a dimensional alternate, or a potential (avoidable) future. The towers of Halcyon City are falling and broken; the sky is scorched a strange yellow. It might have been devastated by nuclear war, plagues, or storms of meteors; it's impossible to tell now. Whatever the cause, mutated talking animal-creatures scavenge for food and weapons in the ruins of famous buildings, including the fallen Spike and the abandoned Exemplars Tower. The Sonata here is in the tower of an evil wizard, served by a tribe of warlike dog-humans. The exact truth of the wizard and dog-humans is far from clear to the PCs, but take this opportunity to draw parallels and connections to their world and their experiences.

IMPORTANT CHARACTER

- Arcturus, the "evil wizard" who bears a connection to at least one PC
- Fidra, a young freedom fighter hoping to depose Arcturus

WRACK

Theme: Nightmare

Complication: Occupied

Label: Danger

Wrack: the homeworld of Ominus and his Host. Wrack is a nightmare made manifest, a massive artificial planet surrounding the black hole at the center of the galaxy. Its surface is covered entirely with silvery metal, with defense towers and spires protruding like needles. The population, which consists of a small number of nobles and warlords and countless billions of laborers and slaves, lives beneath the protective shell in levels that extend to the planet's heart, where the powercore radiates enough energy to keep the whole world functioning. Most of Wrack's inhabitants labor ceaselessly in giant factories that churn out ships and weapons for the empire under the pitiless gaze of robot sentinels, while the nobles live in unimaginable luxury in their gilded towers.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

- The Baron Coronicus Illithar of Maddrox 6, decadent noble and oppressive vizier of Ominus
- Wraith, a slave-turned-freedom fighter hidden in Wrack's underbelly

AGENDAS, PRINCIPLES, AND MOVES

The Apocalypse Sonata still uses the same core agendas, principles, and GM moves as regular **MASKS**. But there are some new elements to think about when planning on GMing a game with this playset.

THE APOCALYPSE SONATA: AGENDA

The three core agendas for **MASKS** all apply to this playset, but there is one more that reshapes how *The Apocalypse Sonata* ultimately plays out.

CREATE A KIRBYESQUE SENSE OF WONDER

First of all, if you are unfamiliar with the work of Jack Kirby, seek out his work immediately. It won't be difficult to find—Kirby is one of the greatest, most influential comics creators in history. Here the term “Kirbyesque” narrows his vast field of accomplishments to focus on the “cosmic” material, the star-spanning epics he created in the pages of comics like *The New Gods*, the *Eternals*, *Kamandi*, and his runs of *Fantastic Four* and *Thor*. Modern day traces of his work are in movies like *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Thor: Ragnarok*.

Kirby's most influential work brought a sense of wonder and awe to a medium oft criticized for being too simple and childish. He added a sense of *cosmicism*, the philosophy that humans are insignificant in a grand universe peopled by intelligences so large and powerful that they barely notice us. And yet, Kirby insisted that humanity was far from insignificant. Though we might be small now, we contain the seeds for greatness within us. Humanity in Kirby's work always has a grand destiny, even if we can't quite see it.

Kirby was fascinated by the work of pseudo-historians like Erich von Däniken and others who claimed that our gods, myths, and legends are poorly recalled stories of ancient aliens, superior beings who acted upon us in pre-history and shaped our present and future. Kirby's “gods,” therefore, exist at the collision point of magic and technology. Mortals interacting with them can't distinguish between the two, as the gods themselves see no such difference.

Another recurring Kirbyesque meme is the world after cataclysm, rebuilding in the wreckage. Heroes find themselves in a world that has returned to a primitive state, with nature gone wild (and frequently transformed, with sapient animals and their own societies, or monsters made hideous by their familiarity). He also was fond of hidden locations containing advanced beings and/or technology in the middle of our mundane world.

All these elements should be reflected in your game. The young heroes of an *Apocalypse Sonata* game should encounter beings, events, and phenomena that make them feel small and perhaps unworthy, but you should also remind them that they are growing towards something greater than they are right now...

THE APOCALYPSE SONATA: PRINCIPLES

Similarly, the core principles all still apply, along with these new ones.

HIGHLIGHT POWERFUL AND GRAND IMAGERY

Kirby's stories are filled with simple but powerful imagery: giant walls hanging in space, with the faces of ancient giants imbedded within them; the enormous spires of a heavenly city, with an eternal guardian standing by the celestial gates; and the cosmically powered, star-surfing herald of an all-consuming space god!

Kirby Krackle (also known as Kirby Dots) is the distinctive “aura” of energy surrounding characters or phenomena that Kirby drew to suggest the incredible magnitude of the forces in play, usually manifesting in patterns of black dots on a bright background. The term “Kirby Krackle” has come to represent the sense of cosmicism and grandeur found in his stories about space gods and other alien wonders. Use imagery like this wherever and whenever possible.

ELEVATE THE MOST HUMAN DESIRES

The phrase “simple yet powerful” also applies to Kirby's plots. Always take advantage of the oldest and most fundamental story tropes. If the basic theme of a story is similar to something in Shakespeare or the Bible, you're doing it right! These ideas include the most human desires: sibling rivalries, children seeking the approval of parents, forbidden feelings of love or hate or jealousy. Embrace concepts as broad and clichéd as the struggle between chaos and order, or between destruction and preservation. Subtlety is not your friend. Think of Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass*, or Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. Melodrama and extreme expressions of innocence or evil rule the day.

TREAT THE HEROES AS ADULTS

Many aliens and other creatures may not recognize that the heroes are teens, or even understand any such distinction. Play with this! Let the PCs react to being treated like serious, influential adults. Even non-villainous NPCs can cause the heroes to reevaluate themselves by asking interesting questions, not understanding human culture and social cues, or trying to force their own assumptions on them, and these can easily lead to PCs shifting their Labels.

REMIND THE HEROES THAT THEY'RE NOT THE FIRST

Keep in mind that most of the locations and situations the heroes will encounter have been around for a very long time, and it's entirely reasonable that members of any of Halcyon City's previous generations of heroes may have encountered them already. How did those encounters go, and how can they impact what the players are going through today?



THE APOCALYPSE SONATA: MOVES

Here are some new GM moves to use in *The Apocalypse Sonata* playset. These moves are supplementary, and do not replace any existing GM moves.

SEND THEM ON A REALLY LONG TRIP

Remember, you're not limited to this time, or this dimension, in your travels. It's completely apropos to travel in time and meet important NPC heroes at interesting points in their lives. Legacies and Protégés can meet their forebears when they were younger or still alive (the long-dead founder of the Legacy, for example). Or, a Legacy could meet their own descendant, who regards the PC as a legend. This is also an opportunity to introduce *alternate* histories; you might introduce them to evil eyepatch-wearing versions of themselves.

The Neutronite punches you, and you stumble backwards, falling into the swirling rainbow portal. What comes next is a haze of impossible images, brilliant colors, and strange sensations, until you fall onto a rocky surface, the other end of the rainbow portal now above you. A voice asks, "Who the heck are you?," and you look in its direction only to see...could that be...your own mother, dressed in a clean, brilliant, retro version of your own uniform? But she looks young, all the years gone from her face. She looks like she's the same age as you. What do you do?



THE ROAD TRIP AS AGENDA

The Apocalypse Sonata is a quest story, where the heroes travel away from their familiar locale in order to accomplish a goal, in this case, to save the multiverse! In the course of their travels, we get to see them interact with different environments, which provide them with new perspectives on their problems and their desires. They may come back changed, or they may have their core beliefs reinforced. It's probably the first time they've truly been on their own, with only each other to rely on, and there should be many opportunities to redefine their interrelationships.

ENDANGER ENTIRE WORLDS

In a cosmic level game, the risks are heightened to match the over-the-top nature of the setting. Plus, by playing across the cosmos, there's more than one world. Players know that a planet-ending threat is unlikely to come to pass in base-level **MASKS**, because where are they going to play without a planet? But when adventuring across space, there are a dozen other planets to go to, so that meta-textual certainty goes away. Entire planets *can* be destroyed, so don't hesitate to raise the stakes to those epic levels.

Your fist connects, and Dredful stumbles backward, only to look at you with rage. "FINE!" he snarls. "IF I CANNOT HAVE THIS WORLD, THEN I WILL REDUCE IT TO ASH!" He touches a button on his wrist communicator, and suddenly a bright light fills the sky—his orbiting cruiser just unleashed its Annihilator cannon! Its only a matter of time before the blast reaches the planet core and detonates the whole thing! What do you?

INTRODUCE A STRUGGLING ALIEN

Kirby's non-human characters frequently have a dramatic disconnect between their appearance and their personality. Monstrously ugly creatures were rarely stupid beasts but either gentle philosophers or brilliant strategists, while the most attractive beings hid something dark and dangerous beneath their appealing exterior. Several Kirby characters struggled greatly to control and master savage passions within themselves, and this very struggle not to lose control and reluctance to give in to unthinking violence was precisely what made them heroic. Introduce alien characters who struggle between what they outwardly appear to be and what they want to be.

The Warmaster of Kayrax looks at you sadly. "I cannot help you," she says. "I have sworn never to wield my blades against another being again. They have caused too much harm already." She turns away from you and walks back towards the prismatic meditation garden. "I wish you luck on your quest to defeat Ominus, but I cannot join you." What do you do?

INTRODUCE AN OUT-OF-PLACE CHARACTER

Another common Kirbyism is the humorous, almost campy genre-mix. Kirby places characters native to one genre in locations from completely different genres: cowboys, hippies, vampires, werewolves, pirates, and ninjas all appear on alien planets or in sci-fi cities. The effect is both comedic and disconcerting, creating a sense of otherness by combining the grandeur of the story with the dislocating familiarity of the well-known image in the wrong place. Regularly introduce characters who seem at odds with their surroundings.

Your ship touches down on the icy surface of Qwyd, right outside the thermal plant. Your feet have barely touched the snow before you hear the sound of metal against metal, and see...is that...a Roman legion emerging from the thermal plant? They tromp across the ice and form up before you, with their leader, complete with feathered helmet, pointing a gladius at you. “Lay down your weapons and submit,” he says (your translation circuits identifying his language as actual Latin). “You are now prisoners of the Imperium Astra Romana.” His gladius begins to glow with a faint red light—is that actually an energy weapon? What do you do?

COMING HOME FROM THE UNIVERSE

When the *Apocalypse Sonata* quest is over, it's time for the heroes to return home to Halcyon City and resume their previous lives. Of course, not everyone will necessarily make it back; some characters might reach the natural end of their stories and have either retired or become paragons.

You might also offer the possible retirement advance, “**Quit the team and remain in (chosen location)**” to any players who might be interested in remaining out in the cosmos. Perhaps the Beacon has fallen in love with an alien prince and no longer wants to live on an Earth they don't feel fits them. Maybe the Legacy, after an encounter with an old nemesis of their mentor, has completed the journey to taking over their responsibilities. Regardless, life goes on for the heroes. What's next? Play to find out!



NEW PLAYBOOKS

In this section of the book, you'll find three new limited-edition playbooks for your game of **MASKS: A NEW GENERATION**. Each one adds new and different mechanics, while pointing the game's focus at different issues.

These limited-edition playbooks are:

- **The Harbinger:** A time traveler come back to fix the future by changing the past...but unsure how exactly to do that.
- **The Nomad:** An experienced roamer of the cosmos, settling down a bit.
- **The Scion:** The child of a major supervillain, doing everything in their power to prove they're different.

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

- **Take care when using more than one limited-edition playbook.** 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 Harbinger's **Connecting the dots**, 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.

You're from the future, and you know how things turn out. You came back with a mission - to make sure that history changes for the better.

But things are scrambled. Your memories, not quite right. You're not sure how this present becomes your future. So until you can figure it out, you might as well do what good you can, where you can, all the while trying to connect the dots between your world and this one.



THE HARBINGER

HERO NAME

REAL NAME (IF APPLICABLE)

LOOK

- ambiguous, man, shifting, transgressing, woman
- Asian or South Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, White
- haunted face, optimistic face, ordinary face, “hyper-evolved human” face
- streamlined clothing, “fashion-forward” clothing, simple clothing, casual clothing
- high-tech costume, impossible costume, sleek costume, dramatic costume

ABILITIES

You're from the future, and that has its benefits, like future knowledge (even though your memories are scrambled). Plus, your powers may have had something to do with how you got back to the past—er, the present day, that is. “Now,” as the locals call it. Choose one option from the list below.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> super speed | <input type="checkbox"/> telepathy & telekinesis | <input type="checkbox"/> futuristic gadgets & implants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> optimized biology | <input type="checkbox"/> teleportation & portals | <input type="checkbox"/> energy absorption/redirection |

/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

- How did you travel from the future to the present day?
- What keeps you from returning to the future?
- Why are your memories and knowledge of the future scrambled?
- What is the most important part of your future that you want to avert?
- Why must you join this team specifically to achieve your mission's goals?

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 averted a disaster from the future's history books. What was the disaster? What effect do we hope it had on the timeline?

/RELATIONSHIPS

_____ turns away from the hero's path, according to your history books. You have to prevent that from happening.

You've always idolized _____, but it's too awkward to admit it to them now that you've met them in real life. Keep it cool, keep it cool.

/INFLUENCE

Every member of your team has the power to change the future—your future. Give everyone influence over you.

HARBINGER MOVES

(Choose two)

- ☐ **Stick to the mission:** When you **defend someone** or something critically important to the future (tell us why), you may mark a condition to shift down one Label and shift up Savior before the roll. If you do, you cannot choose the option 'clear a condition' for the **defend** move.
- ☐ **Tomorrow's golden promise:** When you **comfort or support someone** with tales of what you think their future will be, you may roll + Savior instead of + Mundane. Mark a condition unless you are confident the stories are true.
- ☐ **Applied history:** When you **pierce the mask** of someone you believe will shape the future, roll + Savior instead of + Mundane.
- ☐ **You haven't learned you can do that yet:** When you tell a teammate about a new, never-before-performed trick that they've never considered, spend a Team from the pool to allow them to **unleash their powers, directly engage a threat, or defend someone** using your Superior as if it was their Label. Any costs or complications from their move affect you, as well.
- ☐ **I learned the solution in grade school:** When you **unleash your powers** to extend your senses or overcome an intellectual obstacle, you may roll + Superior instead of + Freak.
- ☐ **21st century studies:** When you **assess the situation**, you may always ask "what does the future know about this moment?", even on a miss. You take +1 ongoing to act on the answers.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

You're from the future, but your knowledge of the past is spotty, intermittent, confused, jumbled. You're doing your best to put together the clues and your broken memories, though, so you can figure out how this world and its people become the ones you know.

When you push yourself to remember the version of someone that exists in your future, mark a condition and roll + Memories. On a hit, you connect who they are now to who they are in the future; choose the role that they fulfill in the future, and the GM will tell you about their future self. On a 10+, ask a follow-up question. On a miss, they're not at all who you thought they would be; the GM will choose their role, or tell you that as far as you know, they don't exist in the future.

Monster: _____

Martyr: _____

Traitor: _____

Architect: _____

Corruptor: _____

Leader: _____

Your Memories score starts at -1, and goes up by 1 (to a maximum of +3) for each name above.

When you write a name above, they gain Influence over you if they did not already have it.

At the start of each session or when time passes, roll + Savior to find out how your investigations into the timeline have been going. On a hit, choose one figure noted above or one aspect of the future world you can remember. You've found a lead to follow to learn more about how the present version of that figure or aspect became the future version. On a 10+, the lead is particularly strong; right now, you can ask the GM one question about the figure or aspect, and they will answer honestly. On a miss, you're lost in the present; the GM will tell you how things are so different here, and shift your Labels according to how it makes you feel.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Everything you do could affect the future. For all you know, saving that one guy means that now the future is full of pterodactyls. The ripples are always so hard to track, and you're not sure if you've helped or hurt—not really. Until now. In this moment, it's all clear. You can see the course of events laid out before you like a river, and you know exactly what you have to do to ensure the future outcome you want. Of course, after this, you've changed enough of the timeline to invalidate your prior research—reset all the names in your “Connecting the dots” section.

TEAM MOVES

When you **confess to a teammate the difference between what you thought they would be and what they really are**, add a Team to the pool, and ask them if you represent a future they'd want. If they say yes, mark potential. If they say no, mark a condition.

When you **share a tale of future loss with someone**, ask them if they think you have the ability to avert that loss. If they believe you do, mark potential and give them Influence over you. If they don't, mark Guilty and shift one Label up and one Label down (your choice). If Guilty is already marked mark another condition, GM's choice.

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.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take another move from your playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take another move from your playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Unlock your Moment of Truth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a move from another playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Someone permanently loses Influence over you; add +1 to a Label |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a move from another playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |

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

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unlock your Moment of Truth after you've used it once | <input type="checkbox"/> Lock a Label and add +1 to a Label of your choice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change playbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> Return to the future and accept its new form, or jump to a different point in the past to begin your mission anew |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take an adult move | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take an adult move | |

OTHER MOVES

PLAYING THE HARBINGER

Fixated, skeptical, searching, damaged. The Harbinger is from the future, and has come back in time to change that future—but the transition has scrambled their memories and their knowledge. Now they have to try to piece together what they came here to fix by remembering who in the present became what in the future.

The Harbinger makes time travel an important element of the game—but does not actually travel through time during the game. They're not bopping around, and are in fact stuck in this time period. Only their memories will let them get some insight on what is coming. For that reason, "Connecting the dots" is crucial for the Harbinger. You need to fill in a few names in that area of your playbook to have some people to investigate, so go for it immediately, even though you're rolling at a -1. If you find an NPC you think is interesting, then connect the dots on them!

Your primary tension is that of the young person driven to make the world better, but not entirely sure how to do it. Most of the other PCs want to do good and make the world better, but they either take situations as they happen, or they have guidance from an external force. The Harbinger, however, can actually begin to fill in a picture of what is going to happen, and then take steps to circumvent that outcome. So be proactive! Pursue your attempt to change the future, especially when it conflicts with more immediate threats or goals!

NOTES ON YOUR MOVES AND EXTRAS

For **Stick to the mission**, whether or not someone is "critically important to the future" is in some ways down to your character's beliefs more than any statement of fact. But you must be able to explain why it is that you think the character in question is critically important. The same idea applies to **Applied history**.

For **You haven't learned you can do that yet**, you are telling your teammate about something you've seen or heard them do in the future. Have fun with it! Come up with crazy maneuvers. But you share in the costs and complications of the moves, including marking conditions or being affected by Influence.

For **21st century studies**, you can always ask what the future knows about this moment, but the answer might very well be "Nothing." You can still take a +1 ongoing to act on such an answer if you can make it relevant to your actions.

When you push yourself to remember for **Connecting the dots**, the roles are fairly open to interpretation. But once a name is filled in, you can't erase it (except for the Moment of Truth). For the start of session move, on a hit, you have a lead to follow, while on a 10+, you get some information immediately.

When you use your Moment of Truth, clear all the names in the **Connecting the dots** section—allowing you to start remembering a new future.

INSPIRATIONS FOR THE HARBINGER

Bishop, **X-MEN**

Deathlok, **ASTONISHING TALES**

Iron Lad, **YOUNG AVENGERS**

Booster Gold, **JUSTICE LEAGUE**

Impulse, **YOUNG JUSTICE**

Rachel Summers, **X-MEN**

GM ADVICE

- Center a plot around their “remembered” characters
- Undermine what they think they know
- Reveal clear future paths
- Evoke the pleasures of the present
- Show the timeline ripples of their actions

The Harbinger makes “the future” a tangible thing in your game. As GM, you are responsible for juggling the idea of causality changes, predestination paradoxes, and multiple timelines. Essentially, you must account for the time-travel nonsense the Harbinger brings to the game so as to amp up the drama and difficult choices. They’re not in charge of making sure the timelines make sense (or at least, comic-book sense); you are, and your goal in doing so is to ensure the different timelines and ripple effects and future selves contribute to interesting and cool stories without being too confusing.

This playbook needs major figures who play roles in both the present and the future to function, and its **Connect the dots** section is designed to foster just that. The player is responsible for trying to fill those names in by triggering the attached move. When a player does trigger the move, they’re signaling that they are interested in this character, so keep that in mind when deciding your portion of the move. Deciding on a miss that the future has no record of the character could write them off in some cases...but it could raise interesting questions in others. Why wouldn’t the future have any records of Champion, one of the greatest heroes of Halcyon City?

Because of the way that move works, at the beginning of the game, you are most likely to have significant say over the role those characters play in the future. As time goes on, the player will have more and more say, but fewer and fewer roles to choose from along with a clearer picture of the future. But ultimate responsibility for making sure that everything fits together into a coherent picture of the future lies with you. And for the most part, all the choices and the information you reveal need to build on each other—until the Harbinger uses their Moment of Truth, and resets everything.

Maybe one time you had a home. A life with a schedule. But if you did, that was ages ago. You've been on your own, bouncing around space, time, and everything in between, for years.

Except now, you've left those farscapes and come back to Earth. And letting other people into your life is way harder than traveling to other dimensions ever was.



THE NOMAD

ALIAS

REAL NAME (IF DIFFERENT)

LOOK

- ambiguous, man, shifting, transgressing, woman
- Asian or South Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, White
- average body, compact body, modified body, sculpted body, wiry body
- traveling clothing, garish clothing, extraterrestrial clothing, unassuming clothing
- weird jewelry, strange greatcoat, eccentric boots, unusual gloves, uncanny belt

ABILITIES

You've seen space, time, and everything in between. One might say you've seen it all. Besides your tremendous knowledge, experience, and haphazard on-the-job training, you picked up some neat toys on your travels. Pick two of your most important.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> rift generator | <input type="checkbox"/> forcefield projectors | <input type="checkbox"/> modular blaster |
| <input type="checkbox"/> anti-grav pack | <input type="checkbox"/> cloaking rig | <input type="checkbox"/> wearable ultraprocessor |

/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 took you from the Earth when you were younger?
- What farscapes did you explore?
- Who was your favorite traveling companion?
- What brought you back to stay (for now)?
- 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 had to deal with a danger I'd met while traveling the farscapes. What was it, and how did we send it away?

/RELATIONSHIPS

_____ knows plenty that I don't about this world, its people, and how to deal with them; I should follow their lead while I'm here.

_____ is...well...boring. But that's okay! I'm going to make them more interesting.

/INFLUENCE

You're here, but not, and it's going to take some time before you really commit. Give no one Influence over you.

/NOMAD MOVES

(Choose two)

- ❑ **No good at being a kid:** When you clear a condition, you can shift Labels, your choice.
- ❑ **Watched C-beams glitter:** When you make a claim about a strange situation or phenomenon based on your experience, roll + Freak. On a hit, you were right; the GM will tell you what opportunity your knowledge grants to you. On a 7-9, your claim is incomplete, flawed, or tangential; the GM will tell you how. On a miss, your experiences are incomplete; the GM will tell you what mistake your flawed understanding leads you to make.
- ❑ **I hate calling the cavalry:** When you call the allies you made beyond this world to ask them for help, mark a condition and roll + Superior. On a hit, someone shows up to lend you a hand. On a 7-9, they're dragging their own problems. On a miss, your call reaches someone you wish it hadn't.
- ❑ **The littlest space bandit:** When you **directly engage a threat** that underestimates you, roll + Superior instead of + Danger.
- ❑ **Out of this world:** When you plug into the cosmic aether and tune out of this world, roll + Freak. On a hit, you come to a new, interesting insight about your current problems and situation; the GM will tell you what. On a 10+, you can also shift your own Labels according to match your new understanding. On a miss, you realize something dangerous or terrible; the GM will tell you what, and shift your Labels accordingly.
- ❑ **Sharpened eyes** When you **assess the situation**, you may always ask one of the following questions, even on a miss:
 - *What's my best way out/way in/way past?*
 - *What here would be handy to grab?*
 - *Who here is susceptible to my words?*

/PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

You have one foot out the door, and it shows. Over time, you may be able to commit to this place.

- **Adults do not have Influence over you by default.** No one does.
- You can only give a total of **6 Influence**.
- During play, you can only give Influence by **revealing a vulnerability or weakness** to someone. You can still give out Influence through the end of session move. You cannot give Influence to somebody who already has Influence over you.
- **Others cannot take Influence over you;** if they would, instead they choose: mark potential or inflict a condition on you.
- **You reject Influence at -2 by default, instead of +0.**
- When someone **takes advantage of their Influence over you**, they can choose two options.
- **At the end of a session**, you can take back 1 Influence from someone you choose.
- **If you have given out 0-Influence**, you cannot **comfort or support** anyone. If you would trigger that move, instead mark a condition as you say exactly the wrong thing. If you have given out 0-Influence and someone tries to **comfort or support** you, you cannot open up to them.
- **You gain benefits based on how much Influence you have given out.** See below. These benefits stack.
- ❑ **1-2 Influence:** When you **defend someone** who has Influence over you, you can ignore the Insecure condition. When you **directly engage** someone who has Influence over you, you can ignore the Afraid condition.
- ❑ **3 Influence:** When you **take a powerful blow** from someone with Influence over you, take -2 to the roll.
- ❑ **4 Influence:** When you **pierce the mask** of someone who has Influence over you, you can always ask them one question, even on a miss.
- ❑ **5 Influence:** When you spend a Team to help someone who has Influence over you, it gives them +2.
- ❑ **6 Influence:** When you accept the words of someone who has Influence over you, mark potential, clear a condition, or take +1 forward.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

You basically exist with one foot out the door, ready to leave this place, to go back out into the wide expanse of the universe. You've never fully committed. That is, until today. Until right now. Now, you pour everything you have and everything you are into this moment. You pull off tricks no one from this planet has ever seen before. You use your tools in ways no one here could have ever imagined. You devote yourself, here and now, to a cause, and you achieve your goal in ways that you never could've if you'd only stayed home. Of course, now you've proved to everyone that you really don't belong here, and the very skills that let you succeed are the ones you earned from out there...

TEAM MOVES

When you share a triumphant celebration with someone, ask them what they admire about you. The GM will shift one of your Labels up and one down based on what they say.

When you share a vulnerability or weakness with someone, mark a condition, give them Influence over you, and mark 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.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take another move from your playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Unlock your Moment of Truth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take another move from your playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take another move from your playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a move from another playbook | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a move from another playbook | |

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

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unlock your Moment of Truth after you've used it once | <input type="checkbox"/> Take an adult move |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change playbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> Lock a Label and add +1 to a Label of your choice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take an adult move | <input type="checkbox"/> Depart for reaches unknown, never to return |

OTHER MOVES

PLAYING THE NOMAD

Weird, playful, mischievous, lonely. The Nomad has seen things that their peers can't even imagine. They've seen the universe at play. They've encountered other cultures and ideas, and they have their own collection of cool toys. And for all that awesomeness, the Nomad has never had their own home or family. Their story is all about connecting deeply to the people and world around them, instead of bouncing off to something new and different.

The two crucial questions for the Nomad during character creation are “What brought you back to stay (for now)?” and “Why do you care about the team?” The Nomad only works because they have chosen to remain with the team—if they followed their wanderlust, they wouldn't be part of a **MASKS** game.

Make sure that between these two questions, your Nomad has clear, durable reasons to stick with the team. “I came back to stay because I need to get a flux capacitor to repay my debt to the Pirate Queen of Orion” is a cool answer, but not a durable answer—as soon as the Nomad gets the flux capacitor, they can go back to space. “I came back to stay because I'm wanted across space for a crime I didn't commit” is better—as long as you remain wanted, you're stuck on Earth, and there's no clear path to having that status changed.

Finally, your extra, **Putting down roots**, has you uniquely playing with Influence. You are incentivized to give out Influence, for all the benefits you get—but remember, you can only give out Influence to six characters total, including teammates. Some of the benefits are much more advantageous when you give Influence to an enemy than when you give it to an ally, too. And while you can take back Influence at the end of every session, it's otherwise pretty hard to shift it around once you've given it out. Balancing the tension between wanting to give out your Influence and picking exactly the right people to give it to is at the heart of the whole playbook—so have fun with it!

NOTES ON YOUR MOVES AND EXTRAS

For **Out of this world**, what it means to plug into the cosmic aether is up to you. Maybe you listen to some weird music you picked up out in space; maybe you burn some transdimensional incense and meditate. Whatever you choose, it should be consistent—it shouldn't shift every time you do it.

For **Putting down roots**, all rules not called out as different here function as normal. For example, those you give Influence to can still shift your Labels, and you can still reject their Influence. Your benefits are based on how many other characters have Influence over you—meaning that if you take Influence over you away from other characters, you may lose some of those benefits.

Note that you do not have an advancement to retire or become a paragon; instead, you depart for reaches unknown, never to return. If you wish to retire or become a paragon, you must change playbooks first and become someone more settled, and less nomadic.

INSPIRATIONS FOR THE NOMAD

Cammi Benally, **AVENGERS ARENA/UNDERCOVER**

Marvel Boy, **YOUNG AVENGERS**

America Chavez, **YOUNG AVENGERS/AMERICA**

The Doctor, **DOCTOR WHO**

Star-Lord, **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY**

Blink, **EXILES**

GM ADVICE

- Introduce bizarre elements from their adventures
- Offer them solace, comfort, and the feeling of home
- Threaten what anchors they have
- Restrain and confine them
- Show them how little they really know

The Nomad is a character defined by a desire to wander and be detached—to be free from the ties that bind. It's your job as GM to make sure that the Nomad's desire is complicated, foiled, and countered.

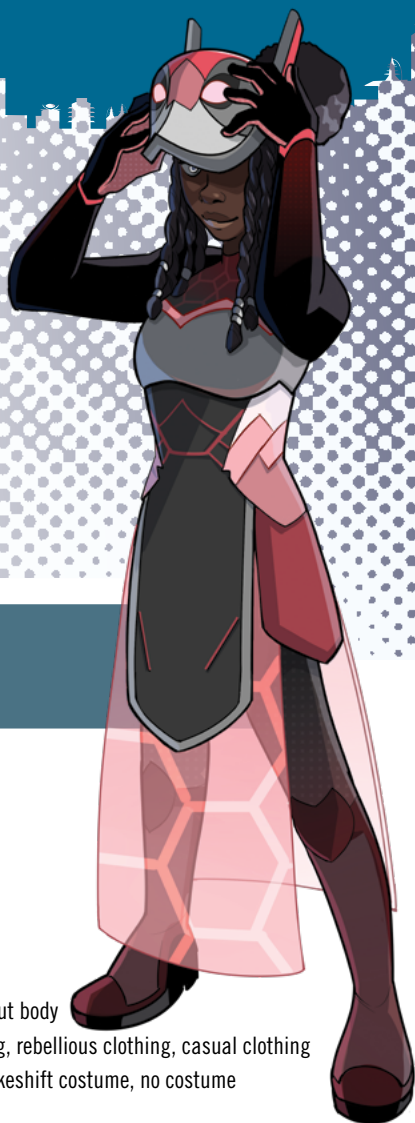
The extent to which the Nomad is tied into the world around them is (somewhat) measurable, by how much Influence the Nomad has actually given out. If the Nomad has given out 0-Influence, then they are ready to run—but if they have given out 6-Influence, then they're heavily tied into the world.

As GM, introduce characters who are interested in the Nomad, who want to have Influence over them, and who go about pursuing that Influence through myriad means, whether by impressing the Nomad or fostering them or even overpowering them. You have no control over whether these characters actually gain Influence over the Nomad—it's all in the player's hands—so all you can do is present interesting and complicated options to the player.

As the Nomad does give out Influence, those relationships become the most important to threaten and stress. Keep those relationships in mind for hard moves and interesting complications.

The Nomad also gives you great license to really go gonzo with the fiction around them. They're an interdimensional/galactic/temporal traveler—and the issues they bring with them can range the full spectrum of those madcap settings. Have fun with it!

You're the child—not an acolyte, not a creation, just the friggin' kid—of a true villain. And when anyone who knows looks at you, all they can see is your parent. Like you don't even matter. Well, forget that. You're out to prove yourself as someone different from them, and how better to do that than to be a superhero?



THE SCION

HERO NAME

REAL NAME

LOOK

- ambiguous, man, shifting, transgressing, woman
- Asian or South Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, White
- stocky body, slender body, scrawny body, statuesque body, taut body
- hand-me-down clothing, expensive clothing, uniform clothing, rebellious clothing, casual clothing
- bright costume, parent's costume, understated costume, makeshift costume, no costume

YOUR LINEAGE

You are the child of a true supervillain. You strive to be different than them, but they are a part of you. Circle at least one option for each question below.

What kind of villain are they?

deadly mercenary, master thief, hateful destroyer, zealous crusader, cruel mastermind, grand tyrant

What is your relationship with them like?

mostly strangers, actively adversarial, sadly opposed, ever-shifting, redemption/corruption, full of denial

They have an array of abilities, assets, and strengths; what are some of them? (up to 3)

superhuman martial prowess, dark sorcery, cosmic might, diabolical machines, endless minions, unrivaled genius, powerful allies, arsenal of weapons and gadgets, supremely honed skills

What abilities do you use to fight them? (up to 2)

impressive martial prowess, magical aptitude, cosmic energies, machine control, regeneration, electrokinesis, seismic waves, a powerful weapon or gadget, mastery of a single skillset

/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 is your supervillain parent?
- Who told you about your parent's true nature?
- Why did you turn from your lineage to become a hero?
- Who, outside of the team, helps you on your chosen path?
- 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...

Someone important learned about my lineage and condemned us all. Who? Why?

/RELATIONSHIPS

_____ is the only one who understands what I'm going through; I told them which part of me I wished was more like my parent.

My parent once fought and thrashed _____; I've got to find a way to make it up to them.

/INFLUENCE

This team may be the key to proving you're different from your parent, but you don't want to be defined by your peers, either. Give Influence to 2 teammates.

SCION MOVES

(Choose two)

- ☐ **I'll show them:** When you **defend someone** who doesn't believe in you, you can always take Influence over them, even on a miss.
- ☐ **Changed sides:** When you mislead or trick an enemy by pretending to be on their side, roll + Danger. On a hit, they buy your charade for now. On a 7-9, choose 1. On a 10+, choose 2.
 - You avoid having to provide concrete evidence
 - You create an opportunity
 - You expose a weakness or flawOn a miss, someone else watching comes to the worst possible conclusion and acts on it.
- ☐ **They don't deserve forgiveness:** When you accuse an enemy of being irredeemable, you can mark two conditions to take Influence over you away from them. When you **directly engage** someone who has no Influence over you, you can always choose 1 additional option, even on a miss.
- ☐ **Moldable:** When you **pierce the mask** of someone whose respect you crave, you can always ask "How could I gain Influence over you?", even on a miss. Take +1 ongoing to acting on the answer.
- ☐ **All the best stuff:** You've compiled access to caches of equipment and weaponry other supers have hidden in the city. When you access a cache, say whose cache it is. If it's a hero's, roll + Savior. If it's a villain's, roll + Danger. On a hit, you find a tool or intel useful to your situation; the GM will detail. On a 7-9, you leave evidence that you've been here. On a miss, you tripped an alarm and they're coming; prepare to explain yourself.
- ☐ **White lies:** When you **comfort or support** someone by telling them lies they want to hear, roll + Savior instead of + Mundane. On a hit, if they open up to you, take Influence over them.

RESPECT

Write down the names of at least two other characters whose respect you need to earn in order to differentiate yourself from your parent. You may fill in new names whenever appropriate.

Your parent's greatest enemy: _____

Respect: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Advancement: ☐

Your parent's greatest victim: _____

Respect: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Advancement: ☐

Your personal idol: _____

Respect: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Advancement: ☐

The city's greatest leader: _____

Respect: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Advancement: ☐

The city's greatest hero: _____

Respect: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Advancement: ☐

The city's biggest celebrity: _____

Respect: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Advancement: ☐

When you seek out one of the characters named above, roll + Savior. On a hit, you track them down. On a 7-9, they're juggling their own problems, and may not have time for you. On a miss, when you find them, the situation is dire; the GM will tell you how.

If you earn Influence over the characters listed above, instead you mark 1 Respect. If you lose Influence over the characters listed above, you lose 1 Respect. If you lose 1 Respect and you have none marked, you immediately mark a condition, GM's choice.

The first time you reach 4 Respect on an individual, take an advancement.

While you have 4 Respect on an individual:

- You can reject their Influence at a +3 (does not stack with the above).
- You take +1 to a Label of their choice (record it next to their name).

If you dip below 4 Respect on an individual, you lose those benefits.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

People have always tried to define you by your lineage. As if from the moment you were born, you were meant to be some villain to be defeated. But...they're right, aren't they? That darkness is in you. So right here, right now, you're not fighting it—you're embracing it. Both hero and villain, and greater besides. You're overcoming impossible odds in ways no hero would approve of, and no villain could comprehend. Of course, after seeing what you can really do when you embrace the whole of yourself, the rest of the world isn't going to forget who you really are...

TEAM MOVES

When you share a triumphant celebration with someone, ask them if you have earned their respect. If you have, take Influence over them and mark potential. If you have not, give them Influence over you and mark potential.

When you share a vulnerability or weakness with someone, ask them if they would defend you against those who mistrust you. If they say yes, clear a condition and shift Savior up and any other Label down. If they say no, mark a condition and shift Danger up and any other Label 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.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take another move from your playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Someone permanently loses Influence over you; add +1 to a Label |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take another move from your playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange your Labels as you choose, and add +1 to a Label |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a move from another playbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Take The Mask and a secret identity from the Janus playbook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a move from another playbook | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unlock your Moment of Truth | |

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

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unlock your Moment of Truth after it's been used once | <input type="checkbox"/> Lock a Label, and add +1 to a Label of your choice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change playbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> Retire from the life or become a paragon of the city |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take an adult move | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take an adult move | |

OTHER MOVES

THE SCION

PLAYING THE SCION

Shameful, resistant, daring, stalwart. The Scion is the child of a real supervillain, but they won't let that define them. They're determined to prove they are their own person by being a greater hero than their parent is a villain, even as the rest of the world paints them with the same brush as their progenitor.

The Scion is heavily defined in relationship to another character—but that relationship is not direct the way it is for the Protégé or the Legacy. The Scion may interact with their villainous parent very rarely during the course of play, but their parent will always cast a dire shadow upon all that they do. Other characters aware of the relationship between the Scion and their parent will always see the Scion in that light, until the Scion successfully “earns” the right to be viewed independently. As a result, when the Scion designs their parent, they are designing an important character for the game as a whole—but they are not necessarily designing another member of the main cast.

Instead, the Scion focuses on particular other characters with their **Respect** extra. Any name filled into the **Respect** area of their playbook is immediately flagged as a crucial character to the game as a whole, someone the Scion is interested in interacting with further. When playing the Scion, you should use this extra to aim yourself at the characters and relationships you are most interested in pursuing—if you name a character here that you don't actually care that much about as a player, you're going to be in trouble.

NOTES ON YOUR MOVES AND EXTRAS

For **Changed sides**, you define who is an enemy, but keep in mind that an “enemy” is real opposition—not simply someone who is currently in your way, but someone you see as truly opposed to you. The same goes for **They don't deserve forgiveness**.

Also for **Changed sides**, someone watching (like a teammate) may still doubt your loyalties even on a 10+...but on a miss, they have no questions. They come to the worst possible conclusion, and act immediately.

For **All the best stuff**, when you define whose cache it is, you should feel free to create a new NPC—but try to use existing characters, especially to bolster ongoing relationships. The GM is the final arbiter of whether a given character is a “hero” or a “villain”—the judgment is not about perception, but the kind of things they would keep in their cache.

For **Respect**, name characters you are interested in spending more time with—especially seeing as you will be trying to earn Influence over those characters. Most of the time that you earn Influence over a given character, you do it through the fiction itself, especially by **piercing their mask** and fulfilling the condition for “How could I gain Influence over you?” That means you're going to want to spend a lot of time with the characters in your **Respect** section, seeking them out and trying to impress them.

Naming a character for **Respect** means you cannot hold standard Influence over them; all of those rules no longer apply with regards to you gaining Influence over them. They can still hold Influence over you, however, and use it in all the standard ways.

INSPIRATIONS FOR THE SCION

Spoiler, **BATMAN**

Ravager, **TEEN TITANS**

Victor Mancha, **RUNAWAYS**

Gamora, **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY**

Quake, **SECRET WARRIORS**

Polaris, Quicksilver, and Scarlet Witch, **X-MEN**

GM ADVICE

- Blame them for their parent's deeds
- Grant them respect
- Make demands on them
- Interrogate their reasons or deeds
- Introduce characters tied to their parent

Unlike most other playbooks in **MASKS**, the Scion isn't just trying to determine their own fate in contrast to the wishes and Influence of others; the Scion is trying to earn the respect of specific individuals by taking Influence over them. For most other **MASKS** characters, earning Influence over an adult is a nice benny. For the Scion, it's the whole game.

The Scion has multiple ways to gain Influence, including **White lies** and **I'll show them**, in addition to using the "How could I gain Influence over you?" option of **piercing someone's mask**. But as the GM, you should feel comfortable awarding them Influence when they've earned it in the fiction—especially in the form of respect. Once the Scion has named a character in their **Respect** section, they can't really earn "Influence" over that character; they can only mark the next box on the Respect track. So think about what that character would actually respect, and when the Scion acts that way, grant them Influence, thereby letting them mark the next box on the track. You can even make the demands explicit, i.e. "I'll see you as your own person when you start acting the way I want."

Consider the options the Scion chose for their lineage when deciding how to use their supervillain parent. If they chose that their parent is a master thief, then their parent is almost certainly more innocuous than a grandiose tyrant or fearsome destroyer. If they chose that their relationship is "mostly strangers," then they barely know their parent, and are either interested in changing that, or okay with how things are. Only when the Scion has chosen particular options should you consider making their parent a consistent, "main" character of the game. Otherwise, having their parent show up periodically in person, but mostly through reputation and their deeds elsewhere, is the right way to go.

logical jest quavering across nebular ytears of vulpine
but planar contusions cannot hide the ferality of wind

HM. YOU ARE FINISHED?

GOOD.

YES, GOOD. I CAN FEEL THE WORLDS. THEY STRENGTHEN ALREADY,
TAKING ROOT IN YOUR MIND. OF COURSE YOU ONLY PERCEIVE THE
MEREST VERSION OF THESE SHARDPLACES, BUT IT IS ALL YOU COULD
ENDURE WITHOUT UNENDING AGONY.

I HEAR MY FOE RAGING AMID THE ABYSS. RAGE AND SUFFERING.
THE WORLDS ALREADY BLOSSOMING AMID YOUR THOUGHTS ARE
POISON TO IT.

YOU HAVE AIDED MY CAUSE, THE CAUSE OF CREATION ITSELF, FOR MY
CAUSE IS TO CHAMPION THE ENTIRETY OF ALL POSSIBLE EXISTENCE,
OF WHICH I AM JUST A PIECE. I AM A SERVANT OF

PANCREATION!

BUT ALAS, THIS DOES HAVE A COST. FOR YOU NOW HAVE THE
ENEMY'S ATTENTION. YOU ARE KNOWN TO IT AS ITS FOE. AND
IT CRAVES YOUR QUIETUDE, THE SILENCE OF YOUR OBLIVION.

DO NOT ALLOW IT VICTORY OVER YOU. CONTINUE
TO DREAM THE DREAMS OF WORLDS. IT IS YOUR
ONLY DEFENCE. IT IS OUR ONLY HOPE.

BEST OF LUCK, MORTAL

random vicissitudes grants sapience to charity which ser
mouths scattered across the profundity of ficescapes...

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Players
3-5

Time
2-4 hrs

Rating
Teen

magpie
GAMES

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APOCALYPSE
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