

WHISPERS FROM THE PIT

Are you really a superpowered character?

Salutations from the pit to all the Savages!

This issue of *Whispers* was inspired by a fan asking whether four color superheroes could be designed using the basic rules only.

The first thing I'll say is very important, so listen up—the *basic rules are not designed to support four color superheroes*. The Arcane Background (Superpowers) Edge makes it very clear that the Edge is for low-level pulp style superpowers. If you want a “proper” superheroes game, the *Necessary Evil Player's Guide* is what you need.

Since *Whispers* isn't a vehicle for handing out new rules, I'm going to look at the difficulties anyone wanting four color superheroes using only the main rulers will face. If you want to go ahead and create a setting this way, at least you'll know what to avoid. In case, you're wondering, yes I could design a four color superhero system that works using just the core rulebook. *Any of you could*, but it would require major changes to the rules to make it fit the genre.

The Arcane Background Edge

Right, so you don't want the *Necessary Evil Player's Guide* and are adamant you're sticking to the main rules only. First, be aware that the powers won't work the same as in the comics. The Arcane Background (Superpowers) Edge, which we'll just call “the AB” from now on, covers powers with a short duration limit. A hero clad in *armor* can't have it on all the time without changing the Edge.

Instead, the power is going to be switched on (perhaps his suit folds out around him like the aliens in *Stargate*) and off using a skill—the Armor skill, to be precise. In fact, every power is going to work this way, which leads to another issue—Skills.

Skills

Given that every superhero using the core rules needs one skill per power, most characters won't be “real” people—they'll be super powered people all the time. Sure, that's fine, but in every superhero game I've run, the on/off-superpowered persona has a lot to do as well. Just playing superheroes all the time isn't my personal cup of tea.

Of course, Fighting, Shooting, and Throwing might also be handy, depending on their background, but so are Intimidation, Notice, and Stealth, maybe even Climbing, Driving, or Piloting. Some characters should probably have other skills as well, so how are you going to buy all these skills?

The only sensible solutions are to raise the initial skill points a character gets or give them a set amount of skill points

(depending on how many powers they start with) only for superpower skills. The latter works better, as it stops characters choosing to play strong characters just stocking up on boost Strength and Fighting, the only skills they really need.

Power Points

Because of the way the AB is designed, every power has its own Power Point total. That's fine for one or two powers, but if you want more powers it means book-keeping, which really isn't the *Savage Worlds* way. If you want an easier way, just give every power a common pool to draw from. Of course, unless you want your superheroes to run out of points very quickly, you might need to up the initial Power Points a bit.

After all, when did you see Iron Man suddenly lose his armor during a fight because his power ran down? Sure, Spidey loses his webslingers occasionally, but that's a plot device when Marvel does it. Superman falling from the sky because his flying power ran out of juice? It'll never happen (at least not without kryptonite being involved).

So maybe you should ignore Power Points and make the power infinite? Sounds good, but you can bet players will go for *armor*, *blast*, *bolt*, *deflection*, and other such powers every time. Why? Because those are the powers which help you stay alive and take down your foes—and if they work all the time, why not?

Powers

Most existing powers work fine for a superhero game, but leaving *boost/lower trait* as a single power doesn't work. Sure, the Hulk has super strength, and buckets of it, but he couldn't get super Agility or super Notice as well using the same power. Each specific trait affected by this power would have to become a unique power to be balanced.

You also won't be able to create the Hulk using the basic rules, anyway. Why? Because at best he'll get a two die steps, and even a d12+2 (which would need the Hulk to have a d12 Strength in human form) doesn't do him justice. Even if you allow starting characters to take their attributes above a d12 (maybe just removing the limit or letting them take certain Legendary Edges), you still just create a character who is little more than a one trick pony. If I want a d12 Strength, that's going to cost four attribute points, leaving me just one die to up another attribute to average. Sure, you can hand out more attribute points, but then you're not using the rules as they stand.

Of course, going strictly by the book a hero also gets just one power for free. If he wants more, he has to use his

Hindrances to by the New Power Edge. And remember, every New Power requires a specific skill.

What if I want to play an invisible person? Do I have to wait until I'm Seasoned, or are all powers available at Novice?

Even worse, you can't build Spidey! Sure, you can use the wall walker spell from *Evernight* or the *Fantasy World Builder Toolkit*, or you can allow a player to take the Monstrous Ability of the same name, but that means either using extra books or converting powers from the Bestiary sections. The latter is certainly feasible, and I'd recommend it if you're going this route so you can expand the powers list, but remember you have to keep them balanced. If you're going to do that, you're really better off using *Necessary Evil* and saving a ton of work

Creating gizmos is, of course, very easy, as the standard Weird Science rules can be used with no alteration. Without the Weird Science skill no one can use your items, so at least you don't have to worry too much about them being stolen.

Damage

Okay, so I managed to get a d12 Strength for my starting character and I have *boost Strength*, which might get me d12+2 strength. Sweet, I can deal damage now with my fists of steel. Sounds fine until you meet Greatsword Man with his d8 Strength and +4 damage weapon. Yes, your Strength is higher, but his weapon didn't require him to buy the AB Edge. Assuming a single die has an average (which it doesn't), you'd get 8 for both (half of 12 +2 compared to half of 8 +4). Strong Man still has the slight edge, but it really doesn't make him a four color super strong character.

Neither of you can also bash down really tough objects, because you don't have Heavy Weapons or a high AP rating. So much for ripping out lamp posts as well to use as weapons. Face it, a d12+2 Strength isn't worth much in terms of true superheroes. How can you rectify this? Only by adding new rules or tweaking existing ones.

Okay, so you're a superhero and can absorb energy and huge amounts of damage. Well, actually I lied. You can have *armor* and *boost Vigor*, but you can't absorb energy beams, deflect them, regenerate damage (though you can buy *heal*), or anything else really cool. At best, you might get a Toughness of say 13 with a d12+2 Vigor and the armor power with a raise. Problem is, avoiding damage might be all you can do.

Of course, now you get the situation where Strong Man (d12+2 remember) can't hurt Armor Man very easily and lesser beings are looking for one or two raises. Strong Man might grab a greatsword of course, but that sort of defeats the point of four color superpowers.

Summary

So, while making four color superheroes with the basic rules is certainly possible, it's a steep hill to climb to reach the

top. Is it worth the effort? Well, I don't have a crystal ball, but for me, the greatest enjoyment from a setting is designing it in the first place. So while I haven't given you a handy package of changes, hopefully there's enough here to get your brains working on avoiding the pitfalls.

Wiggy

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