UNEARTHLY
Cosmic Heroes

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SECTION ONE: GETTING COSMIC

Soaring through space, wielding the power of an exploding sun, staring down an armada of battleships, wrestling with the ageless expressions of gravity and time - these are the exploits of cosmic heroes. They operate on a level beyond most supers, facing mighty challenges that match their own immense reserves of power. Unearthly: Cosmic Heroes provides you with the tools you need to supercharge your game into the cosmic realm.

Section One: Getting Cosmic discusses the most important part of any cosmic heroes game - the characters.

WHAT COUNTS AS COSMIC?

"Cosmic" is a general term for a large range of characters who operate on the extreme end of the power spectrum. In the comics, cosmic characters are capable of incredibly feats as a matter of course. If a character in a comic can decide to explode a sun in one panel, and then do so the next panel, then it's safe to say you're dealing with a cosmic character.

There is no clear cutting off point between "cosmic" and "ordinary" supers. The label is, in fact, more of a guideline to the types of stories told about the character, than a description of the

character's power level. (For example, a character who is capable of simultaneously controlling the mind of every human on earth unquestionably operates on a cosmic scale; but if that character is primarily concerned with running a school for gifted students in upstate New York, the character isn't treated as cosmic.)

Power Levels of 20 and higher are appropriate for cosmic play. X-traits, which are traits so powerful it's pointless to give them numbers, play an important role in cosmic games.

TYPES OF COSMIC BEING

The ranks of the cosmic include a wide variety of beings, but they fall into a few general categories. The discussion below can be used for inspiration when coming up with characters or adversaries for a cosmic game.

Mighty Mortals

The first type of cosmic being is a mortal whose powers allow them to operate on the cosmic level. These include beings who are charged with the power of stars, who achieve full mastery of the mystic arts, who have absolute command of a force of nature, and so on. They need not be human; sentient robots or animated trees might fit this category as well. They are the upper order of "ordinary" powered beings.

This band of cosmic beings generally sits around PL 15-20. They tend to be able to foot it in the cosmic realm only in a limited way; one or two of their powers are up there with the mightiest imaginable, but they are all too fallible in other ways. In very rare circumstances, mighty mortals may possess x-traits.

Mythic Lords

The second type of cosmic being is an entity from the mythological realm. These beings are another leap along the spectrum of power. This category includes gods, demons, nature spirits, angels, and great beasts such as world serpents and great dragons.

This band of cosmic beings generally sits around PL 20-30. They tend to be comprehensively suited to activity on a cosmic scale, with no obvious weaknesses, but neither are they at the absolute top of the pecking order. When you start operating at this level of power, your cosmic awareness almost always reminds you that there are even greater forces at work than you. Some mythic lords possess x-traits, but these are exceptional.

Extreme Beings

The third type of cosmic being is at the very extreme of imaginable might and power. These beings have power far beyond the greatest ordinary mortal. They are capable of reshaping all of reality on a whim. Included in this category are such beings as sentient suns, embodiments of a species-wide collective unconscious, fundamental sources of magic, ultimate godheads, ancient alien life-creators, and survivors from previous realities.

These beings tend not to be violent or destructive. In fact, they tend to be orderly and cautious, understanding that their actions can have far-reaching effects. Of course, there are exceptions to this trend.

This band of cosmic beings generally sits around PL 30-40, but many possess several x-traits, and some possess a majority of x-traits. As x-traits come to the fore, PL becomes less and less useful as a guide to comparison, because in more and more situations the being's x-traits put them beyond comparison.

Reality Principles

The fourth type of cosmic being is beyond what mortal mind an imagine. These beings are embodiments of fundamental principles of reality. They may be expressions of the entirety of time, or entire universal systems, or the process of entropy, or fate.

These beings cannot be represented in any way by conventional statistical systems. Every single aspect of their character is an x-trait. From a certain point of view, these beings they don't really exist at all.

COSMIC GOALS & COSMIC MOTIVES

All characters have both goals and motives. Goals are things the character is working to achieve; motives are the reasons for the goals. One motive can give rise to many goals.

Cosmic characters are almost always possessed of goals and purposes that match them in scale. Some of these goals are impossibly grandiose, or seem on the face of it to be ridiculous. However, for cosmic beings nothing is entirely beyond the realm of possibility.

Possible goals and motives include:
- To protect an entire world.
- To fight off death
- To change the very nature of thought
- To break causality
- To unravel the mystery of existence.
- To alter the functioning of gravity.
- To collapse all times into one.
- To stall the creation of all new life.

Most cosmic beings, however, are not entirely on a higher level. Usually their cosmic goals or motives are matched by something that is more easily understood. Love, fear, hatred, curiosity, self-doubt, and other conventional motives attach themselves to cosmic characters as easily as conventional ones. In fact, these touchstones of easy understanding can ground an otherwise incomprehensibly cosmic character, and provide a way for characters, players and GM to relate to the character concerned.

In play, it is a good idea to give a cosmic character either a goal or a motive that is easily understandable, and then pair that with a counterpart that is truly cosmic. For example, a character with a cosmic goal "resurrect all of my ancestors" might have a mundane motive "to be acknowledged as the greatest warrior in my family". Conversely, a character with a cosmic motive "to replicate the entire universe within my own mind" might pair this with relatively mundane goals such as "steal this focus crystal" and "defeat all enemies in this quadrant". These pairings ensure a character never drifts so far off into the realm of wild ideas that players and GM

cease to be interested in their activities.

COSMIC ISSUES

Certain issues are faced by almost all cosmic characters that are not faced by ordinary people. These issues arise on account of their power, and the way that power relates to a world of people without that power. Every cosmic character you create will have to deal with some of these issues eventually. Their responses can be decided as back story, or can be discovered in play, but either way the character will have to face these concerns.

These issues include the following:

Mastery
Cosmic power takes some getting used to. A character who develops or receives cosmic power is entering not just a new life, but a new kind of life. A new perspective on reality will follow suit when reality itself can be bent and broken by the character. Even characters whose power is innate will have to come to terms at some point with the meaning of their own awesome abilities. All cosmic characters will have to deal with the issue of mastery over their powers at some point.

Rulership
Cosmic power can be taken as a sign of authority, and can be used to gain rulership or to determine rulership over large groups of ordinary people. Moreover, a character displaying such power could be asked to assume rulership based on their demonstrated might. On a slightly smaller (and perhaps more ethically palatable) scale, leadership of groups can be rationalized by power in the same way. All cosmic characters will need to determine their stance towards the potential to lead, or rule, over others. For some, rulership will be an absolute goal; others will shy away from the responsibilities of leadership.

Protectorship
Cosmic power beyond those of others raises the question of responsibility. What responsibility is borne towards the world, given the great power to affect it? Is the role of protector onerous or simple? Is it a sacred duty or something to be

shirked or outright refused? In fact, is refusing the role of protector crucial in allowing people to determine their own future and stand on their own two feet? All cosmic characters will need to determine their stance towards assuming a role of protector of the weak.

Boredom

Many cosmic beings live for incredibly long spans, and across that time encounter little that is a true challenge to their prodigious abilities. How, then, do they stave off boredom? Is their mental system even set up to allow boredom, or is boredom just another weakness to which they are immune? Do they even want to go on living, or are they long past being done with life? Most cosmic characters will have to grapple with boredom and ennui at some point.

Relatioships

To a cosmic being, an ordinary person is inevitably a lesser being. They may live only a fraction as long, and they can never truly appreciate the world as the cosmic entity sees it. How do they see their relationships with ordinary people? Do they look upon mundanes with contempt, or with love and respect? Do they hide from normal relationships? Can a cosmic being fall in love? Will they try and educate the ordinary person to comprehend the true scale of the universe, or simply shelter them from the more traumatic aspects of reality? Most cosmic characters will have to engage with this issue at some point.

Temptation

Does power corrupt? Common sense says that it does, absolutely, but the truth may vary. When a cosmic being is mightier than anyone else on earth, but is a minnow compared to the great forces of the universe, does that make corruption more or less likely? How does the character respond to temptation? Why would they resist temptation? What if temptation disappears along with great power, in a karmic freedom from desire? Whatever the specific circumstances, all cosmic characters will have to deal with the issue of temptation sooner or later.

Mercy

How is opposition dealt with? Cosmic beings are almost certain to encounter foes who will be determined in their opposition. What policy will be adopted in the face of opposition? Will opponents be released, perhaps to continue their opposition? Or will they be simply eliminated when the opportunity arises? How powerful do you have to be before showing mercy stops being a risk? All cosmic characters have the power to determine in their own way how they deal with opponents, and as soon as they encounter opponents they will have to make some decisions about how to deal with them.

Code

Will the cosmic being behave in accordance to a code of behavior? Is mortal law a guide to be followed or a hindrance to be ignored? Is there a greater code, a rules-of-engagement for gods or a set of intergalactic directives, that must be followed instead? What will be the costs of ignoring the code and acting according to whim, instinct, or personal judgment? All cosmic characters are powerful enough to escape the normal obligations of society. They have to decide for themselves whether or not to be subject to a society's laws and punishments.

COSMIC POWERS

At the core of cosmic characters is their great power. Some aspects of cosmic powers are discussed in this section, including common power selections, different power sources and their consequences, and a discussion of 'cosmic energy'.

Common Powers

By their very nature, cosmic characters tend to be operating at a high enough level of existence that certain things come naturally to them in the same way that ordinary humans can walk, talk and eat. As a reflection of this heightened baseline, most cosmic characters possess the following powers:

- The Cosmic Action Suite
- The Cosmic Effect Suite
- Some movement power, usually Flight and/or Space Travel

Cosmic Action Suite

This Power Suite includes the basic set of immunities and senses for cosmic characters. All of these powers are bought per rank, with a maximum of the character's PL rank.

Note that each of these powers could be modified by feats, particularly by the Alternate Power feat. Also note that this suite may have to be broken up to account for anomalies, for example, Protection is limited by the Toughness cap, which means the character's Constitution score can force a lower Protection rank than for other powers. (A good, easy fix is to make some of the Protection ranks Impervious, so the cost ends up the same.)

- **Blast** (Cost: 2 points/rank)
- **Healing** (Cost: 2 points/rank)
- **Mind Shield** (Cost:1 point/rank)
- **Protection** (Cost: 1 point/rank)
- **Sensory Shield** (Cost: 2 points/rank)

Total Cost: 8 points per rank, maximum of PL rank

Cosmic Effect Suite

This Power Suite includes the basic set of immunities and senses for cosmic characters. All of these powers are bought at a flat cost.

- **Comprehend -** Languages (read, speak and understand all languages, can be understood by all regardless of language) - 4 ranks (Cost: 8 pts)
- **Immunity** (life support, inc. radiation, vacuum) - 9 ranks (Cost: 9 points)
- **Immunity** (cold damage) - 5 ranks (Cost: 5 points)
- **Immunity** (fire damage) - 5 ranks (Cost: 5 points)
- **Immunity** (fatigue effects) - 5 ranks (Cost: 5 points)
- **Immunity (**radiation damage) - 5 ranks (Cost: 5 points)
- **Super-Senses** - Awareness (one descriptor, e.g. Cosmic, Magical) - 1 rank (Cost: 1 point)
- **Super-Senses** - Blindsight - 4 ranks (Cost: 4 points)
- **Super-Senses -** Direction Sense - 1 rank (Cost: 1 point)
- **Super-Senses** - Distance Sense - 1 rank (Cost: 1 point)
- **Super-Senses** - Time Sense - 1 rank (Cost: 1 point)

Total Cost: 45 points

SOURCES OF POWER

Cosmic-scale power can come from any number of sources. These sources can be used as power descriptors. Cosmic-scale games often use similar sources of power as conventional games, but with a spin to account for the great scale. Possible power sources include:

Cosmic

The powers draw directly on some kind of "cosmic energy". This is common enough as a power source that it is described in a separate section, below.

Divine

The character's power stems from their connection to the divine, or their own divine nature. They may be a member of a pantheon of ancient gods, wielding enormous power as they have since antiquity, or they may be a newly empowered tool of a newly-discovered and poorly-understood divinity, or any other such arrangement. Divine powers may be limited to certain kinds of expression, as appropriate to the divine source in question; however, the most powerful divine beings are effectively unlimited regardless of their specific portfolio.

Extradimensional

A common source of cosmic power is other dimensions. This could be managed through a scientific or a mystical bond, but however it is explained, the character's power derives from a different kind of reality. Extradimensional sources for power are good choices because they do not have to follow any of the rules of the current reality.

Magical or Psionic

Using magic or psionics as a source of cosmic power doesn't require much in the way of extra explanation. Presumably, the magical or psionic system allows true masters to break the bonds of reality directly, and exert their will upon everything around them. However, relatively few cosmic beings have magic or psionics as a source of power. Mastery of magic or psionics to a cosmic level takes truly exceptional skill and understanding, and very few people are capable of this mastery, which tends to limit their numbers relative to other sources of cosmic power.

Personal

The powers draw on a potential that is inherent to the wielder. The implication is that this great power is within the character and has always been within the character, ready to be accessed. This could be a power that is latent in all members of the character's race, for example an ability to tap into the race's evolutionary potential and make use of that power now, or an ability to pluck enormous reserves of strength from a Jungian collective unconsciousness. It could also be something unique to the character, for example the universe could assign the character to be savior and hero of all that exists in the battle against anti-existence.

Technological

This is perhaps the rarest of sources for cosmic power. Dealing with power on a cosmic scale fits poorly with technology, which suggests that the power has been tamed and understood and harnessed by the technologist. However, occasional cosmic characters do derive their power from the extreme end of high technology, with devices or equipment that are miraculous in their power. For example, an alien race could send a champion out into space to see to their interests in a cosmic scale, and using their advanced technology they could broadcast enormous power to that one champion.

COSMIC ENERGY

When we think of cosmic characters in the comics, the most prominent examples are those whose power comes in the form of "cosmic energy". But what is "cosmic energy"?

If there is "cosmic energy" in your game, you may never need to figure out exactly what it is - just say it's a fundamental form of all the energy in the galaxy, and leave it at that. However, if your game will be soaring amongst the stars for a while, then you might be able to get some interesting game play out of a closer look at cosmic energy.

To define cosmic energy for your game, keep the following principles in mind:

• It is always meant to be science-fiction. "Cosmic energy" relates to quasars, white holes, superstring theory, quantum mechanics. This doesn't mean it has to make any sense. Famed cosmic-hero writer Jim Starlin once described a character's cosmic energy attack as "firing distorted exploding realities".

• It is always general-purpose, and a user of cosmic power can get it to do all kinds of things - blow things up, calm people down, light dark places, and so on. In play, these varied effects can be modeled with built-in alternate powers, or more commonly as dynamic alternate powers purchased on the spot with a timely use of Extra Effort.

• Cosmic Energy Control appears as a power in the core book, but it is just an example form of Blast. However, the suggested alternate powers provide a good list of alternative Cosmic Energy effects: Animation, Boost, Create Object, Dazzle, Disintegration, Healing, Snare, Teleport, Transform

• Cosmic Energy Control can also be used to counter other powers with a cosmic descriptor, particularly those drawing upon a similar power source. Depending on your game's conception of cosmic energy, it may also counter some electromagnetic energy effects.

• A character who uses cosmic energy will use it as a source for all powers. This means Cosmic Energy can also power other effects such as Force Field, Space Travel, and the effects in the Cosmic Action Suite and the Cosmic Effect Suite.

• Cosmic energy is by its nature limitless. The universe will never run out of cosmic energy, and there is nothing beyond its power. The only limitations to cosmic energy are those of the character using it.

• Depending on your game, you may wish to model Cosmic Energy as a variable power. Be cautious about this, however. In the hands of cosmic characters, variable powers are even more potent than normal. Unless you want your player characters to be able to do almost anything at any time, it is best to avoid a variable power at this level of play, and instead force characters to use power stunts and extra effort to accomplish a wide variety of outcomes.

COSMIC TECHNOLOGY

It is recommended that, to set technology at the cosmic level apart from 'ordinary' supers tech, it be treated as an entirely separate category. Cosmic technology can include everything from quantum converters to energy crystals to planetary computer network A.I.s, the important thing to note is that this technology is as far from ordinary electronic or mechanical tech that those Craft skills are of no use in dealing with it. Instead, the following Craft skill is useful:

Skill: Craft (Cosmic Technology)

You can create, alter, repair and jury-rig technology that ordinary humans cannot begin to comprehend. This technology can be used for virtually any purpose. Depending on the detail of your game setting, this Craft skill may be broken up into separate skills, such as Craft (spaceknight technology) and Craft (limbo wraith technology).

IMMUNITIES

One of the side effects of a cosmic-scaled game is that characters will have to spend a lot of points to get all their defensive attributes to a decent level. Defense, Saves and Toughness will all need to be very high to stand any chance of being useful. At ordinary levels of play, a character who has not invested in these attributes might still get lucky through good rolling, but at these high levels the difference between having an attribute and not having one can be enormous.

The best way to keep expenditure down is by focusing on your character's strengths and making use of Immunities to shore up weak spots. At ordinary levels, immunities are very expensive, but at these levels the economy has shifted. Immunities become a very cost-effective way to protect your character when you are looking at buying dozens of ranks in every defensive attribute.

As always with immunities, however, check with the GM for approval..

SPACE FLIGHT AS AN ALTERNATE POWER

Published rules explicitly prevent Space Travel from being used as an alternate power of Flight. There is some merit to this idea; Space Travel as an alternate power of Flight would allow a PL10 Flying character to have rank 20 Space Travel for the cost of just one Power Point. However, this is an exception to the normal freedom of alternate powers, and as a result there has been plenty of discussion about the rights and wrongs of this rule. There is a common trend for house rules to allow Space Travel as either an alternate power of Flight, as a Flight extra, or as an alternate Super-Movement power (like Dimensional Movement). Examples of each approach follow:

Flight Extra:
Space Travel (+1): The character gains the power Space Travel at the same rank as their Flight rank. Space Travel provides a top speed for long-distance travel in a more-or-less straight line, but for maneuvers in close situations, Flight is used.

Flight Power Feat:
Alternate Power - Space Travel: You gain the power Space Travel at a rank up to twice your Flight rank.

Super-Movement Form:
Space Travel: You can move from one section of space to another. For one rank, interplanetary travel is slow (taking days or weeks); for two ranks, it is medium speed (taking a day or so); for three ranks, it is fast (taking hours or even minutes).

Hyperdrive Movement: Hyperdrive Movement operates identically to Dimensional Movement, except it deals with journeys across space rather than across dimensions. For one rank you can move between your home planet and one other destination. For two ranks you can move between any destinations which are in your "known space". For three ranks you can move to any destination at all throughout space. Travel is achieved by moving into a 'hyperspace' dimension at the beginning of the journey and then back into normal space at the end of the journey. Hyperdrive movement has an Instant duration (although the Action drawback can be used if the journey involves spending some time in hyperspace).

You will need to decide for your own campaign which treatment of space travel you prefer. Consider the role of space travel in your game - if there will be frequent encounters in space, in which relative space-speed may play a part, then ensuring a separate Space Travel power, purchased separately, may be the way to go. On the other hand, if space is just what happens off-screen as the characters travel from world to world, then using a Super-Movement option may be most appropriate.

COSMIC ADVISOR

A common shtick in the comics is for very high-powered heroes, usually ordinary humans who have been gifted with enormous power, has some kind of cosmic advisor. The exact form of the cosmic advisor will vary. It may be a race of blue dwarves who you contact through your magic lantern. It may be the collective intelligence of a lost alien world in constant psychic contact with you. It may be a cosmically-aware tree that lives in your hall cupboard. Whatever the specific nature of the advisor, it can comment on your situation and provide some kind of guidance in using your powers or in dealing with the true nature of the universe. Like a Sidekick, a Cosmic Advisor is purchased for your character as a feat.

Feat: Cosmic Advisor

You have a cosmic character serving as your mentor and advisor. This character is not subject to the campaign's power level limit, and cannot aid you directly in adventures. The only benefit you receive from your cosmic adviser is advice, information and guidance.

Your cosmic advisor is considered to have the Communication power to the extent necessary to contact you in all ordinary circumstances. Being out of range of your cosmic advisor counts as a Setback and the player should be rewarded as is normal for a Setback.

You and the GM should collaborate to create a cosmic adviser suited to your character concept. The cosmic advisor is an NPC and is played by the GM. Depending on how the relationship is played, the cosmic advisor may not always wish to make contact with you!

SECTION TWO: BEYOND REALITY

MYSTERIES OF THE COSMOS

Cosmic games aren't just about beings who are far more powerful than run-of-the-mill supers; they are also about the deep nature of the setting. Cosmic beings don't just operate within the laws of the universe, they interact with those laws, and sometimes they even do battle with those laws.

In order to run a successful cosmic game, you'll need to put some consideration into these deep setting mysteries. Some of the issues related to this are discussed in this section.

When to make choices Usually, when making a comics universe, there is no grand plan in mind. Different creators make up bits and pieces in different stories, other creators come along and contradict old ideas, and still later some young writer tries to come up with an explanation for how it all makes sense. This can make the deep mysteries of supers universes deeply confusing, which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Creating material for your supers game can be like that. In different weeks you can steal this idea from this book, that idea from Joanna's character background, this idea from your notebook in college, and this idea from some old Jack Kirby comics and at the end of it you have a detailed, if not immediately coherent, cosmic universe.

However, you can also be much more structured in your approach, and create your entire cosmology in advance, with all the major blocks filled in and several of the details determined. This approach does have some major benefits - principally, it allows you to depict with confidence the entire setting in the earliest of games, instead of hastily and constantly improvising around the latest mad idea from the player group.

Most games will have cosmologies that evolve somewhere in between the extremes of total improvisation and total preparation. Often a game will begin with one or two key ideas in place, set up in character back stories or in GM preparations. These become the linchpins of everything that follows, guiding the creation of new elements in a logical succession. Sometimes new random pieces just turn up, and they get integrated into the slowly expanding back story with the same surety.

This is a very successful model, and it is the recommended one for cosmic-scale games. The model can be formulated as two simple rules. Follow these rules, and your game should develop with a maximum of wonderful detail and a minimum of extra work!

Rule for GMs:
Honor What Has Been Established
When a character back story mentions an alien god, take note of that alien god. When agents of the devil step in, take note of their existence. When a sage in another dimension speaks of the Palace at the End of Time, note down that there's a Palace at the End of Time. Unless you're deliberately out to mess with your players, you should never contradict previous material if you can help it. Everything that has already been established serves as fodder for new sessions of the game.

Rule for Players:
Explore The Unknown
When playing in a cosmic-scale game, don't leave questions unanswered or mystic relationships unexplored. Take some time to ask questions, to seek enlightenment, to challenge received orthodoxies. Look into contradictions and inconsistencies, and savor opportunities to head off down an unknown path. Your game-world will only expand when one of the characters takes the story down these lesser-traveled byways, so don't wait around - go for it.

HOW TO STRUCTURE
YOUR UNIVERSE
A cosmic universe will always have some underlying structure that can be explored through play. These structures often take the form of key sets of principles, which operate under and through everything that happens.

Some examples of sets are:
- Life - Death
- Heaven - Hell
- Chaos - Order
- Creation - Destruction
- Mind - Soul - Body
- Strong nuclear force - Electromagnetic force - Weak nuclear force - Gravitational force
- Existence - Void
- Infinity - Eternity
- Convergence - Divergence

Sometimes these sets will include balance principles, which embody the moderating positions of all other parts of the sets. Sometimes there will be no room for a balance principles.

For each of these sets in the cosmic universe, decide whether or not the set is Active or Passive.

☐ **Active** sets are those which have some role in the ongoing activities within the universe. An active Chaos/Order set might include two con-

versational cosmic entities, one representing chaos and one representing order. Both might be manipulating events to increase the chaos or order in the universe, perhaps working with the cosmic characters on a key mission, or working to foil them if they stand contrary to its interests.

□ **Passive** sets are those in which the members of the set may not have any power at all; by definition, it is hard to tell. The members of these sets may be simply ideas or figures of speech in the game setting. For example, the words "chaos" and "order" might be used to describe the behavior of important NPCs in the game, but apart from this they would have no other impact on unfolding events.

When structuring your own universe, keep these principles in mind. There is, theoretically, no limit to the number of sets that can be active at any one time. However, in order to have a cosmology that displays some consistency and makes for good, fun, stories, it is a good idea not to have more than two or three different active sets in your game. At least, not at first!

ADVICE FOR RUNNING COSMIC GAMES

Cosmic games require a different sensibility to ordinary games. A GM who tries to run a standard supers game, just using larger numbers, will find the experience unsatisfying at best and disastrous at worst. The sheer power of characters and villains casts a long shadow, and everyone needs to adjust their mindset to suit this fundamental change.

Scale

In cosmic games, scale is everything. If your setting isn't too worried about real-world physics, go even bigger and wilder still.

• **The Bigger The Better** - Go big. Go incredibly, mindblowingly big. Battleships the size of moons. Hotels the size of planets. Crushing forces powerful enough to turn air into diamond. Ringworlds, Dyson spheres.

• **The More The Merrier** - Go multiple. Don't stop with just one thing when you can have many things. Don't have just one sun - have two, side by side. Three black holes competing with each other can be much more dramatic than just one. Have the bad guys be an evil army, or an evil species, or an entire evil empire. Don't just have one problem going on - have lots of them happening, all at once.

• **Higher Stakes Are Always More Exciting** - Scale applies to drama as well. Put the fate of worlds at stake, or universes, or all reality. Don't just risk a hero's reputation - put their entire soul on the line.

The key thing to remember about scale is its relevance to your main characters. Enormous scale should never reduce the importance of your characters. The characters are the center of the game - everything else is just fancy set dressing.

There is an exception, of course. Scale should be used to make characters feel tiny and impotent if (and only if) that is the specific point being made. Even so, you don't want to overdo this. No-one turns up to the game table to be told their world-destroying cosmic character actually doesn't matter. Make sure that this point is made

neatly, even gently - it will be all the more significant for this delicacy of touch.

Apart from this, work to ensure that despite the scale, the characters remain relevant. Feeling that they matter is very important in a cosmic game. The whole point of a cosmic game is that the characters can do far more than ordinary heroes can. Some key ways to ensure relevance are:

• **Mobility -** Ensure that characters to get around. Get them from exciting places to exciting places; the less time spent in tedious travel through he vacuum of space, the better.

• **Influence** - Let your characters change things. The distinguishing point of cosmic characters is that they can change their entire environment; give them the story freedom to do so. Let them make suns explode. Allow them to sew black holes shut.

• **Personality** - Relate everything to people. A giant metal sphere that appears around the solar system, imprisoning everything, is a huge and dramatic menace - but revealing the alien warlord behind it is the best way to promote feelings of excitement and connection in your players and characters.

One fundamental consequence of the issue of scale is disparity. As power levels increase, the difference between "extreme" and "ordinary" gets larger and larger. This means that, more and more, characters will find themselves hopelessly and totally outmatched in some areas, while they in turn completely dominate in other areas. This changes the feel of cosmic games a great deal, and is dealt with in more detail below.

Challenge

When creating challenges for characters in cosmic games, a fundamental rule is reversed. In ordinary games, the basic assumption a GM should make is, the characters are limited in what they can achieve. In cosmic games, the rule of thumb is this: whatever it is, they can do it.

For example, in a typical game, if there was a gigantic evil spacecraft entering Earth's orbit, the GM would not just assume a group of ordinary heroes could destroy it. They might be able to, but finding a way and carrying it out will be significant challenges. In cosmic games, this is reversed. A gigantic evil spacecraft in Earth's orbit is well within the scope of most cosmic characters' destructive powers. The GM should expect a cosmic group's immediate response to this situation to be "we fly up to it and smash it to pieces", and they probably can do exactly that.

The GM should always expect that the characters (heroes and villains, PCs and NPCs) can do pretty much anything at all. Tasks themselves aren't the best sources of challenge in cosmic games. Good challenges come not from whether or not characters can do something, but from other questions that arise on the way:

• **How will they do it?** Will they take the fast, messy way or the slow, careful way? Will they stop the damaging process before they attack the source of power, or will they go straight for the heart come what may?

• **What will it cost to do it?** What will they have to sacrifice to achieve their goal? Innocent lives? Financial resources? Social influence? An alliance with a neutral force? Peace on earth and goodwill to all? Their dignity? Their own power?

• **What are they not doing?** Every action leaves other courses of action unexplored. By taking on threat A they leave threat B unattended. By devoting themselves to the mystery they are neglecting their home. What else is going on that they must ignore for the time being?

• **Who is trying to stop them?** The greatest challenge comes not from a task itself - almost anything static is ultimately achievable for those with

cosmic power - but from those who stand in the way. Are they mighty and determined to crush the characters? Are they weak but innocent and willing to lay down their lives to stop the characters? Will they use reason or violence or misdirection?

Flip these around, and you have a guide to creating challenge in cosmic games. Follow these rules when you're preparing and running games, and you will reliably create exciting and involving situations no matter how powerful the characters may be.

• **Ensure there are multiple routes to achieve any goal.** The routes should actually feel different, and present different kinds of difficulty. There should be different positives and negatives for each route. Also, don't make the mistake of having the differences be hidden or mysterious - the best way to create dramatic choices is to give more information about what is coming, not less.

• **Ensure that every route to a goal has an attendant cost.** Find ways to hurt the characters. Most of the time these hurts can and should be small - tactical losses, scrapes and bruises. Sometimes they can and should be large. Balance out the more effective routes with greater and more harrowing costs.

• **Create situations where characters must choose not just between different solutions, but between different problems.** Layer in lots and lots of challenges and force characters to face them all at once. Have neglected problems change, worsen, or solve themselves in an unexpected way. Cosmic characters are capable of roaming great distances easily, which means they don't have the easy excuse of "I'm here so I'll deal with this challenge, the other is too far away".

• **Place obstacle NPCs in the way.** Give the NPCs clear motivations for their opposition. Play the NPCs hard to stymie the characters - they are a dynamic force and the best source of opposition in any task. Memorable NPCs make for memorable games.

Resolution
Challenges in cosmic games are usually resolved in ways similar to challenges at ordinary power levels. The GM is on relatively familiar ground here, at least! However, there are a set of tropes that turn up particularly often in Cosmic games, in part due to the massive power disparities that sometimes exist. Some of these common ways of dealing with extreme challenges include:

• **Supernova Blast! -** the character cuts loose with an extreme blast of ultimate power, drawing on depths they had not previously accessed.

• **Sacrifice** - the character makes an ultimate sacrifice, perhaps of part of their own cosmic power, in order to take out the enemy...

• **Light of Reason or Heart of Compassion** - the character makes use of an interpersonal skill to show the opponent how they should listen...

• **Mystic Logic Prevails** - the character takes some unexpected action according to the principles of a hidden logic system that they have cracked...

• **Soul Access** - the character digs deep into their heart and soul to find new reserves of energy and strength...

ADVENTURE IDEAS

If you are seeking inspiration for adventures in the cosmic realm, the best advice is the same for any game - look at the hero characters. What do they care about? What do they fear? What do they represent? Once you know the ideas that animate the heroes, start coming up with adventures that reflect these ideas. Don't worry about being subtle - subtlety doesn't have much place in a cosmic game.

• **Endanger what they love** - whatever it might be that they care about, a planet, a person, a system of justice, a painting, whatever it is, put it in danger. The danger can be accidental, for spice in an otherwise unrelated adventure, or it can be very specifically directed at the story target. Make the characters really feel that their most loved thing could be destroyed. (And the best way to do that is to risk actually destroying it.)

• **Challenge their principles -** whatever the character stands for, create enemies that represent opposing ideas. For example, a character who draws on the saving power of religious belief could face corrupt religionists, or enemies dealing in blind faith, or evil and destructive atheists. Give the character some foes who stand for principles with which he will violently disagree.

• **Embody their failings** - find the most noble aspects of the character, and create a counterpart who represents the exact opposite. Someone who made all the wrong choices, someone who embraced the dark side that the hero rejected. This could be a literal embodiment of a character's inner darkness - the cosmic comics are full of dark counterparts drawn from the inner psyche of heroes by mysterious cosmic forces and given

a life of their own. It could also just be another character whose story resonates with the hero character's story.

• **Expose their flaws** - if you have characters with deep personal flaws, exploit those flaws for all you are worth. Have enemies draw on them, have the character do battle with them, have crisis after crisis tug directly on the flaw within the character. In cosmic games, the biggest weakness of a character is his personal failings, so make them feel these failings - the stories will make it all worthwhile.

• **Make them ordinary** - for a change of pace, put them in a situation where their cosmic powers aren't much use. Perhaps everyone in this setting has cosmic powers, or perhaps their powers are suppressed somehow. Build an entire adventure around what the characters will do if stripped of their cosmic distinctiveness.

CAMPAIGN IDEAS

What about the big picture? What is the main driver for your game? Who are your characters and where is it all going? Here are some ideas for cosmic campaigns.

Order of Protectors

The player characters are members of a structured order with a mission to protect the universe. They could be a mystical order, protecting reality from mysterious other-dimensional threats, or an intergalactic order, with protector groups assigned to high-vulnerability worlds throughout the universe. Key questions include, how were the characters selected (were they recruited, or abducted against their will, or born into the job), where are the difficult parts of their job (does the job sometimes involve doing things they don't agree with, or that are opposed by the very people they try to protect?), and what secrets are held by the order of which they are a part (do the characters know the true purpose of their order, and can they trust it?) Key NPCs will be mentors, advisors and colleagues. Key villains include those who threaten whatever the characters protect, and those who wish to see the order disbanded or replaced.

Investigators into Mystery

The player characters are committed to the investigation of deep and profound mysteries about reality. The further they follow these investigations, the more danger they face. They could be an independent group of researchers seeking knowledge for the sake of knowledge, or desperate heroes struggling to uncover a secret needed to save all reality. Key questions include, what is the mystery they seek to solve and what other secrets will they uncover along the way (the true nature of time, the reality or otherwise of God), who can they trust on their search (are some allies really intending to turn their discoveries against them, and who really benefits from what they intend to reveal?), and what moral and ethical questions will they face when they learn what they seek? Key NPCs will be fellow searchers, keepers of secrets, protectors of mysteries, rival searchers, and the servants and embodiments of cosmic principles.

Warriors for a Cause

The player characters are aligned with a force greater than themselves, but not as a reactive order of protectors. Instead, they are pro-active advocates for this force. They seek out and challenge anything that threatens their allegiance. They could be a group of enforcers of the laws of time, bouncing through history and future to shut down attempts to mess with the laws of causality, or a flight of angels, seeking to redeem whole populations in the face of devilish temptation and opposition. Key questions include, how committed are the characters to their mission (are some of them harboring questions or doubts?), what kinds of actions do they undertake for their grand purpose (are they hunters, or inquisitors, or proselytizers?), and what impact does their allegiance have on their lives (what must they forsake in order to be warriors?). Key NPCs will be higher-ranking figures in their cause, those who have turned from or betrayed the cause, and those whose own different missions bring them repeatedly into contact with the characters. Key villains are those those who stand against the cause, and those who seek to pervert the cause for their own ends.

Rogue Wanderers

The player characters are not aligned with any great order or master. Instead, the characters are true independents, wandering as they see fit and making their own rules. They will have their own goals, which may be to simply find some peace, or to discover the answers to personal mysteries. They could be the only survivors from a pantheon of Gods stricken by Ragnarök, seeking to find a new existence on their own terms, or they could be the most intelligent minds on the planet using their genius to unlock new possibilities for themselves along with the secrets of the universe. Key questions include, what secrets do the characters hold (do they have other ties to places and people that cannot be trusted?), what goals do the characters seek (freedom, peace, purpose?) and how will their great powers help or hinder their quest? Key NPCs include fellow rogue wanderers, particularly those who have taken more or less moral paths than the player characters, and also representatives of numerous causes and allegiances who will try to recruit the characters to their causes. Key villains will be those who oppose the freedom of the characters, those who have personal issues with them, and those who see unaligned beings as easy prey.

Arch Nemesis

The player characters share a cosmic foe. The existence and threat of this foe brings them together and sustains their relationship, as well as driving many of their actions. The heroes are not free to choose their own destinies, not as long as this determined enemy is at large. They could be a group of Saints who have realized the Devil has managed to kidnap and replace God and are consequently on the run; they could be embodiments of the different planets of the solar system, threatened by an entropic alien emperor from beyond the stars. Key questions include, what is the nature and purpose of the nemesis, why have the characters survived this long, and what would the characters rather be doing than battling this enemy? Key NPCs include people previously threatened by the nemesis, people who don't believe the threat and cause problems for the characters, and people who tacitly support or even worship the threat. Key villains will be the nemesis itself, and all its allies and subordinates.

Reality's Champions

The player characters are united in the face of a threat from another reality. Another reality starts to encroach on and devour this reality, and the only way it can be stopped is by the by whatever process, the player characters are the only ones who can fight for this reality as it comes into conflict with another reality. Key questions include, why is it up to the characters to stop this change (were they selected by the universe? are they themselves touched by the energy of the other reality?), what is the nature of the other reality (would the new reality really be so bad?), and why is this assault happening at all? Key NPCs include those who are most endangered by the reality change, those who welcome the reality change, and perhaps someone from a place that has already been overwhelmed in this way. Key villains will be the beings driving the reality change, and those who blame the characters in some way for causing the problems emerging from the change.

All of these ideas will benefit from discussion among players and GM before making final plans. Supers games are particularly prone to run into trouble because the participants have different ideas about what the game is going to be about - the very best thing you can do for your game is try and head that off at the pass by talking it through a bit in advance and developing a game that appeals to everyone. Usually the GM will come to the party with a core idea, but be ready to modify that core idea before it gets locked down!
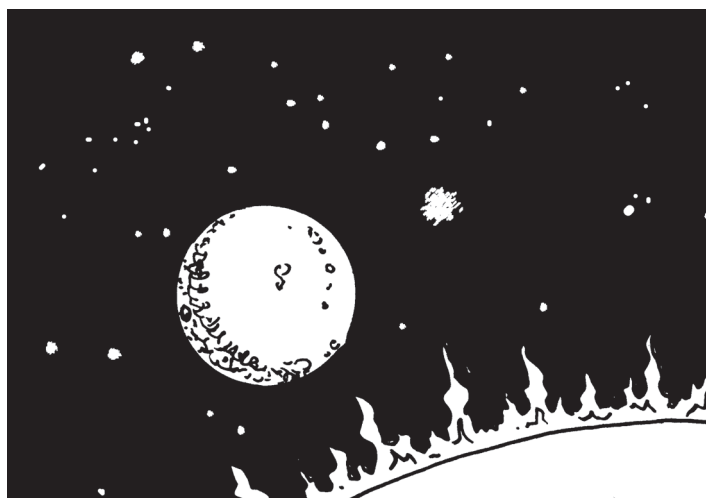
SECTION THREE: CRUNCH TIME

When you're dealing with truly cosmic-scaled beings, the way rules work has some tricky hooks and unexpected outcomes. These areas are discussed below.

BIG NUMBERS

The numbers that you use in a cosmic-scaled game can be an order of magnitude greater than those you'd use in a standard game. These numbers can be quite intimidating, and can seem like they will break the system under their sheer size. However, this is not the case. There are consequences to high numbers, but the system will still work fine - as long as you're aware of how it copes with the large numbers. This section deals with the consequences of big numbers in your game.

COSMIC COMBAT

Combat rules are, very sensibly, scaled to the activities of approximately person-scaled actors. But at the cosmic scale, any sense of ordinary

limit goes out the window. What if a bad guy the size of the sun engages in a wrestling match with a heroic group of moon-sized warrior-gods, all in a magical sub-dimension where trees the size of solar system watch with millions of open eyes? How the heck do you begin to use the rules for this?

Don't panic! The core rules scale surprisingly well to these most high-powered levels...

Just use the numbers! Don't worry too much about deciding what seems possible or not possible. Just use the numbers. The system itself will tell you what is or isn't plausible. At this scale you're well beyond reasonable cause and effect, so just roll with it... and roll the dice!

LARGE DIFFERENCES

One of the consequences of playing at high levels is that the differences between high-ranking characters and low-ranking ones are magnified. In a PL10 game, if a character with no particular ability in something takes on a character with maxed-out ability, the odds are heavily in the maxed-out character's favor, but the degree of success will likely be small and there's also a chance that it will work out the other way around.

However, in a PL20 or higher game, these differences get much more significant. The chance of a character with no ranks getting a victory over a character with maxed-out ranks is essentially nil, and the potential for an enormous degree of success is high.

This has some interesting consequences for conflicts at this level.

• **Pick your battles.** If you can target a weak spot in an opponent or a challenge, then go for it. The magnitude of difference means you will be able to do most damage by targeting that spot. Likewise, avoid an opponent's strong points - they are probably beyond your capacity to damage. The most important thing to remember at this scale is the best way to achieve success is to know your opponent and use that knowledge.

• **Remember to seek and provide aid.** If you can get a large number of people backing you up, then the Aid action can be the difference between success and failure. The only limit to Aid in combat is that the aiding party must be in a position to attack - and with a large enough opponent, that won't be much of a problem. Similarly, the only limit to Aid Another out of combat is the GM's judgment of what is appropriate for the task and conditions. Aiding is the single best way to take on challenges much greater than you.

• **Use Extra Effort.** The harder you push yourself, the better. Every story works best when the characters within it are really giving their all, and the system of Extra Effort lets you do exactly that. Choose your moment and then don't hold back, go all-in with the Extra Effort and see if you can crack open what needs to be cracked open.

• **Use the Story.** Conflicts don't happen in a vacuum. Whenever there's a challenge, there is a situation around it, and more often than not there'll be an easier way through the challenge somewhere in that story. Go and look for it. Be creative, pay attention, speak out loud about your intentions. Sometimes a GM will respond to your initiative with a whole new story strand that didn't exist before, since the possibility hadn't occurred to them. Take the initiative in creating good story, and conflicts will be solved more easily.

FATIGUE AND EXTRA EFFORT

At cosmic scales, with power and ability ranks that sometimes rise high above 20, the impact of modifiers for Extra Effort and Fatigue is negligible. In order to preserve the desired impact of these modifiers, it is recommended that they are scaled in accordance with the character's power, as follows.

It is not recommended that conditions other than Fatigued and Exhausted are scaled in this way.

(In all of the following, where division is used, round down for bonuses and round up for penalties - in other words, do not favor the character with your rounding!)

Scaling Extra Effort

• **Check bonus** - Add a bonus to any single ability, skill or power check, not including attack rolls. The bonus is equal to the character's Power Level divided by 5.

• **Increase power** - Increase a power's ranks for one round. The increase is a number of ranks equal to the character's Power Level divided by 5.

• **Increase carrying capacity** - Add a bonus to the character's effective Strength for determining carrying capacity for one round. The bonus is equal to the character's Strength divided by 4.

• **Power stunt, Willpower, Surge** - no change to these effects of Extra Effort

For example, a PL 52 character with Blast 48 uses Extra Effort to increase the power of the Blast. The power is increased by 10 (52 divided by 5, rounding down because it is a bonus). The character has Blast 58 for one round thanks to extra effort.

A character with 50 Strength uses Extra Effort to increase her carrying capacity for one round. Her Strength receives a bonus of 12 (50 divided by 4, rounded down because it is a bonus). The character has an effective carrying Strength of 62 for one round thanks to extra effort.

Scaling Fatigue

• **Fatigued** - Fatigued characters suffer a penalty to effective Strength or Dexterity equal to the score divided by 5, and a penalty to attack and defense equal to the bonus divided by 10.

• **Exhausted** - Exhausted characters suffer a penalty to effective Strength or Dexterity equal to the score divided by 2, and a penalty to attack and defense equal to the bonus divided by 4. These penalties replace any penalties for Fatigue.

For example, a character with 50 Strength, 16 Dexterity, Attack +36 and Defense +25 is fatigued. Her Strength receives a penalty of -10 (50 divided by 5) and her Dexterity receives a penalty of -4 (16 divided by 5, rounding up because it is a penalty). Similarly, her Attack receives a penalty of -4 and her Defense a penalty of -3. This gives her effective totals of 40 Strength, 12 Dexterity, Attack +32 and Defense +22 while fatigued.

The same character is then exhausted. The penalties become Strength -25, Dexterity -8, Attack -9, Defense -7. This gives her effective totals of 25 Strength, 8 Dexterity, Attack +27 and Defense +18 while exhausted.

POWER LEVELS ABOVE 20

The standard progression for Power Level continues beyond PL 20. As Power Level increases, elements of the system become more and more unstable. However, this instability only calls for caution by GM and players, and for the application of common sense. The fundamental usability of the rules system remains.

Unearthly contains advice for characters from PL 21 as high as PL 120. Very high PL characters will be rare, however; in most situations, characters at such exceedingly high levels will be modeled using X-traits. However, in some situations, particularly in very high-powered games, these exceptionally high PLs will be useful in play.

• All of the following have a limit that is equal to PL: Attack and Defense, Toughness, Strength bonus, Constitution bonus, all Save DC modifier

• All of the following have a limit that is equal to PL + 5: Save bonus, Skill rank, Dexterity bonus, Intelligence bonus, Wisdom bonus, Charisma bonus

Examples:
Limitations for a PL 30 character: Attack +30, Defense +30, Toughness +30, Strength +30, Dexterity +35, Constitution +30, Intelligence +35, Wisdom +35, Charisma +35, Fortitude save +35, Reflex save +35, Will save +35, Save DC modifier of +30 (DC 40), Skill rank of 35.

Limitations for a PL 80 character: Attack +80, Defense +80, Toughness +80, Strength +80, Dexterity +85, Constitution +80, Intelligence +85, Wisdom +85, Charisma +85, Fortitude save +85, Reflex save +85, Will save +85, Save DC modifier of +80 (DC 90), Skill rank of 85.

Ability Scores for high ability modifiers are easily found: double the modifier and add 10. So a +85 ability score bonus corresponds to an ability score of (2*85)+10, or 200.

The highest ability score in **Unearthly** is a bonus of +125, which is found in maxed-out ability scores for PL 120 characters (not Strength or Constitution). This corresponds to an actual ability score of 260. Thus, 260 is the highest possible ability score. This is such a phenomenally large number that there really isn't any need for it, let alone anything higher!

SIZE CATEGORIES

In supers games, sometimes things get really big. Characters and creatures the size of buildings aren't uncommon. In fact, characters the size of mountains aren't really uncommon either. And when you get out to the cosmic scale, you can have people in your stories who are the size of planets, or even larger.

How do you model this in your games? The largest size category in the core rules is Awesome, a mere 128 feet tall. That isn't nearly big enough to represent the most enormous beings in supers games!

The rules for size are easily extrapolated from the categories we do have lifted. The Extended Growth Chart (see next page) features details for all size categories, listed by their rank in the Growth power, from rank 0 (size category Medium) to rank 120 (as big as the sun).

Included on the chart are the Strength and Constitution scores of a character with that many ranks of Growth. (Remember, each rank of Growth provides a +2 increase to Strength and a +1 increase to Constitution). To work out the ability score bonus, subtract 10 from the ability score and then halve what remains. So an ability score of 250 corresponds to an ability score bonus of (250-10)/2, or +120.

Also included are the combat modifier from size, the grapple modifier from size, and the intimidate modifier from size.

Some fighting space information is given, but at larger sizes these are simply replaced with a "!" sign. If you're discussing a character who is the size of the moon, the idea of a fighting space relevant to ordinary-sized creatures completely breaks down. Similarly with Reach, at higher sizes reach is replaced with a "!" sign.

Finally, the cost of that number of Growth ranks is provided in the final column.

UNEARTHLY EXTENDED GROWTH CHART

Rank	Height	Descriptor	Str	Con	Combat	Grapp	Intim.	Space	Reach	Cost
0	6 ft.	Medium	10	10	+0	+0	+0	5 ft.	5 ft.	0
4	8 ft.	Large	18	14	-1	+4	+2	10 ft.	10 ft.	12
8	16 ft.	Huge	26	18	-2	+8	+4	15 ft.	10 ft.	24
12	32 ft.	Gargantuan	34	22	-4	+12	+6	20 ft.	15 ft.	36
16	64 ft.	Colossal	42	26	-8	+16	+8	30 ft.	15 ft.	48
20	128 ft.	Awesome	50	30	-12	+20	+10	40 ft.	20 ft.	60
24	250 ft.	Tall as Niagara Falls	58	34	-16	+24	+12	60 ft.	30 ft.	72
28	500 ft.		66	38	-20	+28	+14	120 ft.	60 ft.	84
32	1,000 ft.	Tall as Eiffel Tower	74	42	-24	+32	+16	200 ft.	100 ft.	96
36	2,000 ft.	Tall as Empire State	82	46	-28	+36	+18	400 ft.	200 ft.	108
40	4,000 ft.		90	50	-32	+40	+20	800 ft.	400 ft.	120
44	8,000 ft.		98	54	-36	+44	+22	!	!	132
48	3 miles	Tall as Mt. Everest	106	58	-40	+48	+24	!	!	144
52	6 miles		114	62	-44	+52	+26	!	!	156
56	12 miles		122	66	-48	+56	+28	!	!	168
60	24 miles		130	70	-52	+60	+30	!	!	180
64	50 miles	In the stratosphere	138	74	-56	+64	+32	!	!	192
68	100 miles		146	78	-60	+68	+34	!	!	204
72	200 miles		154	82	-64	+72	+36	!	!	216
76	400 miles	Touching space	162	86	-68	+76	+38	!	!	228
80	800 miles		170	90	-72	+80	+40	!	!	240
84	1,600 miles		178	94	-76	+84	+42	!	!	252
88	3,200 miles	Big as the Moon	186	98	-80	+88	+44	!	!	264
92	6,400 miles		194	102	-84	+92	+46	!	!	276
96	12,800 miles	Big as Earth	202	106	-88	+96	+48	!	!	288
100	25,000 miles		210	110	-92	+100	+50	!	!	300
104	50,000 miles		218	114	-96	+104	+52	!	!	312
108	100,000 miles	Big as Jupiter	226	118	-100	+108	+54	!	!	324
112	200,000 miles		234	122	-104	+112	+56	!	!	336
116	400,000 miles		242	126	-108	+116	+58	!	!	348
120	800,000 miles	Big as the Sun	250	130	-112	+120	+60	!	!	360

(Note that size penalties to Stealth are not indicated on the table. If the GM really wants characters as tall as Mt Everest to have a chance of using Stealth at all, the penalty to Stealth is equal to the number of Growth ranks.)

SIZE AND POWER LEVEL

When you're dealing with truly enormous beings, the Strength and Constitution bonuses they get as part of their Growth ranks push them quickly into the upper ranks of Power Level. This doesn't always fit. For example, if you're running a group of PL 20 heroes, you don't necessarily want the Living Skyscraper to be a PL 36 villain.

This problem can be avoided simply enough, by adding a Flaw to Growth.

Growth Flaws:

Lesser Strength (-1): Each rank of Growth increases your Strength by 1 point only, the same increase as for Constitution

Abilities Unconnected (-2): Your Growth ranks do not increase either your Strength or Constitution at all.

The 'Lesser Strength' flaw effectively doubles the size of a character you can at a given Power Level. The 'Abilities Unconnected' flaw gives you complete free reign to disconnect size from Power Level, but should only be used on the understanding that appropriate abilities will be given to the character. In all cases, lower Strength scores can be offset by ranks in Super-Strength.
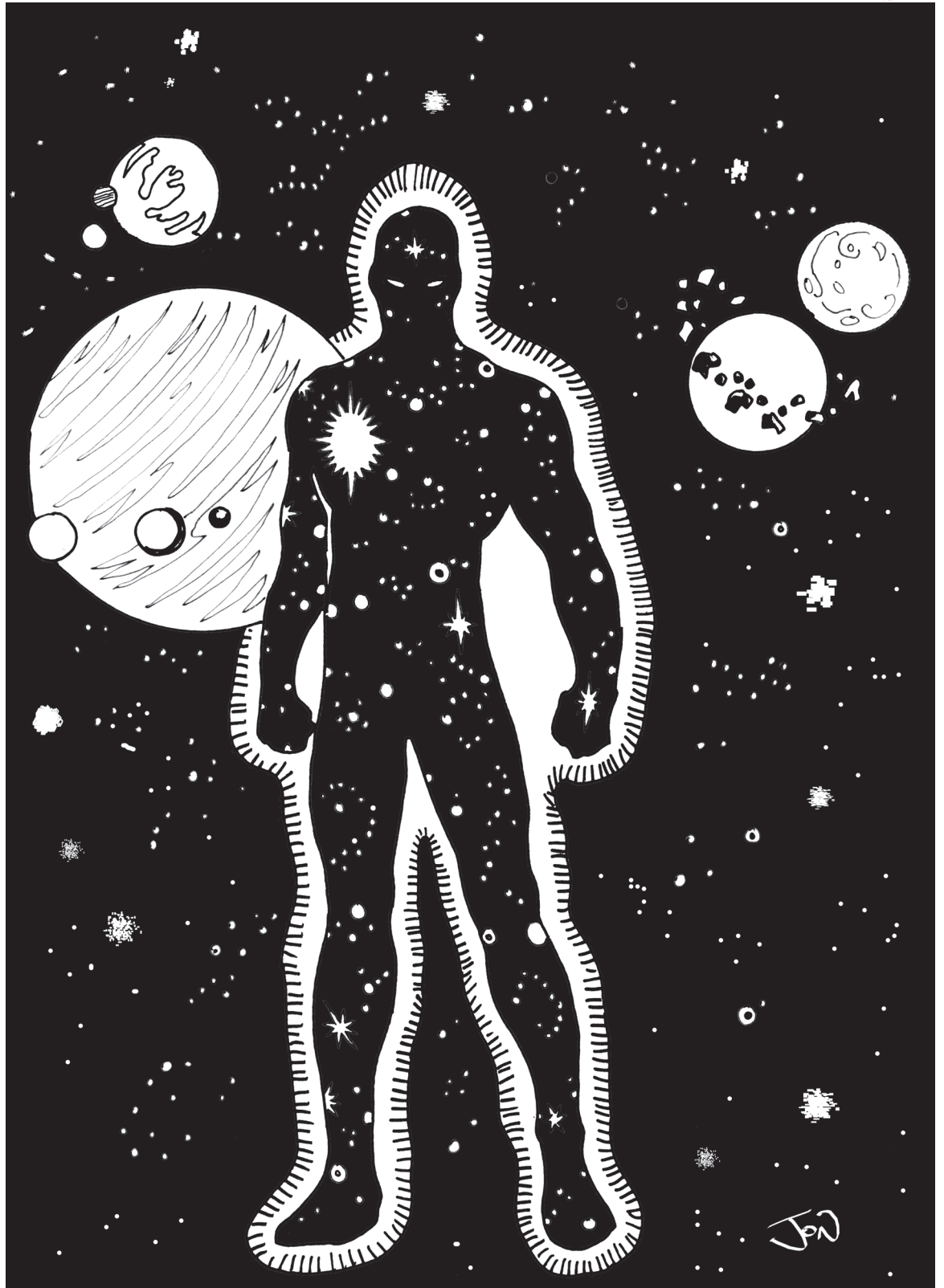
SIZE AND ACTION SPEED

The most gigantic beings probably don't move fast. A creature the size of a mountain must take a while to swing its giant leg over to stomp on someone, when you think about it sensibly.

And right there is the heart of the matter - mountain-sized creatures are already straining credibility. You're well into the realm of fantasy with almost all such super-giants. Is suspension of belief really going to be broken if the creature gets to swing a punch all the way from Hoboken to Delaware in a single round?

There are two general ways to deal with this issue. First of all, just ignore it. This is the way to go if you're playing in a game with a golden-age ethos and sensibility, or a more cartoon-styled game. If it can be drawn in a single panel of a comic, then the character should be able to do it in one round.

The second way is to correct for it using Drawbacks. Give the gigantic being a few ranks of the Action Drawback for all physical actions that would take time to use.

For example, the gigantic world-destroyer Damoclon uses a Sword of Awesome Justice to split in half planets it deems unworthy. Damoclon might have a rank 6 Action Drawback for the Strike power associated with the sword, meaning Damoclon needs one hour to make a single swing of its blade.

These Drawbacks are only needed for physical actions, not for actions that do not require physical movement through space.

Damoclon can use the Gaze of Unpity, a blast of energy emanating from the eyes. Everyone caught within the blast instantly understands the nature of their planet's sins, leading to despair and resignation to the coming destruction. This Gaze is an instant effect, and no action Drawback is needed.

Action Drawbacks are designed to be applied to powers, but in this case the Drawback applies to ordinary actions as well. To reflect this, the Action Drawback should be applied to "general physical actions" as well. It is recommended that "general physical actions" counts as the equivalent of five powers, and so requires five applications of the Action Drawback.

Damoclon takes "Drawback: General Physical Actions" at rank 6, which provides 30 points of Drawback. This is in addition to the Drawback for the Sword of Awesome Justice and for other physical-action powers.

However, it should be understood that correcting for this issue can create more problems downstream. Any physical battle with an immense and slow being is hard to negotiate. Consider a situation where such a being tries to stomp on a non-flying hero. If it takes ten rounds to bring its foot down, does that give the hero a chance to get away? Can the immense being adjust where its foot will land before it does, to stop the hero from scooting out from underfoot? Is such an attack really best modeled by an ordinary attack roll, or should it be treated more like a rockfall, giving the hero a Reflex save to get clear? There is no single answer to these questions, and the GM should be prepared to face them and make decisions throughout an encounter with such a huge being. As long as the answers are consistent, there is no wrong answer to these questions, either.

Note that gigantic, slow beings create new opportunities for drama. An entire adventure could thus take place in the time it takes Damoclon to swing the Sword of Awesome Justice, as the heroes frantically search for a way to avert the coming destruction of the planet!

PLOT DEVICE CHARACTERS

The core rules discuss Plot Device characters briefly and provide a few examples. These are characters who are not modeled in the system like other characters - instead they are treated as tools for the GM to use as appropriate in a story.

One of the rationales for treating a character as a plot device rather than a statted-up individual is the prodigious power that the character might possess. In cosmic games, beings with prodigious power turn up rather more often than in ordinary games, and they can be interacted with more thoroughly to boot. As a result, it is a good idea to think through some of the detail of how you will handle plot device characters in your cosmic-level game.

Understanding the Character

First, you want to determine your plot device character's key function. What role in the plot will they take? Are they there as a source of temptation for the characters? As a source of frustration? As a constant reminder that the character's powers are far from absolute? What does this character bring to the story? The plot device character's goal is a clue to their key function, but it is not the whole story.

For example, a plot device character might desperately want to abduct a famous movie star, but the character's key function in the story might be to demonstrate that magic sometimes causes more problems than it solves.

Second, you want to provide a rationale for the character's exemption from the normal rules. Why can't this character be modeled as a normal character with a full suite of statistics. What sets them apart? Is it their awesome power? Is it because they need to be so flexible that assigning numbers will defeat the purpose of the character? What is the reason for this special treatment?

Once you have noted the key function and the exemption rationale, you are in a much better position when it comes to preparing for and using the character in your game.

Choosing X-Traits

X-Traits can be used for any trait which needs to be left undefined by the system. This usually means that player characters can never, ever better the character in this particular trait.

Look again at your plot device character's key function, and its reason for exemption. What ability scores, powers, and so on need to be left undefined in order to fit? In what specific ways will the character always be better than any hero? Call these traits the X-traits.

Now, consider other aspects of the character. Are there any other elements which would be useful as X-traits? Consider these one by one. Will there ever be a situation where the player characters will need to test themselves against these traits? Is there any chance that the heroes will be able to challenge the character's supremacy in this specific area? If so, don't mark this out as an X-trait. Otherwise, add these traits to the X-trait list.

Now, what remains you can model using conventional numbers. Don't worry about PL or cost, simply give numbers that seem to fit for every other aspect of the character. Don't feel that you need to model every aspect of the character now - feel free to leave some aspects undefined. Perhaps in play you will realize that other powers need to be added, or you will decide exactly what numbers to assign to saves.

The advantage of having conventional statistics for some aspects of a plot device character is simple. Using a plot device character is difficult - the GM must constantly work to invent on the fly every aspect of the character's activities, which is quite unlike how every other character and situation is handled. Using ordinary statistics takes this improvisational pressure off for numerous aspects of the character, and allows the GM to focus creative energy on the important bits where it is really needed.

Behavior Rules

Plot device characters are unlimited statistically. They are not held back by numbers, but can define for themselves just how mighty their actions are. They are completely free in these numerical dimensions.

To balance this out, you need to limit plot device characters in another way. Plot device characters should always be created with clear behavior rules. They may be able to do just about anything statistically, but behaviorally they should always be constrained.
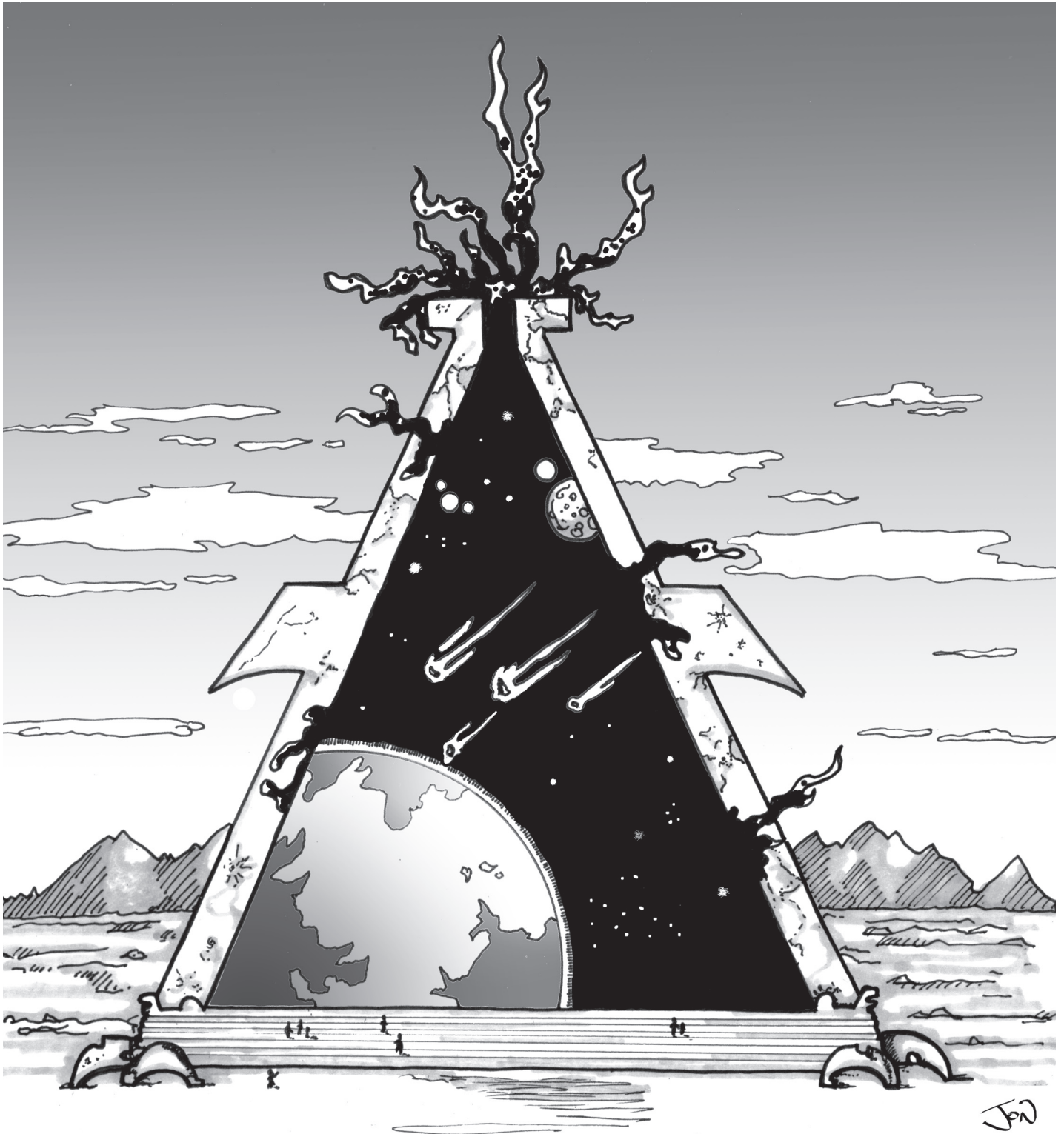
Create for your plot device character a set of behavior rules. These are rules that the character will always follow. They may be imposed from without, like a set of divine laws that all angels or demons will follow; or they might emerge from the character's nature, like a personality trait that requires the character to commune with the home planet before making any major decision. These rules should always be tied to the character's goals and function in the story.

Behavior rules are important because they are weaknesses. Heroes who discover a plot device character's behavior rules will be able to exploit this knowledge against the character. It levels the playing field, just a little bit at least.

X-Traits vs X-Traits

What happens when two plot device characters bring their X-traits into conflict? The GM has several options here.

• Decide what will be most dramatic, and go with that.

• Evaluate on the fly which character is more powerful, and go with that.

• Describe a balanced conflict and ask the player characters to take action to tip the balance in one direction or the other.

• Leave the result unrevealed - disguise the outcome or remove the characters somehow.

• Flip a coin and go with the result.

In all cases, the GM should not let such conflicts steal away the focus of a story from the players. Plot device characters are not and should not be the focus of a story - so get the conflict resolved so the focus can return to the real stars, the player characters.

SECTION FOUR: FIRST APPEARANCES

This section introduces three sample characters for your cosmic games. The first is an intergalactic detective; the second is an ambiguous and amoral scientist; the third is an unabashedly wicked predatory planet; and the final character is a unique, intelligent meme.

KELVIN

Kelvin soars through the seediest of spaceways, taking on the cases no-one else will touch, solving mysteries and uncovering conspiracies and facing down the beings behind the scenes. In the back alleys of space there are mysteries to solve, and he's the only one on the case.

Power Description
Kelvin has a fairly standard set of cosmic abilities - he can fly in atmospheres and through space, is incredibly tough, can fire destructive blasts from his hands, and can heal himself. All of this is done by channeling cosmic energy.

Appearance
Kelvin has shiny golden skin that actively glows, an effect caused by the cosmic energy that flows through him. He retains the basic structure of a human - ten fingers, ten toes, eyes and nose, even genitalia, although nothing about his body is remotely human any more and most of this is really nothing more than decoration. He wears a trenchcoat and a battered fedora, and will often be found smoking cigarettes, which he does purely for something to do with his hands and his mouth - he is not affected by the smoke. He stands at his ease, and tends to lean on anything that's around to be leaned on, such as countertops, vehicles and defeated monsters. When he moves it is fast and decisive and impossibly graceful. His eyes are shining golden orbs, and he never blinks.

Personality
A laconic wiseguy with a stubborn streak and a sobering knowledge of his own dark side, Kelvin is comfortable forgetting his past and hiding from his demons in a series of dangerous investigations through the weirdest hideouts in the galaxy. He is slowly developing a name for himself among crooks and undergalaxy circles, which he relishes. He is extremely powerful, and he knows it; but he also knows that the powers he goes up against, corruption and politics and secrecy, make his ability to destroy battleships look useless more often than not. Still, it does lend him an air of confidence - he can walk into a bar and pick a fight with everyone in the room, and there isn't the slightest risk he'll even scuff a shoe. If he wore shoes.

Kelvin is in love with Ariel, the woman who hired his twin brother all those years ago in Chicago. Ariel lives on New Chicago in the future, and Kelvin sometimes swoops through space and time to see her. But he can't admit his feelings for her, and she can't admit that she shares them, so their love seems set to continue for another 75 years unconsummated. Kelvin is held back by the darkness in his soul, by his grief for his brother, by his resentment of Ariel for inadvertently bringing about his brother's death, and by his awareness of the black murderous depths he plumbed before he was transformed into Kelvin.

Past
Kelvin was once Paul Kelvin, a human being from 1930s Chicago, a librarian whose twin brother Ernie was an intrepid private eye. When a missing persons case landed Ernie on the wrong side of Capone's mob, a hit was ordered, and Paul was there to watch as Ernie succumbed to a hail of bullets. Determined to revenge himself on Ernie's murderers, Paul borrowed Ernie's clothes and hunted them down one by one. Word spread among Capone's men that the ghost of Ernie Kelvin was hunting them, and panic set in. Meanwhile, Paul was contacted by Ernie's client, a woman named Ariel, who had hired him to find her abducted cousin Lenora. Paul's trail of vengeance led him to one of Capone's lieutenants, who was holding Lenora. After gunning down the vicious hood, and walking out with the rescued infant in his arms, Paul prepared to finish his bloody trail by turning his gun on himself. Paul Kelvin's humanity had died when Ernie did, and it was time to finish the job.

Then, an incredible twist of fate changed everything. A rocket ship landed near the lonely river where Paul intended to end it all. Inside were Lenora's parents, who were travelers from a distant future planet named New Chicago! Lenora and her nursemaid Ariel had been blown by timewinds through a crevasse in history and ended up trapped on 1930s Earth. Grateful to Paul for his efforts in rescuing their child, and impressed by Ariel's account of his cleverness and investigative ability, Lenora's parents gave him a gift, and bathed him in concentrated starshine.

This starshine bath transformed Paul Kelvin into a new form, fit to cruise through space and see the universe. Paul abandoned earth, and abandoned his old life, becoming instead the cosmic gumshoe, Kelvin!

Kelvin (PL 25)
STR +5 (20), **DEX** +5 (20), **CON** +5 (20), **INT** +5 (20), **WIS** +5 (20), **CHA** +5 (20)

Tough +25, **Fort** +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +5

Skills: Gather Information 14 (+19), Investigate 14 (+19), Notice 14 (+19), Sense Motive 14 (+19)

Feats: Contacts

Powers: Blast 20, Cosmic Effect Suite (comprehend all language; life support; immune to cold, fire, fatigue, radiation; cosmic awareness, blindsight, direction sense, distance sense, time sense), Flight 8 (alternate power: Space Travel 16), Healing 18, Mind Shield 18, Protection 20, Sensory Shield (All Senses) 18, Super-Senses (normal sight extended x1000)

Drawbacks: Noticeable (Glowing Golden Skin;Uncommon,Minor)

Combat: Attack +23, Defense +23, Initiative +10
- Unarmed Combat: Attack +23, Damage +5
- Grapple: Attack +23, Grapple +33
- Cosmic Blast: Attack +23, Damage +20

Cost Summary: Ability 60 + Skills 14 (56 Ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 215 + Combat 86 + Saves 0 - Drawbacks -1 = 375

THE RED GIANT
A gigantic shape looming over the town, bending low to inspect the subjects of his latest destructive experiment, the Red Giant's investigations often spell doom for those unable to protect themselves!

Power Description
The most important power of the Red Giant is his size - he is enormous, a thousand feet tall, with the physical might that goes along with such enormity. The Red Giant possesses the standard suite of cosmic immunities and protections. Embedded in the Red Giant's forehead is his Analyzer Jewel, which is the tool he uses to channel all his scientific examinations, as well as to fire blasts of physical or mental energy at any target in range. The Red Giant's powers derive entirely from his own prodigious super-science. The Red Giant is often tinkering with new inventions or creating strange and powerful gadgets, which can provide him with additional powers when necessary and appropriate.

Appearance
The Red Giant is about a thousand feet tall. He is roughly humanoid in physique, although his limbs are long and spindly, he has a short tail, and his head is egg-shaped. His hairless skin is a dusky red all over. He has three long fingers and a thumb on each hand, and his feet have four toes. He moves slowly, and deliberately. His disproportionately-small eyes are constantly scanning the environment and processing what they see. He has giant, white teeth in his mouth, all molars, which grind down rocks and trees into digestible food. Embedded in his forehead is the bus-sized ruby gem that is his Analyzer Jewel.

Personality
The Red Giant is a scientist, with a dispassionate outlook on life and a detached fascination with the fundamental laws of the universe. He sees himself as a giant among ants, a self-perception that is conveniently supported whenever he sets foot on a world of ordinary-sized beings.

While he displays nothing resembling emotion, there is a deep well of resentment and hatred far,

far beneath the surface of the Red Giant - anger at his own people for rejecting him, frustration with contact after contact who turned from him. There is a vindictive streak to his work now, and he is capable of creating experiments that make innocent sentients suffer needlessly, rationalizing this under any number of scientific pretexts. The truth, of course, is that the Red Giant is a deeply twisted individual.

However, there is hope for the Red Giant. He is capable of generosity and respect, and he can be reasoned with. Perhaps one day someone will be able to reform him, and turn his genius to the good of all - but they would have a difficult task ahead of them.

Past

The Red Giant's name is Kamo Fregioc of the planet Bellastrata. Kamo was always exceptionally intelligent, even among the quiet and contemplative people of Bellastrata. Their enormous size made them easily dominant over their physical environments, which in turn led them to value caution, and as a result their culture stressed the importance of hesitation and of considering carefully the consequences of your actions.

Kamo did not share these ideas. He was not careless, exactly; more accurately, he did not think the consequences of his actions were of any significance except the scientific. He would destroy whatever he saw fit in order to see how the environment would respond to this.

Kamo's brilliant scientific mind delivered many technological advances to the Bellastratans, but his coldness and uncaring philosophies made him unpopular. Finally, his risk taking behavior went too far and he ruptured the crust of Bellastrata, causing the deaths of dozens. In response, Kamo was exiled forever from his home planet.

He found a new home in the stars, where his intelligence won him many resources, but he rarely managed to maintain any relationships for long. He was ejected from an intergalactic conference of scientists for taking undue risks with his research, including the risk that he would destroy intelligent worlds, change the laws of physics, and perhaps wreck reality itself. The Red Giant

simply took this to mean that the conference could not appreciate the importance of his work and the care he took with all calculations. All errors, of course, were occurring within predicted parameters, although some of those parameters were predicted retrospectively (that is, after they happened).

To this day, the Red Giant continues on his quixotic mission to understand everything that is, even if he needs to destroy it first.

The Red Giant (PL 32)

STR +32 (74), **DEX** +0 (10), **CON** +16 (42), **INT** +25 (60), **WIS** +5 (20), **CHA** +0 (10)

Tough +26 (Protection 10, +16 Con), **Fort** +36, **Ref** +0, **Will** +5

Skills: Craft (Cosmic Technology) 36 (+61), Knowledge (Technology) 36 (+61)

Feats: Attack Specialization (Analyzer Jewel) 16, Inventor

Powers: Analyzer Jewel (Blast 25 - alternate power Mental Blast 12; Mind Shield 25), Cosmic Effect Suite (comprehend all language; life support; immune to cold, fire, fatigue, radiation; cosmic awareness, blindsight, direction sense, distance sense, time sense), Growth 32, Protection 10, Sensory Shield (all senses) 20

Combat: Attack +0 (+32 with Analyzer Jewel), Defense +1, Initiative +0
- Unarmed Combat: Attack +0, Damage +32
- Grapple: Attack +0, Grapple +32
- Jewel Blast (physical energy): Attack +32, Damage +25
- Jewel Blast (mental energy): Attack +32, Will Save DC 31, if fail then Damage +16

(Note that Attack and Defense totals include penalties for size. Excess ranks of Attack and Defense have been purchased to account for these substantial penalties.)

Cost Summary: Ability 60 + Skills 18 (72 Ranks) + Feats 17 + Powers 265 + Combat 98 + Saves 20 = 480

EVIL PLANET!

Evil Planet is a planet with big yellow eyes and a hinged jaw. It opens up its mouth and eats spaceships, space stations, meteors and moons. Did I mention it was evil? It is the evilest!

Power Description

Evil Planet flies through space until it finds a nice-looking planet to eat. Then it opens its mouth and eats the planet. The captured planet dissolves inside Evil Planet's interior. But that interior is also where it is most vulnerable...

Also, Evil Planet is really good at talking trash.

Appearance

Evil Planet is a planet. It is a sickly green, with gigantic yellow eyes and an enormous mouth. Its surface is moist and pockmarked like an acne-ridden teenager. Note that Evil Planet speaks by vibrating noise through its surface, not through its mouth; the mouth is usually too busy swallowing something to talk.

Personality

Evil Planet has a bad attitude. Evil Planet hates you and hates your planet. Before, and during, the devouring-a-planet process, he engages in gleeful smack talk. If any defenders of the planet try to stop him from feeding, he will specifically insult and taunt them. He doesn't just want to eat planets because he is hungry - he gets a kick out of humiliating the planet first.

Past

Evil Planet was just plain born bad. The fifth planet in a large system around a small sun, it emerged with a pallor of evil disfiguring its surface. Life evolved on its surface, unintelligent mammals and birds which were affected by the evil of the planet and were themselves endlessly predatory and violent. Finally, just as civilization began to dawn among the humanoid inhabitants of Evil Planet, their animistic faith tripped the switch inside and Evil Planet became self-aware. Across the following decades, Evil Planet devoured every life form on its surface, and then looked with hatred upon its sibling planets in the solar system. Slowly it shifted its tectonic plates

in such a way as to force the creation of a great fault line halfway around its equator. Then, in a great earthquake, Evil Planet opened this fault line. This was the first time Evil Planet opened its mouth. With sheer force of will, it broke forth from orbit and sailed across to its nearest neighbor, opened its mouth, and swallowed the planet whole. The chemical composition of this planet reacted with Evil Planet's own interior to create a corrosive environment of unimaginable intensity. Slowly, the sibling planet dissolved in Evil Planet's belly. Then Evil Planet moved on to the next of its siblings, and the next...

Evil Planet! (PL 104)

STR +120 (250), **DEX** +0 (10), **CON** +60 (130), **INT** +0 (10), **WIS** +0 (10), **CHA** +0 (10)

Tough +87 (Impervious Protection 27, +60 Con), **Fort** +102, **Ref** +0, **Will** +50

Skills: Bluff 48 (+48)

Feats: Distract, Taunt

Powers: Corrosion 80, Cosmic Effect Suite (comprehend all language; life support; immune to cold, fire, fatigue, radiation; cosmic awareness, blindsight, direction sense, distance sense, time sense), Growth 104, Healing 54, Mind Shield 54, Protection 27 (Impervious), Sensory Shield (all senses) 54, Space Travel 2, Swallow (Snare Engulf) 84 (drawback: Action 8, requiring one day)

Drawbacks: Action 8 (General Physical Actions require one day), Vulnerable 5 (to attacks from inside its maw - Major, Very Common)

Combat: Attack +50, Defense +0, Initiative +0 - Grapple: Attack +50, Grapple +154 but requires one day per attack; Corrosion damage

(*Note that Attack and Defense totals include penalties for size. Excess ranks of Attack and Defense have been purchased to account for these substantial penalties.*)

Cost Summary: Ability 0 + Skills 12 (48 Ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 951 + Combat 548 + Saves 99 - Drawbacks -45 = 1560

VEVIRUS

VeVirus is a mind virus. It invades sentient populations, changing their behavior and replicating itself throughout before seeking to spread even further. It is capable of sentience, but not in the most helpful way. VeVirus is not a danger to life - but it is a danger to thought, and to freedom.

Power Description

VeVirus invades the minds of populations and turns them into servants of its greater needs. When affected by VeVirus, a victim devotes his or her life from then on to transmitting the virus as widely as possible. Virus victims are mostly silent and passive, although they will still take steps to preserve and protect themselves. All the content of their minds disappears beneath the overwhelming need to spread the virus, and the satisfaction that comes from feeling possessed by the virus. For example, an office worker affected by the virus might return home via public transport, spreading the virus to everyone encountered along the way, and then at the family meal will spread the virus to fellow family members. That evening the family will sit quietly together, content in their virus-infected state, and conserving their energy for the next day's activity of concerted virus spreading.

The VeVirus is spread by any form of communication that allows transmission of abstract thoughts. In humans, words are the best form of communication for this. Newspapers will print the VeVirus on their front pages so those who read them will become infected; homeless people will announce the VeVirus from street corners; political leaders will appear on television and deliver the VeVirus instead of their speeches.

The VeVirus is capable of communicating among its various host carriers, in a limited and intuitive way.

Appearance

VeVirus does not have an appearance - it is a mind virus. However, sentient beings afflicted by VeVirus tend to display slight chemical changes in their bodies as a result of the alien presence. This can manifest as increased sweating, different colored blood (leading to different-colored bloodshot eyes), hair changing color or falling out, and so on, depending on the species.

Personality

The VeVirus is a massively distributed entity with no physical existence. Instead, it exists in the minds of all those infected by it. Even though it is so distributed, there is a connection between its different components, and the VeVirus throughout a single species actually shares a latent consciousness and identity. This identity does possess a personality of sorts.

VeVirus has one overarching goal: survival. It survives by spreading as widely as possible. Once an entire population has been infected, the VeVirus will seek ways to reach new populations; it may devote the entire resources of a species to the creation of spaceships allowing journeys to other planets.

Its goal of survival also manifests in making vicious attacks, through its hosts, on anyone who resists infection or actively works to limit the spread of the virus.

The more people VeVirus infects, the more prominent its latent consciousness becomes. It can be interacted with by those with suitable communications powers - for example, by psychic link or by magic. However, there are crucial limitations here. The VeVirus consciousness is a byproduct of its massive complexity and not an expression of its will. In other words, the VeVirus can talk about itself and what it is doing and experiencing, but it does not have any control, any more than a man reading monitors in an automated factory can control the factory.

At least, this is the baseline state of VeVirus consciousness. Cosmic characters may be able to find a way to enhance the power and influence of the VeVirus consciousness and perhaps give it an ability to control the virus as a whole; only

the creativity of your players will reveal if this is indeed a possibility.

The VeVirus is not evil or even malicious. It is a process with a limited degree of self-awareness. Given its freedom, it will infect an entire world, and then let them get on with passively maintaining their existence in the thrall of the virus's narcotic effect.

Past

The origin of the VeVirus is a mystery. It may have been created deliberately by some strange force as a weapon, or it might have arisen accidentally in the course of other science. It could even have arisen naturally in the universe. Whatever the case, the VeVirus itself does not have any awareness of its past, nor does it know how many replications of itself there are in the universe, spreading quietly through the species of different planets or dimensions.

VEVIRUS (PL X)
STR- (N/A), **DEX** - (N/A), **CON** - (N/A),**INT**+0 (10), **WIS** +45 (100), **CHA** +0 (10)

Tough N/A, **Fort** N/A, **Ref** N/A, **Will** +45

Skills/Feats: Nil

Powers: Mental Transform 25 (complete alteration of target's mind, continuous duration, sensory range)
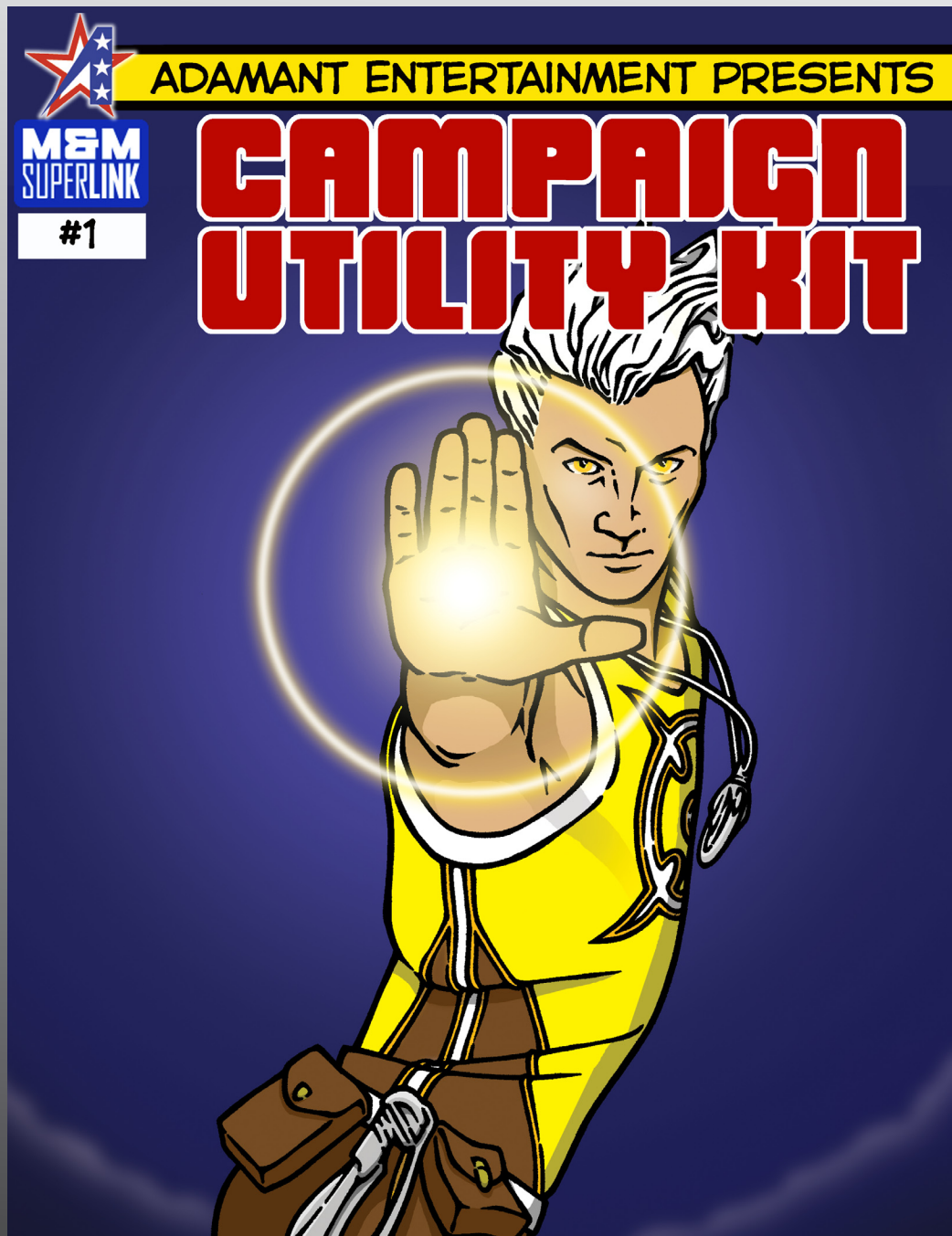
Combat: N/A

Behavior Rules: Always try to replicate as widely as possible

UNEARTHLY
Cosmic Heroes

M&M SUPERLINK