

ALL IN



FOUR ADVENTURES FOR THE *WILD CARDS* CAMPAIGN SETTING



BY BILL BODDEN, D.I. BUTCHINO, JOHN POLOJAC, AND MARK SANTILLO

**MUTANTS
MASTERMINDS**



A WILD CARDS ADVENTURE ANTHOLOGY FOR MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS

DESIGN **BILL BODDEN** (*BUGS IN THE SYSTEM*), **D.T. BUTCHINO** (*SHELL GAMES*),
JOHN POLOJAC (*SPARE PARTS*), **MARK SANTILLO** (*BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT*)

EDITING **JON LEITHEUSSER** DEVELOPMENT **STEVE KENSON**

ART DIRECTION AND GRAPHIC DESIGN **HAL MANGOLD**

COVER ART **BRAIN HAGAN**

INTERIOR ART **BRETT BARKLEY, STORN COOK,**
GREG KIRKPATRICK, AND MIKE VILARDI

CARTOGRAPHY **SEAN MACDONALD**

PROOFREADING **THE GREEN RONIN STAFF**

GREEN RONIN PRESIDENT **CHRIS PRAMAS**

GREEN RONIN STAFF **BILL BODDEN, STEVE KENSON, JON LEITHEUSSER, NICOLE LINDROOS,**
HAL MANGOLD, CHRIS PRAMAS, EVAN SASS, MARC SCHMALZ

ALL-IN is ©2009 Green Ronin Publishing, LLC. All rights reserved. Reference to other copyrighted material in no way constitutes a challenge to the respective copyright holders of that material. Green Ronin, *Mutants & Masterminds* and their associated logos are trademarks of Green Ronin Publishing, LLC. *Wild Cards* is the trademark of the Wild Card Consortium.

The following is designated as Product Identity, in accordance with Section 1(e) of the Open Game License, Version 1.0a: all character and place names and descriptions, all novel descriptions and references, hero points, and power points.

The following text is Open Gaming Content: all game stats and information, except for material previously declared product identity.

Permission is granted to print one copy of the electronic version of this product for personal use.

Printed in the USA



GREEN RONIN PUBLISHING

3815 S. Othello St., Suite 100 #304
Seattle, WA 98118

Email: custserv@greenronin.com

Web Site: www.greenronin.com

www.mutantsandmasterminds.com

INTRODUCTION

The *Wild Cards* series was conceived as a “shared world” with many authors, so it’s fitting that the first adventure supplement for the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting for *Mutants & Masterminds* is also an anthology with multiple authors contributing their own visions of the *Wild Cards* world, and the things your characters can do there.

All-In is a four-card draw of short *Wild Cards* adventures for the *Mutants & Masterminds* superhero RPG. The adventures feature a mix of investigation and action and are suitable for a range of *Wild Cards* games, primarily aimed at characters from power levels 6 to 8, as detailed in **Chapter 6** of the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting book. **The material in this book is intended for the Gamemaster’s use only; players intending to play in these adventures should refrain from reading them, in order to avoid spoiling some surprises and challenges.** The GM should read through each adventure carefully before running it, in order to become fully acquainted with the story and characters.

Both the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook (or the *M&M Pocket Player’s Guide*) and the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting sourcebook are needed to use the adventures in this book. Game information and background details provided in the *Wild Cards* book is not reproduced here, so Gamemasters will want to reference it before running these adventures.

All-In features the following adventures:

- **BUGS IN THE SYSTEM:** In the hot summer months in New York City, a plague of cockroaches adds to the already oppressive mood. When residents begin looking for someone to blame and turning their attention towards Jokertown, the authorities need help. Investigators find a wild card at the bottom of it, twisted in both body and mind, and hungering for revenge.
- **BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT:** When financial trouble hits the Jokertown Clinic, a massive benefit concert seems like just the thing, but when trouble threatens one of the headline acts, someone needs to intervene. Problem is, it turns out the trouble is not what it seems, and the real threat may come from giving the ace headliner a worldwide live television audience!
- **SHELL GAMES:** The Great and Powerful Turtle is back...and committing petty crimes? When one of the Turtle’s old shells goes missing and he apparently takes up a new criminal career, it’s up to fellow wild carders to sort things out. Has the man in the metal shell finally cracked, or is it someone else working on the inside?
- **SPARE PARTS:** Aces are disappearing, and the culprit appears to be the long-lost android Modular Man. The characters are just one faction interested in finding the wayward machine man, and some are not too particular as to whether or not he’s still func-

tional. Has Mod Man finally broken down into some computerized simulation of insanity, or is something else going on?

A WORD ON CONTINUITY

Although most *All-In* adventures make use of existing *Wild Cards* characters, it should be noted that these adventures are “outside” the existing *Wild Cards* continuity; further revelations in the *Wild Cards* series may contradict material in these adventures, and the events they describe are not considered “canon” for the *Wild Cards* series. Of course, there’s nothing to stop you and your players from twisting around *Wild Cards* history and characters however you like in your own games, but we just figured we’d make it clear from the outset what’s “official” and what is not, and these adventures are not.

ALL-IN AND PARAGONS

As **Appendix IV** of the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting points out, the *Paragons* setting for *M&M* is fairly compatible with *Wild Cards* in terms of overall style. This means you can also use the adventures in *All-In* for a *Paragons* series with a small amount of modification, depending on the style of *Paragons* game.

Bugs in the System works virtually unchanged. There may not be a Jokertown or any other freakish paranormals in the setting, but a mysterious plague of cockroaches can still lead to a rise in anti-paranormal violence (if such is known). Regardless, Perry Planet’s terrible transformation and quest for revenge can exist in most *Paragons* settings, and other paranormals are likely to get drawn into it.

Benefit of the Doubt might be staged for a paranormal organization like the Rosemont Center, or a suitable charity, perhaps intended to provide aid to victims of the Breakout or some other paranormal disaster. Substitute suitable paranormal celebrities for the major *Wild Cards* characters, but Skylark and Misery can remain the same. Again, scenes in Jokertown might be less freakish, if there are few unusual-looking paranormals in the setting, but otherwise things work as written.

Shell Games requires some modification, depending on whether or not you want the Turtle to be a character in your *Paragons* setting. Substitute another paragon as you see fit, perhaps a normally law-abiding member of Vanguard. Scrounge is still looking to make a big score using someone else’s powers and name to do it. Without the Turtle’s shell, you might also want to give Scrounge the ability to Morph to look like the target he mimics.

Spare Parts involves Modular Man, a fixture (so to speak) of the *Wild Cards* world. Still, you can make him an android invention of a paranormal (a true example of para-technology), now bereft of his maker. Junk Monkey works as a paranormal as written, and you can use some of the wild card mercenaries in the adventure or substitute appropriate paranormal characters.



BUGS IN THE SYSTEM

An outbreak of cockroaches is sweeping through New York City during one of the hottest summers on record. Roaches may be common in the city to begin with, but it's rare that they cluster together in the light to...steal things. That's exactly what's happening, and the authorities have no clue how to stop it, other than sending out legions of pest control workers. Even then, most of them won't go near Jokertown...

Numerous town meetings have been scheduled all over the five Boroughs. As packed meeting spaces and overflow crowds attest, the problem is unusually widespread, but the city leaders are calling for calm and asking for patience in the face of this adversity—that's where the characters come in. It could be they've been victimized themselves, or it could be that a shadowy organization no one's ever heard of before is asking them to look into things more closely. Either way, it's up to them to get to the bottom of these disturbances; the search is on for clues to solving this curious mystery.

INTRODUCTION

A joker is indeed behind the city's troubles, one driven mad with spite. He seeks petty, jealous revenge on anyone and everyone in the city, and is using hordes of insects under his control to achieve his vengeance.

His lair is deep within the bowels of the city—a long-abandoned underground subway office into which he and his followers have tunneled. He stays in this office night and day, and rarely ventures more than a few feet from it save on rare occasions and for good reason. He keeps all his newfound treasures in the front room, while the back room is a waiting area for his many servants. So far his attacks have been random as he learns how to manage his new powers. But soon, very soon, those who made his life difficult will pay...

FOUL DEEDS AFOOT

The characters can be brought into this scenario several ways.

LOSS OF A PRIZED ITEM

The PC literally watches in horror as a ring, a bracelet, a cherished photograph or other object of sentiment is swarmed over by roaches and dragged to the floor, where it is crammed under a loose section of baseboard or trim, and disappears into the wall. The roaches are very fast and rather large for their type, and the shock of the incident precludes any meaningful attempt to intervene. Subsequent news stories on the radio, television and in the newspapers relate similar occurrences throughout the city. The stories mention that officials have called for a series of town meetings all across the city for people to report incidents and learn the best ways to combat the problem. Award one hero point to any PC who loses an object in this manner.

A MYSTERIOUS BENEFACTOR

One or more characters receive a letter (or email) without return address. The letter states, in a matter-of-fact manner, that the character could gain significantly from a meeting with an unnamed person at a public but discreet location this very night. A subway station after the last train has departed is the most likely venue. Though long after closing time, the station is unlocked. As the character approaches the platform, a figure in a suit and tie with a black overcoat and hat waits at the appointed place.

“Good of you to come,” the person begins, and it’s difficult to tell from the voice if the speaker is male or female. Their appearance is also androgynous, right down to the not-too-stylish clothes. Even this person’s body language is neutral.

“We need someone of your...unique talents to help with an investigation. This pest-control problem may be more than it seems, and we need to get to the bottom of it quickly and quietly. If there’s some kind of terrorist group behind this, we need to know who they are and where to find them so they can be removed from the general population and interrogated.”

The person passes the character a thick envelope.

“This is a down payment for your services. There’s a slip of paper inside with a phone number. Call it from a public payphone once a day and relay any news you have for us. For every day you check in, another grand (\$1,000) will find its way to you. We need whatever is behind this discovered so that the appropriate agencies can take over and eradicate the problem.”

The envelope contains \$5,000 in small bills—nothing larger than a fifty. It also contains a business card-sized slip of paper

with a phone number within the 212 area code. The number is local to New York. If the PC attempts to trace this number, they will find that it’s a dead-end. It forwards to several other phone numbers before it reaches a disconnected number somewhere in Brazil. The money is legitimate—or at least, is not counterfeit. The serial numbers are in no way consecutive.

As the characters make their daily reports, they will be urged to keep their benefactor a secret. The voice on the other end of the line will not say much otherwise.

The daily payment of \$1,000 finds its way to the characters through numerous anonymous vectors. Perhaps the character will find a newspaper on their doorstep one morning with another envelope hidden inside; possibly a sealed frozen dinner or unopened box of cereal already at home will contain the money. Be creative; these payments should serve to creep the players out slightly by their insidious nature.

At least one member of the group should be approached in this way, particularly if they choose not to attend any of the Neighborhood Meetings.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

If the characters attend one of these meetings, they will find a good-sized meeting room in a public building, filled to overflowing with angry, scared citizens. Nothing this odd has happened to any of the assembled citizens before, and the possibilities of these events are the stuff of nightmares for an active mind. The room is hot and steamy, and it will be weeks before the government-mandated date for use of air conditioning to begin. Several obvious jokers are present. Tempers are beginning to fray, and the event has a slight edge of hysteria, which builds as it becomes clear that city officials have no answers.

Sitting behind a table at the front of the room is the city council member for this district (Elaine Albertson), representatives from both the police (Sergeant John Jacobs) and fire departments (Lieutenant Bob Porter), a liaison from the mayor’s office (Greg Stenczak), and an unnamed man in a suit who says nothing and is never introduced. Any questions directed at this person will be intercepted by one of the city officials, who will answer the question to some degree.

A hysterical voice from somewhere towards the back of the room shouts “Start looking in Jokertown; them freaks are setting their pets on the rest of us!” Any successful skill check such as Notice or Gather Information will allow the character to spot the speaker in the dense crowd; he appears to be a homeless man, clad in a grimy zippered coat, a stained, light colored T-shirt with tan plaid trousers and battered brown loafers, with tangled and filthy—possibly graying—hair. From the reaction of the people around him, he hasn’t spent a great deal of time recently tending to any aspect of his personal hygiene. The characters will be easily able to corner this man after the meeting. See **The Evils of Drink**

The representative from the mayor’s office, Greg Stenczak, introduces himself again and makes the following announcement:

"Exterminators have been contracted at government expense to go door-to-door, treating the entire city for pests—starting with the most affected areas and working outwards. Citizens are advised to pack food in airtight plastic containers prior to the exterminators' arrival, and afterwards to wash any dish, cup or utensil before eating. This entire process will take a number of weeks—it's a big city, people—and we warn everyone to be cautious and vigilant until this crisis has passed."

He stabs his well-manicured finger into the tabletop on each of the last five words for emphasis.

The assembled citizens seem mollified, but not content. Mayoral aides circulate through the room handing out photocopied flyers to everyone present. Any aces or jokers in the room (including the characters) are handed a flyer from the bottom of the stack with a handwritten note at the bottom:

Please stick around after the meeting.

Any characters who do so have the following encounter:

The unnamed man in the suit waits until all but the characters present have left the room. A police officer sticks his head in the door, nods to the man, then closes the door and stands guard outside, preventing anyone from entering.

"Thank you for waiting. Here's the intel we have on the situation."

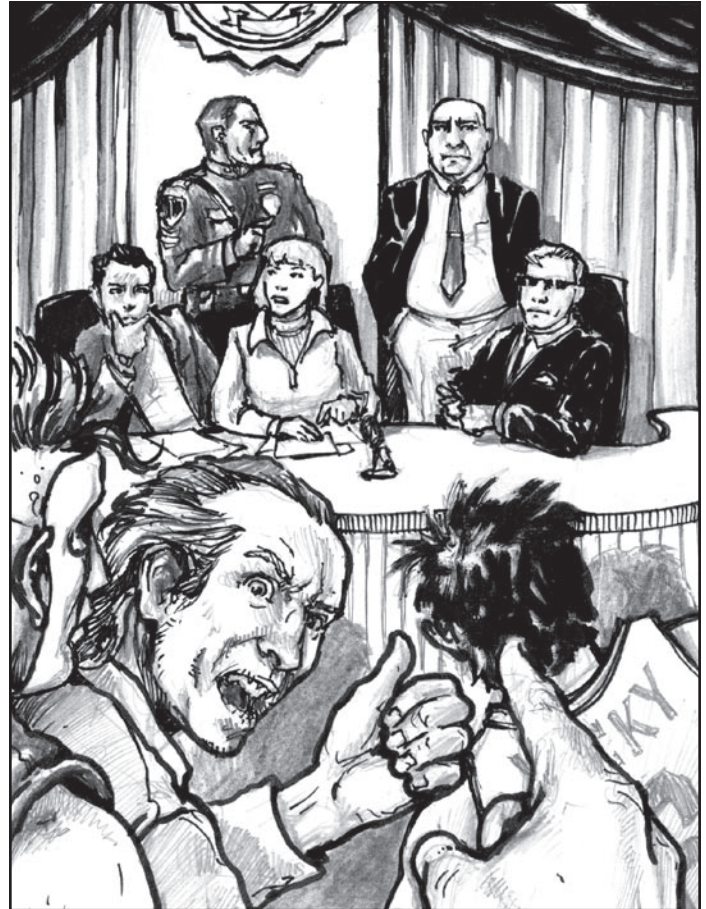
He provides the following points of information:

- 1) The incidents involving masses of cockroaches do not seem to have a pattern, nor are they a localized phenomenon—serious events have occurred all over the city.
- 2) So far no deaths or injuries the authorities are aware of have been caused directly by the roach swarms.

He pauses and asks the characters if they have any questions.

If questioned about his authority, name or position with the city, he will pause briefly but continue on with his briefing as if he had not heard the question. The Players might assume this man is FBI or CIA, or possibly even NSA, and they should be encouraged in this by the Gamemaster without the agent actually acknowledging any specific agency as his employer.

If pressed for further information, he will, for the most part, be less than helpful, reiterating and re-arranging the main points from his briefing. If the characters are persistent in badgering him for more details, he will share a few of the rumors circulating throughout the city.



RUMORS

D20	RESULT
1-3	The plague of roaches is a sign of the apocalypse, sent by God as punishment for the unworthy.
4-6	The government has been secretly breeding intelligent roaches for military-espionage functions, and these events are field tests.
7-9	The Illuminati has been secretly breeding intelligent roaches for military-espionage functions and these events are field tests.
10-12	The Asian/Russian Mafia has been secretly breeding intelligent roaches for military-espionage functions and these events are field tests.
13-16	There is a Joker controlling the roaches for reasons unknown.
17-20	These are super-intelligent, mutant cockroaches, breeding in a secret chemical/nuclear waste dump deep underground.

He then adds:

“You can see the level of hysteria evident in these rumors. If this situation isn’t concluded soon, we may have more to worry about than a bunch of highly motivated roaches—a lot more. To that end, I would like to introduce someone you’ll be working with. Andrew will be your liaison to the joker community. With the paranoia beginning to build, we need all the cooperation we can get to find the reason behind these events.”

He then introduces Andrew Stern:

“This is Andrew Stern. He’ll be your liaison to the joker community, and I highly recommend you have him with you at all times while pursuing any investigations in Jokertown.”

Stern is himself a joker. His 5’10”, 180-pound frame with his closely cropped afro passes for normal most of the time, though he wears oversized sunglasses and carries a collapsible white cane, giving the impression that he’s blind. The glasses and cane are a ruse to hide the fact that he has compound eyes. He can see things most people can’t; heat, odors or chemicals in the air, people or things with the power of invisibility, and even microscopic organisms if allowed to concentrate, though one thing he does not have is X-ray vision. As an NPC, Stern is an almost total non-combatant, but he could act as a vital source of clues if included during the PC’s investigations. The fact that his eyes resemble that of a bug is a coincidence, though if they find out his secret, the group may not believe in coincidence just then. Because of his connection to the joker community, most residents of Jokertown will automatically give the party the benefit of the doubt, even if those same residents ultimately don’t trust the Characters’ motives. Stern can also be used as a PC if needed. A full description and stat-block for him are included at the end of this chapter.

When first introduced, Stern may ask a question of one or two of the characters regarding a recent injury they’ve suffered—along the lines of “How’s your shoulder healing up?” or about a perfume, cologne or deodorant they’re wearing. Merely meant as an icebreaker, Stern might be confused if members of the group react negatively to his seeming omniscience.

The unnamed man also calls in the officer from outside and introduces him as Officer McCready. McCready shakes hands all around while the agent informs the group that McCready is to be their contact within the police department. If they need police back up or resources for any reason, they should call McCready first, without exception.

McCready is above average height, clean-shaven, and built like an athlete. His dusky skin and dark hair and eyes make it difficult to place his ethnicity. There is an indefinable something about him that makes him seem warmer, friendlier, and trustworthier than any other cop anyone in the group can remember.

This is an excellent opportunity for the agent to introduce any characters—who have not otherwise been introduced—to each other.

Finally, the agent thanks them for their time, and wishes them luck in their investigations. They are given a phone number and a name to contact if they learn anything, and are encouraged to keep the regular authorities out of the loop as much as possible, emphasizing that they are only to talk to Officer McCready within the police department. Gamemaster’s note: this is NOT the same number provided by the unnamed person from **A Mysterious Benefactor**.

THE EVILS OF DRINK

If the players decide to question the homeless man from the meeting, he won’t have gone far, shambling between buildings looking for a bit of change or something edible.

As the group approaches, he will turn, smile in a friendly, non-threatening way and ask if they can spare him any change. His breath reeks of cheap liquor; on close examination, he looks like he hasn’t slept in days, and could use several good meals in a row. He does not appear to be suffering from the long-term effects of alcohol abuse.

If the Characters slip him some cash, he will be happy to talk about what he meant. He was sleeping in the basement stairwell of a semi-abandoned building on the edge of Jokertown when he heard a voice coming up from below. The voice quavered and had a hissing quality to it, and seemed to be talking to the wall. When he was finished speaking, the wall shimmered as a thousand roaches scurried up it to a hole higher than head height, through which they poured like a flood.

That was the night of the first thefts attributed to the roaches.

A successful Sense Motive check will indicate that he’s terrified by what he saw. If questioned about this, he will admit that he started drinking after that night. His terror drives him to stay awake at night, sleeping during the day.

If asked for a description of the figure, he can only say that there wasn’t much light, but that the man (he thinks it was a man) was bundled up for cold weather in a heavy coat, with mittens and galoshes. He will lead the party to the building; it’s on the edge of the Bowery in Lower Manhattan, in an area still heavily devastated, and is pretty much as he described. There is no particular evidence on the scene to corroborate his story, however.

If Stern is with the group during this interrogation, he will have nothing further to add from his observations, except to suggest that the obviously terrified homeless man needs police protection in case the person he witnessed also saw him. Stern can confirm that there were indeed numerous roaches on the wall in question very recently, but that it’s been several days, and the evidence of their passing has been thoroughly compromised.

If the characters query the authorities for more information on this man, they will learn that while he is homeless, he has never had a history of alcohol abuse, nor has he been a nuisance or com-

mitted any criminal acts that they are aware of. While the authorities know him, they consider him a basically good—if unlucky—person.

FUN WITH SCIENCE

If the group doesn't think of it on their own, Officer McCready will arrange for them to interview an entomologist for more information on cockroaches. To do this, they will need to visit Central New York University; the department's resources will be far easier to access on-site.

The entomologist, Douglas Stromquist, can answer any questions the group has after launching an obviously prepared speech on roaches. Among the interesting facts provided in this speech are:

- Roaches typically don't swarm in the fashion attributed to them in these attacks; though they tend to be found together in large numbers, they do not share a hive mentality like their cousins ants and bees, though they have, in recent scientific studies, exhibited group decision-making abilities and a "co-operative competition" survival strategy.
- Cockroaches have existed in the fossil record for over 300 million years, and of the 3,500 currently existing species recorded thus far, only about 30 tend to share human habitation.
- Roaches prefer warmer climates. They have few vulnerabilities though, like nearly all insects, exposure to extended periods of below-freezing temperatures will kill them.
- Cockroaches are six times more resistant to toxic radiation than human beings, and a typical specimen can exist for up to a month even if its head is removed.
- Cockroaches typically have a lifespan of only a few months.
- Typical predators of cockroaches include centipedes, spiders and some species of wasps.
- Many species of cockroaches are capable of flight, though most of those found in North American are not.
- Roaches can survive for months on as little as the glue from the binding of a book or from a single envelope. Like the majority of terrestrial animals, they can survive longer without food than they can without water.
- Roaches are categorized under the order Blattodea, and grouped together in related families such as the Periplaneta and the Blattella. He will go on to list a dizzying array of Latin names for individually species, mercifully confining himself only to those thirty or so species found among human habitation.

If asked a question about behavior he hasn't encountered before, his stock answer will be "Just because I've never seen it doesn't make it impossible. Roaches are remarkably adaptable creatures;

we're discovering new behaviors exhibited by them on an almost daily basis." Because of this constant influx of new information he will readily admit, if pressed, that he doesn't know absolutely everything about roaches. Though Stromquist won't bring this up, there are few in the world that can honestly claim to know more than he.

Stromquist will display a variety of different, preserved roaches for the group's inspection, including the famous Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches and several common varieties of typical household pests. He gives the impression that he's in a bit of a rush, as if the group is taking up valuable research time. In fact he's secretly thrilled at playing a part in their investigation. Entomologists don't get out much other than for research purposes, nor do they often have an audience actually interested in their chosen specialty.

SCENE ONE: THE SEARCH IS ON

Officer McCready contacts each of the characters in turn just before 9 PM that same evening, giving them an address on Manhattan's Upper East Side and asking them to meet him there immediately. Once the team is assembled, McCready leads them to the door of an attractive and well-kept brownstone. Well-known theatrical agent Howard "Dizzy" Conrad made a call to the local precinct office around 8:20 PM asking for officers to come to his place and protect him. The power failed in that neighborhood around 8:25 PM that evening, and at 8:26, a call came in from Conrad's cell phone. He was hysterical, and shrieking something about bugs and pigs, and then it sounded as if he had dropped the phone, and a long series of light scratches was heard, followed by a loud thud, while Conrad's voice gibbered incoherently in the background. The last clearly audible words are "Cold will keep them away!" The sound of a large, heavy door slamming could be heard, and is the last significant sound to be heard on the tape. When police arrived at his home around 8:35 to investigate, he refused to open the front door and a muffled voice assured the police that he was fine, and that the "... crisis had been averted." The person was difficult to understand; the majority of what was said was unintelligible. If they ask to listen to the recording of the 911 call, McCready can get it for them.

When the party arrives at the scene, several patrol cars are parked outside, lights flashing. A locksmith is working on the lock, and officers are standing by with weapons drawn. As the door opens they rush inside, declaring themselves as police and calling out Conrad's name. A sergeant comes to the door after a moment, and whispers something to Officer McCready. McCready motions to the characters to follow him, and they step inside.

The home is tidy and well appointed, though there are numerous small, brown specks easily observed on the walls and on a white tablecloth covering the dining room table. Nothing else seems amiss. The officers lead character through the kitchen, though Stern seems to already be following a trail, not waiting

for the police escort. A successful Notice check (DC 25) reveals a small light from a cell phone coming from under the refrigerator. The cell is still turned on, with a police dispatcher's voice dutifully trying to make contact from the other end every half-minute or so. The characters are then led downstairs to a basement room that appears to be a "panic room."

A heavy steel door is standing wide open, hanging on its hinges. The door opens out of the room, with handles and deadbolts on the inside only. There is a light coating of something white on the inside of the door, which further examination reveals to be frost, melting now that the door is wide open. Even so, the interior of this room is still quite cold. A thermostat, dedicated only to this room and run by an independent power source—a generator on the roof—is set for 20 degrees Fahrenheit. A grey suit jacket is lying just inside the threshold, wadded up against where the base of the door would be when it was closed, with little shreds torn out. Closer examination of the base of the door will reveal the missing torn bits clinging to rough metal edges at the bottom of the steel door.

A human body, identified by the police as Conrad, is lying on the floor. Except for McCready, none of the officers will enter this room with the group, and all look extremely pale and shaken. If examined, Conrad's body seems ridiculously light. Very little blood is in evidence in the room, though there appear to be several large bloodstains on Conrad's shirt covering eight large

tears. The tears are directly over eight vicious, gaping wounds in his torso. His expensive clothing is otherwise intact—starched white shirt and blue and white-striped power tie, with grey dress slacks, and black shoes and socks—though they don't seem to fit him well, appearing very baggy and loose. His skin feels dry and papery, and his face seems drawn and sunken. His eyes are closed. No pulse can be discerned, and something about touching his skin gives the examiner a very uncomfortable feeling. If the body is moved or lifted off the floor a slight rattling sound will issue from it. He has, in fact, been devoured from the inside out; all that remains is his skin and the bones inside. Even his eyeballs and tongue are gone.

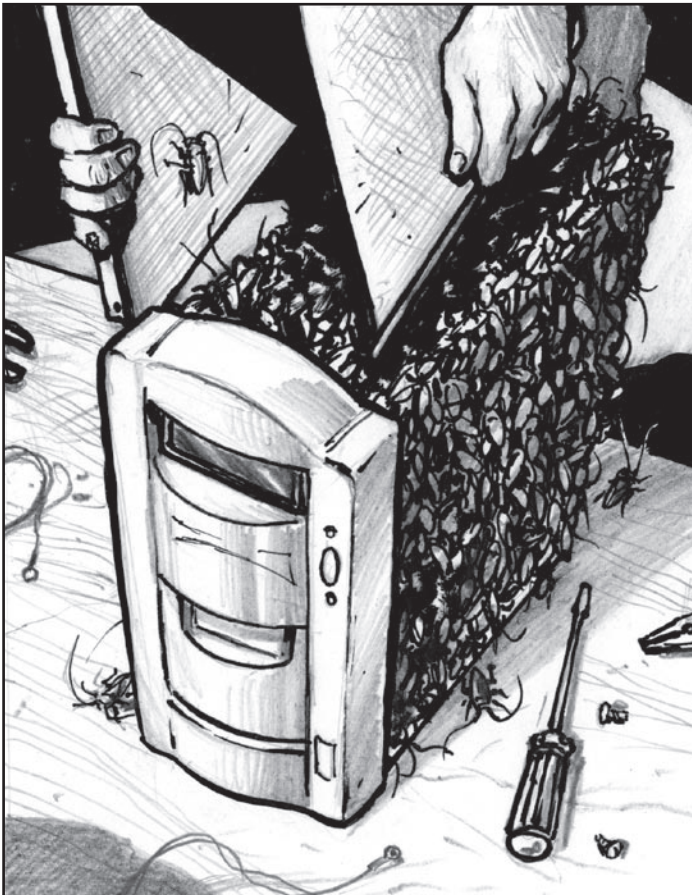
"Looks like the roaches have claimed their first victim," says McCready to the group in a low whisper.

If queried on what he can discern, Stern mentions that a lot of roaches were in this room at one point; thousands, perhaps even a million. He suggests that from what he can smell, some may still be here. He points to the broken door; the seals around the inside were obviously forced from the other side. It would take a great deal of very precisely applied force to buckle the steel door in this manner, or someone extremely strong—far stronger than any normal human being.

A computer stands on a simple table in this room; the only other furnishings are a cot with a pillow and blanket, and a small mini-refrigerator, empty of any contents save a quart bottle of drinking water and two granola bars. Except for a monitor, computer CPU, keyboard and empty coffee cup, there is nothing on the table.

The computer is still plugged in, and the cursor is blinking on a screen showing an online encyclopedia listing facts about cockroaches. Highlighted is mention that roaches are susceptible to cold—additional confirmation regarding the room's abnormally low temperature. Conrad was trying to keep the invading roaches cold enough to render them senseless and eventually kill them. The computer seems to have locked up, though a cursory examination indicates nothing wrong with the machine. If no one in the party has any computer-related skills, Officer McCready will take over here. Several different skill checks (DC 15) indicate that all cords and power sources are properly connected, and that the problem may be internal to the CPU. The unit feels very warm. At this point, the cooling fan attempts to turn on and makes an odd clicking noise. If any member of the party opens up the CPU case, the following encounter occurs:

As the lid lifts off, the assembled persons are horrified to see a mass of thousands of cockroaches, shaped like the CPU in the same way that cereal fills a box, covering every circuit and diode of the machine. Within seconds after the lid comes off, they will pour out onto the table and dash for cover in all directions, with the majority making for the door and the easier escape to be found elsewhere in the basement. If any of the players roll an exceptionally high initiative check, they may act before the roaches scatter. In any case, there is little further information to be gleaned from the roaches themselves. Award one hero point to each PC who was in the room for this encounter.



If any of the characters examine the computer's *other* contents, a successful Computer skill roll of will find an email sent this morning from a blind Internet email account to Conrad, threatening him:

FROM: 1234657@spoofnet.com
TO: dizzymanc@conradproductions.com
SUBJECT: Your life is mine, Conrad...

Mr. Conrad,

You kept me from being great; I am ruined. Your life is now forfeit.

- Gregor Samsa

If no one in the party recognizes the reference from the threatening note, give each PC a Knowledge check or an Intelligence check (DC 25), for this clue: Gregor Samsa is the name of a character from author Franz Kafka's 1915 novella *The Metamorphosis*. Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning to discover that he's changed into a human-sized cockroach. Allow this check every time the reference comes up until someone recognizes the clue. Award one hero point for each PC who correctly identifies the source of this name for the initial discovery.

They will also find an extensive series of networking and contacts files for everyone in show business within 100 miles, and many from California as well. Conrad has copies of his work files on this computer, including current and past clients. With a Computer check (DC 15), the players can access these files to look up clients they wish to question.

The police forensics team scours the place thoroughly for clues and keeps anything remotely connected to the case in lock-up until the investigation is closed. Any information the group wishes to retrieve from this computer after tonight will require the direct assistance of Officer McCready to obtain access.

McCready mentions one other thing to the party; he's just been informed that three pest-control workers have been found dead. One was found in the basement of an apartment building with his head bashed in. The other two were found in the sewers, in a condition similar to that of Conrad. Perhaps Conrad wasn't the first victim after all.

CONRAD'S OFFICE

Conrad's secretary Lillian is upset at the news of his death, but helpful. If McCready is present, she will talk openly about Conrad's files and his clients. If asked about any clients who might want revenge on Conrad, she'll comment, "Well, they'd have to get in line with everyone else in the business that hated him—it's a highly competitive business." She continues that there were five relatively recent clients Conrad had let go; of those five, two have not signed on with other agencies: Charlie Johnson and James "Gig" Benton. The records

show no one with the name Gregor or Samsa ever having been a client of Conrad's. If question further about these two men, she will relate that Johnson was a quiet, brooding type who seemed to constantly be just below his boiling point, and Benton was gregarious, a real charmer. A successful Sense Motive check will reveal that she has more in her heart than just Mr. Benton's best interests. She had a crush on him, though she tries to hide it.

CHARLIE JOHNSON

Johnson was fired for hitting a director with whom he was working; Benton was cut from the agency's roster because of something less clear and even Lillian doesn't know what it was. If pressed, she will provide Benton's address and phone number, although she will do so reluctantly. She has an address for Johnson in Soho, but no phone number. McCready phones the information on the two to dispatch, putting out APBs on both men. One of those addresses is the same building where a dead pest-control worker was found.

Finding Johnson is easy. He's in the city morgue, stabbed to death in a bar fight four days ago. The suspect in his murder is in police custody.

"GIG" BENTON

Before the group can turn their sights to Benton, McCready takes a call from dispatch. When finished, he informs the party that, according to a call from one of his friends, Mr. Benton has disappeared.

The news about Benton jolts Lillian visibly, and she mentions that there is a letter from him still in her desk, discarded by Conrad and unopened by anyone for more than six weeks. In it, Benton goes on about how being cut from the agency was unfair, and especially unfair was that the role that he'd won fair and square was being given to a new rising star at the agency when Benton was cut from their client list. He begs for another chance, and sounds desperate.

Lillian couldn't bear to throw it away, but also couldn't bring herself to open it.

BENTON'S APARTMENT

Benton's apartment was locked from the inside—the door chain was engaged, but now hangs from the door post, still attached to a piece of the door. Before entering, the characters are handed respirator masks; all the assembled police detectives are wearing them, as well as stark white hazmat suits. Even with the masks, the smell is overwhelming—players must succeed in Fortitude save (DC 25) or be violently ill due to the strong musty smell—with a hint of ammonia—of what's inside. All windows are closed and locked—including the one leading to the fire escape—and all his personal affects appear to be present, but there's no sign of the man himself. There is also no clear sign of a struggle, though the place is a filthy mess. Clothing is everywhere, badly ripped and

torn. The furniture has been moved to the center of the room, and arranged in a circle like a fort with a rather large gap in one side. The Cushions from chairs and the sofa and blankets, sheets and other bedding are draped on top of the furniture, making a very dark little cave underneath. The mattress is heavily fouled and leaning against an interior wall of the bedroom. The walls of the room are covered with specks of roach waste. The floor is slippery with the same specks. Any characters with asthma will have difficulty breathing, and will only be able to stay in the apartment for a short time. Several overdraft notices from the First Federated Bank litter the floor, two or three having been ripped into very small pieces. With them is a disconnect notice from the North Atlantic phone company. The bill has gone unpaid for more than two months; the disconnection was effective yesterday.

When Stern first enters the room, he will blanch visibly and stumble back into the hallway. He will claim he is unable to enter the room, and will not be coaxed or persuaded to enter under any circumstances. Gamemaster's note: He is overwhelmed by the visual stimuli he receives from the apartment. The odors alone are complex and painful for him to view, and enough to give him one whopper of a migraine.

If the characters have the stomach to remain here, they might make a few observations with successful Notice or Gather Information tests; success will reveal the following (check once per player for each information point, and share what each PC discovers with their players privately):

- Many items of clothing are split at the seams, particularly shirts and trousers
- The covering of roach waste is so thick in some spots that it can't easily be determined whether the wall was painted, paneled or wallpapered.
- The kitchen and bathroom sinks and the bathtub are all filled with water and stoppered.
- The temperature in this room is unusually high (80+ degrees Fahrenheit).
- The refrigerator and cupboards are devoid of food.
- A large percentage of the books in this apartment have fallen out of their covers, as if the paste holding them together was gone
- Two distinct paths are worn through the roach waste covering the floor. The paths lead from the "cave" to the bathroom and to the kitchen.
- Not one roach can be found in this apartment. Even checking typical hiding places such as under the refrigerator yields no sightings of a single roach, alive or dead.
- Food wrappers, empty cans and cartons and plastic packing covers the floor in the kitchen

There is a framed photo of Benton with a gorgeous woman on a desk against an interior wall, along with a computer monitor and

keyboard. The CPU sits under the desk. The photograph alone is untouched by any kind of dirt or soiling, save odd, greasy smears. If analyzed, the smears match those found on the pipe from **A Body in the Basement**.

Benton's computer yields few clues, and certainly nothing as dramatic as the computer in Conrad's basement. There is a copy of the letter he mailed to Conrad and a heated email exchange just prior between himself and someone name Julia. A more thorough search of his files turns up the name Julia Swenson, and it's clear they were romantically involved at one point in the recent past.

If the party moves the mattress at all, they will discover a large hole behind it, roughly three feet square, and close to the floor. The hole is clearly cut completely through the wall into the building's elevator shaft, though the elevator is no longer functional and was dismantled years ago. Examining the shaft is straightforward, but nasty; years of grime and dirt coat the inside, and anything that was once oiled is now a greasy, sticky mess. From the smell alone, it's clear that at one time tenants of this building used the shaft as a makeshift garbage dump, though little of the trash at the bottom is anything like recent. At the bottom of the shaft is a hole in the wall similar to the one in Benton's apartment; it's carved first through the bricks of the foundation and then through the bedrock under the building, going down about fifty feet until it opens into the top of a subway tunnel. From this point on there is no clear trail.

If at any time the player(s) checking in by phone with the shadowy agents report that the source of the plague of roaches might be human, they are instructed to capture this individual alive and immediately make contact again so the "proper" authorities can retrieve this suspect for questioning.

A BODY IN THE BASEMENT

The body of exterminator Raul Jimenez was found in the basement of this building. The room where he was found is in the immediate area of the base of the elevator shaft, and is dark and dank. The controls for the elevator, a large set of pulleys and cables, all driven by electricity, are found here, along with three industrial-sized circuit breakers. Pipes are everywhere, some of them leaking. The dark humidity along with the numerous pipes gives a feeling of claustrophobia even to those not typically affected by small spaces. None of the fixtures in this room appears less than sixty years old.

Jimenez' body has been cordoned off with police tape, and an officer is standing guard until forensics can do their work here. Jimenez' head has been bashed in within the last two days or so, with the perpetrator most likely using a length of pipe found lying next to the body. There are no discernable prints on the pipe. If Stern is with the group in this area, he will take the characters aside and report, quietly, that in fact there are fingerprints on the pipe, but not ones recognizable as human. If the group convinces McCready to make a forensics expert available to them and a fingerprint dusting is taken, long, thin, oily

smears and scrapes of an organic nature are highlighted on the pipe. DNA samples taken from the scrapes are difficult to accurately classify. The DNA has human traits but also traits from the insect kingdom. The wild card virus is also present in the samples. None of the human-like fingerprint swirls and ridges can be found. The blood and tissue samples from the end of the pipe clearly belong to Jimenez, and Jimenez' wounds match the pipe perfectly. Jimenez's tissue samples test negative for the wild card virus.

Jimenez' spray tank is completely empty. If queried, Stern will note that there seems to be an awful lot of poison compounds in the air in this basement room, and points to several large, discolored patches on one wall where the poisons are particularly in evidence. He also indicates that huge numbers of roaches have passed through this room very recently, along with something else, something larger and less clearly identifiable.

SCENE TWO: READY, AIM...

As the group is preparing to leave the scene, the police officers' personal radios all begin to squawk at once. There is a major apartment fire in Jokertown, and back-up units are being summoned from all over the city to help with crowd control; numerous civilians are trapped inside the burning structure.

When they arrive, the building is burning merrily. Of the eight floors the brick building has aboveground, the bottom three are completely engulfed in flames. Upper-storey windows are open and too many people are attempting to cram their heads outside for a fleeting breath of fresh air. Rescue squads have been dispatched and extra ladder trucks are en route, but the building is crumbling rapidly, and appears to be growing less stable by the minute. If the characters are to act, it must be soon.

The arsonist blocked the front door and the door to the roof with furniture and junk, and set the piles alight with gasoline, effectively preventing easy access. There is a fire escape on one side of the building, but it appears to have been sabotaged; several of the lowest ladders connecting one level to the next are missing.

The arsonist has barricaded himself in one of the top floor corner apartments, and is waving a handgun and haranguing the crowd, firemen, and policemen below. His shouts of "... *cleansing fire!*" and "... *destroy the contagion!*" can be made out from time to time. If the characters attempt to rescue or capture him, he takes his own life.

There are twenty-three people in the building, and the clock is ticking. The group will have 20 combat rounds to rescue as many civilians as possible before the building collapses. Hero points should be awarded for each civilian a PC rescues or helps rescue, plus any bonus points as the Gamemaster sees fit. Award an extra hero point to any of the group who attempted to rescue or capture



the arsonist. Seventeen of the trapped victims are obviously jokers, in varying states of deformity.

Characters who succeed at a Notice check (DC 15) spot an unusual figure towards the back of the crowds outside the barricades. Despite the tremendous heat not only from the fire but also from the weather, this heavy-set person is dressed in a soiled heavy overcoat, is wearing a battered, shapeless hat with a broad brim, and has a ragged scarf wrapped around his face, covering everything but the eyes. This person is also wearing mittens, baggy trousers, and calf-length galoshes with buckles. If any characters attempt to confront this person, he ducks down a side alley, moving very rapidly. When the characters turn the corner into the alley, their quarry has disappeared, having vanished up a fire escape ladder, through a door or window, or down a manhole cover into the sewers. Further searching proves fruitless. If the players are especially persistent in pursuing the mysterious figure, and unwilling to give up the chase, make this a case of Gamemaster Fiat (*M&M*, page 124) and award the players a hero point for the setback of having the mystery man escape, although technically his appearance is nothing more than a foreshadowing of what is to come later in the adventure.

Survivors of the fire will relate the following information:

FIRE SURVIVOR INFORMATION

D20	INFORMATION
1-5	This particular building had been hit three times by thieving packs of roaches
6-8	The arsonist, an actor, was one of the first victims of the thefts
9-10	The arsonist seemed to feel that the plague of roaches was God's punishment for the wicked. He had also mentioned that the roaches were watching him, and kept him awake at night. Descriptions of the man by the survivors suggest he might have been suffering from severe sleep deprivation.
11-14	The arsonist's name was Tony Manachelli
15-17	Tony Manachelli was not obviously a joker
18-20	Tony had been seeing a woman named Julia for the last couple of months.

If the characters ask any of the rescued citizens about the roaches, select a suitable rumor or roll 1d20 on the chart from **Neighborhood Meetings** for each person and have them relate the rumor as "Something they heard." They will be unable to specify where they heard the rumor, or from whom.

If the players don't think of it themselves, allow them an Investigate or Intelligence check (DC 12) to ask Conrad's agency about Mr. Manachelli. If successful, they learn that he was indeed represented by Conrad, and that he'd been offered a major part in a play—a part previously offered to Benton before the agency dropped him.

SCENE THREE: MAKING A WITHDRAWAL

Officer McCready suggests to them that it may be time to learn a lot more about Gig Benton. He offers to set up interviews with any of Benton's acquaintances that can be found at a local station house and allow the characters to watch from behind one-way glass.

The next morning, at the appointed time and place, the characters check in at the main desk of the police precinct office. They are handed visitor's badges as well as a list of Gig Benton's known associates. Included on this list are Julia Swenson, plus subway line operator Henry Johnson and cab driver Louie Lieberman. Despite being friendly and gregarious, Benton didn't have a lot of friends.

Swenson's testimony indicates that she and Benton were involved, but that the relationship had gone south for her, and she had been in the market for a new beau several weeks before hooking up with Tony Manachelli. She acknowledges getting a few calls from Benton after breaking up with him, but doesn't recall anything particularly memorable about them, except that Gig didn't want her to leave him. Suddenly a look of recognition crosses her face:

"His last call was strange, now that you mention it. It was about a month ago; he sounded sick, like he had the flu or something, and begged me to take him to the hospital. I thought it was just another ploy to get sympathy and win me back, so I said no, and hung up. I changed my cell number the next day."

He can tell she is telling the truth to the best of her knowledge, and does not seem particularly mistrustful towards her, although he conceals it well in her presence. If none of the characters mention it, Stern might ask if Swenson still has the voice-mails from Benton, but she does not: She deleted them and, at any rate, they would have been lost when she changed her number with the phone company. Stern has nothing to add to Swenson's testimony.

Louie Lieberman is a cabbie Gig knew, and Gig would often ask for him specifically anytime he called for a cab. Lieberman seems tired and slightly out of breath, though he does not seem overweight. He has thinning gray hair tucked under his flat cap, the bill of which shades his eyes. He's wearing a short-sleeved khaki polo shirt with brown trousers and has sandals on his feet. Louie is clearly a joker, and there appears to be little he can do to hide it—his right arm is roughly the same length as his left, but is at least three times larger in girth, and the fingers are strangely pointed and seem to be boneless. His polo shirt has clearly been hacked at with scissors to improve the fit. Louie admits to sometimes "forgetting to turn the meter on for a couple of blocks," when Gig needed a lift, and thinks that Gig is an okay guy. Other than that, he has little information of use.

If asked about the roach situation, Louie admits

"Yeah, sounds like it's getting pretty bad all over, but it always flares up in the summer, then dies back down during the winter, right? Hey, you know what I heard?"

Here roll 1d20 and consult the rumor chart from **Neighborhood Meetings**, or select a suitable rumor.

Stern has nothing to add to Lieberman's testimony, except that the strain on Lieberman's heart caused by the blood needs of his oversized arm will kill him within a month. The Gamemaster can include this detail, to make Stern's abilities seem more omniscient, or have him say nothing, making him seem more inscrutable.

Henderson's story is more touching. Henderson appears to be in his late fifties, and his thinning, curly salt and pepper hair peaks out from under the bill of his transit operator's cap because he has a habit of wearing the cap tipped far back on his head. Wearing his uniform, Henry looks tired, though he's actually a few years older than he appears. His deep, ebony skin is heavily wrinkled around his forehead and eyes, and his hands are callused with years of hard use. A modest, white mustache graces his upper lip; otherwise he is clean-shaven.

"We struck up a friendship over a Dodgers game at a local watering hole, and stayed friends for several years," he begins. "Wish I could've done more for the kid, you know? He was a talented actor; I saw him off-Broadway a couple of times, and once he played a death scene that had me in tears. Anyway, I'd lend him \$100 now and then to help him get by, and except for this last time a month ago, he was good about paying it back too, though some times it took him a while. I didn't lend it to him 'cause I knew I'd get it back; I lent it to him because he was my friend, and he needed it. He wasn't mixed up in drugs or anything, he was a good kid. That Swenson bitch broke his heart; he pretended it didn't matter, but I saw dried tear tracks on his face even a couple of weeks after. Then he got sick, and asked me to take him to the hospital. As soon as my shift was over, I went to pick him up, only he wasn't there. He didn't answer, and none of his neighbors knew anything about it. I called him a few times to make sure he was okay, and the time he answered he sounded like he had a cold. He thanked me for trying to help him—that was a strange way to put it, don't you think? Anyway, he said he was fine now, and that he might not see me again for a while. I called the police because his phone was disconnected after that. We had tickets to see the Mets and Giants play four nights ago. When he didn't meet me at the stadium as usual, I called you folks to see if he was all right. He wouldn't have missed that game for the world—neither of us can afford to waste the cost of a ticket, and these were good ones—upper deck, front row, first base side. I hope he's alright."

Allow the characters an Investigate or Gather Information check (DC 15) to request the interrogating officer follow up by asking after any places Gig would hang out if he wanted to be alone.

"Oh, that's easy, or it would've been easy to say until recently. He and I used to sneak into an abandoned subway office down the track from the 51st street Station—on the Queen's Boulevard Line. The office was actually in the tunnel under the river. It was damp in there and smelled like mold, but he liked it—called it his "secret hideout." I had a key 'cause it used to be kind of a hidden break room where some of us drivers would blow off steam after a shift with a few hands of poker. Six months ago the bosses finally found out what we were doing and had the door bricked up. They said they were worried about squatters or vandals getting in there and making a mess. Nobody's been able to get in there since."

Attempts to Bluff or Intimidate Henry are met with stony silence and a hard stare. He's been around the block a few times, and isn't afraid to stick up for his friends.

He pulls a wrinkled paper bag out of his jacket.

"I found this on my doorstep this morning; somebody rang the bell and took off. I don't know what's wrong with him but that don't look like his handwriting at all. I don't know how he got these, but I don't want no part of anything stolen."

Inside the bag is a note in a barely legible scrawl and several items of very expensive diamond jewelry and a Rolex watch. The note reads:

*Hey Buddy,
Here's something for the cash I owe you
from last month, plus a little more for the
ticket and because you're a good guy.
Gig.*

If one of the player characters has enhanced senses and succeeds at a Notice check (DC 20), or if Stern is present relate the following information to the PC or have Stern pipe up; the PC or Stern believes Henry is lying about some part of his testimony. He claims there was a slight quaver in Henry's voice that tipped him off, but what he really means is that he can see Henry's terror, and it isn't the police he's afraid of. Plus, Henry has a cockroach in his shirt pocket; a big one.

The group now faces a choice; they can go along with Henry's story and follow him, or they can go in guns blazing. For his part, Henry is a relatively innocent bystander, forced to help "the new Gig" by serving as a distraction. If they choose to follow Henry, he will lead them straight to Gig's hiding place in the abandoned subway office (see **The Lair**). Gig is out tending to other matters at this time, but he will return shortly, paper bag full of money clutched in his mutated fingers and preceded by a swarm of roaches.

Though not as formidable as one of his bodyguard roaches, this roach is a particularly agile and intelligent individual of its kind, and capable of escape on foot or flying, both at fairly high speed. If anything goes wrong it will report on what it saw and sensed to Gig at the first opportunity. Because of Gig's Mental Link, the group must kill the roach to prevent this, requiring a successful attack roll against Defense 12 (given the roach's size). Any damaging attack kills the bug. After three combat rounds, if the roach hasn't been caught or killed, it escapes into the air ducts.

Once this happens, Henry breaks down.

"I didn't have a choice; he put me up to this—threatened to send his pets after me if I didn't help him. Have you ever seen his pets? They're huge; biggest damned roaches I could ever even imagine. He told me they eat people, tearing them apart limb from limb. Then he's got the regular roaches; I seen a whole lot of 'em attack one of those exterminator guys in the

sewers—stripped him clean from the inside. When they was done, only skin and bones was left. There's nowhere we can hide from him; he can get to anybody! He's messed up; the change put the whammy on his head. He ain't the same Gig Benton I used to know; now he calls himself Perry Planet. He thinks he's a god. I'm a dead man now; do you hear me? A DEAD MAN!" When he calms down, Henry will admit to having written the note himself, at Planet's urging.

As Henry is calming down, an urgent call comes in; the First Federated Bank of Upper Manhattan is being attacked by a massive swarm of roaches. The local police precinct is requesting backup from all officers from any precinct who can be spared.

When the characters and the police arrive, roaches are covering the inside of the plate glass doors making it impossible to see into the building. The doors have been locked from the inside. If they smash their way in, the group will immediately arouse the ire of several swarms of cockroaches standing guard; they will attack. The party will be briefly greeted by a scene from hell before the swarms move in; everyone in the building—including several police officers—has been covered with a swarm of roaches, knocking them to the floor and holding them pinned. The screams of these writhing roach piles are terrible; the sounds of terror and madness in equal measures.

Rooting through a cash drawer is a familiar yet still mysterious figure: a slightly stooped individual wearing a soiled, heavy overcoat; battered, shapeless hat with a broad brim; a ragged scarf; a pair of mittens; a pair of filthy trousers; and calf-length, grime-encrusted rubber galoshes with buckles. When he sees the group enter, he stops, and the sound issuing from behind his scarf is like a hissing snicker. He says: "Greetings. My name's Perry; Perry Planet, and you're too late to stop me." Players who happen to know or remember from the entomologist's briefing, or whose characters can make a Knowledge or Intelligence check (DC 15), can confirm that part of the scientific name of a grouping of the roach family is *periplaneta*. Award any players who succeed in this one hero point.

Perry Planet slowly ducks down behind the teller window as huge swarms of roaches approach the characters from all sides.

If Stern is present, he appears stunned, and is clearly staring right at Planet. Any character who doesn't already harbor such suspicions can make an Intelligence check (DC 25) to get the idea that perhaps Stern isn't blind after all. If Stern is not completely incapacitated, he will be able to warn the group if and when Planet is about to flee, due to the complex cloud of pheromones Planet constantly exudes.

Battling a swarm of roaches is difficult; while they are an easy target in such a large group, they can be killed by the thousands without losing any effectiveness or even any apparent decrease in the mass of the swarm. Their primary attack is to keep their victim distracted by sheer weight of numbers, holding the poor creature at bay unless given other orders by Gig. As the characters move about in the swarm, the footing becomes treacherous from



all the squished bug bodies; apply a -4 Dexterity penalty for every combat round after the first while the character remains within the swarm itself. The swarm also contains more than a few flying roaches; besides the gift of flight, these “Palmetto Bugs” are also larger than their city cousins, and have no fear of light whatsoever.

Battling “Perry Planet” is just as difficult; he will summon swarms of roaches to defend him, putting the bugs between the group and himself as much as possible. If forced to engage personally in hand to hand combat, he will first use his incredible speed to avoid being struck and unleash a stream of noxious gas, requiring all characters to make a Fortitude save (DC 25) or be incapacitated for 6 combat rounds minus the character’s Fortitude bonus, gagging and vomiting. He can release this gas attack a total of twice per 24-hour period. He needs at least an hour to recharge his system between blasts, then needs 24 hours before he is capable of using this weapon again.

If the gas attack isn’t sufficient, he will engage his attackers in combat only if fleeing is not an option. Escape will always be his overriding concern. He will abandon the roaches without a second thought; they can take care of themselves once the fracas is over.

Fire is the most effective weapon against the roaches; unfortunately, the bank has a first-rate sprinkler system which will activate within ten seconds of any significant pyrotechnic display, making any further such displays extremely difficult (-10). Extreme cold is also effective, but only at slowing the bugs down until the ambient temperature remains at well below freezing for at least an hour. After an hour of below freezing temperatures, the bugs will die.

The cash is less than essential to Gig’s plans; if things go poorly for him, he will cut and run without hesitation. The money would have been useful to further his schemes, but he can make do well enough without it. The main objective was to cause problems for the bank that gave him grief, charging him exorbitant late-payment fees and garnishing his wages to recover overdue credit card payments; if nothing else he’s done that. The roach swarms will cover Planet’s escape by preventing any of the party from giving chase until he’s out of sight. Then they will scuttle off back to the holes from which they first appeared and vanish from sight. A few will be left behind, peering from under cracks and appliances, reporting to Planet on the chaos caused by his show of force.

If this series of events is reported to the Mysterious Benefactors, they will insist that Planet be captured and turned over to them at the earliest opportunity.

Since the primary idea of this scene is just to give the characters their first face-to-freakish-face meeting with Perry Planet, and for them to get some idea of his capabilities, feel free to use Gamemaster Fiat (*M&M*, page 124), if necessary, to let Planet get away clean this time, so the aces can deal with him for good later in the adventure. Be sure to award the players a hero point each if you do this; they’ll need them to take on Planet and his pets in **Scene Five!**

SCENE FOUR: THE HEAT IS ON

If the characters thought the heat was off for now, they were mistaken. Terrified by the presence of a dangerous joker in their midst, the “nats”—natural humans, i.e. humans not infected with the wild card virus—are ready to riot. The day after the robbery attempt a huge mob of nats approaches Jokertown from the north, intent on dishing out some justice, Manhattan-style. The characters are summoned by Officer McCready to help keep the unruly mob out of Jokertown. They are indiscriminate in their violence; a man whose only crime was having a clubfoot was taken to the hospital after the mob finished with him; doctors admit they don’t expect him to live through the night.

Nearly everyone in the mob is carrying some kind of improvised weapon; baseball bats, two-by-fours with nails pounded through them, bricks, tools, and even a few firearms. The group will have to think fast to calm the mob down and convince them to return to their homes, or they will grab the first few jokers they stumble upon, and in all likelihood kill them without mercy. The police have set up barricades and riot police are present in force, but that only enrages the mob further, making the police and the characters targets of their anger as well for defending the “freaks.”

For their part, the jokers are well aware of the situation, and frankly they are tired of being blamed for anything that goes wrong in the city. They begin to gather on the other side of the barricades—at first only to watch—but as the taunts get meaner and the insults and rocks begin to fly, cooler heads no longer prevail, and jokers that need weapons begin appearing with them in their hands. The press is covering the event heavily; TV crews, reporters and photographers are on the scene, for their part only inciting more violence from the crowd, most oblivious to their accidental, “inspirational” effect on the crowd, while some are encouraging violence openly.

If the characters can’t find other ways to calm down the mob and convince everyone to go home, tear gas is likely to be an effective deterrent; if things begin to go badly in a hurry and the characters’ efforts are ineffective, the riot police will not hesitate to use the gas in convincing the mob to disperse. This may be the characters’ last line of defense against the howling mob. Within an hour of deployment of the tear gas, the mob will have broken up, venting their rage in minor acts of vandalism, and isolated incidents of looting and other mayhem. It will be a situation the police will be able to handle on their own at that point, but the underlying anger and feelings that the good citizens have been consigned to their fate by an uncaring city government will continue to smolder under the surface. For their part, the jokers are just as happy to not have a fight, though they too harbor easily inflamed resentment, particularly over their recent treatment at the hands of the nats.

If the characters have been paying attention, it should be obvious to them that Julia Swenson’s life is likely in grave danger. If they haven’t come to this conclusion on their own, use Officer



McCready or Andrew Stern to drop hints; doing so in the form of leading questions will help the players feel they came to the right conclusion without much help. If they do nothing to protect her, then the events of **An Insect Scorned** will play out later in this scenario.

Swenson is indeed in mortal peril; Gig Benton intends to deal with her in the same way he dealt with Conrad; using his bugs to eat her alive from the inside. Spiriting her away to a place of hiding will buy the characters some time, but roaches are everywhere; within a day or two at most, Planet will know where she is thanks to his six-legged informants. See **An Insect Scorned** for more details on the likely outcome to that encounter. Bottom line: the party probably can't protect her for long. They need to find Planet and stop him before he discovers his ex-girlfriend's hiding place.

SCENE FIVE: THE LAIR

Henry Henderson's testimony should lead the group to believe that Planet has taken refuge in the bricked-over subway office. If they follow Henry after he leaves rather than kill the spy he carries, the result will be the same, though the GM should encourage the group, using pleas for help from Officer McCready, to help investigate the bank robbery first. Henderson can be held at the station "for further questioning" until the party returns.

There are essentially two ways to get there; the first is through the brick wall blocking the only door, which requires obtaining maps from the Central Transit Authority. The second is to go through the hole in the wall of Gig's apartment and follow the elevator shaft to the bottom where a conveniently human-sized passageway has been burrowed through the ground and into the subway tunnels. Following the trail from there isn't hard; the path left by one largish humanoid and well over a million cockroaches stands out to one with abilities such as Stern has. When the front office door was bricked over, the workers didn't know about the fire exit; a trapdoor in the floor of the back room that leads down to a rusty, iron ladder bolted to the wall of the subway tunnel below. Formerly covered by a desk, the ladder comes out in a secondary subway tunnel beneath the one above it where the office is situated.

Following this trail to the hideout is simple, though the tunnels are very dark. Any character doing so will be filthy in moments; slime from industrial lubricants, stray rainwater and countless other, less desirable substances combine to make the tunnels unpleasant at the very least. Play this up to keep the players on edge.

Stern will be able to lead the way if the characters falter in their resolve, and will follow the trail unerringly to the ladder. Stern is aware of the many roaches keeping eyes on their progress, and will report from time to time that "We're being watched." Should the group ask for more specific details, Stern will only add "They're all around us; thousands of them." Thanks to these many sets of eyes and antennae along the entire length of the tunnel system, Planet will be well aware of the group's approach.

Perched in his throne room atop a pile of befouled trophies, he feels invincible, and will patiently wait for the characters to arrive. He will not impede them in the least, and will use Hide in Plain Sight to nearly disappear atop his pile of stolen loot until all the characters have entered his throne room. He sends a command to the roaches in the room next door, and they slowly begin to creep into the room, out of sight of everyone except the uncanny vision of Andrew Stern.

If the party follows Henry Henderson instead of going to the bank, thanks to his legion of six-legged informants Planet will still be aware of their presence in his lair. Upon his return, the swarm of roaches will precede him into the room, hopefully giving the characters a bit of a shock. Planet's undisguised form appears at the top of the ladder, and welcomes his "guests" to his humble home.

Planet will talk to the group to buy time, and Stern grows more agitated as the conversation between the party and Planet goes on, and more and more roaches flood silently into the room. He warns the players of the trap before it is launched, which keeps them from being surprised, but he isn't trained as a combatant and will quickly be swarmed by a mass of roaches and pinned to the ground.

If Officer McCready is with the characters, a roach swarm overwhelms him, but he draws his gun before he goes down and, if given the opportunity, shoots at Planet. It is up to the GM to

decide if the situation warrants his success, failure, or an inability to get off a clean shot under difficult circumstances.

The lair itself, a former train driver's office, is a pair of 20' x 30' spaces hollowed out from bedrock with steam hammers, dynamite and human muscles during the glory days of subway construction over a hundred years ago. It is lined with brick and the bricks covered with ceramic tiles. The original color of the tiles, after close to a century of accumulated grime and weeks of abuse from the roaches, is impossible to guess. Treat this as a moderate obstruction in terms of movement (*M&M*, page 34). Any furniture that was in these two rooms has either been destroyed or removed; in his current form, Planet can't make use of it anyway. Planet's throne pile is in the center of the second room, close to the trap door leading to the iron ladder.

The front room is filled with roaches in such a thick carpet that the floor and walls cannot be seen clearly. The roaches give Planet his space, but they're still nearby in case he needs them. He's set them on a captured derelict, a man too drunk to resist. Now he's roach food—after Planet took his share, of course. With so many mouths to feed each only gets a tiny portion—a fraction of the amount each would need to stay alive. Planet plans on feeding them several times in the near future, starting with the characters themselves, as they obviously intend to be troublesome, and continuing on to Swenson. Perry Planet, as Gig Benton now calls himself, is convinced of his near-godlike status. His personal bodyguard surrounds him: eight grotesquely large roaches that have been fed a strict diet of raw meat since birth. These basketball-sized monstrosities can fly, and they don't ask questions; they do Planet's bidding without hesitation. The ensuing carnage results in the room's floor growing even more slippery than before; consider it a very bad surface, for a x1/4 movement penalty (*M&M*, page 34).

If Planet feels threatened, he will send the mental command that brings his swarms flooding over the characters. His standard strategy will be to set his swarms on everyone, and have his bodyguard roaches attack any characters that manage to fight their way through. He will only personally resort to direct attack if there is no other option; retreat is always his preferred stratagem. He will first release a stream of noxious gas to discourage pursuit if his system has recharged since the last use.

If Planet feels comfortable and secure (*i.e.*, his roach swarms have incapacitated the characters), he explains his plan. His voice is thin and reedy, and his new mouth often has trouble pronouncing certain sounds, particularly hard consonants like D and T. Sounds that mimic humming or hissing, like Ms, Fs, Ss and soft Cs, are much easier for his hybrid mouth to handle.

If before **An Insect Scorned** takes place:

"Your pathetic attempt to disrupt my plans has failed. Still, I am feeling merciful; I will bestow a great honor on your undeserving selves. I will allow you to watch as I take my revenge on the woman who spurned my love, who rejected my affections, who humiliated me in front of the en-

tire world. Once you see the glory of your lord and master in action, you will be unable to resist falling on your knees to offer me the worship I deserve."

If after **An Insect Scorned**:

"Pitiful. You were too late to stop me from taking my revenge, and now you are too late to stop me from taking over the City. The Mayor will have no choice but to surrender his office to me, and the police will enforce my bidding. Food and other tribute will be collected and delivered to me and my pets daily, or the entire city will suffer my wrath!"

In either case, he continues:

"My roach army will take control of the city. I will know everything that happens here—nothing will escape my eyes. My reach is long, oh yes—very long. By now I can command all roaches on the Eastern Seaboard. Within a year, I'll be able to control those across the Atlantic Ocean. The whole world is now mine, and I will subjugate it to my will. Join me and I will reward you; serve me well, and there is nothing you shall not have. Reject my offer at your own peril."

Planet's boasts of the range of his powers are difficult to prove or disprove. The few remaining human features of his face show no emotion during any of his speeches, nor at any time during their encounters with him. The only time he is truly emotional is when he thinks back to the time before his change—if he is shown the photo from his apartment of his pre-wild card virus self with his one-time sweetheart, Julia Swenson. He will break down briefly, sobbing into his mutated hand before rage comes over him again and he becomes his tyrannical self once more.

CAPTURING PLANET

The group must first incapacitate the roach swarms, which die by the thousands to defend their master. If Planet himself is knocked unconscious, the roaches will scatter; while his control doesn't entirely depend on his being awake, nor does it depend on speech, it does depend on current instructions being fed to the roaches mentally by Planet, even if those orders are only "Wait," or "Rest until I need you." Without more specific commands, the roaches will revert to pure instinct, and will flee from light or vibration.

If the characters have nets or ropes at their disposal and can stun or otherwise incapacitate Planet, they can render him immobile for whichever group of authorities to whom they choose to surrender him. His carapace is a bit bulky and not very flexible, and prevents his arms from being bound behind his back. If the characters have no such restraint devices at their disposal (all McCready can offer is handcuffs) they have a problem; Planet will be difficult to control if he regains consciousness.



As soon as Planet comes to, he will attempt to summon his hordes of insects to help free him, so the group needs to be quick and efficient at getting him out of the tunnels and into official custody, or they may have more swarms to deal with before making good their escape. The authorities may still have a problem later, when Planet decides to call his servants to him and escape, but there are places to confine him that roaches would have great difficulty reaching, such as a remote island in the North Atlantic. Even without the hordes typically at his disposal, Planet is still a dangerous opponent with numerous tricks up his proverbial sleeve. Like the creatures he has come to resemble, he is normally susceptible to fire, cold and electricity. Because of his high Constitution and his Immune powers, poison, disease and other toxins are practically useless against him, and his armored carapace, while neither indestructible nor bulletproof, is tough enough to ward off most blows.

AN INSECT SCORNE

If the characters aren't quick enough to confront Planet in his lair, he will take his revenge on the paramour who dumped him unceremoniously. He sends his bodyguard roaches and his roach swarm, and he takes an alternate route that places him at the scene precisely as the swarms emerge. He watches with glee and taunts Julia, asking if she'd like to change her mind about dumping him

now that her former love is a god. For her part, Julia is terrified beyond words, and well she should be. If left in her own apartment, the armored death machines that comprise Planet's bodyguard roaches attack her without mercy while thousands of roaches swarm over her body and into her through every opening they can find—including fresh tears opened up by Planet's monstrous, meat-eating creatures. Planet finds the entire situation exceptionally amusing, and will exhort his followers to be gentle at the end, so as to extend the agony Swenson is undergoing. If there was any question before, it's clear beyond a doubt that Planet has bugs in his belfry, and is completely mad.

If the party arrives in time and has powers that allow them to stop the roach swarms before they can attack Swenson, she has a chance to survive. Otherwise, she is doomed to a slow, painful death as thousands of tiny mouths tear her apart piece by minute piece.

If the group is able to apprehend Planet, they must now decide what to do with him. Any characters who were offered (and accepted) payment from the shadowy figures at the start of the adventure have by this time been pressured heavily during their regular reports to turn Planet over to their benefactors rather than the police. If this happens, nothing more will be heard from the megalomaniac insect or his minions, though roaches will continue to plague populated areas normally as they have for centuries.

If McCready is with the characters, he will insist that Planet be turned over to him and a select group of discreet officers. They will file extensive paperwork on Planet, and make sure he is escorted safely to a facility designed to hold criminal wild carders. McCready knows not to imprison him near a populated area, but he may not have the final say in the matter. If the authorities are not careful, Planet could easily summon his minions to bust him out of jail and make his escape into the nearest sewers. After that, it's only a matter of time before he seeks out those who thwarted his plans. The lovely Julia Swenson, of course, will be given special consideration for her part in Planet's downfall.

If Planet is turned over to the police, the characters receiving payments from the Mysterious Benefactor also receive a phone call the night after Planet is apprehended. A smooth, silky male voice will make the following declaration, and then hang up.

"I must say I'm very disappointed. Our information said that you could be trusted; apparently that was not entirely correct. Now we'll have to take steps without your help to insure that Planet is no longer a threat."

The line goes dead.

The group may even decide that Planet is too dangerous to be allowed to live. This should not be undertaken lightly, of course, but the danger Planet represents is not so much from himself as from his legions of willing roach slaves. It would be difficult to fight such an army—one that used guerrilla tactics and could move in force through a crack no thicker than a 25-cent

piece. But the characters can take heart; they saved the city not only from the menace of Planet, but also helped rescue civilians from a burning building and assisted in stopping a rioting lynch mob. These are accomplishments to be proud of. They have the thanks of a grateful city, and in particular the appreciation of the joker community for defending them from any angry, blood-thirsty mob.

CHARACTERS

The following are the major characters in *Bugs in the System* and their *M&M* game stats.

ANDREW STERN

When the wild card virus took hold of Andrew Stern, he didn't realize it at first—no one did. The manifestation was similar to glaucoma, but didn't respond to any sort of treatment. His vision began to degrade daily, and the doctors were at a complete loss; nothing they tried—even laser-surgery—had any effect on the progression of his vision loss.

Having resigned himself to eventual blindness for the rest of his life, he took to staying home and having everything delivered. Gradually he realized not only was his vision returning, it was doing so in overwhelming fashion; he could now see things that were nearly microscopic, as well as see in all spectrums of light, including infrared and ultraviolet. He can also see other things; odors, airborne particulate matter, minute trace elements or chemicals, and if he concentrated for some time, he could even detect microscopic organisms.

He helped capture the infamous rapist, a joker dubbed Mr. Invisible, claiming to have done so thanks to super-acute hearing. In reality, Stern could see the man perfectly well even though Invisible's skin bent light around him.

Stern has become a fixture in Jokertown, his newfound abilities inspiring him to make the most of his second chance to help others. He is well-respected in the joker community as well as in the city at large, and law enforcement officials—aces, jokers and nats—have consulted him on puzzling cases, with more than a fair share of success.

Stern is 5'10", and 180 pounds. His frame is solid, but not especially muscular or unusually thin. He wears his hair in a closely cropped Afro, and his mocha-colored skin is smooth. He has a few small acne scars on his face, but these aren't noticeable on first glance because of his unusual, oversized eyewear. These resemble the sunglasses designed to cover a pair of corrective glasses. The bows are wide at the hinge, tapering only gradually before curling over his ears, effectively concealing his eyes entirely. His eyes are compound in nature, though they have other unusual properties. They can move independently of each other, and for difficult viewing requiring concentration, Stern typically demands the room be cleared so he can focus without distraction. In reality, he

ANDREW STERN

POWER LEVEL 3

STR 10	DEX 12	CON 13	INT 14	WIS 13	CHA 14
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Concentration 8 (+9), Gather Information 8 (+10), Intimidate 4 (+6), Notice 8 (+9), Search 8 (+10)

FEATS

Connected, Contacts, Well-Informed

Equipment: Oversize goggles, collapsible white cane

POWERS

Sensory Shield 3 (vision)

Super-Senses 11 (vision; accurate, acute, extended, darkvision, infravision, low-light vision, microscopic vision 2, tracking, ultravision)

COMBAT

Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +1, Fortitude +1, Reflex +3, Will +3

Abilities 16 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 14 + Combat 6 + Saves 4 = Total 52

takes off his shades so his eyes can extend on short stalks, giving him extra magnification ability.

JAMES "GIG" BENTON

Gig Benton was a struggling actor with big dreams. He had a face and body that turned heads, and though times were tough, everyone told him he would be a big star someday. Then the wild card virus found him, and his life changed dramatically. He slept for days, missing appointments, auditions and phone calls. He woke only long enough to stuff himself with every last scrap of food in his meager apartment, cooked or otherwise. While he slept, his body swelled and a chitinous covering grew over his back. The hair on his arms and legs grew stiff and sharp, while the hair on his head mostly fell out, leaving patchy clumps. After these changes had taken place, one look in the mirror was enough to drive Gig to the brink of madness.

He discovered he could control roaches with his mind alone. Shortly after the transformation, he sat on the floor of his kitchen in the dark, despair practically oozing from every pore, when he spotted a roach moving across the floor. He screamed at it "Get out!" and it stopped dead, looking at him. He repeated himself, this time with even more rage, and the roach did something curious; it dipped its front end as if bowing then scurried off under the baseboard, back the way it had come.

In the following weeks, Gig performed experiments to test whether this power was genuine. After weeks of trials, he was satisfied the roaches really were obeying his every command, up to and including orders to kill themselves in a number of gruesome ways. Slowly it dawned on Gig the weapon he held; his vengeance was finally at hand. It took him a while to master his new body,



JAMES "GIG" BENTON/"PERRY PLANET"

PL 8

STR 17	DEX 20	CON 19	INT 12	WIS 10	CHA 4
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	-------

SKILLS

Climb 8 (+11), Disguise 4 (+1), Perform 8 (+5), Profession (actor) 4 (+4), Stealth 8 (+13)

FEATS

Animal Empathy 2 (roaches only), Blind-Fight, Evasion 2, Fearsome Presence 2 (DC 12, 10 ft.), Improved Initiative, Rage 2, Uncanny Dodge (auditory)

POWERS

Animal Control 8 (Burst Area; Limited to cockroaches; Mental Link)

Environmental Control 5 (swarms of cockroaches, DC 10 distraction)

Flight 3 (wings; Fades)

Immunity 2 (disease, poison)

Nauseate 8 (noxious gas; Burst Area)

Protection 2 (armored carapace)

Strike 1 (limb spines and mandibles; Mighty)

Super-Movement 1 (wall-crawling)

Super-Senses 4 (blindsight, vibrational)

DRAWBACKS

Power Loss (Flight, if wings are disabled, -1 point), Vulnerability (light-based attacks, x2 effect; major, uncommon, -3 points).

COMBAT

Attack +3, Grapple +6, Damage +4 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -3, Initiative +9

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +6, Fortitude +6, Reflex +6, Will +3

Abilities 22 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 58+ Combat 14+ Saves + 6 - Drawbacks -4 = Total 115

but he's come to see it as vastly superior to the "weak shell" he inhabited before the wild card virus bestowed its "gifts" to him.

His eyes are still human-like, and that may be the single most terrifying thing about him. His mouth now closes from side to side instead of up and down, and two small mandibles jut out from his jaw, partly covering his mouth, twitching rapidly when he is agitated. Where his nose should be there are only two small holes. His greasy, pale, hairless skin is partly transparent, and his back is covered by a chitinous, brown shell that can split into a set of fully functional wings when he is pressed. His arms and legs are very thin and covered with the same color of chitin as his back, and he now has several joints in each limb. His hands have become somewhat vestigial; only two fingers and a thumb-like appendage are apparent. His feet are entirely insect-like. He does not yet possess a third set of limbs, but two thumb-like lumps have appeared, one on either side of his abdomen; they have lengthened over the past week, and now wiggle in sync when he uses his arms or legs. It's only a matter of time before his metamorphosis becomes complete.

Tough, sharp spines protrude from his limbs at regular intervals, adding both heightened sensitivity and some very sharp edg-

es to his arsenal. His bulk gives no hint of the blinding speed at his disposal. A short, stubby set of constantly wiggling antennae protrudes from his forehead, tasting the air for vibrations. Because of his antennae and hypersensitive spines, he can “see” in the dark as well as in broad daylight by sensing vibrations around him. Planet’s behavior has taken on insect-like qualities; his movements are sudden, jerky and twitchy, seemingly fueled by nervous energy. His head can rotate side-to-side, but it cannot tilt up down or at any kind of angle; this may seem like a weakness, but just like a real cockroach, his antennae make up for it by sensing vibrations, warning him of approaching danger.

Planet was not a particularly skilled fighter before the change, although he knew some stage fighting. What he lacks in skill he makes up for in savagery and his wild card abilities give him several edges in combat. He is strong and fast, as well as tough and possessed of some natural weapons. He can unleash a nauseating gas cloud from his body. His ability to command swarms of roaches can create a powerful distraction, giving him an additional advantage. He is also largely immune to disease and toxins.

Planet’s Flight power Fades thusly: for every two rounds of flight, he loses one rank, with speed adjustment as per the new rank. When he reaches zero ranks he must land. He can, if necessary, push for one more round at the cost of becoming fatigued, after which he glides to the ground—no longer capable of supporting himself in flight. He recovers one rank of Flight per hour once he is no longer fatigued.

Planet is vulnerable to light brighter than direct sunlight; he flees the area of any such light source immediately, no matter what he’s doing at the time. When the light source is removed or dims, he can return. The same is true of any normal roaches under Planet’s command; brighter than normal light sources cause millions of years of evolution and the self-preservation instinct to override their commands from Planet, and they flee. Planet’s metamorphosis has made him susceptible to light-based attacks.

BODYGUARD ROACH

Planet’s roach bodyguards are massive insects, hand-fed a diet of raw meat from the time they first hatched through their nymph stage and into their monstrous, adult form. Planet has eight of these enormous roaches at his disposal.

Measuring roughly one foot (12 inches) across, they are larger even than many turtles. They are more rounded in shape than a standard roach, and strong fliers, even capable of carrying small objects of up to their body weight (roughly five pounds) while

BODYGUARD ROACH

PL 3/MINION RANK 1

STR 6	DEX 18	CON 17	INT 1	WIS 1	CHA 1
-------	--------	--------	-------	-------	-------

SKILLS

Stealth 8 (+16)

FEATS

Evasion, Fast Overrun, Improved Initiative, Improved Overrun, Uncanny Dodge 2 (auditory)

POWERS

Flight 2 (25 MPH)

Super-Movement 2 (wall-crawling 2)

DRAWBACKS

Power Loss (Flight, if wings are disabled, –1 point), Vulnerability (light-based attacks, x2 effect; major, uncommon, –3 points).

COMBAT

Attack +3 (includes +1 size), Grapple –4 (includes –4 size), Damage –2 (unarmed), Defense +3 (includes +1 size), Knockback +0 (includes +1 size), Initiative +8

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +3, Fortitude +3, Reflex +4, Will –5

NOTES

Note: Size modifiers are already taken into account for this character’s abilities, skills, and combat scores.

Abilities –12 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 13 + Combat 8 + Saves +0 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 13

flying. Their coloration is jet black, and their abdomens appear segmented like the body of an earthworm. They have tough armor and utilize overrun actions at every opportunity while in flight during combat. After several overrun fly-bys to soften up a potential victim, they land on them and begin a vicious biting attack.

If an opponent is armored or otherwise impervious to its bite attack, the bodyguard roach flies off and continues overrun attacks until the target is unconscious or the roach is dead (or Planet calls them off).

The roaches flee if exposed to light brighter than direct sunlight, as instinct overrides even Planet’s control. When the light source is removed or dims to less than direct sunlight, they return and continue where they left off. Due to exposure Planet’s powers, the bodyguard roaches are also more susceptible to light-based attacks, a weakness that the PCs may be able to use against them.

WILD CARDS



BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Like many stories set in the *Wild Cards* universe, this one exemplifies the misleading nature of appearances. It is about the difference between talent and fame, especially the lengths to which some will go in our celebrity-obsessed culture to achieve the latter, and the potential harm inherent in such idolization, both to the observer and the observed. This phenomenon is only compounded by the extraordinary potential of the wild cards. While many *Wild Cards* characters may appear in this adventure (the most likely being listed under **Dramatis Personae**), use of any particular character is left to the discretion of the Gamemaster.

INTRODUCTION

Due to recent cuts in funding, the Jokertown Clinic is in danger of shutting down. A group of prominent aces and entertainers have banded together to stage a landmark benefit concert for the Clinic in New York's Central Park. Such a prominent fundraiser on behalf of jokers has inflamed all the usual passions surrounding victims of

the wild card virus and there have been several acts of vandalism in the weeks leading up to the concert. It also seems someone with ties to Jokertown is closely monitoring everything that happens. As the controversy grows the stakes for the Clinic get higher. Topping it all off, a singing sensation named Skylark is set to launch her national comeback tour as the benefit's closing act.

There are two different factions at work. Skylark is using her secret ace power to implant specific emotional states into her listeners, pushing them to acts of sabotage. She inflames them against the benefit and jokers generally, not because she hates jokers, or wishes the benefit to fail, just the opposite, in fact. She wants to increase publicity surrounding the concert so it will be picked up for national broadcast. After her card turned, Skylark's newfound abilities transformed her from a mediocre wanna-be into a huge success but also unhinged her mind. When her CD releases tanked and she lost her recording contract, she became psychotic, and her resentment at being scorned by the listening public took dangerous shape. Her ace ability only works "live," not via recorded media so she intends to drive the world's largest broadcast audience insane out of spite. She has been planning this

ADAPTING THE ADVENTURE

The intended chronological setting for this adventure is the late 1980s, before the murder of Chrysalis. It also assumes Melissa Blackwood is attempting to follow in her grandfather's footsteps as a stage magician prior to her role as a member of Jay Ackroyd's agency. If the adventure is set in the present-day *Wild Cards* world, make the following adjustments:

- The incident at Aces High should be replaced with a similar encounter at Starfields restaurant, owned by Ackroyd's wife, Hastet. The attackers are a group of Shriners from Burlington, VT in town for a convention.
- The whereabouts of Mark Meadows are unknown so his part (and that of J.J. Flash and Starshine) is taken by his alter ego the Radical, who is more than happy to work the benefit. Although it is unlikely that the Radical would be affected by Skylark's ace, should this happen, the GM could use the opportunity to restore Dr. Meadows to reality or to create a new persona for him.
- As a second information source, replace Chrysalis with Digger Downs, who may also be useful in learning Skylark is a secret ace.
- In the present day, Peregrine is in her 50s, still vivacious, but her flight routine at the benefit should emphasize grace and artistry, not force. Instead of her speed dive finale, Peregrine executes a complex downward spiral in which she changes positions many times, creating dazzling patterns with her wings.
- If the Turtle makes an appearance at the benefit's climax, he does so using his original shell from the Wild Card Dime Museum (for old time's sake).
- Both Misery and Skylark are about ten years older, and "Deenie" Watson's promising career and sudden disappearance following the "outbreak at The Apollo" are better documented, as are Skylark's failed recordings (related Gather Information checks should be easier). Conversely, Skylark's life as Cynthia Chalmers is more obscured (related Gather Information checks should be harder). Attenuate the "Two Years Ago"/"One Year Ago" aspects of the **Timeline of Past Events** to "Five Years Ago"/"Two Years Ago" respectively.

for weeks, seeding anger toward jokers generally and this event in particular at her regional concert performances, and now locally.

The second faction is a group of jokers suspicious of Skylark's intentions through a joker-ace named Misery, who shares a common past with Skylark (they drew the wild card together) and has a specific foreboding that the performance must not happen. Misery knows Skylark is unstable, but is not exactly sure what she has planned. She only knows it will have terrible consequences. She sends her friends and associates to report everything they see concerning the benefit, its volunteers, and the various acts of sabotage, all of which looks suspicious. In the end, she and her allies attempt to disrupt the benefit before Skylark can wreak havoc.

The adventure begins on the Monday morning before the Saturday concert. Each day has specific encounters associated with it, although there are some interludes that may take place whenever the characters initiate them, by following a lead for example. Aside from the fixed attacks, add whatever additional random attacks seem likely to ratchet up the paranoia and the notoriety surrounding the concert, to keep the characters busy and off-guard right up until the performance.

GETTING CHARACTERS INVOLVED

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

"...Thanks, Felicity. I'm standing here at the Sheep Meadow in Central Park, where preparations are frantically underway for Saturday's performance to benefit the Blythe Van Renssaeler Clinic, which we'll be airing live

at 8:00 p.m. right here on WPDT-8. Behind me you can see the world-famous Dr. Tachyon consulting with Hiram Worchester, owner of the "Aces High" restaurant, on final preparations. And I have standing with me the lovely Peregrine, who will be hosting the gala event. Peregrine, are you concerned that the benefit may not go off as planned?"

"I'm not really worried, Todd. Dr. Tachyon has everything well in hand, and we've got top-notch security. Besides, who would want to harm me?" [Peregrine shakes both her hair and feathers seductively, looking straight into the camera].

"Are you excited to be working beside such great performers like Reggie Wright, Greg Running Bear, and the captivating Skylark."

"I should think that they're all more excited to be working beside me, Todd."

"I know I'm certainly excited. What are your thoughts about the recent rise in anti-joker sentiment surrounding the benefit?"

[Peregrine's demeanor turns momentarily serious, she seems shaken and her voice drops] "Speaking as a member of the joker community, I think it's terrible that a group that is already so misunderstood, and that is only trying to care for its own, should be so horribly mistreated. The Jokertown Clinic, the work being done by Dr. Finn and his staff, is irreplaceable.

[Peregrine regains her equilibrium] "And I'll be interviewing Dr. Finn about his work on Peregrine's Perch tomorrow.

I'll also be talking with Greg Running Bear about his decision to perform Saturday, and perhaps he'll give us a preview. You don't want to miss it! That's all for me, Todd. Sorry, but I've got to fly!" [Peregrine smiles broadly, spreads her wings out, the right wing briefly curling around the reporter, and launches into the air. The reporter seems noticeably flustered.]

"Um, that was benefit hostess Peregrine positively buoyant about Saturday's performance. Count on WPDT-8 to bring you updates on this exciting event as they happen. I'm Todd Samson, reporting live from Central Park. Back to you, Felicity."

At this point the GM should provide whatever additional information s/he thinks would be relevant to the characters to determine their involvement with the story.

The benefit concert has attracted national attention, and many out-of-town aces, jokers, and nats have come to New York for the spectacle. The size of the effort also requires the involvement of hundreds of volunteers, many of them drawn from the wild carder community. Members of the media are swarming, too, looking for the next headline. Folks who live in Jokertown and rely upon the services of the Clinic are certainly invested in the outcome, as are the local aces who feel sympathy toward their plight. And there are always those looking to make a quick buck. Characters could be among any of these, but the adventure supposes they have all decided to volunteer. As the adventure opens, the curious and the committed are gathered on the Sheep Meadow of New York's Central Park.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The following characters play roles in *Benefit of the Doubt*, summarized here for reference. You can find game information for new characters in the **Characters** section at the end of the adventure, while established *Wild Cards* characters are described in **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook.

DR. TACHYON

Also one of the Masters of Ceremony (he can't resist being the center of attention), Dr. Tachyon has invested much personal capital into the project, pulling many strings on short notice. Failure would mean a loss of dignity and respect. He is also motivated by the residual guilt he feels over his role in unleashing the virus. Dr. Tachyon can be used as a source of advice and motivation, but is not intended to play a large role in the scenario.

DR. BRADLEY FINN

The Clinic's first joker doctor, the centaur-like Dr. Finn has volunteered to manage the first aid stations and organize the emergency medical response for the expected crowds. The good Doctor is distraught and distracted over the potential closure of the clinic, his nerves and his tail frayed.

JAY ACKROYD, "POPINJAY"

Popinjay has been hired by Dr. Tachyon to lead the security team for the concert. He has memorized the locations of the largest lock-ups in the city so he can "pop" troublemakers out of the way; this might well include the characters if he gets annoyed with them. He is very much concerned about the acts of sabotage that have taken place over the past week and is on a short "trigger" but also knows he can't be everywhere. He could use some help.

BILLY RAY, "CARNIFEX"

The muscle on the security team, Billy Ray is always on the lookout for some heads that require righteous busting. He does not get along with his "boss" Popinjay. Jay has dropped Billy Ray into the East River "to cool off" at least once during the last week. Carnifex should be used for extra muscle if the need arises. Do not expect him to show restraint.

HIRAM WORCHESTER

Proprietor of the exclusive Aces High restaurant, Hiram is providing the catering for the concert free of charge. He is also in charge of the meticulous arrangements for the performance and helped Dr. Tachyon to line up the talent for the show. He seems to be everywhere, making sure that everything is just the way *he* wants it. Worcester can provide resources and direction when dealing with the ace community.

PEREGRINE

Mistress of Ceremonies, Peregrine is reluctant to share the spotlight, even with Dr. Tachyon. She has been practicing flight maneuvers for weeks and plans an aerial display that will remind everyone why *she's* the one to watch. She's not happy about the prospect of being overshadowed by Skylark's comeback performance. Play up her vanity and truculence whenever she appears. Fortunately for her, it's hard to stay mad at someone that looks like Peregrine and she knows it.

MELISSA BLACKWOOD, "TOPPER"

Melissa has decided to follow in her grandfather's footsteps and go on stage with a traditional magic act, relying heavily on her ace ability. She has been practicing some illusions and sleight of hand, and she plans to produce all sorts of "lost" items for members of the audience. She is stepping out of her comfort zone in this adventure and should be very unsure and prone to errors, perhaps used for comic relief. Or maybe she can pull some much-needed help out of her hat?

JUMPIN' JACK FLASH

Always ready to contribute to socially progressive causes, Mark as J.J. is preparing to wow the audience with a display of fiery prowess, shaping various forms to startle and delight. He's preparing to

send a dragon soaring over the crowd, a la Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* film. Other of Meadow's "friends" can make appearances at the GM's discretion.

REGGIE WRIGHT

The most popular stand-up comedian of the day, he doesn't care about any cause but his own. His manager told him that the playing the Benefit would be a good career move and she hasn't steered him wrong yet. Reggie is a nat example of the façade not matching the real person, and the GM should emphasize this duality whenever he shows up.

GREG RUNNING BEAR

A rock star with a conscience, Greg uses his fame and wealth to support humanitarian causes all over the world. He's energetic, likeable, smokin' hot, and likes to get his groove on as often as possible with whomever suits his fancy at the moment. He's strong enough and skilled enough to wade into a brawl and be the last man standing.

MISERY

"Deenie" to those who know her well, she is secretly the owner of the Broken Mirrors Saloon in Jokertown, a jazz club with a storied past. She has assembled around her a group of devoted employees who will do just about anything for her. Misery is a reluctant joker ace whose precognitive ability and personal connection to the tale's antagonist Skylark allow her to sense that something bad is going down with regard to the Benefit and the ability to put a stop to it.

BARTHOLOMEW RIDGEFIELD, "POPS"

Maitre d' of The Broken Mirrors Saloon, he is very, very old and getting older by the minute. He knows every story in the joint and is fiercely loyal to Misery. As a point of reference, imagine that "Pops" is similar in attitude to Sir John Gielgud's butler character in the film *Arthur*: older, wiser, and with a wry wit.

SAMMY SCHEIN, "TINKLES"

Sammy has been Misery's accompanist for more than 20 years, and is the most loyal of her entourage. There is nothing he wouldn't do for her. Aside from that, he's all about the music. His tentacled joker form has finally given him the chance to play the way he's always dreamed, but watching him can be a bit unnerving. He also composes for his ensemble, Twelve Hand Bop, to take advantage of their unique talents. His "Requiem for Jokertown" is an unheard modern masterpiece of composition.

CINDIE CHARMAINE, "SKYLARK"

The antagonist of the adventure, Skylark is a secret ace with an axe to grind. A no-talent hack who just happened to draw an ace, she



suffers from deep-seated insecurities, jealousies, and a fierce desire for vengeance against the listening public. If she gets her way, the entire benefit audience will be driven stark raving mad. Her psychosis is so entrenched that she even has herself fooled.

TWELVE HAND BOP

The band at the Broken Mirrors, these are the jokers sent by Misery to observe the benefit, the characters, and Skylark, and to lurk wherever their presence might seem sinister.

"Lips" Mahoney plays a variety of brass and woodwind instruments and is a perfect mimic. He can sound like anyone or anything if he tries. This ability frequently helps him to elude pursuit or to distract others. When he's not playing or making sounds, the orifices covering his body constantly open and close, purse and pucker, and wheeze and puff in a disturbing way.

"Big Daddy" Jenkins, the bassist, is a gentle giant of a man who has become his instrument. Towering over 8 feet and 425 pounds, he can intimidate almost anyone just by staring down at them. If one of the other band members gets into trouble, "Big Daddy" will always come to the rescue, and when he has to hit someone in the process, they usually stay down.

Glenn "Spider" Morrison is the drummer of the band, and the most volatile. He's very reactive, and prone to being startled, which invariably leaves the startler covered in his sticky webbing. He's a spider from the waist down, and has two extra human arms

as well as compound eyes. He's quiet and he can walk on walls, so he is the one that Misery sends out when stealth is required.

Carlos is the guitarist and the newest member of the band. He's also the most inexperienced musician. As the newest member, he has not yet formed the strong ties of loyalty to Misery that the others share, but he is grateful for the job. He's never held one so long. If Misery is worried about a fight, she's most likely to send Carlos, since he's least likely to get hurt, as his body is highly resistant to most physical harm.

TIMELINE OF PAST EVENTS

All of the information within the timeline is public and readily discovered through research or interviews. Difficulty levels have been assigned to obtaining this information through relevant means.

- **Two years ago:** Deenie, on her way up, and Cynthia, on her way out, are both performing on the same bill at the revitalized Apollo Theater in Harlem when an outbreak of the Wild Card virus hits. Both disappear from public view. (Gather Information, DC 25)
- **One year ago:** "Skylark" makes her debut in Montreal and establishes a new career in Canada, quickly gaining recognition. She is signed to a major record label and releases her debut album, *Caged Melody*. Critics pan the recording as mediocre and sales are lower than expected. (Gather Information, DC 15) "Misery" turns up quietly in Jokertown bars, singing for tips and becomes established. (Gather Information, DC 30, or DC 15 for joker characters based in Jokertown)
- **Eight months ago:** Skylark returns to the states and begins playing cabarets in Boston. She is greeted with acclaim, and called "a consummate live performer." (Gather Information, DC 10) She triumphs at venues all along the East coast. Misery secretly buys the Broken Mirror using money she saved from her nat career. (Gather Information, DC 40, or DC 30 for joker characters based in Jokertown; no one knows but Misery, the former owners, and the lawyers involved, so it must be a leak.)
- **Six months ago:** Skylark's second recording, *Flying High*, fails miserably and her recording contract is canceled. (Gather Information, DC 15) Skylark's realization that she is truly talentless apart from her ace ability rekindles long-simmering resentments and, ultimately, drives her into full-blown psychosis. Realizing that her ability only works on a live audience, she ramps up her public performance schedule, continuing to build her reputation as a concert artist (Gather Information, DC 10 finds her performance schedule only)
- **Two months ago:** Dr. Tachyon and Dr. Finn announce the financial status of the Jokertown Clinic and plans for a benefit performance featuring aces and sympathetic nat entertainers. (Common knowledge.)
- **One month ago:** The tentative line-up is announced but public response is muted. The mainstream media show little interest in a concert to benefit jokers, despite the high-profile performers involved. (Common knowledge.)
- **Two weeks ago:** A few of the earliest committed performers are threatened. Protesters begin to gather around the city, many from out of town. Handbills promoting the event are defaced with anti-joker sentiment. Attacks on jokers increase. The media begins to show interest and starts airing regular reports. (Common knowledge.)
- **One week ago:** Greg Running Bear and Reggie Wright announce they will be performing in response to the threats. Skylark announces that the benefit will launch her first world-wide tour. Media interest skyrockets, and live broadcast rights are sold for a princely sum. Complex preparations begin in Central Park. (Common knowledge.)

SCENE TWO: MONDAY, MONDAY

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

It is the third Monday in May, the weather is delightful, and New York City is in the swing of spring. The Blythe Van Renssaeler Clinic Benefit Concert is taking place this coming Saturday and Dr. Tachyon has called a general meeting for all interested persons at 9:00 a.m. this morning at the stage being assembled at one end of the Sheep Meadow in Central Park (See map of Central Park for layout of concert area). A fairly large crowd has gathered by 8:45 and the mood seems hopeful. Nats, jokers and maybe even a few aces mix and mingle, waiting to hear Dr. Tachyon.

He arrives right on time. Joining him on stage are Hiram Worchester, Jay Ackroyd, Carnifex, and Dr. Bradley Finn. Tachyon is dressed somewhat conservatively in a long red leather duster with matching gloves, a bright yellow scarf trailing his neck and a Prussian blue cavalier hat at a jaunty angle. Worchester is wearing a traditional linen summer suit, and Finn his usual white lab coat. As the crowd pushes forward to hear their words, Tachyon seems engaged in some petty dispute with Hiram about introductions, with Hiram insisting that Peregrine should open the show, while Tachyon insisting upon that right for himself. Ackroyd and Finn look as though they've seen this debate a million times. Dr. Finn clears his voice—"Gentlemen, I believe the volunteers are assembled and waiting." "Yeah," says Ackroyd, "Get on with it before I pop you both to Takis."

Tachyon snaps at Worchester, "We shall return to this topic later, Hiram!" and turns to address the volunteers. "Thank you all for coming. I'm pleased that so many have responded to our cause, and you do me honor. There are

some in this city who would disagree with us and who are determined to thwart our good work. Do not be discouraged. I have every confidence in our security arrangements under the capable Mr. Ackroyd. Please put such concerns out of your mind. We are down to the final few days before the performance, and there are still have many details to sort out” Tachyon shoots a harsh look at Worchester, whose face remains defiant.

Before he can continue, a group of protesters comes marching onto the Meadow, carrying placards with anti-joker sentiments, shouting slurs and slogans. Dr. Tachyon cautions patience, Popinjay gets ready to point, and Carnifex starts to flex his muscles in preparation for what he hopes will be a good brawl. “What do you people want? Please leave peacefully,” Tachyon almost pleads. “We’re not going anywhere, alien. Take your freak show and get out of our park, out of our city, and off our planet,” shouts one of the men.

Most of the protesters are dressed for work. With a casual glance (Notice, DC 10), almost anyone would spot that their signs seem very hastily thrown together with whatever materials were at hand. “Really, there’s no need for this. Please leave, or we shall have to call the Police.” Tachyon and Ackroyd whisper to each other (Listen, DC 20; “I can’t get through, something is blocking me. Their anger is so strong” “Should I pop them, Doc” “No, Jay, let’s give peace a chance, shall we.” “I’ll give ‘em a piece, says Carnifex).

While the group on stage quietly discusses, the protesters push forward into the volunteers, pushing them to the ground and kicking them. “Good going, Tachyon; now I can’t draw a bead on them, calls out Ackroyd. “I’ll sort ‘em out for ya’, Popinjay,” says Carnifex and jumps down into the crowd. Dr. Tachyon calls out, “Some restraint if you please, Billy Ray.”

The scene turns into a general brawl. There are about two dozen lightly armed nats carrying makeshift signs attached to mailing tubes, yard sticks, etc. Two are teens wearing uniforms and carrying aluminum baseball bats (+2 damage) that they swing freely. Others fight with handheld objects like staplers and bottled water (+0 damage) while the rest punch and kick. They seem more ornery than determined. The characters should feel free to join the fray. Throughout the fight, Dr. Tachyon exhorts his people not to hurt the protesters. Mental powers have to overcome Skylark’s Emotion Control to affect them (giving the protesters an effective “Will save” of +8). A sharp blow leaves them dazed and takes the fight out of them. They are still clearly angry. “We’ll go but you haven’t seen the last of us yet, you freak-lovers.” They leave the field, being shoved along by Carnifex.

“Perhaps, Jay, now might be a good time to discuss security procedures,” Dr. Tachyon helpfully suggests. “Dr. Finn, would you

please see if anyone needs medical care.” Dr. Finn trots down a ramp to the grass and steps carefully among the volunteers. A pair of jokers (choose two from among the members of Twelve Hand Bop) walks quickly away and leaves the park (Sense Motive, DC 15 to arouse suspicions). They get on a city bus, and get off in Jokertown, where they are quickly lost. Characters must succeed at a Notice, DC 20 (or DC 15 with Track) to follow, as the pair know their way around Jokertown quite well. If caught and questioned using Intimidation, Diplomacy or powers, their loyalty to Misery proves hard to overcome (remember to apply their Loyalty bonus to all relevant saving throws). In any case, they are not privy to her suspicions about Skylark, only the benefit generally. (“Somethin’ ain’t right; I got me a bad feelin,” etc.) Their circuitous path leads to a non-descript back alley entrance with faded paint labeled “Staff – Shangri-La.” The door is locked, as is the front entrance, although all of Misery’s employees have the key. The club does not open until 4:00 p.m. No one will answer the bell until that time.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

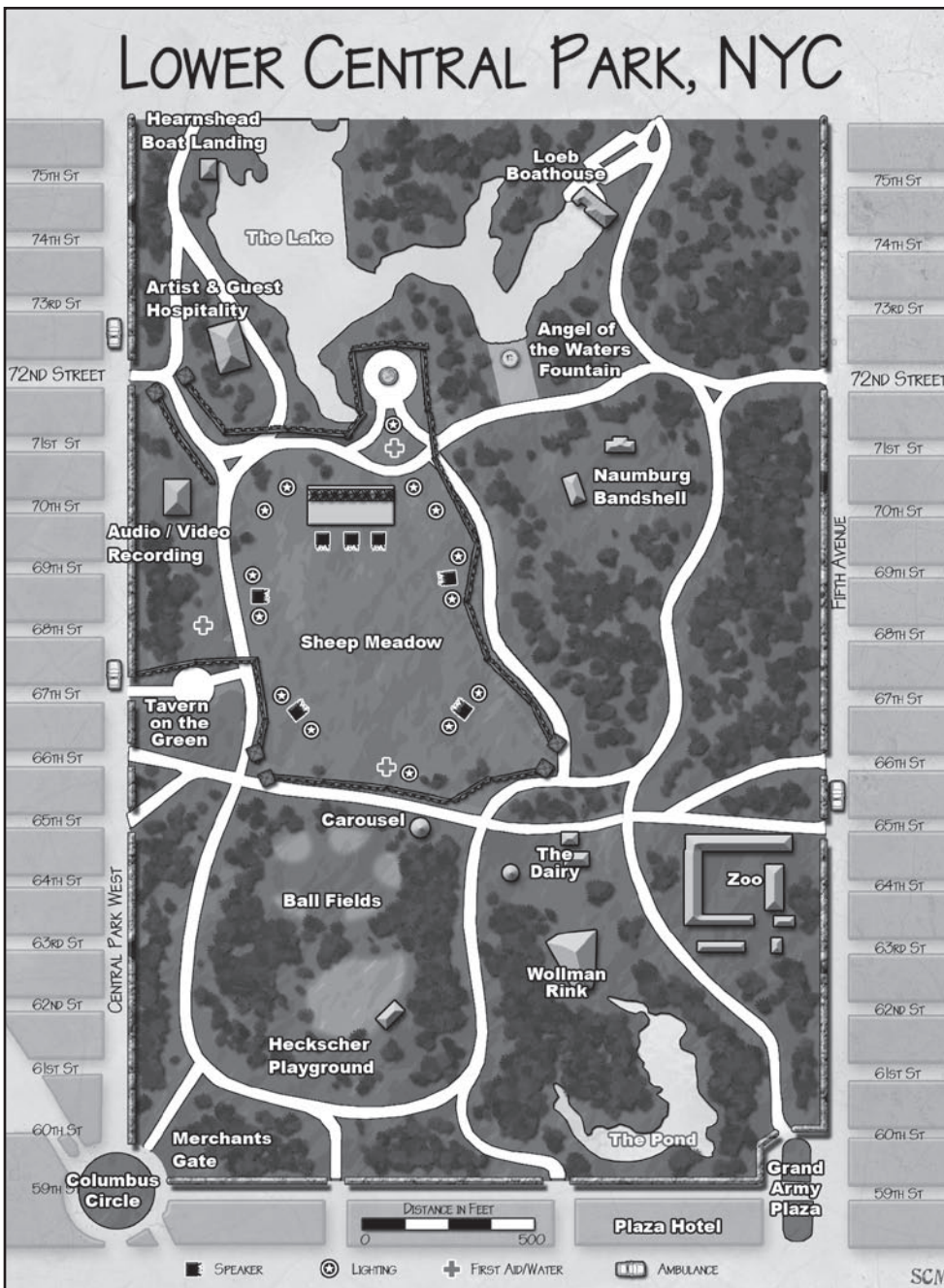
Jay Ackroyd moves forward. “As Dr. Tachyon mentioned we’ve been having some security problems. We’re stretched thin, and we need a few volunteers for general security, walking the perimeter, escorting guests, that sort of thing. It’s not glamorous but it’s necessary. Do I have any takers?” Hiram Worchester steps forward. “In addition, good people, we also



need couriers.” “That’s the snob way of saying ‘errand boys,’” remarks Jay sarcastically, “Yeah, we need some couriers, too.” “Yes,” says Dr. Finn, “I will need people to go back and forth to the Clinic regularly.” “Getting them there won’t be a problem, Dr. Finn, but they’ll have to make it back on their own. I’d rather deal with the Astronomer than midtown traffic any day.” Ackroyd smiles sardonically.

Ideally, the players should accept one of these assignments. If they are going to work security, Jay sends them to Billy Ray, who takes them through “basic training,” such as which colored badges corre-

spond with which privileges, where the entrances and exits will be located, proper frisking techniques, how to spot concealed weapons, and other useful bits of information. Couriers are instructed to go with Hiram, who issues everyone with official identification, and tells them where to find the offsite ticket sales offices (In Jokertown at the Clinic and at the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum, in Midtown at the New York Public Library and the Empire State Building, and uptown at the Museum of Natural History and the Low Library at Columbia University). A courier should never pick up cash by himself, he explains, but always take at least one security person with him. The couriers and the security staff are all issued radios, with security on channel two and couriers on channel three.



SCENE THREE: BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A DIME?

Toward evening, Hiram sends out courier/security teams to pick up the day’s receipts from the ticket offices and take them to “Aces High” where they are tallied and locked into the restaurant’s safe overnight. He sends one team to Jokertown, one team to Midtown and one team uptown. On their way out the door of the Wild Card Dime Museum with a bundle of cash, the characters are confronted by a group of angry Japanese businessmen swinging briefcases (+1 damage). Their comments are unintelligible (unless, of course, you understand Japanese) but their anger is unmistakable, and their purpose clear—to steal the courier’s pouch. A similar scene, with different homogenous groups (travel agents and the Brooklyn Knights of Columbus Women’s Auxiliary, respectively), plays out in Midtown and Uptown. It seems to be a coordinated attack on the day’s sales.

Each group consists of at least ten ordinary humans. Treat half as having blunt weapons (+1 damage) and half as unarmed. They are focused on stealing the money, and will ignore any characters or bystanders who are not in the way of that immediate goal. Should they succeed, the thieves race to the

nearest tall building, take an elevator to a high floor, find an open window and dump the cash. The characters must then deal with the chaos caused by a few thousand dollars raining down upon a New York City street. Like other victims of Skylark, this group has an effective Will save bonus of +8 due to her Emotion Control.

At whichever location the characters happen to be, they may notice (Notice, DC 15) a figure lurking in the shadow of an alley across the street. This is another of the members of Twelve Hand Bop, sent by Misery because she had a “bad feeling.” Before this figure can be approached, it vanishes into the alley (“Spider” would be ideal for this encounter because of his speed and movement advantages. Characters must make a Notice, DC 20 or Track, DC 15 to follow him). The figure can be traced to a back-alley marked in faded paint “Staff — Shangri-La.” The door is locked. If the characters choose to investigate, refer to the description of the Broken Mirrors Saloon under **Interlude III: Lady Sings the Blues**.

SCENE FOUR: HIGHER AND HIGHER

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

At Tuesday morning's call, Hiram Worchester greets the volunteers. Worchester is once again dressed impeccably in a white linen suit with a pale blue shirt, spats and straw hat, and sporting an ivory cane. His spade beard is neatly trimmed. Hiram informs the volunteers that the technical staff will be setting up the lighting and amplifiers, conducting sound checks, and other technical tasks, and that volunteers will be assigned to assist throughout the day. “Before we begin that rather arduous task,” he continues, “I have asked Dr. Finn to say a few words about the health and safety procedures for the concert. Dr. Finn, if you would...?”

Dr. Finn's tail swishes nervously as he canters up to the microphone. He does not seem comfortable addressing a large group. “Everyone, and especially those of you with any sort of medical training, whether it be in first aid, CPR, or related areas should be aware of the location of the medical tents. The first is behind the stage, the second roughly at midpoint on the right. —No, Billy Ray, your other right. —And the third will be opposite the stage at the far end of the Meadow. Each station is equipped with basic first aid supplies, water, and portable defibrillators. There will be an ambulance standing by on the street closest to each station in the event of a life-threatening emergency, although I expect the biggest problem to be dehydration. Here are the signs to look for...” He continues in this way for a while.

Before the characters have a chance to get away, Hiram Worchester comes bounding over in a fashion that belies his enormous

girth. “I say, fellows, before you toddle off, may I have a word? As you're gadding about at the moment, I was hoping that you might assist me. My sous chef has informed me that there's been some sort of incident at Aces High. I can't get away from my duties here at the moment—so much to do, so little time, you know. Would you mind, um, popping over there to see what's amiss? Tell Chef I told you that he would make you a crab and asparagus omelet for your troubles.” If they agree, Worchester asks Popinjay to send the group to the restaurant. If the group turns down Hiram's request, he sends Carnifex to check it out.

If the group accepts Worchester's request, Ackroyd deposits them in the middle of the dining room at Aces High. The view from the top of the Empire State Building is stunning this clear May morning, not that the group has time to admire it. A group of executive employees from one of the offices below, all dressed in professional attire, has broken in to the restaurant, rushing the door as the early morning deliveries were taking place, and are now trashing the restaurant. As they do, they yell out slurs like “freak lover” and “traitor ace.”

The sous chef and his assistant are waving knives at the frenzied group as they dodge the plates and glasses being thrown at them. None of the thrown objects is connecting with its target, as the pencil pushers' aim seems to be rather haphazard. Observant characters (Sense Motive, DC 15) conclude that the workers are not really out to hurt the chefs. Some keep the chefs pinned down while the rest overturn tables, smash light fixtures with chairs, and



cause general destruction. Throughout the melee, two jokers from Twelve Hand Bop watch surreptitiously from down the hallway (Spot, DC 10 to notice), and flee to the elevators if approached (one happens to be waiting conveniently open).

This group is a bit more intense than the crowd that attacked at the Sheep Meadow yesterday, and they will need to be knocked unconscious before ceasing their attacks, after which they awaken somewhat calmer but still aggressive in attitude. Some questioning reveals that all of the attackers were from the same office, a group of assistant vice-presidents from the Stanford, an insurance company in New Haven Connecticut, that had come to the New York office for training. If anyone takes the time to investigate, looking for common threads in the workers' recent activities, they learn that every member of this group had attended one of Skylark's performances in New Haven the preceding week (Gather Information check, DC 20). If they are let go, the executives will only return and attack again on their lunch break. They will keep coming back until restrained or the restaurant is completely destroyed. After the chefs have calmed down following the initial attack, they prepare whatever breakfast items the characters request, including crab and asparagus omelets.

If Carnifex is sent instead of the characters, he will break up the attack without asking too many questions and hand over the crazed insurers to the cops. They will not have an opportunity to attack again. In this case, the characters later learn from hearing Worchester talking with Ackroyd that they were all from the same office in New Haven. The Gamemaster may want to improvise a more coordinated attack to dismantle the stage if the characters choose not to go to Aces High.

Back at the Sheep Meadow, members of the technical staff and any of the characters who have agreed to help them begin setting up the generators, amplifiers, sound and lighting systems. This is skilled work. Characters with appropriate technical skills may make a check using that skill (DC 12) to avoid making a mistake. If a character fails this check, s/he makes a second skill check (DC 15) to avert an accident. Failure at this second check means that something breaks: either a spotlight or amplifier blows out, there is a short in the wiring or something similar that leads to a small fire breaking out. The Gamemaster should add whatever complications and damage to this mishap as seem logical under the circumstances. Once this happens and the emergency is addressed, the techs will not let the characters near the equipment again, except to lift or move it. These characters gain a -2 Charisma bonus when dealing with the technical staff for the rest of the adventure.

SCENE FIVE: YOU'RE SO VAIN

Greg Running Bear and his band come by at midday to check on things. Greg doesn't like security details and never uses them, so he and the band arrive alone. Well, not exactly alone. He loves attention, so is followed by an entourage of autograph hounds, paparazzi, reporters and swooning fans of both sexes. This crowd

will undoubtedly get under foot, cause commotion and disrupt everything around them. The scene should be played for amusement. Greg's fans are shameless in their pursuit of famous entertainers and aces. If any of the characters displays ace abilities, s/he will be quickly surrounded. Greg takes this all in stride. He's not worried about fans getting too close. He can take care of himself. If a fight breaks out, Running Bear will usually identify with the underdog and plow right in to help. He may not be an ace, but he's strong, in top physical shape and he knows a few fighting techniques.

"Heya, brothers and sisters! How is the Great Spirit treating you today? I want you to know that I really appreciate everything you're doing here to help out. You're the real deal. Does anyone want a picture for the folks back home?"

Running Bear seems genuine and sincere. He takes special interest in the wellbeing of any jokers among the characters, inquiring about the nature of their condition, if there's anything he can do to help, et cetera. He takes a different sort of interest in any character, male or female, with high Charisma. He likes to, um, "meet" new people and is always on the lookout for his next hot date. It is difficult to resist his natural charms, if a character is inclined in that direction. He is also an excellent judge of character.

He will not leave until he has found one hook-up from among the assembled group, preferably an ace, someone with high Charisma or social feats such as Attractive, Fame, Inspire, or Leadership. If he should set his sights on one of the characters, the GM should roleplay every possible advantage Greg has in his stat block to maximum effect for a lively social encounter. Needless to say, Greg never fails to please. Any character who "gets some action" from Greg receives an additional Power Point at the end of the adventure for bragging rights!

SCENE SIX: BAD BOYS

That evening, the characters are sent to pick up receipts from the Upper West Side of Manhattan. As they leave the park at West 66th Street and begin walking up Central Park West, on a successful Notice check (DC 10) they see that benefit promotional posters in the area have been systematically defaced, each and every one. Those characters with sensory (smell, touch, sight) or postcognitive powers making a relevant check (DC 15) can tell this defacement is recent. The defacement becomes progressively worse as they walk up the block. Only if a player announces that his character is looking for patterns, that character may make a Notice check (DC 15) to notice that posters featuring Skylark have been left alone.

Following the "trail," the group comes across a Wilderness Scout troop (Huntington Troop #612) across the street from the Museum of Natural History at 73rd Street busily engaged in scrawling

on a batch of posters plastered to the park's outer wall. They are seven boys in their teens and two Scoutmasters, one in his mid-twenties ("Rick") and the other in his early forties ("Doug"). The boys are quite intent, pushing and shoving each other, competing to see who can draw the most offensive additions to the posters. The Scoutmasters egg them on, occasionally clouting them. There is an undercurrent of anger about the whole scene.

As the boys work with malicious glee, they chant, "Joker, joker, stick her with a poker. Throw her in a fire and really smoke her. My brother is a joker, his girlfriend is a nat; I caught them in his bedroom and smashed them with my bat." The Gamemaster is encouraged to create even more unpleasant rhymes for the boys to chant. Aside from their overt hostility this is an ordinary Wilderness Scout troop. If asked what they are doing and why, they spout off about the curse of jokers on society, with the Scoutmasters somewhat more articulate and the kids being, well, teenaged boys. Their arguments are rather haphazard, based as they are on an unarticulated emotional response.

If asked why they did not deface the posters featuring Skylark, one of the kids says, "Because she's smokin' hot!" "Yeah, I bet I could get her to sing for me," says another. The boys try to outdo each other with crude references to Skylark's appearance and their sexual prowess with her. This attitude might strike some of the characters as odd if they compare Skylark's image on nearby posters with that of Peregrine, who is truly the "hotter babe" (Notice, DC 5). The troop saw Skylark perform on the set of "Good Morning, Long Island" last Friday, where they were being profiled for collecting food for African Famine relief.

If the characters attempt to interfere with the Scouts or try to dissuade them, the troop will attack. The boys are not much trouble by themselves, but each of the Scoutmasters has an ace up his sleeve. Rick's body exudes a chemical acid to which he is immune and which dissolves whatever it touches, like a character's clothing or flesh. Any direct contact with his hair or skin causes the equivalent of third degree chemical burns. He can limit this secretion to certain parts of his body, like his hands, if he chooses. If he loses control he will burn off his own clothing. By concentrating, he can generate smaller amounts of a higher strength acid from his fingertips that will eat through metal. The older man, Doug, possesses an array of vibration powers that he uses to keep the characters stunned, dazed, and off-balance so that his scouts can "earn their self-defense badges." He uses this power to make the characters fall to the ground where the boys can more easily harm them. He only takes a more active role if the boys appear to be losing. The men and the two oldest boys also carry hunting knives (+2 damage). The troop gains an effective +8 Will save from Skylark's Emotion Control.

Even though the troop may attack first, to passersby it will look like the characters are attacking a group of Wilderness Scouts and it is possible they may be arrested. If the characters stop fighting, the Scoutmasters will make the boys apologize for attacking and then move on to the next set of posters. They cannot be deterred from this purpose easily.



Sometime during this encounter or just afterward, the characters may see (Notice DC 15) that they are being observed by two figures peering over the stone wall from within Central Park ("Lips" would be a good choice because of his ability to misdirect the characters if necessary). Misery is trying to determine if the characters can be trusted with her suspicions about Skylark. The jokers don't know anything about that; they're just loyal to Misery and do what she asks. Again, their loyalty to Misery makes it difficult to pry information out of them.

SCENE SEVEN: NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

When the characters arrive Wednesday for 9:00 a.m. call at the Stage, they see that activity is already underway.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

As volunteers and staff gather round, a petite somewhat plain brunette stands at the microphone. "Is this distance alright?" she says timidly, looking in the direction of the sound engineer at a mixing board off to the left of the stage. "That's perfect, Skylark. Let's just get the volume adjusted. Whenever you're ready." Skylark clears her throat, look-

ing unsure of herself, and begins tentatively, then picks up confidence as she goes along. She sings an old Patsy Cline standard called "Crazy".

"Crazy, I'm crazy for feeling so lonely. I'm crazy, crazy for feeling so blue. I knew you'd love me as long as you wanted and then some day you'd leave me for somebody new. Worry, why do I let myself worry wondering what in the world did I do? Crazy, for thinking that my love could hold you; I'm crazy for trying and crazy for crying and I'm crazy for loving you." Many in the audience are visibly affected, some shedding tears and trembling. The sound man checks in, his voice choked up, "I, uh, I think we've got it, Skylark. That was beautiful." You can hear him sniffle. Skylark smiles sweetly, says, "Thank you, Bill."

It is possible that the characters may be affected by Skylark's ace. If so, they feel uncontrollably melancholy and weepy. Skylark has prepared this incident to cause misdirection. During her song, she implanted amongst the nearby crew a desire to cause havoc, while the rest of the audience was made to feel sad. Skylark sings a few scales inconsistently into the mic, waiting for something to happen. Those watching her closely (Notice or Sense Motive, DC 20) notice her eyes darting back and forth; she seems to be anticipating something. Those watching the crew (Notice or Sense Motive, DC 15) notice a sudden change in their demeanor. Their faces quickly fill with a queer glee. Bill the sound man starts flipping switches and turning dials on the board, sending a power surge through the circuitry, and one of the electricians yanks on a power cord to the amplifier.

The soundboard and the amp at Skylark's feet both explode, sending shards of metal and plastic flying 20 feet in all directions (treat as equivalent to a fragmentation grenade). Those within the radius may be hit, but can avoid damage with a Reflex save (DC 12) by throwing themselves to the ground. The smell of burning wire fills the air. Skylark cries out and falls. The force of the explosion throws Bill backward several feet.

Dr. Finn comes galloping from the medical tent behind the stage carrying a medical bag in one hand and a radio in the other. He stops to size up Bill's condition then moves quickly up the ramp toward Skylark. "Don't just stand there," he shouts, "grab a pair of stretchers from the medical tent. These people have been seriously injured." You can hear him calling into the radio for an ambulance. Any character can tell at a glance (Notice, DC 5) that Bill is very badly injured; he has shards of metal and plastic sticking out of him, he is bleeding from multiple wounds, and he has suffered third degree burns to the chest. Examining Skylark with either the Medicine skill or an appropriate sensory power (DC 15) reveals that her wounds should have been more severe. All of the significant damage is from shards in her back, not her front as one might expect (because she was prepared for something to happen and turned away from the blast just in time).

Once Bill and Skylark are brought back to the medical tent, Dr. Finn and an assistant do their best to clean them up and prepare them

for transport. Bill is moaning while Skylark stays quiet, occasionally trembling and whimpering comments like "why me?" and "this is so unfair." She plays this scene for everything she's worth, and so should the GM. Skylark should come across as a pathetic innocent. Within a few minutes, EMTs arrive with rolling stretchers. While they are lifting Bill and Skylark off the medical tables, Jay Ackroyd comes bursting in. "Holy Christ! I leave you people for thirty minutes to get a bagel and..." He clams up when he sees Bill and Skylark. "Aw, jeez. What the hell happened?" He turns to Finn. "Do you want me to pop them to the Clinic?" "No, Jay. They need a hospital, and unless you can pop them into a bed in the ER, I think it's safer to take them by ambulance. They're stable now" "If anyone would know a stable condition, it's you," Jay replies reflexively, and instantly regrets it. "Um, sorry Doc. Force of habit. Now would somebody please tell me what happened?" The explanations and the clean up take some time. No one feels much like working for a while.

The characters may want to investigate the scene on their own. An examination of the equipment by someone with relevant technical skills or sensory powers (technical skill or Search, DC 12) reveals that it was tampered with. A general inspection of equipment around the site (technical skill Search, DC 12) confirms that the equipment tampering is widespread (wherever a tech was working at the time Skylark was singing; if the players don't come up with this themselves allow them to make an Intelligence check, DC 12 to draw this conclusion). The electrician, who was only mildly shocked by pulling the amp cord, remembers pulling the cord but not why. If questioned further, he gets angry and defensive. "I don't know why I did it, okay. But it had to be done. This show ain't gonna happen. That's all I'm gonna say." The other technicians mention similarly vague feelings of needing to stop the concert.

If the group checks with New York Presbyterian Medical Center later that day, they are told that Bill Sizemore, the sound man, is unconscious in the Intensive Care Unit in critical condition. Hospital staff will not allow visitors. Skylark was treated for her wounds and released three hours after her arrival. The hospital information desk clerk recalls that she ordered a cab back to The Swan Club where she is currently performing. "I remember because she made a big deal about 'the show must go on,' and 'if Piaf could do it, so can I'. I don't understand what rice has to do with anything..." Skylark is comparing herself with the great French chanteuse Edith Piaf who famously went on stage right after being told that her lover had died in a plane crash. Someone with Knowledge (music) or (France) might pick up the significance of this comparison (DC 18, or with Knowledge (trivia), DC 22). If someone establishes this connection a simple Sense Motive (DC 5) indicates that Skylark must be highly egotistical to compare herself to Piaf.

Suspicious about Skylark's involvement in the incidents no doubt increase. Unfortunately, the Subtle nature of her ace means conventional means of detection do not turn up anything. A blood-test can reveal Skylark has the wild card, but she refuses to cooperate with any sort of test, and even then it does not conclusively prove she's up the sleeve or that she had anything to do with the incidents.

SCENE EIGHT: THE HEAT IS ON

After the events of yesterday, Thursday's call is subdued. Carnifex and Popinjay have tightened security considerably. They stand by the gate and scrutinize everyone as they arrive. Dr. Tachyon, too, has returned for the first time since Monday morning. His attire is noticeably restrained, a simple burgundy crushed velvet short coat and loose trousers with a matching square cap, black high-heeled boots, and emerald hose. He also wears a gold-and-emerald choker and amulet close to the throat, with the symbol of his Takisian House engraved in the gemstone. As each volunteer passes by, Dr. Tachyon says, "this one is clear" or words to that effect. Characters with relevant mental abilities may sense that Tachyon is probing their minds. Use of a power to resist this probe triggers suspicion in Tachyon and it will take a lot of convincing to avoid a more painful examination, either by Tachyon or Carnifex. Once the trio is satisfied that everyone has been sufficiently vetted, Dr. Tachyon takes the stage.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

"Greetings once again. I apologize to you all for this morning's checkpoint procedure, but Mr. Ackroyd has impressed upon me that we can no longer take anything for granted. (He raises his voice in anger.) We have been breached and I will not have it. This benefit will take place and it will succeed. . . (He takes a moment to calm himself.) It is also with profound sorrow that I report the passing of William Sizemore, our chief sound engineer, of wounds received in service to our noble cause. He will be missed. William was neither joker nor ace; just an ordinary man doing what he believed to be right. I ask you all to let that same spirit guide you for the next three days." Tears begin to trickle down his cheeks. "Aw, jeez, there go the water-works," Ackroyd mutters. "Would someone get this man a tissue?" "That will not be necessary, Jay; I have brought my own kerchief." Tachyon pulls a long iridescent pink cloth from his sleeve and blows his nose loudly as he walks off the stage.

A short while later, Hiram Worchester arrives to organize the tasks of the day, which consist mostly of run-throughs for each act. Reggie Wright sweeps in with three large bodyguards, and Billy Ray stiffens when he sees them. He whispers to Ackroyd (Listen, DC 15 to overhear these comments), "I think I once busted that guy on the left for gun-running in Nicaragua." "I thought that *you* were gun-running in Nicaragua," Ackroyd replies. "Okay, so maybe it was Honduras..." Wright affects a conspicuous *bonhomie*. "How's it goin'? You're doin' a fine job. That's a great look for you. What's happenin', baby?" And then he utters his famous catchphrase: "It can't be wrong 'cause I'm so-o-o Wright." Once he gets on the stage, he says more quietly to Worchester (Listen check, DC 15 to overhear this remark anywhere near the stage),

"Okay, Shamu, let's get this done, 'cause I've got a mani-pedi in an hour." His guards take up positions cross-armed behind him. Hiram tightens his fists and the three big men begin to sweat. Worchester smiles slightly (Notice check, DC 18 to notice this minor interplay). Characters observing Wright may make a Sense Motive check (DC 12) to determine that his demeanor is faked.

Down on the ground, Ackroyd turns to greet a tall lanky fellow sporting a blonde ponytail and scraggly goatee, and wearing tattered jeans, sandals, a tie-dyed t-shirt and purple "John Lennon" sunglasses. "Hey, Dr. Meadows, surprised to see you up this early! Are you sure you're not flashing back to yesterday?" He smirks, but Meadows is oblivious. "No, man. At least, I don't think so. It's, like, Thursday, right? Sorry, I'm not wearing my watch. Oh yeah, I don't own a watch. Have you seen my sunglasses? I can't seem to remember where I put them." "Don't worry," Ackroyd replies. "Maybe one of your 'friends' borrowed them." "Could be. Hey, that reminds me, J.J. is here to practice."

Meadows takes a vial of reddish powder from a pouch at his waist and swallows the contents. In a moment, there's a flash of bright light, and he is replaced by a short red-haired man wearing a flame-themed tight one piece jumpsuit that would not be out of place on a male figure-skater. "Owwww—I feel good. I knew that I would, now. So good, so good. Hey, how's it hangin', Popinjay? Jumpin' Jack Flash reporting for duty, yessiree." J.J. smiles mirthfully and gives Ackroyd an exaggerated salute, then takes to the skies, whooping and hollering. He draws a flaming heart in the air and then, straight as an arrow, flies through it. "It's going to be a long hour," Ackroyd mutters.

Somewhere backstage, a telephone rings. "I'll get it," says Ackroyd and jogs back. Everyone can hear him shout, "What! You've gotta' be friggin' kidding me! Just what we need!" He comes rushing to the front of the stage. "Folks, we've got an emergency. The Jokertown Clinic is under attack!" Dr. Finn, who was just coming around front, startles and rears involuntarily. Ackroyd shouts, "I need volunteers now!" He looks at the characters "Congratulations! You've been drafted. Bye."

He points at the characters and "pops" them to the sidewalk across the street from the Clinic, facing the entrance where an angry mob of nats, armed with baseball bats, golf clubs, bricks. More people have begun assailing the building, shattering the plate glass and rushing the door. Their faces are twisted into masks of unreasoning hatred. A few jokers who had tried to defend the building are lying in blood (or whatever) on the street. Thus far, most of the damage has been confined to the street and façade of the building. You can see the staff frantically trying to block the doors and windows with desks, shelving, anything that might slow the crowd from coming through. There are no police in sight. A moment later, Carnifex pops in and yells, "Don't just stand there, you morons. Get busy!"

The mob consists of about thirty ordinary humans armed with a variety of blunt objects. They are not coordinated in any way yet seem single-minded of purpose. Anyone who takes a few moments to observe sees (with a Sense Motive, DC 10) that their



actions are completely automatic, as if they are on “auto-pilot.” Thinking back to previous encounters, the characters may realize that this group seems less free-willed than any previous group of attackers. The mob fights with frenzied determination, driven to psychotic hatred of the clinic by Skylark’s performance last night.

If there are any jokers among the player characters, the mob targets them first, and will not stop attacking until the joker is no longer moving (so “playing dead” works) or flees the scene. The mob cannot be reasoned with. Mental powers that can get past their psychosis (and effective +8 Will save) may affect them, but only complete mental or emotional domination or unconsciousness ends their attacks. The characters should be aware they are in the unenviable position of having to harm innocents to save innocents.

After the fighting is over, Carnifex loses interest and asks the characters to “mop up” the situation, and to let him know if they find out anything interesting. He needs to return to Central Park. “I’ve gotta’ get back before Popinjay screws it all up. Some problems don’t go away so easy.” He takes off at a lope.

Once an attacker has been rendered unconscious and then awakened s/he becomes calmer but no less rational. Through careful diplomacy (Diplomacy, DC 15) the characters discover the mob’s hatred is totally “programmed,” not part of a comprehensive belief system. Even the mention of jokers or the clinic causes an automatic response; their psychosis reasserts itself, and they attempt to attack their captors, jokers passing by, and the clinic,

in that order. Trained characters (those with Medicine or Science (psychology) can make a DC 15 check) conclude that these people are completely psychotic and may never be cured of their condition by normal means.

If the mob is carefully searched (Search, DC 12), the characters find that some of the mob have ticket stubs in their wallets or purses to Skylark’s performance at an uptown cabaret, the Swan Club, from the night before. If any of these folks can be kept calm long enough (*i.e.* no jokers appear nor are they mentioned, plus a Diplomacy check at DC 15) they may relate that Skylark appeared on stage battered and bruised, clearly shaken by what had happened earlier that day. At one point, she was so distressed that she stopped in mid-song. She related the death of Bill “my audio engineer” as a result of sabotage. These audience members associated her suffering with the joker cause and the clinic, and “*decided to send a message that joker scum are not worth dying for.*” The GM is advised to try to generate some sympathy for these folks even as they spout reprehensible bigotry. It should be clear that they are not in control of themselves any longer. Unlike the other groups of attackers, they can no longer be reasoned with even temporarily. They will need to be hospitalized.

While the players’ characters are talking with the members of the mob, have the players make Notice checks (DC 12), if they succeed they see a figure peering around a corner from the shadows of a building across the street. She is gone quickly, but a second Notice check (DC 15) conveys the impression that it was a gaunt, visibly diseased African-American woman, practically skin-and-bones, wearing a hooded tan robe. Anyone who gets a good look at her should be aghast at her appearance (Will saving throw, DC 10 to not be disturbed at the sight). She is definitely a joker. This is Geraldine “Deenie” Watson, AKA Misery, the owner of the Broken Mirrors nightclub. Following her is easy as she walks slowly. If she is confronted before she gets to the Broken Mirrors, she says, “Some of my friends was in the clinic an’ I was goin’ to visit with ‘em. When that mob arrived, I just hid, scared for my life. Please let me go!” She pretends to be afraid, but a Sense Motive check (DC 12) sees right through this. If the players try to get tougher or say that they already know who she is (as a result of intercepting one of the band earlier or by going to Jube or Chrysalis, see **Interlude II**), she agrees to tell them what she knows if they come to the Broken Mirrors nightclub at around 7:00 p.m. tonight (see **Interlude III**).

As a result of any of the above scenes, the characters may decide at some point to interview Skylark. They can find her at the uptown cabaret, The Swan Club, just off Columbus Circle, where she is practicing. They may also decide to investigate Misery, the Broken Mirrors nightclub, or find out more information about the jokers that have been following them. The Interludes provide information on these encounters.

The characters can also pursue their own course of investigation about the incident, but there does not appear to be any reason for the mob’s behavior (since Skylark’s influence cannot be detected by other wild card abilities), and they have nothing in common except for their connection to Skylark’s recent performance.

INTERLUDES

The following interludes take place in and around the scenes of the adventure whenever the characters initiate them.

INTERLUDE I: CANARY IN A COAL MINE

Note: This assumes that the characters visit Skylark after the attack on the Clinic. Adapt as necessary if they visit her before that time.

If the characters visit the Swan Club at any time before 7:45 p.m., they find the front entrance closed. They must go around back to the stage entrance to get in. A ring of the bell brings the stage manager. He is a sixty-ish Caucasian man in rumpled dress clothes and a tie pulled halfway open. He seems tired and cranky as he opens the door. "I told you damned reporters, no more interviews. Some of us have work to do!" The players need to convince Melvin Florsheim, the stage manager, that they have legitimate business with Skylark. He's been around the block a few times, has seen a lot of "stage-door johnnies" and won't give in easily (a Bluff or Diplomacy check, DC 15 is required).

Assuming they get past Mel, the characters find Skylark in her dressing room. Before knocking, sharp-eared players (Listen, DC 12) hear Skylark muttering...

"What's wrong with me? It's got to be perfect, perfect." She sounds upset. Interrupted by the knock, she seems startled and angry. "What is it now, you wretched little man? I told you to leave me alone!" She opens the door, wearing a peach-colored cotton robe and matching slippers. She is wiping make-up off her face with cold cream. She quickly rearranges her attitude "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were someone else. Do forgive me. I'll be happy to sign autographs if you'll just give me a minute to clean up."

Skylark sits at a vanity with a lit mirror, cluttered with make-up, hairbrushes and the like. There's not much to see in the dressing room. To her right is a small closet, and to her left is a rolling clothes rack with several changes of clothing, most of them suitable for performing or as evening wear. Out of make-up she seems even less remarkable than she did on stage yesterday morning, a real "plain Jane." She quickly wipes her face with a cloth, picks up a pen, and turns back to the group. "Now, whom should I make this out to?"

When the players question her about last night's performance, she says nothing remarkable happened. She confirms that she did make some comments to the audience about the events of the day and urged them to attend the benefit (which is true). On a successful Sense Motive check versus her Bluff (and she will Boost her Charisma for it) one can tell that her commitment is insincere. If asked about her career or her meteoric rise to stardom, she will let her true feelings out just a bit: "Yes, it's true. I struggled for many years, singing in small clubs, hardly getting noticed. Then, one day, everything just fell into place. I guess I finally found my

voice. The critics who had ignored me started paying attention. I always knew I had it in me, even when nobody else could see it. I always believed. I can't wait for everybody to see how good I really am. They say it's going to be as big as the Super Bowl." She seems thrilled at the prospect. Again, on a successful Sense Motive check versus her Bluff this is revealed as false bravado; that she is actually either insecure or deeply worried. Her psychosis protects her from the full realization of what she intends to do at the benefit, however. Any failed attempt to break through this barrier triggers her defenses, and –she says, "Since you were so kind to come and check up on me after that terrible incident this morning, let me give you a favor in return," and she sings a song that causes the characters walk away satisfied that Skylark is naïve and egotistical but mostly earnest unless they are able to resist or prevent her from singing.

If the players return to Skylark's dressing room when she is not around, and they search the closet, they find an unlocked travel trunk, inside of which is Skylark's scrapbook, including all of the terrible reviews she received before the Wild Card virus changed her. She has scrawled angry comments like "philistine," "tin ear," "Neanderthal," and "hack" across them. One page contains a handbill for that fateful performance at the Apollo, with her name circled and Geraldine Watson's crossed out. In the accompanying picture, Watson is wearing a beautiful and expensive-looking tan fur-lined hooded robe while Cynthia is wearing a rather plain dress. At the bottom, she has written, "Cynthia Chalmers is Dead!" After a few blank pages, reviews of Cindie Charmaine's performances begin, accompanied by neat comments in the margins: "so true," "perceptive," "sent flowers," and "totally loves me." There is no mention of the poor CD reviews, if the characters learned of these earlier.

INTERLUDE II: WHO CAN IT BE NOW?

If the players look for information about the mysterious figures they have seen lurking in the shadows, or the person that members of Twelve Hand Bop refer to as Misery, they find no one in Jokertown willing to talk to nats or aces right now. The jokers are even more paranoid than usual following recent events, and are very suspicious of strangers asking questions. It requires a Diplomacy check (DC 20) to get any sort of cooperation. If a fellow joker does the asking, s/he stands only a little better chance (DC 15), but must first establish trust. This requires some careful negotiation, and perhaps proof that the players are volunteers for the benefit (remember that Worchester issued them all identification). Anyone showing a security badge gets a +2 circumstance bonus on her check.

Other potential sources of information in Jokertown include Jube the Walrus and Chrysalis. Chrysalis will not talk to them without an introduction of some sort from Tachyon or Worchester and will instead have them followed to see what they're up to. A Jokertown in disarray is bad for business, and she would like to see things return to normal as soon as possible. From that point for-

ward, as long as they remain in Jokertown, the players may sense that they are being shadowed (Notice checks ranging between DC 12 and 18 to notice, depending upon circumstances).

If discovered, the jokers tailing them readily admit that Chrysalis has asked them to keep an eye on the group. "There's no sense tryin' to do anyt'ing about it," one says, "If we goes away, someone else'll takes our place. When Chrysalis takes an int'rest in ya, yur on her radar fer good." Presented with a note or a phone call from Tachyon or Worcester, Chrysalis agrees to make some inquiries. After a few minutes behind a closed door, she says,

"The woman you're looking for is called 'Misery.' I'm not sure where she lives, but most nights you can find her at the Broken Mirrors Saloon." She provides the address. "She should be easy enough to find; just look for the most miserable face in the room. Oh, and you can tell those two posers Tachyon and Worcester that they owe me dinner at Aces High, and I expect both of them to dine with me. I'm sure you can find your way out. Ta."

Note that Chrysalis does not know Misery *owns* the Broken Mirrors, nor that Skylark is a secret ace and this information might be valuable to her.

Jube the Walrus knows Misery well enough. If the characters explain what they're up to in a sincere and friendly way he responds in kind. Award a Diplomacy circumstance bonus based

on the player's roleplaying of her approach to Jube. "She buys a copy of Daily Variety from me most days, even though it just seems to make her more depressed, today especially." He chuckles. "Yeah, she's been more upset than usual lately, and that's the truth. I'm sure you'll find her singing the blues at the Broken Mirrors Saloon." He provides the address. "Hey, you might want to buy something!" He offers a copy of today's Daily Variety. "That'll be a buck." If they take the paper, they see (Notice, DC 8) that the headline is about Skylark's worldwide tour launch at Saturday's benefit.

INTERLUDE III: LADY SINGS THE BLUES

Broken Mirrors Saloon was once a classy joint called The Shangri-La, the kind of place that well-heeled folks would go after dinner or the theater to knock back a few drinks and listen to some sultry singer or a hot jazz combo. After the Wild Card virus hit, and the neighborhood "changed" (literally), the original clientele took their business elsewhere. Abandoned for a number of years, the place was eventually purchased by a few jokers looking for an investment. The first thing they did was shatter every mirror in the club. They felt that their customers, looking to escape their troubles, didn't need to be reminded of them. They kept the original name, but customers kept calling it Broken Mirrors and eventually the name stuck.

Broken Mirrors opens for business at 4:00 p.m. and closes whenever the consensus in the room determines that it's time to go home. The neon sign still says Shangri-La but some of the letters have broken over the years so that it glows "Sang La" in the darkness. It is clear from the décor that the club has seen grander days. The street entrance leads onto a raised landing with a concierge's podium to one side and a coat check to the other. Past the podium is a long mahogany bar with bucket stools that follows the curve of the room. A joker bartender is busy cutting limes with razor-like fingernails. From the bar, three sets of six steps (at near, middle, and far) lead down to a curving tier of black leather semi-circular banquettes that stretches from one side of the club to the other. All of these have small signs saying, "Reserved." The next two tiers feature tables for four, while the floor around the stage is filled with two-seat café tables. There is a small open area for dancing. A piano, microphone and drum set have been placed upon the stage, as well as three chairs with music stands, two of them also with instrument stands. A few staff people are busy putting cloths and tea candles on the tables, straightening chairs, and generally preparing the place for opening. All of the employees are jokers.

This is a joker joint now, and non-jokers seldom come here. Anyone who is not a joker and who inquires about Misery is countered with "Who wants to know?" or even less helpful responses. Diplomacy checks (DC 20) may succeed. The best way to cut through the suspicion is to say that Jube, Chrysalis, or some other prominent joker recommended that they come to hear her sing, followed by a generous tip. They might also suggest that they have come from the benefit to ask her to perform and show appropri-

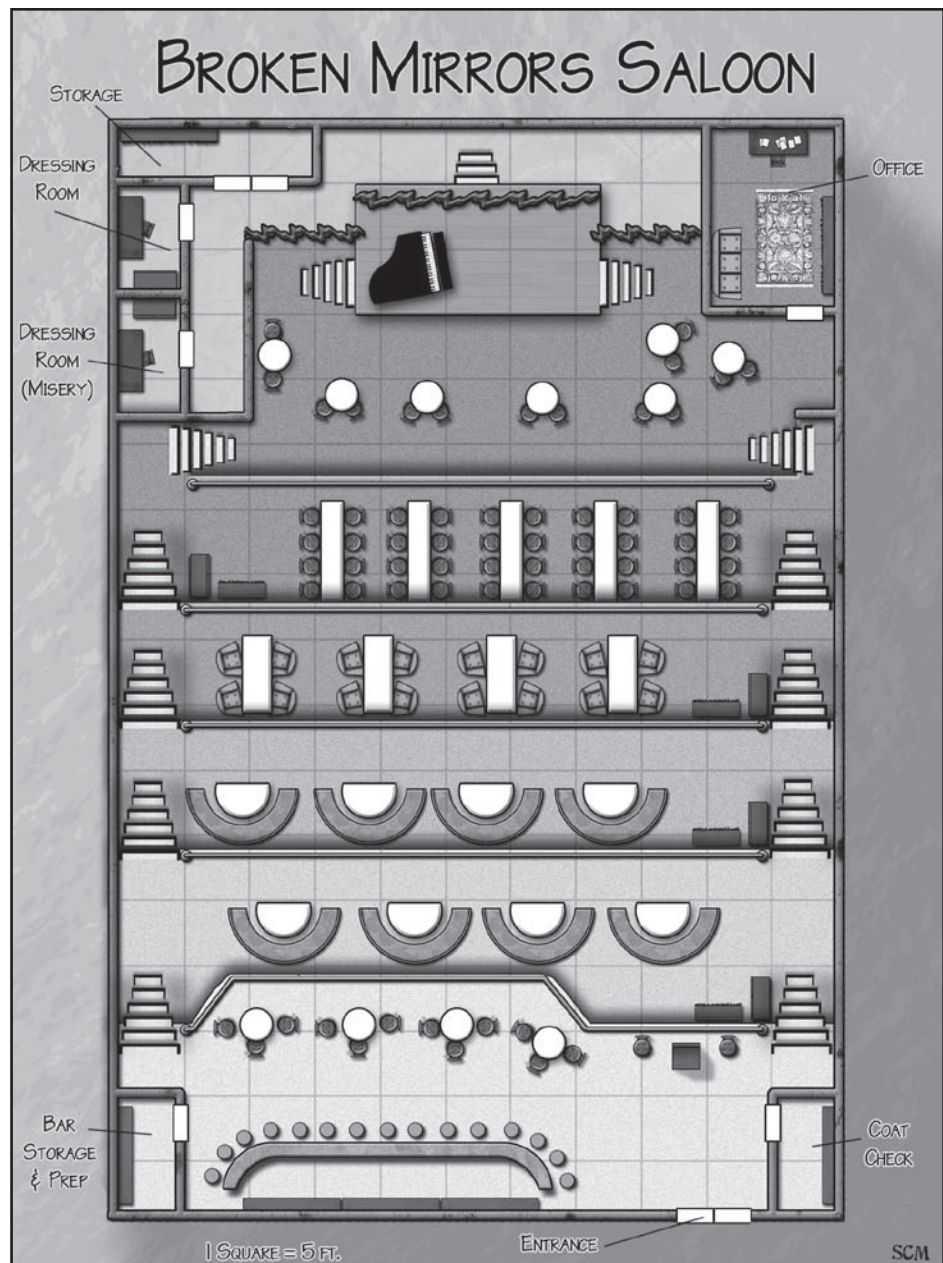


ate identification. (This ploy is worth a +5 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks.) The bartender's name is Ginger and she has sharp spikes sticking out of her at various angles. No one has tried to rob the bar since she took the job. Any reasonably innocuous suggestion followed by a generous tip will get them a seat at the bar. Every \$5 in tips grants a +1 Diplomacy bonus. At least the drinks are cheap! Misery does not perform until 8:00 p.m. so the characters can hang out and socialize, or try to gain information from the crowd,

As the club fills up, the player characters see a rather curious sight. The jokers, it seems, have preserved the spirit of the original Shangri-La, at least insofar as dress and manners are concerned. Most of the patrons arrive appareled in what can only be described as their Sunday best! The mood is light. Were it not for the misshapen forms, odd appendages and such, this could be any a fancy nightclub anywhere in the world. So long as any non-jokers in the group remain unobtrusive, they won't be bothered.

Successful information gathering (Gather Information, DC 18) indicates that the patrons are frightened about recent events but remain hopeful that the benefit will be successful. They are a bit resentful that no jokers are performing. Should any of the characters take this to heart and arrange for Misery and Twelve Hand Bop to play the benefit, award them a bonus Power Point at the end of the adventure. Characters might also learn any of the following on separate checks:

- That Misery was once a famous singer before her wild card turned; that she knew Skylark "way back when;"
- That folks who know her well call her "Deenie;"
- That Bartholomew has been at his post for more than 50 years;
- That the Broken Mirrors Band, called Twelve Hand Bop, is managed by "Tinkles," the piano player;
- That Tinkles was once a classical concert pianist;
- That "Lips" Mahoney can imitate almost any sound;
- That "La Bamba" killed a man (not true, but he spread this rumor himself so he would appear tougher).



At 7:00 p.m., a jazz quartet named Twelve Hand Bop takes the stage. Any characters that are fans of modern jazz are amazed at the versatility of the combo, owing in part to the various extra digits, mouths, built-in instruments, and other Wild Card-induced mutations the band members have. Take care to describe the band's members and their unique capabilities. "Lips" might imitate Louis Armstrong, for example. The crowd responds enthusiastically. They play for 45 minutes. At 8:00 p.m. a tentacled pianist takes his seat and warms up a bit, his appendages writhing. One reaches for a drink, another straightens the microphone, one scratches his head, and another turns pages of sheet music. The pianist seems unaware of all this. The players have probably never seen piano for four hands played by one person before. Shortly thereafter, a truly sorry sight walks up

on stage. An African-American woman, who is little more than skin and bones, her features gaunt, her eyes sunk deep into her skull, her flesh mottled, covered in boils, as if all four Horsemen of the Apocalypse had been visited upon one person. It takes a Will saving throw (DC 13, but only DC 8 for jokers) to avoid being discomfited and looking away. The pianist whispers, "Ladies and gentlemen, if there's one person in this room who knows what it's like, who sings for all of us, it's our very own 'Deenie' Watson." The crowd applauds loudly, and folks cry out, "Tell us how it is," and, "Sing it, sister," etc.

The pianist tinkles a few notes, and Misery starts to sing the blues. She sings about trials and tribulations, everyday sorrows, disappointment, lost love, and small shattered hopes. She sings about the innocence of children that fades too quickly, about isolation and abandonment. Somehow, through it all, she captures the monumental tragedy of jokers everywhere, and makes it seem like a burden that can be borne with dignity and courage. Anyone with Knowledge (music), a Performance skill, or an auditory power realizes that she is phenomenally talented, equal to the best singers in the world (and certainly better than Skylark if they heard her sing before now).

Her set lasts for thirty minutes and she walks quietly from the stage. The room is silent. The pianist announces, "Twelve Hand Bop will be back in 20." After a few minutes, voices raise from whispers slowly up to normal levels. Misery walks over to where the players are sitting. "I heard that you folks was looking for Misery. Well, you found her. What can I do for ya?"

Misery doesn't mind chatting with strangers. She doesn't get a chance to talk with many people; even most jokers find her too depressing to be around for long, at least when she's not singing. The characters can ask her why she was watching the clinic, having them tailed, or if they've found the scrapbook in Skylark's trunk, what she knows of the other singer.

To the first question, she responds:

"I may not talk much, but that's 'cause folks mostly don't like to hear what I gots to say. So instead of talkin', I listen. And I watch. And I starts to see things that make me worry. If there's one thing I know, it's tragedy; I feels it in mah bones, down deep. And my bones is tellin' me that somethin' awful's 'bout to happen. When my card turned, I got hit hard. Not only mah body, which is more than enough for any woman, God bless, but mah soul, too. I know, I know, sometimes by looking, sometimes by somethin' in the air, when bad things is gonna' happen. If you had to live with that every day, I guarantee you'd be singin' the blues too. Sometimes, when the feeling is strong, I can follow it if'n I choose. Most times I don't. Who would want to? You wonder why folks don't like to see me? It's not just 'cause of hows I look. Pish, chile, down here, I'm just one more freak in the sideshow. Nope, it's 'cause they think that I'm bringin' 'em bad news, prob'ly think I cause it." She sighs deeply.

Misery goes on to explain that she has had premonitions about each of the incidents related to the benefit, that they have grown stronger each time, and that she "followed" the last one to see what would happen. "It's like I'm connected ta this somehow." She also admits that she has sent her friends to watch the volunteers closely in an effort to figure out who is trying to sabotage the performance. She has come believe that it's an inside job, that is, someone closely connected to the benefit.

When asked about Skylark, she has another story to tell.

"Ooh, that Cindie Charmaine, or Skylark, or whatever fancy name she calling herself now. I knew her back when she was plain ole' Cynthia Chalmers of Waukegan, Wisconsin, come to the big city, 'to be a great star, make records, and be on the cover of People magazine.'" (Misery does a fair imitation of Skylark, and it's hard not to laugh.) "I had another name then, too—Geraldine Watson, but most everyone called me Deenie. We shared quite a few dressing rooms back then, both of us trying to make a name for ourselves by singin'. 'Course, I'd been at it a few years, paid mah dues, and was on my way. Straight out the gate she thought she gonna' be the next Miss Whitney Houston or Miss Barbra Streisand. Anyone with ears could see she didn't have the chops. She got more bad reviews than a truant chile. She kept every one, too, and read 'em over and over. Never could understand that. Truth is, I felt sorry for the girl, tried to tell 'er gentle to go back home and find a nice fella. She wouldn't listen to none of it. Didn't have the good sense God give a goat. But she stubborn as one, that for sure.

"You know, we was together that day, just over two years ago now, backstage at the Apollo, when the virus hit. Ya can see how that turned out for me now. Lord, there ain't no justice in this world, when a no-talent country girl get the spotlight and me pourin' my heart out nightly eight and ten at Broken Mirrors. Still, they my people now, and I'm at peace with it. But that girl, she ain't never gonna be at peace. And that's all I know."

Misery has no confirmed knowledge that Skylark is a secret ace, only a vague premonition surrounding her that she is not willing to share.

There's not much more that Misery can relate, although she's happy to natter on about her glory days playing the big clubs and laying down some tracks with Winton Marsalis for a CD that never got released. It's been so long that anyone has taken an interest in her that she will start asking the characters about their families, their hobbies, etc., and relate what they say back to some relative of hers from South Carolina ("I'm from Charleston, 'The Holy City' ya know."). If the characters provide her with some means to contact them, she offers to tell them when she gets another "intuition." Otherwise, she just goes backstage to get ready for her next set. The characters are welcome to stick around for a listen, and appreciate Misery's work futher, but they do not learn anything more from this visit.

SCENE NINE: REUNITED

Either the characters' visit or her own observation causes Misery to think more carefully about Skylark's actions and intentions. Her ace-inspired trepidation growing by the moment, she decides to see if she can shake Skylark's composure a bit and suss out her character. On Friday morning she sends a hand-written note addressed to Miss Cynthia Chalmers, care of the Swan Club, inviting her to reunite in an impromptu performance at Broken Mirrors that evening. If she was not given a means to contact the players, she will leave word at the Jokertown Clinic, also inviting the characters to attend. The message says, "Misery loves company. Won't you please join me and my special guest Miss Charmaine for a reunion concert tonight at 8:00 p.m. at the Broken Mirrors Saloon? Arrive 30 minutes early and show this card at the door." Misery rightly concludes that Skylark cannot resist such an invitation, as any reminder of her past failure triggers her pathological resentment.

When the characters arrive and show the card, the joker *maitre d'* Bartholomew is waiting for them.

"Misery is expecting you. Please follow me." He takes them behind the rear curtain of the stage where Misery is pacing. "It's good to see y'all again. I'm glad ya come. I can't say I really know what I'm doin' here, jus' call it instinct." All I'm askin' ya' ta do is find someplace discreet and keep your eyes and ears open. I don't mind sayin' I'm a bit worried that maybe I done somethin' foolish. We'll see."

If any of the characters has the capacity to hide beyond normal human ability, s/he may be able to wait with Misery in her dressing room. Otherwise, Misery won't risk it.

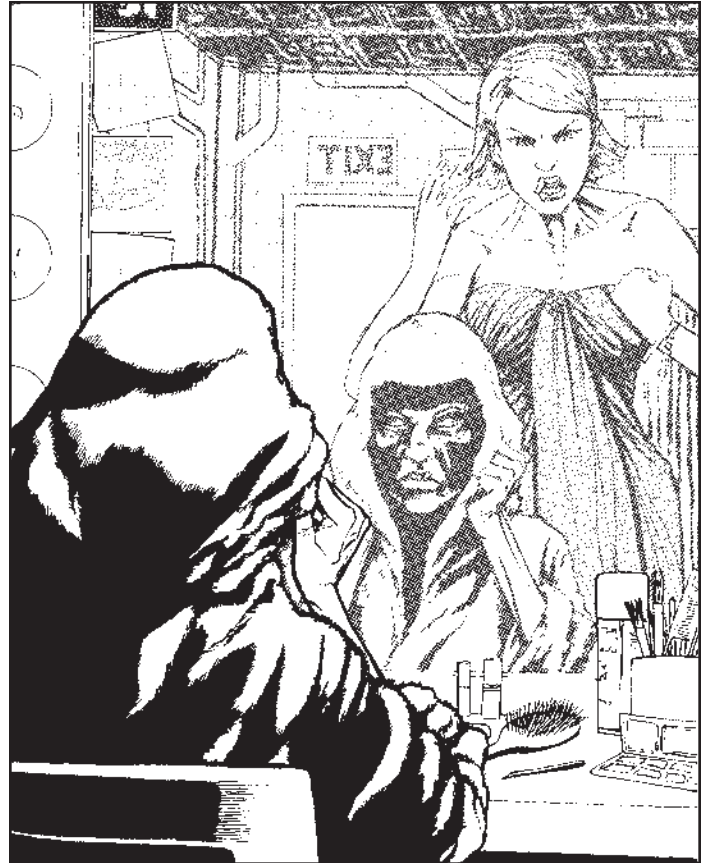
Skylark arrives at Broken Mirrors at 7:45 p.m. and is taken to Misery's dressing room. Stealthy characters may attempt to follow and listen at the door.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

As Skylark enters, it's rather obvious from the look on her face that she views the surroundings with distaste. The concierge takes her back to Misery's room, knocks, and announces that her guest has arrived. Then he opens the door and allows Skylark in. Misery's room is dimly lit. She is in a concealing robe and does not get up to greet Skylark when she enters. Misery speaks intentionally loudly, most likely for your benefit, when she says. "Why, as I live and breath, if it ain't Miss Cynthia Chalmers. You come a long way from Waukegan, girl, now aintcha?"

"It's Charmaine now, Deenie," says Skylark, "Cindie Charmaine. Cynthia Chalmers is dead and buried"

"Is that so?" Misery drawls. "I hear you been makin' quite a name for yo'self, Cindie. Gonna' sing at the big



ben'fit, I'm told. I'll bet you surprised a lot of folk; I 'bout fell outta my chair when I heard. You sure you not too good to sing with ole' Deenie Watson one mo' time, jess for old time's sake."

Stern-faced, Skylark responds, "Face it, Deenie; you were wrong about me. Everybody was wrong. Now I'm on top, and you're, you're...here." She spits out this last word with evident disgust. Skylark looks as though she just sucked on a lemon.

"You' right 'bout one thing, Miss Charmaine," Misery says calmly. "Some of us got it, and some of us ain't, and it's the good Lord above that decides who gets what. Let's see what you got." She glances up at a clock on the wall. "I believe it's show time." She removes her robe, revealing her emaciated, mottled appearance.

Skylark gasps! "I never knew. No wonder you hid yourself away in this hole. Well, look at you now! How can you live like this?"

"One day at a time, chile, one day at a time," Misery replies and moves quickly out the door.

Characters may need to conceal themselves quickly to avoid being seen. If Skylark notices them, there is a chance (on a Notice check of 15 or more) that she remembers seeing them at the benefit earlier, which could tip their hand.

Continue reading or paraphrasing the following to the players.

Emerging from behind the curtain, Misery addresses the crowd. "Folks, thank y'all for comin' tonight. We got a special surprise for y'all, Miss Cindie Charmaine. Come on out, sugah'. Let's give her a warm Jokertown welcome, everyone." To her credit, Skylark strides proudly through the curtain and takes a bow. "Hit it, Sammy." Misery launches into a spirited rendition of The Lady is a Tramp. The symbolism is not lost on Skylark. After the song ends, Misery takes a step back and says, "Cynthia, honey, it's all yours."

Skylark starts to sing, Happy Days are Here Again, projecting all the loathing she can muster through her ace. She pushes the limit of her power to be revenged upon Misery for this humiliation. Within moments, the crowd begins to turn surly (Sense Motive, DC 10 to detect). Patrons start to jostle each other, throw drinks, and raise voices. It is possible that some of the characters may also be affected as well. Misery gets an odd look on her face for a moment (Notice, DC 12 to spot), then steps forward and joins the song. The crowd begins to settle down again. When the song ends, applause is faint, and Skylark is visibly shaken. She seems to be in pain, holding her hands to her head. She whispers breathlessly into the microphone, "I'm sorry; I'm not feeling very well. I have to leave now." She flees the stage, dashes up the stairs and out the door.

"Well, how 'bout that," says Misery. She motions for you to come to the side of the stage where she tells you, "I had a bad feeling; thought I ought to step in. Seems to have done the trick, though I don't rightly know how. I think we'll be alright now."

The importance of this incident is that it demonstrates that Misery can cancel out Skylark's ace (and more) with her own, that they are truly tied together. Characters who figure this out should receive an extra Power Point at the end of the adventure.

SCENE TEN: CAN'T STOP THE MUSIC

By Saturday morning, the characters may be convinced that Skylark is up to no good. Unfortunately, Tachyon, Worchester and Ackroyd are not going to jeopardize the benefit based on circumstantial evidence. Skylark passed Tachyon's initial screening. Although he admits there is something odd about her, he is too preoccupied with the details of the event to investigate more carefully. Meanwhile, based on her experience with Skylark at the Broken Mirrors, Misery decides that she must find a way to trump Skylark's ace at the benefit. She intuitively correctly that her voice will cancel out Skylark's power if she sings at the same time. She enlists

the help of Tinkles and the band in her plans. She needs a way in through the security screening, and will enlist the aid of the characters if they have formed a positive relationship.

On the actual night of the performance, Ackroyd and Carnifex have asked a few other aces to monitor the event (the GM should use his/her discretion in selecting any additional aces that might be present). Shaken by the events at Broken Mirrors, Skylark remains alert to any interference with her plans and will try to sing her way out of trouble by turning nearby listeners (which might include aces) against those who would try to stop her. One temporary solution would be to cut power to the microphone and amplifiers. This protects people farther away but not those nearby. Also, the audio and video feeds to television are on separate circuits and these too have to be shut down. The broadcast facility is in a trailer behind and to the left of the stage.

Remember that any attack on the benefit by ace, joker or nat volunteers will be perceived as just one more act of sabotage by the organizers, since they already know that random groups are being controlled for this purpose, unless at least one can be convinced otherwise. Of these, the most likely to listen is, paradoxically, Carnifex. Ackroyd will not let Carnifex assault a performer however, and will "pop" him away quickly, or indeed anyone who attempts to gain the stage unauthorized. If the characters can get Misery to Ackroyd, Worchester, or Tachyon, they may be willing to listen to her story. Tachyon will know instantly that she is telling the truth. Or they can distract Ackroyd long enough to get Misery and the band backstage before Skylark's performance.

Saturday evening arrives and the benefit is about to begin. All of the performers are backstage, including Skylark if she was not intercepted beforehand. As she is scheduled to perform last, the players have about two hours to figure out how to stop her. Physical force is always an option, but if she has a chance to sing even a few notes, she can set friend against friend or use the crowd to protect herself. Dr. Tachyon may be enlisted to reach into her mind, but her psychosis forms its own defense. Dr. Tachyon's attempts to penetrate that defense bounce off a "wall of musical madness" as he describes it. He says that in order to get through, he would have to risk lowering his own defenses, a risk he is not willing to take. The best possible outcome would be to get Misery to a microphone connected to the sound system to counter-sing as Skylark starts her set. The longer it takes to get Misery plugged in, the more people will be affected by Skylark.

Misery's voice, however, not only cancels out the effects of Skylark's ace; it turns that power back upon itself, sending Skylark spiraling down into irretrievable madness and permanent silence. If Skylark starts to sing, the effects become evident very shortly, as fights begin to break out among the audience, people engage in aberrant behavior (feel free to make up any number of bizarre outbreaks). It is also possible that members of the group may also be affected if they are not prepared (by wearing earplugs, for example). Remember however that this is a concert in Central Park and the speakers are massive. It is doubtful that earplugs will protect anyone for very long. Play out the tension of this scene by

introducing each act, and cutting back and forth between the performances, the actions of the players, and the actions of Misery and her Joker saboteurs as they seek a way into the high-security backstage area. If you think it would cause more distraction (or be more fun), Skylark can sing brief songs backstage just to cause trouble. You may also wish to allow the players to take control of Misery's band for the final assault, switching back and forth between their own characters and Twelve Hand Bop.

Read of paraphrase the following to the players.

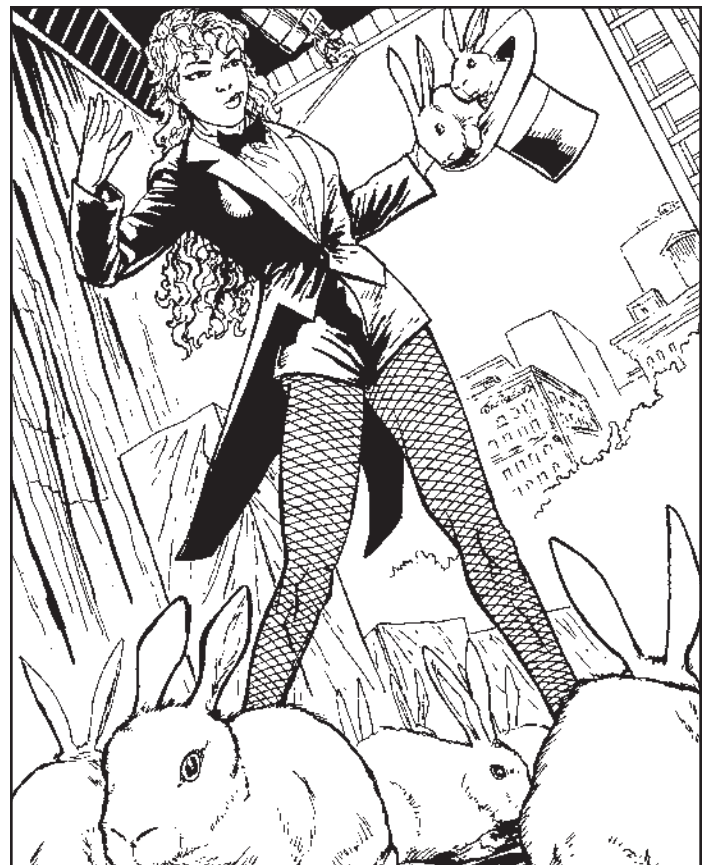
The lights in the Park dim, and a hush falls over the enormous crowd. Everyone is expecting something extraordinary and they are not disappointed. One by one, huge spotlights flicker on, pointing skyward, moving in small circles until they converge upon a central point in the center of the Sheep Meadow. Into the light swoops Peregrine, wearing a tight-fitting golden gown covered in sequins. A silver circlet restrains her hair. She seems the vision of an angel, sparkling like a star. Her wings, too, appear to be dusted in some sort of reflective powder, and shimmer a rainbow of color across the sky. She engages in a series of dazzling aerobatic maneuvers, accentuated by colored lights and symphonic music. Flying high, she makes a graceful arc and then speeds straight down toward the crowd, gaining speed as the music gets faster. She pulls out of her dive about ten feet above the crowd and heads straight for the stage, barrel-rolling as she goes. Just before reaching the stage she turns to face skyward, spreads her wings wide to brake, and alights perfectly. "Ladies and Gentlemen, aces and jokers, your hostess for tonight's Benefit Performance, the captivating Peregrine." And the crowd goes wild.

"Thank you, Richard, and thank you all for being here tonight, and to the millions of viewers at home. We have a spectacular line-up of entertainment for you, and we think you're going to be amazed. I know that I am. And while we're all enjoying tonight's performances, I'd like to remind everyone that we're also here in support of a good cause. As you know, the Blythe Van Renssaeler Clinic recently lost its state and federal funding, and only through the generous contributions of private donors and the people watching this evening will the clinic be able to continue its important work. And now, I'd like to introduce my co-host for the festivities...Dr. Tachyon!"

A fanfare plays as Dr. Tachyon steps to the podium and the spot shines down. It's hard to determine who is dressed more to impress, Peregrine or Tachyon. He is resplendent in a purple velvet short coat with flared sleeves and silver trim, blue leather boots with silver buckles and gold hose to match his Musketeer's hat. Beneath the coat, he is wearing a dark blue vest with ruby buttons over a ruffled ivory shirt, also with flared cuffs. Anyone else would look ridiculous, but Dr. Tachyon carries it off with flair. "Thank you,

Peregrine." He bows slightly in her direction. "Before we move on to our first performer, I've been asked by the entire cast to say a few words about recent events surrounding tonight's benefit. All of us realize that the ongoing effect of the Wild Card virus continues to be the most challenging social, moral, and medical issue of our time. We beseech you all to understand that, regardless of outward appearance or innate ability, every person should be accorded the same dignity and respect. And now, to kick off our program, please welcome to the stage the funniest man alive, Reggie Wright."

After Wright completes his set, Melissa Blackwood steps up, tentatively at first, taking some time to warm to the occasion. She banters back and forth with Peregrine and Dr. Tachyon, producing progressively more silly and astonishing articles from her hat. She then performs a few large-scale illusions that go over fairly well. For her finale, she produces a cascade of rabbits from her hat that go bounding off in all directions. "Well, I guess we'll have to get animal control on that one right way. And, by the way," pulling a set of car keys out her hat, "would the owner of Green Honda Accord, license plate X3T-5B8 please report to your vehicle. Your lights are on" Everyone can hear the sound of a car horn honking in the distance and the park erupts in laughter and cheers. Melissa blushes furiously, takes a quick bow, and rushes off the stage.



Next up is Greg Running Bear, who quickly has the audience on its feet. Wearing next to nothing, his taut muscles gleaming in the lights, he is a bundle of energy, running back and forth across the stage with his guitar. He takes a moment to tell the story of one of the jokers he's met among the volunteers (maybe one of the characters), who he insists on bringing onstage, providing a poignant reminder of the purpose of the benefit. Then it's back to rocking out! His set lasts just over an hour, and he leaves the crowd cheering. Then, in a burst of fireworks, Jumpin' Jack Flash shoots up into the sky from the center of the crowd (Mark Meadows was there, incognito). J.J. traces out fiery patterns in the sky, including his initials JJF, the insignia of the New York Yankees, the House symbol of Dr. Tachyon, and, for some unknown reason, the number four inscribed in a circle ("I saw it somewhere and it looked cool!"). He next traces out the 12 Zodiac symbols, and has each one move in a characteristic way. For his grand finale, true to his word, he creates a giant fiery dragon and sends it flying low over the heads of the crowd. He ends his performance with the image of a playing card—the Ace of Hearts—and flies back behind the stage exhausted. The crowd goes silent, still trying to absorb what they've seen. Slowly, the applause begins to build to thunderous levels, and J.J. comes out onto the stage, bows, and erupts into one last fiery burst before flying away.

If it looks like the players could use a little more time, the GM may want to insert additional ace performers into the lineup at this time.

The crowd settles down after the last act and the announcer states, "And now, to close our benefit, the Blythe Van Renssaeler Memorial Clinic is pleased to present the national debut of a singing sensation who has captured hearts all across the country. Please give a warm welcome to Miss Cindie Charmaine, the enchanting Skylark." Skylark steps onto the stage wearing an elegant red evening dress, her hair coiffed neatly atop her head. She wears a white pearl necklace. She seems a bit nervous and stammers her introduction, partly out of artifice and partly out of genuine stage fright. "I, um, thank you all for that. I want everyone here to know, and the people watching on TV, how much I appreciate this opportunity to sing for all of you tonight. The last few months have changed my life, and I hope that in this small way, I might be able to reach out and touch your lives, to give back to you what you have so generously given to me." And she begins to sing . . .

If Misery gets to a microphone to sing, with or without Twelve Hand Bop, Skylark looks increasingly more pained, until finally she freezes, overwhelmed by all of the negative emotions inside of her. She is stuck in a permanent vegetative state, her face twisted in hatred. The crowd is stunned in silence. Dr Tachyon announces quite calmly that there will be a brief delay before the finale while Hiram Worchester frantically makes phone calls. Twenty minutes

later, just as the crowd becomes restless, Peregrine announces brightly, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Blythe Van Renssaeler Clinic proudly presents the Great and Powerful Turtle and the New York Philharmonic."

Flying in from the direction of Lincoln Center comes the Turtle, airlifting the entire orchestra—their chairs, music stands and instruments, even a grand piano—who have begun to play the *1812 Overture* just as they reach the audience. The Turtle flies the orchestra around the Sheep Meadow before placing them gently onto the stage. The consummately professional musicians don't miss a beat. Dr. Meadows' alter ego Starshine rises into the sky to provide fireworks that punctuate the music with a brilliant display that lights up the nighttime sky.

If Misery does not make it, and Skylark is not otherwise silenced, at the end of her performance she collapses, having burned out her ace ability in this one burst of vengeance. She will awaken plain old Cynthia Chalmers, ordinary, unimpressive, and irretrievably psychotic. Most of the listening audience is driven insane, perhaps irreversibly.

SCENE ELEVEN: LAST DANCE

It's Sunday morning, and there could be one of several outcomes.

TOTAL SUCCESS

If Skylark was stopped and the performance went on as scheduled, read of paraphrase the following to the players.

The Sheep Meadow is littered with debris left over from the huge crowd in attendance. Several aces have shown up to assist with clean-up, with the Great and Powerful Turtle doing most of the heavy lifting, abetted by Modular Man. Assuming the characters had a significant part in stopping Skylark, they are welcomed as heroes by the community of aces and jokers, and receive a meal in their honor at Aces High later that night. On their way off the Meadow, they are met by Misery and Twelve Hand Bop.

She says, "Glad to see you come through it okay. For once, nothin' bad happened. Hard to imagine any good could'a come from these premonitions of mine. But now I think there's finally a change in the wind for me. I may still sing the blues from time ta' time, but the song in my heart is one of joy. I think I got you to thank for that. You'll always be welcome at the Mirrors. Come by any time and I'll sing a song just for you. Oh, and I ain't gonna be Misery no longer; you can just call me Deenie; everybody does."

PARTIAL SUCCESS

If Skylark was not stopped, but Misery was there to intervene, read of paraphrase the following to the players.

Sunday morning arrives, and the entire production staff is exhausted from the night's events. Even though disaster was avoided there are reports of isolated cases of psychosis among those who heard too much before Misery reached the microphone. Dr. Tachyon tries to appear stoic, but cannot conceal his weeping. As usual, he blames himself. "If only I had looked more closely at her state of mind, but how was I to know? Her true intentions were shielded, even from herself. I should have risked it. I have never known someone with a such a tremendous capacity for self-deception; well, one other." And he sighs deeply.

Ackroyd is not impressed. "Cry me a river, Tach. We all dropped the ball on this one. But you're right. To quote one of my favorite films, 'I'm laughing at the superior intellect.' Only it isn't funny, not a bit."

Dr. Finn remarks dryly, "Surely, Mr. Ackroyd, you can cut Dr. Tachyon some slack. After all, this was one disaster that he had nothing to do with."

"Why, Dr. Finn," Hiram Worchester chuckles, "I believe that was a jest; a veritable bon mot."

Ackroyd shoots back, "Stick to surgery, Doc, and leave the smartass remarks to professionals." Even Tachyon smiles wanly.

As this dialog plays out, Misery and the Twelve Hand Bop approach the stage from below. "What you sad sacks cryin' 'bout?" Misery asks. "I thought that was my gig. Remember it could've been a lot worse. I think y'all done pretty well. I just thank the good Lord that these folks (she points to the you) helped me to realize how me and Cynthia was connected in time to do some good. Never thought I'd be glad of my gift, neither. Now I understand that knowin' when things is gonna be bad means you have a chance to stop 'em from gettin' worse. And that's cause for hope if ever I seen it. I may still sing the blues from time ta' time, but the song in my heart is one of joy. (She turns to you.) And you lot'll always be welcome at the Mirrors. Come by any time and I'll sing a song just for you. Oh, and I ain't gonna be Misery no longer; you can just call me Deenie; everybody does."

FAILURE

If Skylark was not stopped at all, read of paraphrase the following to the players.

The aftermath of the Benefit concert is devastating. The world's largest television audience has been afflicted with mass psychosis. Not everyone was watching, of course, and some resisted, aces and jokers more than most, but the outcome is poor by anyone's standards. Dr. Tachyon blames himself, as always, and announces that he will devote him-

self to reversing the effects. He calls upon other powerful members of the ace community, such as Fortunato, to aid him. The benefit production staff and all of you who remain unaffected gather solemnly at the stage, as Greg Running Bear plays a quiet melody on his acoustic guitar. Tachyon weeps quietly, the boards of the stage sag beneath Worchester's full weight as he relaxes his reflexive self-adjustment, and Ackroyd seems to sum up the general sentiment. "Nuts, just nuts."

Misery, whose connection to Skylark left her unaffected, walks up to the stage from below with Twelve Hand Bop. "I doan know what to say, folks. We can all wish it was diff'rent, but it ain't. And that's somethin' we all have to live with. At least it weren't worse, and Cynthia can't hurt nobody no more. Now we got to get on with the business of livin'. With so many of us jokers unaffected, I think we finally got a fightin' chance to get some of our own back, and you got to admit we deserve a fair shot. In any case, I won't be singin' the blues no more—life's sad enough. Sometimes you got to accentuate the positive, like ole' Bing Crosby used to sing. Yeah, the world's had enough of sad songs. Any y'all want to come down to the Mirrors, and you'll be welcome. Maybe I'll sing a song for ya'. Just doan ask for Misery, 'cause she gone for good. From now on, you just call me Deenie; everybody does."

CHARACTERS

The following characters play roles in *Benefit of the Doubt*. For details and game information about *Wild Cards* series characters, see **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook.

Some of these characters have the Feature power from the *Ultimate Power* sourcebook, reproduced here for easy reference (and for Gamemasters who may not have access to that book).

FEATURE

Type: General	Action: None (passive)
Range: Personal	Duration: Permanent (see description)
Saving Throw: None (see description)	Cost: 1 point per rank

You have one or more minor features or effects that grant you an occasionally useful ability worth about 1 power point. This effect is essentially a version of the Benefit feat (see **Benefit**, *M&M*, page 59) but a power rather than a virtue of skill, talent, or social background. For example, diplomatic immunity or wealth are Benefits; fur, the ability to mimic any sound, or a hidden compartment in your hollow leg, are Features.

REGGIE WRIGHT

POWER LEVEL 3

STR 11	DEX 13	CON 10	INT 14	WIS 10	CHA 13
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Bluff 5 (+6), Diplomacy 1 (+2), Drive 3 (+4), Gather Information 5 (+6), Notice 4 (+4), Perform (stand-up comedian) 8 (+9), Profession (entertainer) 5 (+5), Sense Motive 5 (+5)

FEATS

Attack Focus (melee) 1, Benefit—Fame 2, Contacts, Distract (Bluff), Minions (2 bodyguards [use the **Thug**, see *M&M*, page 229]) 3, Taunt (Bluff), Well-Informed

POWERS

None

COMBAT

Attack +2 (melee), +1 (ranged), Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +4, Knockback -0, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +0, Fortitude +0, Reflex +3, Will +2

Abilities 11 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 0 + Combat 10 + Saves 4 = Total 44

It's up to the GM what capabilities qualify as Features; generally if something has no real game effect, it's just a descriptor. If it has an actual game system benefit, it may be a feature. There's no need to define every possible feature a character may have down to the last detail.

REGGIE WRIGHT

The most popular stand-up comedian of the day, Reggie has been filling arenas around the country with his brand of hip, irreverent commentary focused on the incredible stupidity of the average person, celebrities, and politicians. Audiences eat it up. Reggie knows that he's the one having the last laugh because his act is entirely calculated and his trademark attitude is just a façade.

Reggie is a slender African-American man with a short goatee and a shaved head. Image is important to him, so he dresses stylishly and well, and is partial to black leather coats and jackets.

GREG RUNNING BEAR

A Native-American rocker who champions the causes of the politically disenfranchised, Greg's last three albums have gone platinum. He uses his success wisely, bringing attention to worthy causes and donating large sums. His most recent single, "Reservations," has been at the top of the chart for a record 22 weeks.

Greg is muscular and likes to show off his bronzed ripped physique. He usually wears tight denim shorts or jeans with tan work boots and button-down cotton shirts unbuttoned and the sleeves ripped off. He has piercing black eyes, the angular features of his native heritage, and wears his straight black hair at shoulder length, pushed back from his face with a leather band.

GREG RUNNING BEAR

POWER LEVEL 5

STR 14	DEX 14	CON 15	INT 11	WIS 14	CHA 18
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Bluff 0 (+4/+8 with Attractive bonus), Climb 4 (+6), Concentration 5 (+7), Diplomacy 6 (+10/+14 with Attractive bonus), Drive 3 (+5), Handle Animal 4 (+8), Intimidate 4 (+8), Notice 6 (+8), Perform (sing) 10 (+14), Profession (musician) 6 (+8), Ride 4 (+6), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Survival 4 (+6) Swim 4 (+6)

FEATS

Attractive, Attack Specialization (unarmed) 1, Benefit—Fame 2, Endurance, Fascinate (perform), Improved Initiative
Equipment: electric guitar, acoustic guitar

POWERS

None

COMBAT

Attack +1, +3 (unarmed), Grapple +5, Damage +2 (unarmed), Defense +3, Knockback -1, Initiative +6

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +2, Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +2

Abilities 26 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 0 + Combat 8 + Saves 4 = Total 62

Greg is an "equal-opportunity" lover and makes no attempt to conceal this fact. This lustiness is not aggressive, but it is always present. His weakness is his love of attention; it sometimes conceals his better nature.

BARTHOLOMEW "POPS" RIDGEFIELD

Pops look old partially because he is. He was the original *maitre d'* at the Shangri-La. Even then he looked old for his years, and customers began calling him "Pops." When his card turned at about 60 years old, he took on a mummified appearance. His skin is wrinkled, dry and liver-spotted, his crow's feet have crow's feet, his back is slightly hunched, and he moves very, very slowly. Other than that, he's completely healthy and just keeps getting older. He's not sure he *can* die; he's at least 150 years old. He no longer thinks about it.

Pops is dedicated to the club and to Misery, knows all the regulars well, and hears a lot of gossip. He is a Caucasian male, thin with an oval face, a few wisps of gray hair still clinging to his head, and dark thick eyebrows he waggles expressively. He speaks in a low, slow gravelly voice.

Anyone who researches the history of the Shangri-La (and succeeds at Gather Information, DC 12) finds that "Pops" is in just about every picture taken at the club, often posing beside the rich and famous down through the years. Some of the locals might also know (Gather Information, DC 15) that he lives in an apartment above the saloon.

BARTHOLOMEW "POPS" RIDGEFIELD POWER LEVEL 3

STR 8 DEX 9 CON 10 INT 13 WIS 14 CHA 11

SKILLS

Bluff 4 (+4), Diplomacy 6 (+6), Gather Information 10 (+10), Knowledge (popular culture) 8 (+9), Profession (*maitre d'*) 8 (+10), Sense Motive 8 (+10)

FEATS

Fearless

POWERS

Immunity 1 (aging)

COMBAT

Attack +0, Grapple -1, Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback -0, Initiative -1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +0, Fortitude +0, Reflex -1, Will +4

Abilities 5 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 1 + Combat 0 + Saves 2 = Total 20

SAMMY SCHEIN POWER LEVEL 3

STR 12 DEX 12/16 CON 12 INT 11 WIS 10 CHA 11

SKILLS

Concentration 8 (+8), Knowledge (art) 8 (+8), Notice 8 (+8), Perform (keyboards) 8 (+8), Profession (band manager) 5 (+5), Sleight of Hand 3 (+4/+6 with tentacles)

FEATS

Ambidexterity, Improved Grab, Improved Pin

POWERS

Additional Limbs 5 (25 semi-independent tentacles around torso)

Enhanced Dexterity 4 (Limited to tentacles)

COMBAT

Attack +1, Grapple +2, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +3 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +1, Fortitude +1, Reflex +1, Will +2

Abilities 8 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 7 + Combat 8 + Saves 2 = Total 38

SAMMY SCHEIN

Sammy is a joker whose card has been something of a mixed blessing. A concert pianist before becoming infected, Sammy was never quite good enough for major venues. Now he has his wish, but at a price: his torso is covered with a mass of writhing tentacles of varying length and thickness that he has learned to control as if they were hands. They have made him a much better pianist than his basic talent or training ever could, able to pull off impossibly complex chords and "fingerings". Too bad he can't find a concert hall that will book him now. So he plays at the Broken Mirrors and private gigs around Jokertown.

"LIPS" MAHONEY

POWER LEVEL 3

STR 10 DEX 12 CON 11 INT 13 WIS 10 CHA 10

SKILLS

Concentration 4 (+4), Knowledge (art) 6 (+7), Notice 5 (+5), Perform 8 (+8), Profession (musician) 5 (+5)

FEATS

None

POWERS

Feature 2 (mimicry, +20 to Bluff checks to mimic any sound or voice previously heard)

COMBAT

Attack +0, Grapple +0, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback -0, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +0, Fortitude +0, Reflex +1, Will +2

Abilities 6 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 2 + Combat 2 + Saves 2 = Total 19

"BIG DADDY" JENKINS

POWER LEVEL 4

STR 22 DEX 10 CON 18 INT 11 WIS 12 CHA 10

SKILLS

Concentration 4 (+5), Intimidate 3 (+5), Knowledge (jazz) 6 (+6), Listen 4 (+5), Perform 8 (+8), Profession (musician) 7 (+8)

FEATS

Endurance, Stunning Attack

POWERS

Feature 1 (sound tendons)

Growth 4 (large, +8 Str, +4 Con; Continuous; Permanent)

COMBAT

Attack +1 (includes -1 size), Grapple +12, Damage +6 (unarmed), Defense +1 (includes -1 size), Knockback -7, Initiative +0

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +4, Fortitude +6, Reflex +2, Will +1

NOTES

Note: Size modifiers are already taken into account for this character's abilities, skills, and combat scores.

Abilities 11 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 13 + Combat 8 + Saves 4 = Total 46

He assembled and manages the Mirrors band, Twelve Hand Bop (available for weddings, bar mitzvahs and parties). He is generally good at manipulating objects, and his tentacles will often act on a subconscious level if he is not paying attention. He finds it hard to get shirts that fit so usually goes around bare-chested or wearing a loose-fitting trench coat. As his tentacles are constantly writhing when not in use, it can be a bit unnerving to look at him. He stands 5' 5", with light blond hair over a broad face with thick rubbery lips and shiny olive-green skin. He speaks with a gurgle, and his skin is always damp. He is good-natured, and very dedicated to music in all its forms.



"LIPS" MAHONEY

"Lips" Mahoney was a jazz clarinetist who never made it big. He looks normal except for the many orifices all over his body, most of which are functional in various ways. They produce a creepy sucking sound when he is not playing any of the several brass and wind instruments he knows. He is a Caucasian male about 5' 8", with red hair and green eyes. He wheezes when he talks. Lips can also perfectly mimic just about any sound or voice that he hears, which comes in handy when he needs to create a distraction

"BIG DADDY" JENKINS

"Big Daddy" Jenkins, the bassist, has become one with his instrument. His chest is hollowed out and open, tendons stretch from his abdomen to the base of his neck, which is fretted. He plays these tendons like strings using his chest as the sounding chamber.

He is an extremely large African-American man in his mid-40s, with close-cropped graying hair, hazel eyes, a deep voice, and an infectious laugh (think of Baloo the Bear from Disney's animated *The Jungle Book*). The most physically intimidating in the band, he is actually the least excitable. But don't get him angry; you wouldn't like him when he's angry!

GLENN "SPIDER" MORRISON

Glenn "Spider" Morrison is the band's drummer/percussionist. He is human above the waist, except for his four arms and compound eyes, and a spider below the waist, with four spider legs. The extra arms make him a great drummer and his legs allow him to move very quickly, climb sheer surfaces, hang from ceilings, spring long distances, and spin silk. Above the waist, Glenn is a Caucasian male, about 5' 2", with black bristly hair and red eyes. He is the most volatile member of the band, easily agitated. He is also the one they send out when stealth and speed are required

CARLOS "LA BAMBA" GUTIERREZ

Carlos Gutierrez, called "La Bamba," (a nickname he dislikes) because he started his career as back-up guitarist for Ritchie Valens. Unfortunately, he could never hold down a steady gig after that and bounced around doing all sorts of odd jobs, many of them dangerous and for low pay. Somehow he never got seriously hurt.

When his card turned, Carlos took on properties that reflected how he felt about himself; he looks exactly like a crash test dummy. His face is featureless: no ears, nose, hair, eyebrows, et cetera, just a smooth round oval with a straight slit for a mouth and pinholes for eyes and ears. The rest of his body is the same: hairless, his feet and hands smooth (he has no "prints") and without nails. He stands 5' 10", has a tan complexion, and speaks with a robotic

GLENN "SPIDER" MORRISON

POWER LEVEL 4

STR 10 DEX 14 CON 12 INT 10 WIS 14 CHA 10

SKILLS

Acrobatics 4 (+6), Concentration 4 (+6), Knowledge (art) 6 (+6), Notice 8 (+10), Perform (percussion) 8 (+8), Profession (musician) 6 (+8)

FEATS

Dodge Focus 2, Improved Initiative, Move-By Action, Sneak Attack

POWERS

Additional Limbs 4 (four spider legs, four human arms)

Snare 4 (webbing; Burst Area)

Super-Movement 2 (wall-crawling 2)

Super-Senses 3 (darkvision, radius)

COMBAT

Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +6

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +1, Fortitude +3, Reflex +3, Will +2

Abilities 10 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 23 + Combat 8 + Saves 3 = Total 58

CARLOS "LA BAMBA" GUTIERREZ

POWER LEVEL 5

STR 12 DEX 12 CON 18 INT 13 WIS 11 CHA 10

SKILLS

Concentration 5 (+5), Disguise 3 (+3), Escape Artist 5 (+6), Knowledge (art) 5 (+6), Notice 4 (+4), Perform (stringed) 6 (+6), Profession (musician) 4 (+4)

FEATS

None

POWERS

Immunity 11 (critical hits, life support)

Protection 4 (Impervious)

COMBAT

Attack +1, Grapple +2, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -6, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +8, Fortitude +4, Reflex +3, Will +2

Abilities 16 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 19 + Combat 6 + Saves 4 = Total 53

tone. Thanks to the wild card virus, Carlos may not look much like a person anymore, but he's also very hard to hurt and can withstand most environmental conditions.

SCOUTMASTER RICK

When he's not under the influence of psychotic singers, Scoutmaster Rick Winger is a likeable guy who cares about helping kids, building his community, and preserving the environment. So he spends his spare time as a Scoutmaster doing all of the above. He's not particularly bright, but smart enough to get a degree in computer science and find an easy IT job at a small company. His wild

SCOUTMASTER RICK

POWER LEVEL 4

STR 14 DEX 14 CON 14 INT 10 WIS 11 CHA 14

SKILLS

Climb 4 (+6), Computers 4 (+4), Diplomacy 3 (+5), Escape Artist 3 (+5), Intimidate 2 (+4), Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+4), Notice 4 (+4), Profession (IT Support) 6 (+6), Sense Motive 3 (+3), Survival 4 (+4), Swim 3 (+5)

FEATS

Attack Specialization (acid touch) 1, Leadership, Teamwork

POWERS

Corrosion 4 (acid)

COMBAT

Attack +2, +4 (acid touch), Grapple +4, Damage +2 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +2

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +2, Fortitude +3, Reflex +4, Will +2

Abilities 17 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 8 + Combat 12 + Saves 5 = Total 55

SCOUTMASTER DOUG

POWER LEVEL 6

STR 14 DEX 13 CON 13 INT 16 WIS 16 CHA 14

SKILLS

Bluff 5 (+7), Climb 2 (+4), Craft (structural) 6 (+9), Diplomacy 4 (+6), Drive 3 (+4), Gather Information 3 (+5), Knowledge (business) 5 (+8), Notice 4 (+7), Profession (financial advisor) 6 (+9), Sense Motive 4 (+7), Survival 2 (+5)

FEATS

Taunt

POWERS

Vibration Control 6

Alternate Power: Deflect 6 (slow and fast projectiles)

Alternate Power: Drain Toughness 6 (Ranged; Limited to Objects)

Alternate Power: Force Field 6 (Impervious)

Alternate Power: Nauseate 4 (Ranged)

Alternate Power: Stun 4 (Ranged)

Alternate Power: Trip 4 (Ranged)

COMBAT

Attack +2, Grapple +4, Damage +2 (unarmed), +6 (vibrational blast), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -1 (-7 with force field), Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +2 (+8 with force field), Fortitude +3, Reflex +2, Will +5

Abilities 26 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 18 + Combat 8 + Saves 6 = Total 70

card turned when he was interning in a "clean room" where chips were being etched. Now he can do it himself!

SCOUTMASTER DOUG

Doug Masters has been involved with scouting for over 20 years, first as a Junior Scout, then as a Ranger, then as a Troop Leader. It's a family tradition that he's proud to honor. It also gets him

SKYLARK

POWER LEVEL 8

STR 10	DEX 10	CON 10	INT 10	WIS 10	CHA 12
SKILLS					
Bluff 8 (+9), Concentration 5 (+5), Disguise 3 (+4), Knowledge (music industry) 6 (+6), Notice 4 (+4), Perform (singing) 4 (+5), Profession (singer) 4 (+4), Search 5 (+5), Sense Motive 5 (+5)					
FEATS					
Benefit—Fame 2, Master Plan					
POWERS					
Boost 5 (any one mental ability; Move Action; Subtle 2)					
Emotion Control 8 (Auditory Area, Selective Attack; Subtle 2, Triggered [implanted suggestions]; Power Loss [must sing appropriate song; -1 point])					
Mind Shield 6					
COMBAT					
Attack +0, Grapple +0, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback -0, Initiative +0					
SAVING THROWS					
Toughness +0, Fortitude +2, Reflex +1, Will +4					
Abilities 2 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 57 + Combat 2 + Saves 7 = Total 82					

out from behind his spreadsheets and away from the pressures of his job.

He was hiking in the vicinity of Mt. St. Helens on that fateful day in 1980 when the mountain blew its top and he was caught in a landslide. As the earth heaved his card turned and Doug developed the vibrational powers he has now learned to use with great precision. He enjoys showing off what he can do in front of the boys whenever possible. It helps him to maintain his “cool quotient” against the more charismatic Rick Winger.

SKYLARK

Born Cynthia Chalmers, Cindie was an ambitious small-town chanteuse with dreams of big-time stardom. Her modest talent generated mostly poor reviews until her wild card turned. Then she rose meteorically to become the singing sensation “Skylark,” mesmerizing audiences whenever she performed.

Unfortunately, her transformation also unleashed her tremendous resentment against all those who had previously dismissed her, which includes *everyone*. Now quite insane, she unwittingly plans to unleash her power to induce emotions—angry, violent emotions—into everyone within the sound of her voice, creating a nation of psychotics. And for that, she needs a massive broadcast audience.

Skylark is an average-looking woman in every way: about 5-foot, 7-inches, medium build with short brown hair and brown eyes. She affects an air of glamour and sophistication, but it's quite easy to see she's still just a bumpkin from Waukegan, Wisconsin.

MISERY

POWER LEVEL 6

STR 9	DEX 9	CON 14	INT 13	WIS 16	CHA 16
SKILLS					
Bluff 4 (+7), Concentration 6 (+9), Knowledge (popular culture) 7 (+8), Notice 6 (+9), Perform (singing) 10 (+13), Profession (night club owner) 5 (+8), Profession (singer) 8 (+11), Sense Motive 6 (+9)					
FEATS					
Inspire					
POWERS					
Emotion Control 6 (Auditory Area; Power Loss [must sing suitable song; -1 point])					
Immunity 1 (Skylark's Emotion Control)					
Super-Senses 5 (precognition, tracking)					
COMBAT					
Attack -1, Grapple -2, Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback -0, Initiative +0					
SAVING THROWS					
Toughness +0, Fortitude +2, Reflex +2, Will +6					
Abilities 17 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 23 + Combat -2 + Saves 6 = Total 58					

Although she tries to control her behavior, every now and then her psychosis leaks out in telling gestures or brief words.

MISERY

“Deenie” to those who know her well, was once hailed as the next Billie Holiday. Her naturally soulful singing seemed to rip straight through your heart and leave you yearning for more, until the wild card intervened. Just on the edge of stardom at the age of 42, she became infected along with Skylark as they were hugging backstage before a big performance, tying them together in a way neither was aware of until recently.

When she became infected a lifetime of singin' the blues took its toll, and Deenie became a walking portrait of human misery: skeletal, hollow-eyes, covered in a tissue of diseased-looking skin, a figure not even a mother could love and certainly not the music-consuming, image-conscious public. Misery is a joker-ace because of her precognitive ability to sense when bad things are about to happen, and to “track” down the source by concentrating. This gift has only further alienated her since most people don't want to hear bad news, and she has learned to keep quiet about it. Living with that awful knowledge has been a greater burden to her than her appearance.

Misery is a light-skinned African-American woman, about 5'9", with brown eyes and thinning tightly curled brown hair. She strives to carry herself with dignity at all times. Misery is secretly the owner of the Broken Mirrors Saloon, and she can still sing like nobody's business, but only her joker audience has the opportunity to appreciate her talents now.



SHELL GAME

Heroes are a rare commodity in life. Many attribute certain qualities to being a hero: bravery, confidence, and will-power. In the *Wild Cards* universe it's not so different. Take one hero, Thomas Tudbury, also known as The Great and Powerful Turtle. For years, he protected the world using his ace abilities and various Turtle shells, but like all heroes, he eventually faded away from the public eye, becoming the stuff of history and legend.

But what happens when a well-known hero goes rogue? When a legend falls from grace? How quickly the public eye turns back the hero, only this time, instead of a look of hope, it's a glare of shame. The police are now on the hunt for the once Great and Powerful Turtle, connecting him and one of his amazing shells to a bank robbery. Could he be in such dire need that he'd resort to such a terrible thing as grand theft? Or is there something more behind this?

The public had their doubts about his motivations in the past, but is he responsible for what's happening now? And if so, who can bring the disgraced Tudbury to justice? Someone should get to the bottom of this and that someone is you!

INTRODUCTION

Gamemasters should read this adventure in its entirety before running it. **Anyone interested in playing in the adventure should stop reading here**, as it may spoil the mystery and fun of the adventure.

In **Scene One**, the city learns one of their heroes has fallen from grace as Thomas "The Turtle" Tudbury's shell is seen participating in a bank heist. As the city lies in shock, a small band of people on either side of the law join up to find the shell and get some answers.

Next, in **Scene Two**, the band investigates the crime scene and deals with the fallout of the crime. As the team searches for details, the plot leads them through alleys, a mission and, eventually, a hotel, where they find more than they bargained for inside.

Uncovering the bad guys, **Scene Three** explodes in a hallway combat. As one of the leaders desperately attempts to flee, the other is preparing to make a break before he's discovered. Battling their way out of the garage, the villains make their way out into

the city with the stolen shell and what looks like Tudbury.

As the characters chase down the shell, they arrive at the final climax in **Scene Four**, battling Scrounge and Bullfrog, as well as a controlled Thomas Tudbury, in a junkyard. They must now not only recover the shell, but also save a former hero before he inadvertently does any more damage.

SCENE ONE: PICK A CARD...

It didn't take long for the news to hit the city. In a flurry of sensational journalism, the media is calling Thomas Tudbury a criminal. Once the hero known as the Turtle, Tudbury retired and attempted to live a relaxing life. That all changed when one of his former shells was spotted during a bank heist the other night.

Police report the Turtle ferried a team of masked criminals to the bank and, after looting the safe, provided them with an aerial escape. The officers on the scene attempted to pursue, but lost their trail somewhere near the Queens/Midtown Tunnel. According to the report, the shell is the same one stolen a few nights back from the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum. Police are hoping anyone with leads will contact them concerning the whereabouts of the shell or Tudbury, who hasn't been seen since the incidents began.

YOUR CIVIC DUTY

Though not everyone in the *Wild Cards* universe is necessarily a "nice person", there are those who consider themselves upstanding citizens. Many of this brand of person may investigate the robbery for several reasons: clearing Thomas Tudbury's name, recovering the stolen funds, or even finding out who could use such a symbol of heroism for villainy.

In some cases, these heroes may already work together, perhaps as a group of friends or even professional investigators. Others may work together for safety or the sharing of information. In the case of those needing more motivation, there is always the possibility the museum is offering a cash reward for the return of their property. Or maybe the police or one of Tudbury's friends approach the characters and request help. This works especially well if any of the heroes have worked for the police in the past or have connections to the public (e.g. an investigative reporter, private detective, etc.).

BUT IN THE WRONG HANDS

There are plenty of people who would find the shell useful for their own ends. In most cases, its actual worth alone would be enough to motivate criminals to seek it out. But the fact that someone is using it to commit crimes has gotten the underworld's interest... and they're paying big money to find out more.

Organizing a group of less reputable characters could be a bit tricky. In many cases, running the adventure as a heist scenario might be the easiest way to accomplish grouping them together. Taking inspiration from such stories as *Ocean's Eleven* and *Gone in 60 Seconds*, the characters could be gathered together by someone looking to make a bigger score and needing the shell to accomplish it. Or perhaps it's an infamous collector looking to add the shell to his collection and, using some shadier contacts, gathers the group to collect his prize piece.

In other cases, characters may be interested in obtaining the shell to use in their own illicit way. Perhaps they're looking to ransom it back to the Museum or even Tudbury. Or maybe they're hoping to figure out how it could work for them to get a bigger score.

BANKING ON IT

One of the first places the characters may start their investigation is the scene of the crime: the bank. When they arrive, the bank is still swarming with police officers, both in and out of uniforms, as well as a forensics team examining the area, and a few FBI agents.

If the characters have worked with the police (or are still working for them), they may be let into the crime scene. If they haven't, but have proper credentials (press pass, P.I. license, etc.), they may be able to talk their way in (Diplomacy or Bluff, DC 15). If they are pretty much unknown, chances are slim they'll be able to get in the front door (Diplomacy or Bluff, DC 20+). If the group is a bit less law-abiding, it may be trickier walking in unless they have something they can bypass the police with (fake I.D.s, invisibility, etc.).



VAULTED

When walking in the front door, the bank is in a state of disarray. Drawers are on the floor, chairs are knocked over and the vault, which is still in one piece, is wide open. Inside, trays are spilled over and there's a good amount of coins and safe deposit boxes on the ground, but everything else is gone. The forensics team has taped off the vault and there are currently a few investigators inside taking photos.

Over by the bank tellers' station is a lone investigator wearing a black jacket that says "CSI" on the back of it. He looks to be in his late 30s, has blonde hair (receding a bit) and a pale complexion. A camera hangs around his neck and he's recording something on forms held by a clipboard. He greets anyone approaching him with a quick "Hello". Looking closer, he bears an I.D. with "Lt. Gerard" on it. If approached by the characters, he greets them like anyone else and continues with his work unless pressed by someone to speak. In most cases, he'll attempt to dismiss the person, but on a successful Bluff or Diplomacy check, he may reveal some information just to placate the person questioning him (see **What Lt. Gerard Knows**).

WHAT LT. GERARD KNOWS

If one of the players wants to question Lt. Gerard, use the following information based on the result of a Bluff or Diplomacy check. In the case of higher DCs, the player learns all information up to the DC achieved.

WHAT THE LIEUTENANT KNOWS

D20

INFORMATION

DC 10 "It was a heist, what more do you want to know? The perps came in from skylight and must've repelled down. They must've gassed the guard or something, because he has no recollection of this happening."

DC 15 "Looks like they cleaned the place out. But you'd think with that much time, they either had an army of crooks or wanted to be seen. Weird, huh?"

DC 20 "Haven't found a single print or hair. Whoever they were, they knew what they were doing. I've got some of my men viewing the video surveillance over the last month to see if we find anyone that may've been casing the joint. Sure it's a shot in the dark...but we don't have much else."

DC 25 "The vault door? To be honest, there's no signs of explosives or rewiring. It's almost like the door just opened for them."

Approaching the vault doors, a tall man in a black jacket marked "FBI" stops the group. He appears to be in his mid 40s, has thinning brown hair and wears more formal business attire under the jacket. The badge on his lapel identifies him as "Special Agent Pitch". He looks over his horn-rimmed glasses, examining the characters, and asks, "Can I help you?" If they work in

LT. HENRY GERARD

STR 14 DEX 12 CON 13 INT 13 WIS 12 CHA 10

SKILLS

Drive 2 (+3), Intimidate 2 (+2), Investigate 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 2 (+3), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+3), Medicine 2 (+3), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (police officer) 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Swim 2 (+4)

FEATS

Equipment 3

Equipment: undercover vest (+3 Toughness; Subtle), light pistol (+3 damage), tonfa (+1 damage), handcuffs

COMBAT

Attack +3, Damage +2 (unarmed), +3 (pistol), Defense +2, Knockback -2 (-1 without vest), Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +4 (+1 without vest), Fortitude +3, Reflex +1, Will +3

Abilities 14 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 0 + Combat 10 + Saves 4 = Total 38

SPECIAL AGENT FRANK PITCH

POWER LEVEL 3

STR 10 DEX 12 CON 13 INT 15 WIS 14 CHA 10

SKILLS

Computers 2 (+4), Diplomacy 3 (+3), Drive 4 (+5), Gather Information 4 (+4), Intimidate 4 (+4), Investigate 6 (+8), Knowledge (behavior sciences) 3 (+5), Knowledge (civics) 2 (+4), Knowledge (current events) 2 (+4), Knowledge (history) 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+4), Notice 4 (+6), Profession (government agent) 3 (+5), Search 5 (+7)

FEATS

Defensive Roll 1, Equipment 2

Equipment: light pistol (+3 damage), handcuffs, camera, cell phone, notebook computer

POWERS

Super-Senses 3 (detect wild card; ranged, sense)

COMBAT

Attack +3, Grapple +3, Damage +0 (unarmed), +3 (pistol), Defense +4, Knockback -1, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +2 (+1 flat-footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +1, Will +6

Abilities 14 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) Feats 3 + Powers 3 + Combat 14 + Saves 7 = Total 53

law enforcement, he may talk to them. However, if they work for the private sector, he attempts to usher them out the door, explaining the area is a crime scene and their mere presence is infecting it. If they attempt to convince him otherwise, he'll be a hard sell (Diplomacy, DC 20) but may eventually come around to help them.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT AGENT PITCH?

If someone talks to Agent Pitch, have them make a Diplomacy check, comparing the results to the chart below.

THE PITCH MAN

D20

INFORMATION

DC 10 *"Me? I work at the FBI's wild card division. We specialize in crimes involving aces and jokers."*

DC 15 *"Of course it seems like a wild card crime. You do realize the Turtle's involved, right? Never would've thought it...but I don't know of anyone else who could pull off what they did. I mean, who else could fly that thing?"*

DC 20 *"How do I know? Call it a hunch...there's a reason why I work in this division. You could say that I have a 'sense' about this sort of thing...if you catch my drift. It was definitely a wild carder."*

Even after the characters question Pitch, the agent tends to keep a close eye on them as they walk about the bank. What the players may not realize is that S.A. Pitch is an ace himself with the ability to sense others infected by the wild card virus.

If the characters begin their own investigation, they may uncover a few clues the police have yet to find. Have the players make Investigation skill checks and consult the chart below for evidence they may uncover. If the players don't have Investigate, they may make Search checks, but add 5 to the Difficulties on the chart due to the lack of procedure and possibility of getting hassled by someone else in the bank.

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

D20

INFORMATION

DC 10 You find some frayed cable near some shattered glass.

DC 15 Looking around the security station, you find a small smattering of blue-white mucus on the floor. It's a bit gooey to the touch, much like spoiled milk, and has no odor.

DC 20 The glass on the floor doesn't add up to the way that the skylight is broken. It almost appears as if someone threw some glass down from the ceiling but didn't pay attention to how much of the skylight was actually broken.

A SKYLIGHT'S VIEW

For those not able to go in through the front door, they may attempt to begin their investigation on the roof. As they climb to the top, they'll notice the area's been taped off with police tape and there are a couple of small flags in place around the roof. The rooftop itself is set in a square formation, with a four and a half foot ledge around the edge. There is a skylight with broken glass near it, a few small exhaust ports leading into the building and a roof access door leading down onto the floor below. Examining closer, the characters notice the following:

- Flag 1 is positioned by the skylight. There seems to be a dent in the frame of the structure and a slight scrape, possibly from metal hitting metal.
- Flag 2 is where a small part of the roof's ledge seems to be broken. It appears as though there are flakes of color in the rock.

From below, they can hear officers milling about with their investigation. If they listen closely, they may catch some of the same information as someone entering through the front door, at the GM's discretion. However, if they investigate the roof, they may find clues the police have not. Have the players make either Investigation or Search checks and consult the results below.

UP ON THE ROOF

D20

INFORMATION

DC 15 Snooping around, you find a karabiner near the roof access door. It doesn't seem to have been used and shows no wear.

DC 25 You notice that the roof appears to have been swept recently and in a hurry. It's possible that the police swept it, but it seems unlikely as it could've swept away evidence.

DC 30 Checking a few of the exhaust ports for the air ducts, you find a bag of glass shards. Looking it over, there are quite a few shards in it of varying sizes. Examining the glass closer reveals that it could be similar to the glass in the skylight (additional Investigate or Search check, DC 10).

If the characters want to avoid being seen, have them make a Stealth check (DC 18). On a failure, they are spotted and a squad of police officers is sent to apprehend them. This may cause trouble for them, depending on the side of the law that they're on. If they are spotted running, the police pursue until they capture and detain the characters or lose them. This is a great chance to have a chase across the rooftops of New York City, if you are so inclined.

SCENE TWO: NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE

With the bank only offering a few clues, the next place to investigate is the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum in Jocker-town; which displayed the shell before it was stolen. As the group arrives on the scene, there are no police cars present, but a repair crew is fixing a large hole in the wall of the building. Lights are on inside and the door is unlocked.

WELCOME TO THE SHOW

A chime announces anyone entering the museum. The inside of the building is like looking through time; several historic items are displayed around: a set of Tachyon's clothes draped on a man-

CHARLES DUTTON

POWER LEVEL 2

STR 9	DEX 10	CON 14	INT 14	WIS 14	CHA 14
-------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Diplomacy 3 (+5), Gather Information 4 (+6), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 3 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 3 (+5), Knowledge (history) 3 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 1 (+3), Profession (curator) 4 (+6), Profession (stockbroker) 3 (+5),

FEATS

Benefit—Wealth 1 (wealth bonus 12), Connected, Contacts, Well-Informed

COMBAT

Attack +1, Grapple +0, Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback -1, Initiative +0

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +2, Fortitude +2, Reflex +0, Will +2

Abilities 15 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 4 + Combat 4 + Saves 0 = Total 29

nequin, a mock-up of Jetboy's JB-1 jet plane and, of course, two of the Turtle's shells near the gaping hole in the wall. Stepping out from around the corner is a man with a yellowish skull for a head dressed in a well-cut suit. He looks in the general direction of the group and says, "I'm sorry, but the museum is closed and will be for at least a few more days." Those who have lived in Jokertown or read any news clips may recognize this gentleman as Charles Dutton, one of the prime players in this area of New York City (history or pop culture Knowledge check, DC 15). If the characters are affiliated with the law or have credible identification, he may talk to them a bit (Diplomacy, DC 15), but is reluctant to say much and seems uncomfortable. If the characters have no credentials, Dutton has little to say (Diplomacy or Bluff check, DC 25). Once they have his trust, however, he'll open up a bit to them.

MR. DUTTON'S RECOLLECTION

If the characters speak to Mr. Dutton, have the players make a Diplomacy check and compare their result to the chart below.

TALKING TO MR. DUTTON

D20

INFORMATION

DC 13 "The museum was closed when the robbery happened. I can't imagine why the shell was the only thing taken. It's valuable, certainly, but hardly the only thing of value, and certainly not the most portable."

DC 16 "I wasn't the one to discover the robbery. Ms. Machallan across the street felt an odd disturbance and called the police. But it was too late to do much by the time they'd arrived."

DC 20 "The funny thing is, I don't know why they took that specific shell. It was unique, but also the most beaten-up of the ones in the collection. Had a handprint embedded in it by the Sculptress and a big dent from someone throwing a cannonball at it."



After Dutton has spoken with the characters for a bit, another man with smooth, rock-like features, wearing a dress shirt, tie, and slacks comes around the corner with a suit case and some papers. "Mr. Dutton, I need you to sign some of these papers before I leave," he says in a gravelly tone. Dutton introduces the other joker as Matthew Stevens, an insurance adjustor assessing the damage to the museum. If asked questions, Mr. Stevens is very short in his answers and requires some coaxing.

STEVENS' ADJUSTMENTS

If the characters persist to ask Stevens questions, have the players make a Diplomacy or Bluff check and consult the following table:

WHAT STEVENS KNOWS

D20

INFORMATION

DC 12 "Well, I can't say much, but there doesn't seem to be much damage beyond the wall and whatever damages were done to the item stolen."

DC 16 "I would say that, whoever was responsible knew how the security system worked or has had experience in the past with such a system. According to the police, the alarm wasn't tripped at all."

If the group earns Dutton's trust, he allows them to poke around the museum while he attends to this task. He then returns to the counter he was at prior to the characters' entrance and begins to finish his paperwork with Mr. Stevens. The character may use Investigation or Search to acquire any remaining clues in the building. Have players make the appropriate check and consult the following.

THE MISSION SHELL

D20	INFORMATION
DC 15	The cables that held the shell in place are broken, rather than cut. It could be the thieves flew the shell right out of its spot, snapping the cables in the process. If comparing the cables to the cable found at the bank, they do not match (the cable at the bank was much smaller).
DC 20	There doesn't appear to be any dust left on the floor near the shell's exhibit. If looking around, there seems to be dust on the other displays, but none where the item was stolen.
DC 25	You find some blue-white sticky mucus near floor where the exhibit was. If the group found the mucus in the bank, it matches the same consistency and odorous smell.

In the case of a more criminal group of characters, Stevens may tell them what they need to know with an Intimidate check. Dutton however attempts to lie his way out of the situation and threatens to call the police. If the characters figure out he's bluffing (Sense Motive, DC 16) and call him on it, they may attempt a second Intimidate check to gain the same information described previously.

MATTHEW STEVENS

POWER LEVEL 2

STR 10 | DEX 10 | CON 12 | INT 16 | WIS 14 | CHA 14

SKILLS

Computers 1 (+4), Diplomacy 3 (+5), Gather Information 1 (+3), Knowledge (business) 4 (+7), Knowledge (current events) 3 (+6), Knowledge (history) 3 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 1 (+4), Profession (adjustor) 4 (+6)

FEATS

Benefit—Wealth 1 (wealth bonus 12), Connected, Contacts, Well-Informed

POWERS

Protection 4

COMBAT

Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback -2, Initiative +0

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +5, Fortitude +1, Reflex +0, Will +2

Abilities 16 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 4 + Combat 4 + Saves 0 = Total 33

If they attempt to search the museum, Dutton either activates the building's silent alarm or attempts to tip off one of construction workers to call the police (Notice, DC 18). If successful, it won't take long for a few squad cars to show up (Notice, DC 10, to detect them as they approach without lights and sirens).

BACK ALLEY SHENANIGANS

Once the characters finish snooping around the museum, they may check the museum's exterior for other clues that might otherwise be overlooked. For some, using the hole in the back wall may be their starting point, for others, they may attempt walking around the entire building from the front door (that way they don't disturb the crime scene). Whichever way they choose to go about it, they may make a Search or Investigate check to find any clues.

CHECKING OUT THE ALLEY

D20	INFORMATION
DC 10	The back alley has some evidence of transients living there. From the looks of it, they must have left in a hurry, as they left their meager possessions behind.
DC 15	You notice some glass mixed in with the wall's debris. Poking around a bit, you also see some smaller pieces of light wood.
DC 20	The remains of the wall outside the building seem brittle to the touch, almost like something was hammering on it before it was cracked. However, from the solid pieces, it doesn't appear as though there are any marks indicating a tool was used.
DC 25	Off to the side of the debris, between it and where the transient camp is, there appears to be a smattering of blood on the wall. However, there are not any signs of a struggle.
DC 30	Poking around near the front of the building, you find a small piece of ripped paper, part of a receipt. Printed in green, stylized type are the letters "QUIN" that appear to be part of a larger word. The paper is a heavy yellow stock, reminiscent of a manila cardstock

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

After looking around the alley, the group may want to ask Mr. Dutton a few other questions. If he was receptive before, he'll stop briefly to answer a few questions before he has to leave. He seems rushed and a bit nervous.

- If asked about the transients, he informs them he knew some people would occasionally shelter themselves in the alley, but didn't know who they were.
- If asked about the glass mixed in the debris, Dutton tells them there was a medium-sized window on the wall. If pressed

DR. TERRANCE TABER

POWER LEVEL 2

STR 12	DEX 12	CON 13	INT 14	WIS 10	CHA 10
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Diplomacy 2 (+2), Knowledge (life science) 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+4), Medicine 4 (+6)

FEATS

Equipment 3, Improvised Tools
Equipment: Shotgun (+5/+6*), dog whistle

COMBAT

Attack +2, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +2, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +1, Fortitude +1, Reflex +1, Will +0

Abilities 11 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 4 + Combat 8 + Saves 0 = Total 26

about the size (Diplomacy, DC 10), he notes someone might have been able to fit through it.

- If asked about the blood, he has no idea what it could be.
- If asked about paper, he says it looks familiar and they may want to check around Jokertown for anything like it.

After the characters ask their questions, Dutton excuses himself and leaves. If pressured to answer any other questions, he mentions he doesn't have time and asks the characters kindly to leave him be. If he's threatened or an intimidation attempt is made on him, he kindly and abruptly says, "Good Evening" and steps in his car.

CHECKING THE BLOOD

Checking the blood splatter takes either a lab or a contact with a chemist or biology background. If the characters can get access to the appropriate equipment, they may use Knowledge (life sciences) to check the blood (DC 15). Alternatively, they could have a contact check it out, requiring a Gather Information (DC 15) check. In either case, if the check is successful, it establishes the blood is from someone tainted with the wild card virus, possibly from a joker. If compared to anything found in the transient camp, they discover the DNA in the blood matches one of the transients (Knowledge (life sciences) or Gather Information, DC 20).

Additionally, if the investigators want to also check any of the blue-white fluid they found earlier, they may be able to do that as well. A Knowledge (life sciences) check (DC 25), finds slight traces of MDMA, a strong hallucinogenic, within the mucus. But further research (DC 30) shows it has an oxidizing period where the mucus seems to become completely inert after a time.

A KEEN TRAIL

Getting some answers from Dutton may lead the characters onto the trail of the transients behind the alley. However, finding them

WILSON "KING KOMODO" JOHNSON POWER LEVEL 5

STR 17	DEX 12	CON 16	INT 10	WIS 10	CHA 10
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Intimidation 4 (+4), Knowledge (pop culture) 4 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+2), Medicine 1 (+1), Notice 1 (+1)

FEATS

Diehard, Fearsome Presence 2 (DC 12, 10 ft.), Improved Block, Power Attack, Rage, Stunning Attack, Taunt

POWERS

Protection 3

Strike 2 (Mighty)

COMBAT

Attack +5, Grapple +8, Damage +5 (unarmed), Defense +4, Knockback -2, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +6, Fortitude +3, Reflex +1, Will +0

Abilities 15 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 6 + Combat 18 = Total 50

may prove a more difficult. Without names, they have to spend a few hours asking other inhabitants of Jokertown, transient and otherwise, if they know or have seen anyone in the alley. As they look, have the players make Gather Information checks for every 30 minutes the characters spend on the streets. Consult the following table to see what they turn up:

"ANYONE SEE ANYTHING?"

D20

INFORMATION

DC 15 There were a few transients living in the alley near the Dime Museum. Though what became of them is unknown. Most of the folks you talk to didn't even realize they were missing.

DC 20 The few who knew these transients called them Lucky and Sims. Lucky was a joker with no nose and thirteen digits on her hands, while Sims appeared more like an ape than a man.

DC 25 You find someone who heard Sims was hit by a car near the Dime Museum. Lucky brought him to the All-In Mission for some help.

Entering the All-In Mission, the characters notice it's a clean establishment with a soup kitchen and clinic available to anyone who lives in Jokertown. The lobby is set up as an open area with a few chairs, a table, and some magazines. In the middle of the room is a circular desk, currently abandoned with a few phone lines ringing. As they enter, a large joker standing well over six and a half feet tall approaches them. He's bald, his skin tinted a sickly dark green, and he has lizard-like features. Wearing a tank top and some jeans, he looks everyone over and asks, "You're too clean to be off the streets. What do you want?"



If they make a Knowledge (pop culture) check (DC 15), the characters realize this is Wilson “King Komodo” Johnson, a former amateur boxer in the non-official Joker Boxer Commission. A few years ago, he had been banged up pretty bad after refusing to take a fall and was taken out of the limelight. If anyone recognizes him, he’ll cheer up a bit and talk to them. Otherwise, it requires a Diplomacy check (DC 15) before he speaks in any depth (or lets the characters go any further). He doesn’t respond to intimidation well and, if someone attempts to push him around, defends the Mission with force.

If the characters manage to get on his good side, Johnson won’t answer any questions, but brings them to meet the proprietor of the Mission, Dr. Terrance N. Taber. Dr. Taber is a tall, handsome man in his mid-30s with short-cropped, light hair. He wears a plaid flannel shirt and some casual brown slacks under a doctor’s jacket.

The doctor greets them and asks them to enter. If treated well, Dr. Taber is happy to aid the group, especially if they show some kind of official identification (badge, press pass, etc.). Have the players make Diplomacy checks and compare the results to the table. If the characters don’t have any official identification or are rude to the doctor, add +5 to each DC. The result of the Diplomacy check determines what the investigators find out. You can use the same guidelines for Bluff or Intimidate checks if the players decide to take a different tack with Dr. Taber.

THE DOCTOR SPEAKS

D20

INFORMATION

DC 15 “I know the pair well. Lucky volunteers in the soup kitchen on occasion and has been looking after a few other transients. She brought her friend Sims in last night after a car hit him. She seems fine, other than some mild shock due the incident, but he was hit pretty hard. Are they in some kind of trouble?”

DC 20 “Hmm...well there were some weird markings on Sims. Sure, I imagine it could’ve been a car, but it didn’t fit the angle exactly. His injuries weren’t life threatening, he broke a few ribs, part of his arm, and he had a few contusions to the head. He should be alright in a day or two.”

If the characters ask to speak to them, Dr. Taber informs the characters he could ask Lucky if she’d like to talk, but Sims is sedated for pain and probably wouldn’t be a very good witness at the moment. After a few moments, he brings Lucky back into his office with him and asks her to sit down with him and the characters. Lucky is a bit scared and seems reluctant to share any information at first. A Diplomacy check (DC 20) is required to get her to speak to them or, alternatively, if they use strong-arm tactics, they may make an Intimidation (DC 15) check to scare the information out of her. If they do the latter, Dr. Taber attempts to get her out of the room and inform the characters she won’t be available for further questioning from them. With a successful check, Lucky tells her tale to the characters, informing them of the following:

“There were a f-few of us there last n-night. T-The museum’s alley always keeps us w-warm and...and we were k-kin-da cold, you know? We m-made a fire and Lizzie...sh-she’s a friend of ours...sh-she was talkin’ about some stuff when all o’ the sudden the wall b-broke apart. We all sc-screamed and Sim...he wanted to pro-protect us. He thought he could stop the thing th-that shot outta the wall and it r-ran him right over when it fl-flew up the wall. Th-there was people inside it...some guy and a couple o’ jokers...one of them looked like it had worm hands and the other was like some kinda frog-thing. All Sim wanted to do was to pr-protect us...you know? Who’d do something like that?”

After her account, Dr. Taber escorts her back to Sim, allowing the group to take in what they heard or, if need be, to get out of the building. After returning, Dr. Taber comments on the hardships the pair have been through and answers any remaining questions before escorting them to the door. On their way out, he offers to help in any way he can and gladly takes a business card or any contact information offered to him.

If the characters were overly forceful with their questioning, Dr. Taber expects them to be gone when he returns to his office,

calling Johnson over to help if necessary. The doctor also calls the authorities if necessary, ensuring the group is ejected from the Mission and possibly arrested.

PUTTING THE QUIN INTO HARLEQUIN

If the characters decide to investigate the piece of paper, they won't have to travel too far. A simple Search or Investigate check (DC 10) in the Jokertown phone directory matches up the rest of the logo:

Harlequin Hotel

The Best Night's Sleep for the Joker on the Go!

26 Bleeker Street • (724) 316-8265

HOURLY – DAILY – WEEKLY RATES AVAILABLE

The Harlequin Hotel's ad is a bit deceptive. From the outside, anyone approaching the hotel can tell it's a hovel, as the walls all look as though they need spackling and the steps up to the front door are littered with garbage, disheveled drunks, and the scurrying of various vermin. As the characters climb the steps, have players make a Notice check (DC 13). If successful, characters smell a noxious odor coming from within: like cheap cigars and stale sweat. As they swing the door open, the smell becomes apparent to everyone. Within, sounds of people yelling and loud, neo-jazz bleat past the glass doors.

Within the lobby, there are a few people lounging about. Many are jokers dressed in fairly raggedy suits and slick dresses. The hotel manager is a joker himself with large, fish-like eyes and bulbous ears. He's wearing a wrinkled, brown suit and reading a trashy paperback novel.

One of his eyes slyly glances at the group as they enter. From a door to the left, the music, noise and stench seem to pound its way through, almost like it's attempting to escape. To the right are an old, gated elevator and a worn stone stairway. Torn and faded red curtains drape the brown-stained windows that move up the building with the stairs and tarnished chandeliers project as much light as they can through bulbs covered in years' worth of grime.

THE DESK

Approaching the desk, the fish-man blinks a few times sideways and nods. "Evenin'...what can I do for ya?" He asks in a nasally voice as both his eyes scan in different directions. For the most part, the desk manager seems pretty apathetic to anyone's sob story. If questioned, he resists anything initially, especially if there's a badge involved. Most of his responses will be "Who?" or "Can't say as I know what you mean..." A simple Sense Motive check (DC 15) reveals he's actually a bit nervous, but hides it well. However, he does respond well to money, as well as to threats. If the players wish to know anything else, they'll have to make a Wealth

check to bribe him (if you're using those optional rules) or an Intimidation check to make him understand that he needs to talk. Consult the following table for results:

TALKING TO THE FISH

D20

INFORMATION

DC 10 "I think I seen them here before. Maybe they were passing through?"

DC 15 "Oooh...you mean that frog guy and worm dude. That's Bullfrog and Scrounge...I've seen 'em here and there."

DC 20 "Okay...I've seen them here and not there. They got a room upstairs. Third floor."

If the characters offered him money, he thanks them and counts it before slipping it in his pocket. However, if he was threatened, he brushes himself off and tries to stay out of their way.

THE NOISY ROOM

Upon opening the door to the noisy room, the stench the characters smelled earlier, as well as the sounds within, hit them like a hammer, almost bowling over anyone of small stature. From the doorway, the team can see the room is dimly lit with a haze of



smoke around the ceiling fans, giving the feel of an old Prohibition-era gin-joint. To the left is a bar manned by a bartender wearing a mask and a neatly pressed suit. Straight ahead is a well-lit bandstand with a band comprised of jokers and nats, all jumping to the beat while playing their instruments. The rest of the room is packed with people, mostly jokers, talking, drinking and listening to the band.

Approaching the bar, the characters find it's only marginally brighter than the rest of the room. The hazy veil of smoke is lit by a dim light from the mirror behind the bar and a fluorescent light underneath it. The bartender nods to them as he cleans the bar top. If asked any questions, the bartender offers only a blank look. The only thing he responds to is a drink order.

Talking to the band is a near impossibility. The music drowns out any discussions near the bandstand, assuming the characters can get past the two joker goons acting as the bodyguards and bouncers for the band. If the characters even approach the stage, one of the bodyguards escorts the transgressors to either the bar or the door, depending on their behavior.

If the players want to work the room and talk to the audience, they may make Gather Information checks:

AUDIENCE INFORMATION

D20

INFORMATION

DC 10 *"Isn't the band great? I think they're called 'Straight Flush' or something. I see all sorts of people in here all the time but never pay them no mind...y'know?"*

DC 15 *"Bullfrog? Yeah, I think I've seen him in here before. Big guy, right? Could've sworn that I've passed him in the parking garage."*

DC 20 *"Who? Oh man...you don't want to mess with 'Frog and Scrounge. Pretty nasty guys. Heard the cops arrested Scrounge before...but he escaped before he even got to the precinct. I'm not looking for trouble...but they're staying in this hotel someplace. I saw them on the stairs just a little while ago."*

THE ELEVATOR

If the characters examine the elevator, please read the following to them:

Stepping into the Elevator, you see that the buttons go from the basement up to the fifth floor. The elevator itself isn't in the best repair; between the rusted metal cage and stains of what you hope are merely garbage, you're just hoping that it gets you to where you want to go. As the elevator moves, it makes a grinding noise and smells of burned oil all the way to its destination.

The characters may use the elevator to investigate the other levels of the hotel. If they go up, go to **Scene Three: Double Down** immediately. However, if they go down to the basement, refer to the sidebar **Jumping Ahead in Scene Four: Shell Spotting**.

THE STAIRS

When they approach the stairs, make a quick Notice check (DC 10) for the characters. If successful, they see a door under the stairs labeled "Basement". Otherwise they continue on unaware there is a second set of stairs available for exploration, unless a player specifically asks to check. Walking up the steps, they notice a few drunks passed out against the wall and the occasional discarded article of clothing or stash of garbage. Each floor has a landing and a door with the floor number in a large, bold type. Most of the landings have a variety of bottles (some still containing some liquid) strewn about and occasionally vermin can be seen scurrying and scuttling across the floor and walls.

SCENE THREE: DOUBLE DOWN

As the characters make it to the third floor (whether via the elevator or stairs), they see a large man with frog-like features exiting a room about halfway down the hall. Looking up, he notices them as well and begins moving in the opposite direction, away from both the stairs and elevator. If they follow, he casually snatches up his phone and makes a call to the rest of his gang on this floor.

However, if the characters rush him, he screams "Cops!" in a loud, deep voice and makes a dash to the window at the other side of the hall. In any event, once notified, his gang opens the doors to their rooms and attacks. Within moments, the hallway bursts into a scene out of an action film. The group has to think fast, as their prey is on one side of the hall and ten thugs stand in their way of getting him.

The hall is pretty straightforward: it stretches past twenty rooms, ten on each side, plus a laundry room, maintenance closet and a window at the end. Half of the thugs come out of rooms towards the end of the hall, while the other half come out from the middle rooms. The characters have five rounds before Bullfrog dives into the laundry room and down the laundry chute to the basement. If they catch up to him, he uses his Leaping and Strength to attempt to bowl them over and make his way to another exit. In an extreme case, he dives out the window and uses Acrobatics to land on the ground floor, only to rush back into the hotel.

In a straight-out fight, Bullfrog is a pretty formidable opponent, showing both strong hand-to-hand skills and marksmanship. His primary concern is warning Scrounge, but, if cornered, he fights, targeting weaker opponents first. If anyone displays abilities that may hinder him, they become a primary target for his attacks until he can get away.

Since it's best that Bullfrog gets away at this stage and leads the aces into **Scene Four**, feel free to use Gamemaster Fiat (M&M,

BULLFROG'S GANG POWER LEVEL 4 / MINION RANK 3

STR 15	DEX 14	CON 14	INT 10	WIS 10	CHA 10
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Bluff 4 (+4), Climb 4 (+6), Disable Device 4 (+4), Drive 4 (+6), Gather Information 1 (+1), Intimidate 2 (+2), Notice 1 (+1), Search 4 (+4), Stealth 4 (+6)

FEATS

Equipment 3

Equipment: 15 points of various weapons, typically knives (+1 damage) and light pistols (+3 damage)

COMBAT

Attack +4, Grapple +6, Damage +1 (unarmed), +2 (knife), +3 (pistol), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +0

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +2, Fortitude +4, Reflex +3, Will +3

Abilities 13 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 0 + Combat 16 + Saves 6 = Total 45

page 124) to allow him to do so, awarding the players a hero point each for the setback they can use in the next scene.

THE POST-FIGHT SHOW

If the characters defeat the gang and interrogate them, have them make Intimidation checks and consult the following results:

THUG'S INFORMATION

D20

INFORMATION

DC 15 "We work for the Frog. He and the other guy, Scrounge, hired us to do some bank jobs."

DC 20 "I don't know anything about any Turtle. All I know is Bullfrog and Scrounge had an inside guy at the bank. All we had to do was get out...though we already had an in so it was kinda dumb to break out, y'know?"

DC 25 "Scrounge brought this other older guy in right before we stole that ship they had. He can somehow make it fly...think he might be one those 'aces'. For some reason, Scrounge keeps him down in the parking garage with that ship."

For the most part, Bullfrog kept his men in the dark, figuring the less they knew, the less they'd squeal if they were caught. If they search the thugs, they'll only find a few bucks and a pistol for each of them with an extra clip. If they attempt to use Investigate or Search, they may find (DC 20) some of the same blue-white mucus they'd seen before around some of the food in Bullfrog's room.

CATCHING FLIES

If they catch Bullfrog, the characters may attempt an Intimidation check to see what he knows. Unlike his thugs, Bullfrog's pretty



stubborn when it comes to most questions, but, with some work, he may crack under pressure. Check the results on the table to see if they gain any information:

BULLFROG'S INFORMATION

D20

INFORMATION

DC 20 "Yeah, Scrounge and I work together. What of it? You'll never catch him...he's got the shell and will get out of here when I don't show up."

DC 25 "Ooo...tough guy. Good thing Scrounge ain't up here. You'd be flat out if he were...just like that idiot in the shell."

DC 30 "Tudbury? Heh. Scrounge has got him all zombified with that goo that he uses. If you're lucky, there might be a piece of the chump left when Scrounge is done with him."

If anything falls below the difficulties above, Bullfrog eggs the group on, making an occasional wisecrack or laughing at them. This is a distraction to see if he can wiggle out of his bonds using Escape Artist and flee to warn Scrounge.

Again, if you want to have Bullfrog escape after the characters have gotten all the information they can out of him, you can invoke GM Fiat to allow him to do so. The criminal joker gets a

lucky break in the form of a momentary distraction (maybe one of the gang regaining consciousness unexpectedly, or more of them suddenly showing up at the hotel), allowing him to slip his bonds (if any) and bound away and out a window or other exit.

LEAPING LILLYPADS

If Bullfrog gets away (either initially or after **Catching Flies**), he attempts to reach the basement to warn Scrounge of their presence. Below are some of the possibilities for his escape.

THE LAUNDRY CHUTE

Whether in the initial encounter or afterwards, the laundry chute is a direct route to the basement and the fastest way for Bullfrog to escape. If any of the characters follow him, they may find themselves in a trap, as Bullfrog may have had time to warn Scrounge. If this is the case, see **Trapped! In Scene Four: Shell Spotting**.

THE WINDOW

Diving out the window, Bullfrog uses his Acrobatics and Leaping to land safely on the street level and run. Anyone chasing him can either use a movement power or their own skills, making an Acrobatics check (DC 15) to land safely on the street. As he runs,

Bullfrog makes a frantic beeline to the parking garage and begins screaming “COPS!” again.

THE STAIRS

Finding a way past the group, Bullfrog heads towards the stairs, ricocheting off the walls and chandeliers to maximize his speed. Chasing after him, anyone with movement powers may be able to pace him and anyone with ranged attacks should be able to take a shot at him. If he manages to hit the ground floor running, he’ll initially head for the elevator shaft, though he may take the basement stairs as well, whichever seems better to throw any pursuers off his tail.

THE ELEVATOR

If the elevator isn’t on the third floor, Bullfrog uses the elevator shaft as a quick exit. Diving down the shaft, he relies on his skills and abilities to land safely on the basement floor and pries open the gate, screaming “COPS!” If you decide the elevator is below the third floor, Bullfrog either tries to go through the elevator, using the repair hatches in it, or attempt to bypass it with an Escape Artist check (DC 15). If he fails the check, he gets stuck for two rounds before prying himself loose, allowing the characters to gain on him.

SCENE FOUR: SHELL SPOTTING

The parking garage is pretty typical in design: large concrete columns hold up the upper levels, while asphalt covers the entire floor. Off the elevator access is the stairs up, as well as a laundry room and a soda machine. There are a few cars in the lot, though most of them look as though they’ve seen better days. In the right hand far corner, there’s a larger vehicle with a tarp over it.

If Bullfrog manages to elude the group, he runs up to the tarp-covered vehicle (possibly even leaping to cover better ground). He begins pounding on the side of it, yelling “Let me in! C’mon... they’re right behind me!” After a round, the door opens and he’s allowed in as the vehicle begins to hover up. Once any pursuers catch up, they see the shell they’ve been seeking hovering out from under the tarp and maneuvering in their general direction. As the characters confront the shell, read the following:

As you follow Bullfrog into the parking garage, you see a strange looking vehicle begin to rise into the air. The vehicle is a bit larger than a car and, though a bit beat up, appears to be armored plated, as well as dull in color. From a first glance, it almost seems like an alien ship from a cheesy science fiction show.

Scrounge has every intention on crushing the characters with his borrowed abilities. Though not as skilled as Tudbury in the shell, he’s willing to do what he can to get the characters of his trail. During the combat, he’ll use his surroundings to help him,



JUMPING AHEAD

If the characters decide to use the elevator while initially investigating the hotel, they may find the shell before encountering Bullfrog. In this case, they will encounter Scourge by himself, causing the joker to hold off the heroes until he can either escape with Tudbury or backup arrives. If he does happen to escape with Tudbury, Scrounge stops at the second floor to pickup Bullfrog before leaving, allowing the characters a chance to ground shell before the chase.

picking up various vehicles and tossing them at the players for five rounds or until someone breaks his concentration. When this occurs, the shell drops onto the ground for about two rounds and then shoots out into the city. Anyone who catches a good glimpse (Notice, DC 15) sees Tudbury in the vehicle and a strange-looking man with his hands on the hero's head.

TRAPPED!

If characters followed Bullfrog down the laundry chute, they are a few rounds behind him. As they land, have them make a Reflex Save or an Acrobatics check. If failed, the character takes a bruised condition, while, if successful, the character rolls out of the chute without harm. In the event multiple characters went down the chute one after the other, have each of them roll an extra Reflex save. Failure means they get landed on by another character. This is especially effective if running the adventure with an over-the-top action feel.

As they get their bearings, Bullfrog heads for the door and, if not entwined, the characters may try and stop him, but they only have two rounds to do so. If initiated in combat, Bullfrog attempts to use the close confines to his benefit, using Bouncing to ricochet around the room and attack the characters. As soon as it looks like he has the advantage, he attempts to escape again, making a bounding run to Scrounge and the shell.

THE HEAT IS ON

As the shell leaves the garage, the wild carders have to find some way to pursue. If any have Flight or a similar power, it's fairly simple. Otherwise, they have to find a vehicle and fast. Looking around the garage, there are a few cars here, but most look a bit dilapidated and in barely-running shape. Making a Search check (DC 13), the characters can find a few cars in good shape right outside the garage. By making a Disable Device check (DC 15), they can hot-wire one and pursue the shell.

While on the ground, there should be a one character driving and at least one keeping an eye on the shell. Because the shell is flying, it doesn't have as many obstacles as a car, so there should be regular Drive and Search checks.

Most of the Search checks should be fairly easy (it's not every day someone flies a giant metal shell through the city), so on average, most checks should be against DC 10 (clear area) to DC 15 (tighter area with more traffic). If at any point the characters lose sight of the shell (failing one of their Search checks), finding it again may be tricky (requiring a Search check, DC 20).

Driving, on the other hand, can be even trickier, especially since the driver is following verbal directions on the fly. Average difficulties for driving should be DC 15 (clear area) to DC 25 (going the wrong way on a one way street) to DC 30 (semi-gridlocked streets). If a failed Driving check is made, there is a possibility of getting stuck in traffic, or, in the worse case scenario, getting in a car crash. Have the driver make a Drive check (DC 10). If successful, the car gets stuck in traffic and must find a new route. If failed, or if the initial Drive check is a critical failure, the car is involved in a crash. Make an attack roll for the car using the Drive skill as the attack modifier and perform a slam attack (see **Chapter 8** of *M&M*) against the other car, resolving damage normally. If the car is rendered inoperable, the characters have to find alternate transportation (hot-wiring another car, flagging one down from the street, etc.). In the event that someone is seriously wounded, whether a character or an innocent bystander they crashed into, they may try and help them. But every moment they spend away from the pursuit, the trail gets colder. For every two rounds not spent in pursuit, add +3 to the DC of finding the shell.

JUNKYARD JAM

After roughly ten to fifteen rounds of chase, anyone with a firm eye on the shell sees it wobble and plummet towards a fenced-in junkyard near the East River. Approaching the tall gate, they hear dogs barking in the distance and see a light on in a shed nearby. The gate itself is a pretty sturdy combination mesh and steel slat fencing with a hardy lock and chain holding the gate shut. On the left side is a metal sign fastened to the fence, stating the hours of operation, while on the right is a hanging sign saying "CLOSED. Please Return During Business Hours." The lock is Toughness 8, while picking it requires a Disable Device check (DC 20). Those with movement powers may be able to circumvent the gate altogether.

HOT PURSUIT

If you have access to the *Mastermind Manual*, you may want to use the Pursuit rules (see *Mastermind's Manual*, page 98) to enhance the sense of a chase. If you choose this option, the terrain should be considered Close and the people in the shell want nothing more than to evade capture, so they'll be using Target Maneuvers as much as they can.

Once in the yard, the characters see a maze of crushed cars and stacks of junk piled over thirty feet high. Off to the right is shed with the light on, while off to the left is a small pile of junk and some welding supplies; straight ahead is the entrance to the maze.

ONE MAN'S ART IS ANOTHER'S JUNK

Examining the pile of junk and welding supplies reveals some of the scrap is welded together into the beginnings of an armature. Among the welding supplies are a torch, two large gas tanks fastened to a two-wheeled cart, and a tool-kit full of standard tools (hammer, wrenches, pliers, etc.). Anyone making a Knowledge (art) check (DC 15) recognizes the welded pieces are more like an artistic work in progress than any kind of support mechanism or functional object.

The characters may be able to use the tanks or torch to their advantage. The torch, used as a weapon, inflicts +5 heat damage, but is damaged easily. If a natural 1 is rolled on an attack with it, the torch's gas line is cut and the tanks stand a chance of exploding. Have the player of the torch's wielder make a Reflex save (DC 18). If the result is a failure, the tanks blow up causing a Blast 8 explosion, centered on the wielder. If the save is made, the tanks still explode, but the wielder suffers only half damage (Blast +4).

JUNKYARD ENCOUNTERS

D20	ENCOUNTER
1-5	The characters encounter one of the guard dogs. Make a Notice check to see if the dog spots them (DC 10 if the PCs aren't sneaking or an opposed Stealth check if they are). If successful, it attacks and barks to alert the rest of the dogs, as well as the night attendant. If the characters had already ran into another dog, the pack doesn't need to make a check, as they're on alert.
6-10	Wandering through the maze, character discover some scavengers raiding a junk pile. If the scavengers notice them, they'll flee, grabbing whatever they can. If stopped, they explain that they're just looking for parts to build a home. A simple Sense Motive check (DC 10) confirms they're telling the truth.
11-15	Searching through the yard, the characters stumble across one of the guard dog packs patrolling nearby. Give the three dogs a Notice or Search check to notice them (DC 10 if the PCs aren't sneaking or an opposed Stealth check if they are). If successful, they immediately attack, barking to alert the other dogs. If the characters already ran into another dog, the pack doesn't need to make a check, as they're on alert.
16-20	Have players make a Notice check (DC 15). If successful, the characters hear one of the junk piles creak and are able to move out of the way before it falls. If the check fails, a Reflex save (DC 15) is required to avoid +10 damage from the falling debris.

Characters could attempt to employ the gas tanks as a crude bomb. If arranged properly with a Craft (mechanical or chemical) check (DC 15), the tanks could be used as a one-shot Blast 8 Explosion to any single target within throwing distance. Once activated, there is a one round lag and the target, if mobile, should be allowed a Reflex save (DC 18) to halve the Blast damage.

JUNK SHACK

Walking up to the shack, characters hear faint sounds of music playing within. The door to the shack is locked and there's a video game on pause in the next room. If they want to investigate further, the characters may attempt to unlock the door (Disable Device, DC 15), break it down (Toughness 5), or even break the window (Toughness 0).

Once inside, they notice the door opens to a small, poorly maintained porch with a few chemicals here and there (turpentine, metal stripper, etc.). It has a doorway leading to a bigger room with a television (with the game on pause), a recliner, a radio (currently blaring out a country song) and a small monitor system currently on the fritz. Searching around, they won't find anything of real interest.

MAZES & MUCK

Entering the maze of junk, the characters notice visibility is not so great, especially since most of the scrap heaps are high enough to cover up the yard's main light sources. This allows for a few scattered pockets that aren't blanketed by shadows. As they search to find their way through, have the players make Search checks (DC 20). They may take 10 or 20 while in the maze, with the understanding that the longer they take, the better the chance they may lose their target. It should take them a little while to traverse the maze, and with every failed check, they spend an extra turn trying to find the right way through. There are many obstacles they may encounter, some of which are mundane, like dead ends or wrong turns, while others may be a bit more dangerous (like those described in **More Than Junk**).

GUARD DOG POWER LEVEL 2 / MINION RANK 2

STR 15	DEX 15	CON 15	INT 2	WIS 12	CHA 6
SKILLS					
Notice 4 (+5), Search 4 (+0), Survival 2 (+3), Swim 2 (+4)					
POWERS					
Super-Senses 3 (scent, tracking, ultra-hearing)					
COMBAT					
Attack +3, Grapple +5, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +3, Knockback -1, Initiative +2					
SAVING THROWS					
Toughness +2, Fortitude +5, Reflex +5, Will +1					
Abilities 5 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 3 + Combat 12 + Saves 6 - Drawbacks 8 = Total 21					

RUDY

POWER LEVEL 2

STR 1	DEX 12	CON 13	INT 10	WIS 10	CHA 10
-------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Drive 2 (+3), Craft (artistic) 1 (+1), Knowledge (art) 1 (+1), Knowledge (pop culture) 4 (+4)

FEATS

Attack Specialization (shotgun) 1, Equipment 3
Equipment: Shotgun (+5/+6*), dog whistle

COMBAT

Attack +2, Grapple +5, Damage +3 (unarmed), +5/+6 (shotgun), Defense +2, Knockback -0, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +1, Fortitude +1, Reflex +1, Will +0

Abilities 11 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers) + Combat 8 + Saves 0 =
 Total 25

MORE THAN JUNK

There's more than just junk in the junkyard. Use the **Junkyard Encounters** table for some random encounters as they search for the missing shell.

MEET RUDY

When they get through most of the maze, the characters come across a middle aged man wearing stained overalls, t-shirt, and backwards trucker cap. He's a bit overweight and has a slightly awestruck look to him. In his hands is a well-used shotgun he slowly raises towards the intruders.

This is Rudy, the yard's night attendant. Like the characters, he saw the shell land in the yard and went to investigate. He found the shell and knew wild carders when he saw them, so he decided to sneak off and call the police. Rudy started making his way to his shack when he stumbled on the group. Now, surprised with gun in hand, he's prepared to turn them all in. The characters may attempt to subdue him physically or convince him they're not with Scrounge. If entering combat, Rudy's main tactic is to shoot anyone attempting to harm him or, if he has a chance, blow his whistle and summon the guard dogs. Once subdued, he explains where the shell is and that the three men are looking to destroy it.

TURTLE TUSSLE

Heading after the shell, the characters enter a large clearing in the junkyard and see the shell straight ahead in a pile of junk. Standing in their way, however, is Bullfrog (if not captured) and Scrounge with Tudbury! Seeing the heroes, Scrounge makes a dash back to the shell with Tudbury while Bullfrog keeps them occupied. "All we wanted was a little fun," says Scrounge. "And now you've ruined it!"



The players should now roll initiative, as the villains are initiating combat with them. No amount of talking will stop them and they want nothing more than to pummel the characters. During the combat, Scrounge will stay in the shell, usually using telekinesis to grab things to use as weapons. Bullfrog, on the other hand, fights using his strength and leaping abilities. Once inside the shell, Scrounge is fairly confident that no one will be able to touch him. If the characters attempt to pry open the doors, he'll do what he can to swat them off and keep them away.

While the characters combat the pair, make a Notice check for the characters (DC 20). If passed, they notice that Scrounge occasionally has to stop for a round and touch Tudbury. If they don't seem to be able to put one and one together, they may make an Intelligence check (DC 15) for them to put the puzzle pieces into place. Once they deduce Scrounge is actually using the hero as a battery and somehow copying his powers, they may attempt to focus their attention on breaking his concentration and free Tudbury. Once he realizes the heroes have discovered his limits, Scrounge does what he can to maintain his hold on Tudbury and uproot the shell from the junk it seems to be mired in. Unless characters find a way to stop him from exiting the heap, they have three rounds before he's able to leave the scene with Tudbury. At which point, Scrounge is only interested in escaping and will leave Bullfrog if the opportunity arises. In turn, Bullfrog covers his escape, knowing Scrounge will get him out of prison.

EPILOGUE

Once the group takes care of Scrounge and Bullfrog, Tudbury thanks them and explains that the whole experience was like having a bad nightmare. Nearby, police sirens can be heard and, within a matter of minutes, the yard is swarming with police. If the characters stick around the scene of the crime, they're confronted by Special Agent Pitch, who asks them for a statement of what went on. If they left a good impression on Pitch from before, he'll take statements on the scene and ask them to stick around the city, just in case they have any further questions. If not, he'll request to bring them to a precinct to question them in a proper environment.

In the event that they are given any problems, Tudbury speaks in their defense, explaining what happened and how they saved him. Pitch takes what the former hero says with a grain of salt, but many of the older cops on the scene will vouch for him and explain what he's done for the city in the past. If the characters don't explain about Scrounge's abilities, Tudbury does, recommending they keep his hands covered in something so he won't be able to touch anyone.

After all is said and done, Tudbury again thanks his rescuers and offers to transport the shell back to the Dime Museum for Mr. Dutton (under an officer's watchful eye of course). Scrounge and Bullfrog are placed in jail pending grand larceny and kidnapping charges.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER BAD GUYS?

If the characters are less than reputable "businessmen", they're going to have to issue a report with their underworld connections involving the hows and whys of what happened. Depending on what they tell their "friends", they may end up in another job or they could end up in serious trouble, especially if the cops could finger them. In most cases, a simple Bluff or Diplomacy check can be made (depending on if they're lying or just giving a report), the outcome of which (Bluff, DC 18 or Diplomacy, DC 15) determines if they believe the characters or not.

WHAT IF THEY GOT AWAY?

If Scrounge managed to escape with the shell and Tudbury, he plans on leaving New York City for someplace else nearby and keeping a low profile. Using his contacts, he keeps an eye on Bullfrog's trial and attempts to use his influence to get Bullfrog transferred someplace where he can intercept him. If the characters are in law enforcement, or if they just want to see things through, they may end up involved in the case and, if Scrounge has his way, the potential escape. You can create further adventures where the characters pursue Scrounge (and possibly Bullfrog) outside of the city to try and rescue Tudbury and capture the criminals.

AWARDING POWER POINTS

At the end of the adventure, award each character a power point for chasing down and capturing the shell. If the characters handled things particularly well—managing to stop Bullfrog in the first encounter, making good use of Investigation and Search—give them an extra power point. You might also consider awarding a bonus power point for exceptional roleplaying or for quick thinking when playing the adventure. In addition to the reward of power points, the characters have also gained the gratitude of Charles Dutton and Thomas Tudbury, who may, in turn, pay them back someday if they need information or advice.

If the aces weren't able to capture Scrounge, Tudbury and the shell, they should still receive a power point for participation. In addition, they may be able to continue their quest for the shell and save Tudbury from being Scrounge's slave.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Though the characters have managed to defeat Scrounge and Bullfrog, there are a few other plots that could spin out of *Shell Game*.

THE CRIMINALS STRIKE BACK

After their defeat, Scrounge and Bullfrog have vowed revenge on the characters. A few months after the events of *Shell Game*, the duo escapes from prison and begin hatching a scheme to trap them individually, starting with the most powerful ace. Once down, Scrounge attempts to subdue them as he did Tudbury and then copy their abilities to attack the others. It will be up to the remaining characters to save their comrade and clear their names before Scrounge and Bullfrog take it too far.

FBI: JOKERTOWN DIVISION

Impressed with the way the characters handled themselves, Special Agent Pitch suggests they help the FBI as a special attaché to the Wild Card Division. Operating out of Jokertown, they'll be responsible for acting as Pitch's eyes and ears in the area, helping the local precincts with Card related crimes and reporting to Pitch himself.

This is especially good for a group of starting characters, allowing the Gamemaster a chance to establish them with a major organization. In contrast, this would also be good for a group that's become a bit stagnant, offering a breath of fresh air to the game, or for the group of criminals to go straight.

CRIMINAL MISCHIEF

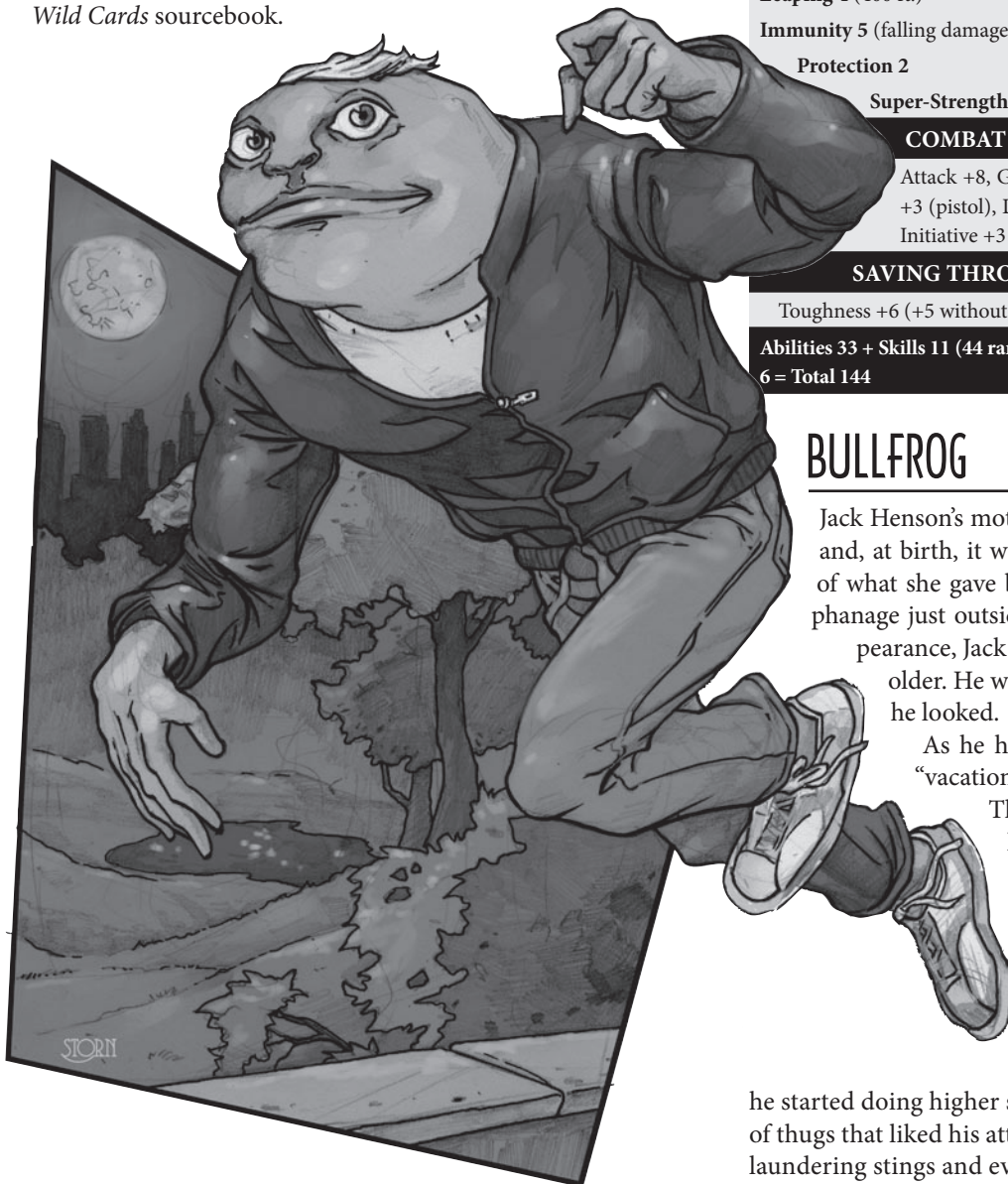
If the players are playing less reputable individuals, a few different adventures could spin out of *Shell Game*. With Scrounge and Bullfrog in prison, the underworld may want to recruit them, based on what they accomplished with the Turtle. Employing the characters to provide a jailbreak, they'll have to figure out the layout of the prison, the prison's schedule and attempt to decipher an

easy way to get the two felons out. Not to mention that, during the escape, if they recognize the characters as the ones who got them in the slammer, would they trust them?

On the other hand, if the group did a good job, they may be entitled to some reputation and payback. Perhaps their bosses would like to bring Tudbury in and “convince” him to work with their organization. Or, while at the museum, there could’ve been a few other items that their organization could use and the characters are sent to retrieve these for their bosses.

CHARACTERS

Shell Game uses a few new characters as well as offering an opportunity to interact with a wild card legend. This section provides game information for the new characters in this adventure. For further *Wild Cards* characters, see **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook.



BULLFROG

POWER LEVEL 8

STR 23	DEX 16	CON 16	INT 12	WIS 13	CHA 13
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Acrobatics 8 (+11), Bluff 4 (+5), Climb 4 (+8), Disable Device 4 (+5), Drive 2 (+5), Escape Artist 6 (+9), Intimidate 3 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 3 (+4), Notice 3 (+4), Search 2 (+3), Stealth 4 (+7), Swim 1 (+5)

FEATS

Acrobatic Bluff, Defensive Attack, Diehard, Elusive Target, Endurance, Equipment 3, Favored Environment (Jokertown), Instant Up, Minions 16 (25, PL3 minions, fanatical), Move-by Action, Power Attack, Prone Fighting, Second Chance (Reflex Saves), Uncanny Dodge 2 (sight)

Equipment: leather jacket (+1 Toughness), machine pistol (+3 damage, Auto-fire), tonfa (+1 damage)

POWERS

Bouncing 4 (Ricochet; see sidebar)

Leaping 4 (400 ft.)

Immunity 5 (falling damage)

Protection 2

Super-Strength 3 (heavy load: 2.4 tons)

COMBAT

Attack +8, Grapple +17, Damage +6 (unarmed), +7 (tonfa), +3 (pistol), Defense +10, Knockback -3 (-2 without jacket), Initiative +3

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +6 (+5 without jacket), Fortitude +5, Reflex +7, Will +1

Abilities 33 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 32 + Powers 26 + Combat 36 + Saves 6 = Total 144

BULLFROG

Jack Henson's mother was a carrier for the wild card virus and, at birth, it was apparent he wasn't normal. Ashamed of what she gave birth to, she gave up the child to an orphanage just outside of New York City. Because of his appearance, Jack didn't make too many friends as he grew older. He was often picked on and teased about how he looked.

As he hit his teen years, Jack would often take “vacations” from the orphanage into the city.

There he would work out at gyms and bully others smaller than him for money. In time this led to a series of misdemeanors and an eventual criminal record, setting him on the path he leads now. When reaching adulthood, Jack left the orphanage behind him, along with the name “Jack Henson”.

Taking on the moniker “Bullfrog”, he started doing higher stake crimes and hooked up with a gang of thugs that liked his attitude. Together, they worked bank jobs, laundering stings and even a few kidnapping jobs. It was during

BOUNCING

Effect: Leaping, Protection	Action: Reaction (passive)
Range: Personal	Duration: Permanent
Saving Throw: None	Cost: 2 points per rank

Rather than hitting a solid surface with a resounding “thud,” you bounce! This might be due to a rubbery or elastic form, a kinetic-absorbing force field, or any number of other descriptors. The key is that you’re less affected by falling and knockback and able to “bounce back” from an impact.

Falling or knockback damage with a damage bonus up to twice your Bouncing rank has no effect on you (you automatically save against it) and higher damage is reduced by twice your Bouncing rank before you make a Toughness save against it. Additionally, you may rebound in the opposite direction of an impact (hitting the ground or a wall, for example) after a fall or knockback as a reaction, up to the original distance you traveled. You can stretch out your bounce distance into a long arc, in which case, double the distance but halve the height of your arc. The bounce takes a full round, during which you can act normally, except you cannot change your direction or speed.

POWER FEATS

- **Ricochet:** You can change direction after each bounce you make. This may allow you to make a surprise slam attack by ricocheting behind an opponent (see **Surprise Attacks**, *M&M*, page 163).

one of the latter jobs that he met Scrounge and the two became fast friends, forming a criminal partnership that they value to this day.

Bullfrog is incredibly strong, with his upper carrying capacity ranging above a few tons. This strength becomes especially apparent in his leg muscles, allowing him to leap great distances and perform amazing feats of acrobatics. Because of his dense muscular physique, he’s also incredibly resilient to damage and doesn’t seem to be effected by damage inflicted by falling distances.

Besides his abilities, Bullfrog is also a capable hand-to-hand fighter. Alternatively, he’s also a fairly good shot with a pistol and isn’t afraid of using one if the situation calls for it.

Bullfrog is an impressive figure, despite his joker qualities. Tall and muscular, his skin has a sickly green tint to it that almost makes him look as though he was ill all of the time. Though he has a human physique, his head is more frog than man, with large murky white-green eyes and a large maw that often has a cigar hanging out of it. He typically wears casual clothes like t-shirts and jeans.

Although not dumb by any means, Bullfrog’s no genius, either. Scrounge is the brains of their partnership while Bullfrog is the muscle. He has bluster and attitude to spare, and nothing but bitter sarcasm for aces who got lucky and ended up with both powers and normal looks. He’s loyal to himself first and his partnership with Scrounge a close second.

SCROUNGE

POWER LEVEL 7

STR 12	DEX 14	CON 18	INT 14	WIS 15	CHA 12
---------------	---------------	---------------	---------------	---------------	---------------

SKILLS

Bluff 4 (+5), Concentration 4 (+6), Gather Information 6 (+8), Intimidate 4 (+5), Knowledge (physical science) 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+8), Notice 2 (+4), Search 2 (+4), Sense Motive 6 (+8), Stealth 6 (+8)

FEATS

Assessment, Attack Specialization (mimic), Attack Specialization (stun), Chokehold, Contacts, Grappling Finesse, Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative 1

POWERS

Mimic 15 (all powers at once; Tainted)

Regeneration 13 (bruised and unconscious, 1/round; injured and staggered, 1/minute; disabled, 1/minute; Regrowth)

Stun 9 (Sleep; Noticeable: Target appears “goood” –1 point)

COMBAT

Attack +5 (+7 with mimic and stun), Grapple +6, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +5, Knockback –2, Initiative +6

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +4, Fortitude +4, Reflex +2, Will +2

DRAWBACKS

Disability (No Digits, –3 points)

Abilities 25 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 92+ Combat 20 + Saves 0 – Drawbacks 3 = Total 152

SCROUNGE

Wilson Geddy was a first-hand victim of the wild card virus. At the age of eight, he contracted the virus and developed his joker nature. His father, a criminal himself, disassociated himself with Wilson and, when the youth turned twelve, kicked him out of the house. Alone and on his own, he adopted the identity of The Worm and started hustling people while learning how to use his abilities to his advantage.

This was only the beginning of his criminal career. Within a few years, some more entrepreneurial criminals noticed Geddy and hired him on to help with odd jobs. Through the use of his abilities, he started working kidnapping jobs and basic entry jobs, allowing the crooks he worked with a chance to work jobs they’d never been able to do in the past.

Picking up the nickname Scrounge due to his tendency to scrounge for compliments, Wilson eventually hired himself out as a mercenary criminal specializing in the more personal crimes. During one kidnapping job, he’d met another joker that was hired on as muscle named Bullfrog. The two became fast friends and started doing odd jobs as part of Bullfrog’s gang.

Scrounge has the ability to mimic powers from aces for a short period of time, as well as secrete a mind-numbing fluid from his hands that allows him to sedate a target. The fluid, a psychotropic drug, seeps into a targets skin and causes the target to sleep as if under anesthetic. This works well for him, as it



allows him access to mimic others' powers without the hassle. In the past, he typically keeps a mimicked subject sedated nearby, permitting him the chance to use the stolen powers at his leisure. The abilities gained through the mimic process also carry any detriments that they carry as well. In game terms, this means that Scrounge not only gains the powers and advantages

THE GREAT AND POWERFUL TURTLE

STR 9	DEX 10	CON 10	INT 15	WIS 13	CHA 11
-------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

SKILLS

Computers 4 (+6), Concentration 10 (+11), Craft (electronics) 4 (+6), Craft (mechanical) 6 (+8), Craft (structural) 6 (+8), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+8), Knowledge (technology) 4 (+6)

FEATS

Equipment 4 (shell), Ultimate Effort (telekinesis)

Shell: Huge, Str 0, Speed 4* (see Abilities), Defense 8, Toughness 11 (Impervious 3); Features 3 (amplifiers and speakers, computer, parabolic microphones), Super-Senses 6 (infravision, extended radio blindsight [radar])

POWERS

Telekinesis 21 (*heavy load*: 25,000 tons; Perception Range; Subtle 2)

Alternate Power: **Telekinesis 15** (*heavy load*: 400 tons; Burst Area, Perception Range; Subtle 2)

COMBAT

Attack +2, Grapple +1 (+42 with telekinesis), Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +2, Knockback -15 (-0 outside shell), Initiative +0

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +11 (+0 outside shell), Fortitude +3, Reflex +3, Will +7

DRAWBACKS

Normal Identity (full-round action, -4 points), Power Loss (all but 1 rank of Telekinesis, outside of shell, -1 point)

Abilities 8 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 66 + Combat 8 + Saves 12 - Drawbacks 5 = Total 104

associated with them, but adopts the limitations and drawbacks as well.

Like a worm, Scrounge also has the ability to regenerate, allowing him to regrow parts of his body and to be less prone to debilitating damage. This, combined with his intelligence and connections, makes him a threat to any area that he may wander into.

A tall, lanky man, Scrounge has rough, tanned skin that appears very wrinkled. Wearing his hair in a messy stalk, he almost looks a bit cartoonish from a distance. Up close, his eyes are completely brown, no iris or white, just brown, and his hands have no fingers or thumbs, but rather look like a flat worm with sucker-like pores underneath. He typically wears baggy clothes, especially hoodies as he uses them to conceal his features.

THE GREAT AND POWERFUL TURTLE

The Turtle is described in detail in **Chapter Four** of the *Wild Cards Campaign Sourcebook*. A great hero in the *Wild Cards* universe, Thomas Tudbury was enjoying a well-earned retirement until Scrounge came knocking on his door.v

WILD CARDS



SPARE PARTS

It appears a long-gone hero has returned to the Big Apple, only to cross over to the dark side. Once a celebrated champion, he becomes the most hunted individual in New York City. Can a team of intrepid wild cards uncover the truth behind these events? Has the character really become a ruthless kidnapper? Or is there more going on than meets the eye? And what are the perpetrator's true motives behind his crimes?

INTRODUCTION

Spare Parts is written for four to six *Wild Cards* characters averaging power level 8; the encounters detailed in the adventure are designed to challenge a team of that approximate size and power level. GMs running a *Wild Cards* series involving a significantly larger or smaller number of players or higher- or lower-powered characters should modify the opposition facing the heroes accordingly. While *Spare Parts* does make occasional references to events outside the confines of the adventure, there is nothing present that requires Gamemasters to alter their version of the *Wild Cards* world or introduce any major changes to their own series' storylines.

While the adventure does use several existing characters from the *Wild Cards* universe, nearly all of these with the exception of Modular Man (the original) can be substituted for others if necessary. If any of the character listed in the adventure are deceased, retired, or otherwise unavailable in your series, feel free to use other suitable characters, whether original creations or ones from the novels.

Spare Parts assumes recent wild card-related historical events unfolded as they did in the novels, primarily the Typhoid Croyd incident and the U.S. military campaign against Bloat and the Jumpers.

SCENE ONE: SETTING THE STAGE

Two reoccurring news stories circulating in the New York news media concern a spate of ace disappearances and the emergence of a new masked vigilante in Jokertown. A fresh aspect to the vigilante story is that many Jokertown residents believe the vigilante is Modular Man, the android hero who hasn't been seen since the events surrounding the Rox siege.

TIME AND PLACE

Spare Parts is based in New York City; while the *Wild Cards* novels chronicle stories taking place world-wide, NYC was depicted as having the highest level of ace/joker activity, as well as being Modular Man's stomping grounds. The adventure can be reworked to take place in a different locale, but it will be difficult to run without major alterations in any other than a major metropolitan area that has a fair number of wild cards and the equivalent of a Jokertown—a mostly economically downscale, segregated section where jokers congregate.

The default time period for the adventure is the present day, eighteen years or more after the events depicted in *Wild Cards Vol. XI: Dealer's Choice*. By the end of that tome, Modular Man was a federal fugitive, one of his legs had been torn from his body in a clash against the Turtle, and he (apparently) fled the United States after gathering the still-living body parts of his new girlfriend Patchwork. As written, the adventure assumes that Modular Man did indeed leave the country after the Battle of the Rox, and has been little seen (at least in the U.S.) since that time. But aside from a few minor cosmetic changes, *Spare Parts* can be run as written in a series set earlier in *Wild Cards* history. The adventure can reasonably take place as far back as late 1991/early 1992, approximately a year after the conclusion of the Rox siege. This still allows enough time to have passed for Junk Monkey to build the flawed Mod-Man Mark III and for the real Modular Man to be "Missing In Action" for a while.

It is also possible to run the adventure (with a few revisions) as occurring between the inadvertent destruction of the first iteration of Modular Man (at the hands of the Sleeper) in *Jokers Wild* and his subsequent resurrection (courtesy of Maxim Travnicek) in *Down and Dirty*. In this case, Junk Monkey doesn't back-engineer her own mechanical man from a lost leg, but instead from one of the many parts left unaccounted for after Mod-Man Mark I blows up inside Aces High. The genuine Modular Man doesn't appear near the end of the adventure, as he's still on a slab being rebuilt by his creator. The location of the climactic final battle between the heroes and Mark III is changed from the then-still-living Travnicek's old building to a private salvage yard owned and operated by Junk Monkey. Otherwise, everything transpires as described.

Introduce these stories to the player characters however you wish; radio, television, conversations with ace-obsessed friends, or via *Aces!* magazine and the *NY Times*, both of which have been covering the stories. Excerpts of articles from these publications have been provided for the players. You can find Handout #1 (the *NY Times* story) and Handout #2 (the *Aces!* story) on page 89.

SCENE TWO: TERROR AT THE TOP DECK

The two stories percolating in the New York news media—tabloid tales about Mod-Man popping up in Jokertown and speculations regarding the ace kidnappings—suddenly converge one night at the Top Deck, one of the city's hottest new restaurants/night clubs. A trendy spot currently popular with actors, athletes, and aces, the Top Deck has drawn comparisons with the famed Aces High in that establishment's heyday. Everyone from the A-list crowd to the wannabes wants to be seen there.

The club music and laughter give way to screams of panic when a glowing, menacing figure emerges from one of the Top Deck's walls. Draped in a dark blue cloak, features concealed by a burn mask and bandages, the figure flies through the crowd, knocking patrons aside like playthings. Reaching the club's bar, he seizes Jillian "Bodyshot" Henderson, a former fitness model turned ace media personality.

Ms. Henderson's boyfriend/bodyguard/manager, Deacon "Dealbreaker" Borden, tries to stop the abduction, grappling with the assailant. The inhumanly strong ace proves no match for the masked figure, and is repeatedly flung to the floor with bone-jarring force. When Borden gets up for the fourth time, the abductor

fires a beam from some unseen weapon apparently hidden under his cloak. The ray strikes Dealbreaker's right leg, freezing it solid below the knee. The masked assailant then kicks the frozen limb, shattering Borden's foot and ankle into bloody, icy chunks. The entire horrible incident takes place in less than a minute.

The assault and kidnapping at the Top Deck is captured on film (read: digital camera phones and the club's security cameras) by several patrons brave and/or foolish enough to stay and witness the proceedings instead of running from the scene. These images are largely blurry and out of focus, the result of amateurs trying to capture the swift, chaotic action, but they're soon playing all over cable news networks and the Internet. Police investigators are able to enhance the pictures, uncovering important clues to the assailant's identity. Borden may have been unable to overcome the kidnapper, but he did rip away the kidnapper's cloak and some of the bandages covering the figure's face and hands. Though still not definitive, the attacker is tentatively identified as Modular Man. The part of the figure's face that was exposed closely matches photos of the android, there was a shoulder mounted firearm underneath the cloak, and gleaming metal patches are visible past torn flesh.

GETTING TOGETHER

Unlike in four-color *Mutants & Masterminds* series, such as *Freedom City*, conventional super-hero teams are not at all commonplace in the *Wild Cards* setting. They are, in fact, nearly nonexistent. Only the famous Four Aces group bore a real resemblance to an actual hero-group, though a few other temporary ace teams have existed through the years, such as the various SCARE strike teams assembled from time to time, or the collection of wild card criminals that operated under the leadership of the Astronomer. Getting all the player character wild carders together to solve the

mystery of the “Mod-Man kidnappings” is a little trickier than in less “realistic” series, where the heroes likely start the series as a crime-fighting unit or form a team after all finding themselves battling the same menace. Several options are presented for the GM’s consideration, though they should not be considered exhaustive.

WITNESSES TO THE ABDUCTION

This scenario falls closet to the “we’re all facing the same villain, so let’s team-up” comic-book cliché; the protagonists were all at the Top Deck when Mark III attacks the restaurant, maims Dealbreaker, and kidnaps Bodyshot. Perhaps they were there as a group, already friends or at least acquaintances, just enjoying themselves with a night out on the town. Alternately, the characters might have been working as security for the club, or as bodyguards for the various celebrities. Or maybe they got together after the assault by Mark III, and decided that after failing to stop what went down, they had to do whatever they could to redeem themselves. This means tracking down the out-of-control android and rescuing his victims, assuming they’re still alive.

If the GM desires, the owner of the Top Deck might step forward to offer a sweet financial incentive for the aces to take on “Modular Man”. The club owner isn’t really motivated out of any sense of altruism; he’s simply enraged about the damage the android did to the restaurant, both financially and publicity-wise. Should the heroes succeed in their goals, they’ll gain a useful contact among New York’s society elite.

Should the players protest their characters *wouldn’t* have stood by helplessly while Bodyshot was forcibly taken, explain the Top Deck is a large club with three floors, packed with people on the night of the kidnapping. The chaos breaking out among the throng as they tried to rush for the exits slowed the heroes just enough to allow the assailant to escape. Also, any non-abstaining characters were likely indulging freely in the club’s libations at the time. Everything simply went down too fast for them to react. Obviously certain players will insist their characters’ wild card talents *would* allow them to react; if this is indeed the case, the GM should consider awarding the characters’ a hero point to offset this unavoidable setback.

THE ACKROYD AND CREIGHTON AGENCY

Once the prototypical struggling gumshoe, Jay Ackroyd is now the prosperous owner of a large detective agency and a famous New York City restaurant. He employs other aces such as Mr. Nobody, Peter Pann, and Topper to assist him in cases. Motivated by curiosity and a desire to possibly help an old ally somehow gone wrong, Jay hires the characters to investigate the Modular Man kidnappings. While he has other ace resources, none except maybe Mr. Nobody (by a stretch) really have powers suited to throwing down with Modular Man if matters come to that. Ackroyd is getting along in age by the time of this adventure, but perhaps the aging Popinjay accompanies the heroes on the case nonetheless.

Alternately, the characters could be the employees of a rival wild card detective agency, perhaps the “new kids on the block”

WHAT THE CHARACTERS DON’T KNOW, PART I: MODULAR MAN’S RETURN

While part of the truth has been revealed—a single figure bearing a striking similarity to Modular Man is behind the kidnappings—much remains unrevealed. The truth about the kidnapper has yet to be uncovered by the media or the player characters.

A Modular Man is responsible for the Ace abductions, but *the* Modular Man is not. What no one else yet knows is a year and a half ago, a joker-ace named Elizabeth Van (nicknamed “Junk Monkey”) came across a piece of the genuine Modular Man, the cybernetic leg which the android lost during the federal government’s conflict with the forces of Bloat and the Jumpers. Her wild card allowed her—even forced her—to begin replicating Modular Man from the ground (or rather leg) up. Experiencing frequent, disturbing visions derived from the life of Mod-Man’s original creator, the late Maxim Travnick, Junk Monkey eventually tracked down the crumbling old building where Travnick had first brought the android to “life”. Elizabeth found that the place had long since been abandoned and boarded up, becoming a refuge for homeless drug addicts. Enlisting the aid of her friend Milton Moulton (AKA Mr. Mounds), she had the imposing joker run off the squatters and moved in to finish her task. Her efforts were greatly facilitated when she uncovered a few boxes of spare parts still untouched in Travnick’s former apartment (he was keeping them on hand in case he ever had to rebuild Mod-Man again, as he did once before). She soon had her own “Modular Man Mark III” up and running. But as always with her handiwork, there were a few differences between her version and the real article. Elizabeth’s versions of Modular Man’s infamous flux generators were fully functional—they allowed Mark III to pass through solid matter and deflect attacks—but they also disrupted the molecular integrity of normal matter. Her creation was outfitted with a cryogenic cannon and a screecher instead of a microwave laser and a dazzler. But it was the mind of the Mark III model that was most flawed. He was more brutally logical than his predecessor—and far less emotionally stable.

The Mark III model started kidnapping wild carders with enhanced analytical or inventive prowess, hoping that one would hold the key to “perfecting” him in mind and body, making him identical to his progenitor. He has been imprisoning them in the same old apartment building where Mark III and his “ancestor” were constructed, forcing them to work on new replacement parts for him. None have been successful so far in meeting his expectations—that’s just not how their powers work. Mark III is aware of this, but his number one directive drives him forward anyway, in the crazed hope that one of the captive aces can defy the odds and make the modifications he desires

compared to the Ackroyd firm. They may be hired by the families of the victims, by *Aces!* magazine, or even (unbeknownst to them) the Russian Mob (serving as unwitting dupes). Jay, Mr. Nobody, Topper, and the other Ackroyd Investigations crew may be their rivals on the case, trying to beat them to the punch.

This fits into the **Ace Investigators** series described in **Chapter 6** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook, though the characters are likely a bit more powerful than usual for the style of play. They may be as motivated to uncovering the story behind the events as rescuing the victims or halting the perpetrator.

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT OR SCARE

The JD/SCARE option may be the most appropriate for series adhering more closely to the *Wild Cards* novels, where permanent super-teams are basically non-existent. The adventure's protagonists are all employed or recruited by the federal government for the mission of apprehending "Modular Man" and recovering the abductees. Besides being a wanted fugitive since the Battle of the Rox, SCARE has held an interest in acquiring possession of Modular Man since his first appearance. Though they realize he is almost certainly a wild card invention that cannot be duplicated, SCARE researchers still believe there is a good deal that could be gleaned from the android's engineering and programming.

If the wild carders are Justice Department or FBI agents, they are dispatched to apprehend the out-of-control android because a) Modular Man is a federal fugitive; and b) kidnapping is a federal crime. If they are free agents, accepting the mission on behalf of the SCARE will net the heroes mid-level government contacts and a fair amount of monetary compensation. Assuming they finish the mission in a satisfactory manner, they will be on SCARE's "short list" of reliable ace assets to call upon in the future.

For more tips on running a series where the characters serve as actual or *de facto* government agents, again refer to **Chapter 6** of the *Wild Cards* source book.

RUSSIAN MAFIA

While the adventure assumes the characters are heroes motivated (at least partially) by altruism, the *Wild Cards* books feature numerous protagonists who are criminals or outlaws, such as Black Shadow and the Sleeper. In this scenario, the protagonists are mercenary wild cards, recruited by Leonid Sakhalin to avenge the death of his sibling, Gregori, at the androids' hands (see the **What the Heroes Don't Know, Part II** sidebar). In this scenario, they take the place of the gang headed by Croyd described elsewhere in the adventure. If the GM wishes, a heroic ace group could also be on the case, for different motives (likely a Justice Dept. or SCARE sponsored team). They would serve as the mercenaries' rivals, just as the "Sleeper Cell" acts as competition for a more altruistic group.

SCENE THREE: ON THE TRAIL

However the wild card team is assembled, once brought together the characters may begin the adventure in earnest. The best way for them to begin their investigation is by establishing a few basic facts about the case.

AT A GLANCE

Certain information about the kidnappings can be easily obtained by the heroes as it almost falls in the category of common knowledge. Characters searching for links among the victims can turn up the following fairly easily (Gather Information or Knowledge (pop culture) (DC 10) skill checks). After the incident at the Top Deck, the major cable news stations are running stories on the crime(s), while in the print media *Aces!* and the *New York Times* were carrying stories even before this, as noted previously. Biographical information on Modular Man and the abductees are readily obtained through multiple sources—from watching television, combing through news articles, or hitting the Internet.

JILLIAN "BODYSHOT" HENDERSON

The latest abduction victim was once an undergraduate chemistry major at Columbia, but left her studies shy of a degree for a career as a professional fitness competitor, personal trainer, cover model, and gym operator. Her career in the fitness industry started to slide as she got into her forties, prompting her to switch careers. After starting her own fitness-wear business, her latent wild card virus turned up an ace. She began creating "miracle-skin bodysuits", which enhance the athletic abilities and physiques of any women who wear them. The bodysuits can change their colors and contours to suit the whims of their wearers; in addition, the suits can re-direct kinetic energy, granting enhanced agility, speed, and resistance to harm.

Ms. Henderson has to personally make every suit or else they have no special properties, even if others follow her procedures precisely. The body stockings fray and fall apart after a cumulative 48 hours contact with human skin, except for the original suit that Bodysuit made for herself. Despite their short shelf lives, she has made a nice living selling her handcrafted outfits to celebrities and affluent women of all shapes and sizes.

GINA "CORRIDOR" CORTEZ

An ex-bicycle messenger, Ms. Cortez had a night job cleaning offices in the engineering wing at one of the City University of New York schools. One evening her wild card activated and by morning she had cobbled together the "Corridor" harness, a device that looks like a police spotlight connected to a car battery, all held together by four leather straps. The Corridor harness projects a column of light that whisks Gina and whatever she can carry through solid matter at high speed. Gina promptly set up her own

ace messenger service, one that proved nicely lucrative. While little known, Ms. Cortez also possesses enhanced stamina; this was a necessary corollary of her primary power, as use of the Corridor device is very taxing to the human body.

She had been recently profiled on a local public TV station as an example of ace entrepreneurship. Ms. Cortez was kidnapped in Central Park, while out for a walk with her boyfriend and three-year old child. A flying figure swooped down and made off with her, casually backhanding away her boyfriend when he tried to intervene. The man suffered several cracked ribs and a broken collarbone, attesting to the kidnapper's superhuman strength.

DETROIT STEEL

A prominent wild card adventurer known to have participated in several SCARE missions, Detroit Steel is actually Mike Tsakos, a laid-off autoworker who constructed a massive exo-skeleton from stray car parts. Outside of his robot suit, he's a normal middle-aged man. Inside the rig, he's Detroit Steel, an ace with the strength to take on the toughest wild carders in the world. Detroit Steel was kidnapped while visiting an old friend who lives in NYC, grabbed while enjoying himself at an impromptu barbeque held in the friend's back yard. The other attendees at the barbecue reported his abductor as a "heavily bandaged" flying man who came "out of nowhere" and snatched up Mr. Tsakos.



See **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook from Green Ronin for more info on Detroit Steel. Though the original Detroit Steel suit was lost during the Rox siege, you can assume his wild card allowed him to build another if you want to use him as an active SCARE agent.

ELIZABETH "JUNK MONKEY" VAN

A Jokertown resident, Ms. Van is not as well known as the other victims. A small businesswoman in Jokertown, she moved to New York, originally hailing from a posh Boston suburb. She runs a do-it-all repair service in J-Town, and also owns a salvage yard. Ms. Van is a technological savant, able to repair any mechanism. A tiny woman in her early thirties, her wild card makes her look prematurely aged. Junk Monkey is not confirmed as being among the abductees. No one witnessed her being taken—she just stopped showing up at her shop or around the neighborhood. She had vanished for a few days at a time in the past, so this didn't arouse concern at first. Her disappearance was reported only after her apartment and shop was found burglarized. Jokertown police are still investigating under the theory she may have been murdered by one of the area's gangs, possibly for failing to pay "protection" money.

Astute players may note that Junk Monkey's disappearance does *not* fit the pattern of the others'. All the others were abducted in a very public fashion, in front of numerous witnesses. In a twisted way, this follows the old Modular Man's penchant for showy public heroics. Junk Monkey, on the other hand, just quietly vanished one day. If none of the players catch this, the GM may allow them to attempt a Notice skill check (DC 10) to pick up on the clue.

ALEXANDER "THE PROFESSOR" VOS SAVANT

As a living reservoir of information, the Professor's gifts include accelerated learning abilities and a truly prodigious memory. His wild card enhanced his already impressive mental aptitudes, allowing him to master nearly any field of human knowledge within minutes. He has PhD-equivalent knowledge in multiple fields, can recite the complete works of Shakespeare off the top of his head, and speaks fifteen languages fluently.

The Professor is technically a joker-ace, as his increased intellectual prowess is accompanied by a swollen cerebellum at the base of his skull, but like Peregrine, he is rarely categorized as such by others. The Professor was taken while giving a lecture at Columbia University, when a figure materialized from beneath the stage, grabbed him, and then carried him *through* the walls of the auditorium.

TYRELL "TERRABYTE" TOMKINS

A wild card computer wizard, the nineteen-year-old Mr. Tomkins instantly comprehends all computer languages. A master programmer without any formal training, he can improve the performance of any system. Terrabyte's mind functions with astonishing speed, able to perform complex mental tasks and calculations within seconds. He transcends the abilities of "normal"

THE FORGOTTEN VICTIM: DEALBREAKER

The investigators may wish to speak to the one individual who went *mano-a-mano* against the kidnapper, Deacon “Dealbreaker” Borden. The maimed ace is recuperating in a local hospital, after the loss of his limb. Dealbreaker is understandably traumatized by the experience, but he is strong and stable enough to speak with the characters provided they offer a good reason for him to do so (*i.e.*, they intend to save Jillian Henderson. When they encounter Deacon (real name: Dillon Bordeaux), he is nothing like the massively muscled, swaggering ace so frequently seen hanging off the arm of Ms. Henderson. In his normal form, he is a plump, soft-looking man with a pleasant, friendly demeanor. He confesses he and Jillian are not a romantic “item”—Jillian is a lesbian. Dillon knew her from before either were aces, when she was a slightly aging personal trainer at his gym. When he gained the ability to bulk up with an extra two hundred pounds of wild card muscle mass, he agreed to pose as her boyfriend for publicity purposes.

Unfortunately, Dillon doesn’t have much new to tell the investigators about his assailant. He relates the attacker had superhuman strength at least equal to his own, as well as an astonishing ability to absorb punishment. His blows can shatter concrete blocks, but didn’t seem to faze his opponent at all. In his Dealbreaker identity he has a psychic aura that makes most people more timid around him (even disregarding his formidable presence). In fact, the more intimidated people around him are, the stronger Dillon becomes. But his aura didn’t affect the kidnapper at all.

When they grappled, his attacker’s flesh felt strange—sort of cold and rubbery. Even he was startled, though, when his foe’s skin came away in strips, exposing metal.

After telling his firsthand account, Dillon implores the characters to do all they can to save Jillian. He then begs off further conversation, citing exhaustion.

mathematical savants; his computational abilities have been compared to those of a (so-far-theoretical) quantum computer. His talent for considering nearly all possible probabilities gives him the equivalent of short-term precognition.

Terrabyte was grabbed as he was taking part in a role-playing game session with his friends (*Aces and Adversaries*) in his mother’s basement. The abductor smashed through the basement wall, tucked Tyrell under one arm, and walked off into the night.

SCENE FOUR: FOLLOWING THE LEADS

Two obvious sources for leads should occur to the players: Digger Downs of *Aces!* fame and *Times* investigative journalist W.J. Williams. They were the first reporters to begin reporting on the “Modular Man” story, even if they didn’t realize at the time they were covering two aspects of the same story. If the players do not think of turning to these sources, the GM might consider charging the characters a hero point to “think” of the idea.

Both writers are easy to contact through their respective publications. Unfortunately, Mr. Williams has little new to offer, as he had begun covering the ace disappearances only a few weeks prior. Still, he’s open to helping the heroes if he can—so long as they convince him of their good intentions (Diplomacy check required, initial attitude is Indifferent). Williams relates that the FBI does have a working theory; their profilers believe Modular Man’s android body (assuming he is the culprit) is on the verge of irrevocably breaking down, and he’s kidnapping aces with enhanced intellectual or technological abilities in a desperate attempt to stop this from happening. They believe it very likely all the abductees are alive, but imprisoned, forced to work on some sort of “solution” for whatever’s wrong with Modular Man.

The profilers came up with this hypothesis by noting that many wild card inventions break down or cease working when their creators die. They postulate Modular Man’s inventor has passed on, putting the android’s continued existence in danger. His cybernetic mentality has experienced the equivalent of a psychotic break, driving him into a hopeless mission to preserve his artificial life. Given the man-made ace’s erratic behavior during his last confirmed activities, they don’t consider the idea of an android undergoing a mental breakdown to be beyond reason.

The argument against their premise is the vigor Modular Man has displayed; he’s shown no signs of weakness during his crime-fighting exploits in Jokertown or the clash with Dealbreaker. The android appears as powerful as ever, maybe more so. Whatever physical problem he may be facing isn’t impairing his fighting prowess.

TABLOID TATTLER

The wild card team can contact Digger Downs at *Aces!*, but the veteran tabloid gossip-hound is a tougher nut to crack in terms of getting useful information (Unfriendly starting attitude). Information is his bread and butter, and if he is going to divulge anything, he expects to be paid back in kind. Digger demands the heroes promise him exclusive updates on their investigation of the “Amazing Android Turns Crazy Killer” story (never mind that no one has turned up dead—no one has seen them alive yet either). He’ll make sure they go on the record (digital recorder) with their promises, and warns that if they renege on the deal they’ll be getting *really* bad press in *Aces!* for years to come. Digger Downs also insists on the first rights to their story if they actually solve the case.

Assuming the characters agree, Digger speaks with them about the facts he’s managed to sort from among the rumors circulating on the Jokertown grapevine. The Jokers who remember Modular Man from back in the day swear the “mystery crime-fighter” is



indeed Modular Man. Yes, he hasn't been seen without a mask and slouch hat, but Jokers are quite good at seeing through masks. A few allow Modular Man also sports a hairpiece nowadays, though most are of the opinion he looked better with the old skullcap.

Digger Downs says a half-dozen or more Joker bars and clubs claim Modular Man has been a regular guest of theirs since returning, but most of these stories are bogus. Digger's only been able to confirm that he's frequented three of these: Club Dead Nicholas, Freakers, and the Outer Limits (a relatively new joker strip club-featuring native Jokertown talent). These would be good places for the heroes to begin looking for information.

The gossipmonger suggests they contact Cynthia Delaney, the one-time girlfriend of Mod Man who resettled in the Big Apple after a less than memorable sojourn to Hollywood. If anyone could give them any kind of personal insight into the android, it would be her. Digger's willing to give the characters her number and address for "free", mainly because she's already in the phone book.

AN OLD FLAME

Although he dated numerous comely young women back in the day, Modular Man and Ms. Cynthia "Cyndi" Delaney had a particularly close, relatively long-lived relationship. Termed "Mod-Man's main squeeze" by the always highbrow Digger Downs in *Aces!*, she likely knew the android better than anyone else besides his creator.

She was one of the last people to communicate with Modular Man before he left to join the SCARE team assembled during the Battle of the Rox. As an actress, Cyndi had a few minor successes in the field, mostly in TV commercials, but her career eventually petered out. She returned to New York from California and earned an MBA, then became a talent agent.

Now in her mid-thirties, she's a fairly well known NYC entertainment figure. Cyndi still thinks about Modular Man from time to time, though she never heard from him after the Rox incident. She was skeptical of the stories about his possible return, but she knew it wasn't impossible. Despite the footage of the Top Deck kidnapping, Cyndi still doesn't believe Modular Man is really behind the crimes. She's certain even if it is Modular Man he's being controlled somehow, just as he was when he fought the SCARE team when they went after the Jumpers.

So long as the protagonists are able to persuade Cyndi of their good intentions (Diplomacy check, treat Cyndi as indifferent), she will tell them what she learned during her romantic relationship with Modular Man. The heroes will learn that Modular Man's inventor was a wild card genius (which they likely already guessed), but that after he was re-infected by Typhoid Croyd, the inventor lost his power to maintain Modular Man. Cyndi tells them that Mod Man's systems were failing, which was putting him in mortal danger. He even suffered a minor emotional breakdown because he had to keep fighting "enemies of society", which meant mixing it up and taking damage, but he couldn't be repaired anymore. He expressed a lot of anxiety about the short life span ahead of him. At her suggestion, Mod Man began attending classes at Columbia University, learning physical sciences in an attempt to keep going.

Cyndi tells the heroes the reason she was reluctant to speak to them at first; shortly after the Bodyshot kidnapping, an Asian-American man asking similar questions visited her. Though superficially friendly, there was something intimidating about the way he asked about Modular Man. He made it clear that she shouldn't withhold anything she knew. The man made a swift exit when she asked for identification, but not before insisting she take a phone number in case she "remembered" anything. If the player characters contact the number, no one answers on the other end, though a recorded voice asks the person calling to leave a message. Attempts to track the cell phone number prove futile—the person to whom it is registered never really existed.

Although Cyndi is described here as an established professional in her mid thirties. In series set earlier in the *Wild Cards* timeline, she could still be a college student or a twenty-something just starting her career. It will not make any difference in the characters' interactions with her.

PROJECT MODULAR MAN

Modular Man audited classes at Columbia University in the time between the Typhoid Croyd plague and the Rox battle. Columbia administrators allowed him to attend in return for Modular Man making himself available for study by the university's sci-

ence and engineering departments. Modular Man wanted to learn how to repair himself, or (in the best case scenario) alter his own programming so he wasn't compelled to obey his inventor. Columbia's researchers hoped to advance their understanding of the principles underlying the android's make-up. Both parties were mostly frustrated in their efforts. No matter how much knowledge he soaked up, Mod Man could never effect more than minor repairs on his android body. Columbia professors got a few fascinating ideas about the theoretical limits of engineering and software development, but many aspects of Modular Man just defied known scientific principles.

Depending on what time period the adventure is run in, the staff of Columbia may have finished up their research on Modular Man mere months past or nearly two decades ago. Regardless, those researchers still remaining from the Modular Man Research Project are excited that others are again taking interest in their work. They're especially thrilled that they may play a part in an actual wild cards adventure—it may be the closest they ever get to “being hip”.

Much of what they communicate to the aces is too esoteric or technical to be of any use, such as how Modular Man's cybernetic brain may support current quantum entanglement theory. But one of the researchers is astute enough to suggest a practical application of their research. While trying to figure out how to repair the android's flux generators, they noted even though the flux generators weren't functioning, they still “leaked” low levels of electromagnetic radiation. This radiation had a distinctive sine wave signature, which they noted and recorded. They suggest jury-rigging a device to identify the radiation trail within a fairly short amount of time (the scientists can do this on the order of days). The device's range would be limited, as the electromagnetic wave fluctuations are faint, but might be enough to detect whether Modular Man had very recently passed through an area. If Modular Man's flux generators are working again, the signal might be strong enough to use the device as a “divining rod”, pointing out a trail that leads right to him.

SCENE FIVE: THE JOKERTOWN CODE

Given the “Modular Man” sightings prior to the kidnapping spree came out of Jokertown, the only logical place for the heroes to seriously pursue the case is in America's most notorious ghetto. Prior to the kidnappings, the masked vigilante many jokers believed to be Modular Man fought gang members, street criminals, overzealous police officers, and even (though unconfirmed) an actual “Swamp Monster” dwelling in the sewers. If the reports are credible, Modular Man was fighting “enemies of society” in Jokertown for at least six months. News stories detailing his behavior—assuming it is Mod Man—are worrisome. They point to escalating violence on Mod-Man's part, to the point where he overturned a

police cruiser with two officers inside, apparently because they conducted a seemingly unprovoked stop-and-search on a group of Joker teenagers moments earlier. Neither of the cops was permanently injured, but both suffered broken bones and lacerations. One officer actually was a joker (though without a visible deformity) and two of the teenagers were later found out to have connections to the notorious Werewolves street gang.

Unfortunately, Jokertown is not terribly friendly to outsiders. The neighborhood has been a haven for wild card criminals and crazies almost since it was founded. The Jokertown PD is better than in previous decades, but the under-funded, under-staffed precinct gets little respect and less cooperation from the locals. Nearly anyone can find a safe haven in Jokertown, at least for the right price. Though the Mafia was driven out of Jokertown some time ago, other organized crime syndicates still operate with near-impunity, while street gangs such as the Demon Princes and Werewolves rule the streets at night. Even the law-abiding inhabitants have an “us against the world” mentality (one that's usually well-justified). For obvious reasons, the locals particularly resent aces swaggering about in their environs. The characters will find most residents (80%) to be close-mouthed and unfriendly, with an equal number (10%/10%) either indifferent or openly hostile. There are individual exceptions, of course, but even those jokers who think their newfound protector may also be a ruthless kidnapper thinks they should be the ones to handle the matter, not outside aces. The notable Jokertown hero known as the Oddity even organizes a small crew to confront the heroes at some point (see **Jokertown Scuffle**).

Assuming the players picked up on Digger Downs' comments regarding “Modular Man's” favorite Jokertown hangouts, they'll likely have their characters head to Club Dead Nicholas, Freakers, and/or the Outer Limits. While Club Dead Nicholas is a fairly respectable place, even a touch upscale, the same cannot be said of the other two establishments. Freakers and the Outer Limits cater to the jaded and morbidly curious; the latter is intensely disliked by some residents, who resent the exclusively nat throngs that flock there on weekends to gawk at Joker women. Neither are places to tarry for characters who want to preserve their public reputations (or have any hang-ups *at all* about the female body). According to Digger, the individual the heroes are looking for was most frequently spotted at Freakers, then the Outer Limits, and more rarely at Club Dead Nicholas.

JOKERTOWN SCUFFLE

Soon after the heroes begin investigating, word spreads through the grapevine of aces nosing around looking for Modular Man. Longtime Jokertown resident the Oddity decides to teach these “outsiders” a lesson about going after a “friend of jokers”. The most unstable personality of the gestalt being (John) is in control, and the Oddity is motivated as much by a desire to lash out violently as by any sense of justice. Not foolish enough to take on the heroes alone, Oddity gathers a crew of local joker-aces.

STRAIGHT FROM THE JOKER'S MOUTH

Mr. Mounds has a potentially important story to impart for the players; if the heroes treat him and his friends decently, he tells them how he helped Junk Monkey run off the crack-heads and other junkies staying in a building where she “wanted to do some work inside”. He doesn’t know exactly what kind of work she was doing, except it involved something that looked like a mechanical leg. The artificial leg wasn’t like those worn by amputees—it was made out of metal, and had wires sticking out of one end.

Mr. Mounds has a terrible sense of direction, and has no idea where the building is located. But he would recognize the building if he saw it again; Milton performed a lot of the renovation labor for Junk Monkey, and he has a good memory for places. He even agrees to accompany the heroes in their efforts to locate Junk Monkey and the others, if they convince him of their good intentions. Of course, if they do not do so, there remain other avenues of investigation for tracking down Junk Money and Mark III’s hideout.

In addition to Mr. Mounds, the Oddity has gathered together three other formidable jokers: Big Gumbo, Brood Mare, and Terry Saur. Big Gumbo is a hulking Cajun transplant whose waterlogged skin is infested with various fungi; use Father Squid’s combat stats but add the power Nauseate 6. For Brood Mare, an Amazonian female centaur, rework Dr. Bradley Finn’s write-up, increasing Str to 18/22 (lower body), Toughness to +6, and **Growth** to 6 levels. Use Peregrine as a template for Terry Saur, a pteradactyl-like teenager, adding **Sonic Control 5** (AP: Blast) and substituting **Strike 3** for Peregrine’s artificial titanium claws. Details about the established characters used as templates for the joker-aces are found in **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook.

At some point during their activities in Jokertown, the investigators are confronted by a group of jokers led by the Oddity. The Oddity serves as the group’s spokesman and demands to know

what makes the characters think they have the right to barge into Jokertown, “throw their weight around”, and “intimidate civilians into giving you the answers you want”. Obviously this is a badly skewed view of the heroes’ actions, but the Oddity isn’t particularly objective on the subject. He tells the heroes that vigilante aces (or JD/SCARE agents, as the case may be) are not welcome in their neighborhood, especially when they’re trying to “persecute” someone like Modular Man, who’s been a friend to Jokers. The Oddity advises them to “leave any investigation to the Jokertown PD—at least they belong here”.

The confrontation does not have to end in violence, though the characters will find it difficult to avoid a fight. If the conflict does turn physical, the heroes will ultimately benefit from using the minimum amount of force necessary to subdue their opponents.

Though formidable by nat standards, the Jokertown crew should not really pose much of a threat to the characters, unless they are foolish or extraordinarily unlucky. Assuming the heroes are PL 8 or above, only Mr. Mounds is their equal, with Oddity rivaling them in ability; the other joker-aces are just not in the same league as the PCs. The encounter is meant as a test of the heroes’ character. If they manage to talk their way out of a fight, or show restraint if violence does break out, then Mr. Mounds shares important information with them, making their mission a lot easier (See Mr. Mounds entry in the **Important NPCs** section). But if they mock the Jokertown heroes, use excess force, or even just gloat over their victory, they will alienate any Jokers present, increasing the DC of any future Diplomacy or Gather Information checks in Jokertown by +5.

FREAKERS

Freakers caters exclusively to a nat clientele. This is technically illegal, but joker patrons are clearly not welcomed. The management and employees are not interested in talking to the investigators, and the patrons simply do not know anything about the case.

No matter how intimidating or persuasive the characters are, questioning the staff and/or customers of Freakers yields little save the standard Jokertown rumor about the goings-on: “The mystery vigilante is indeed a returned Modular Man, but the kidnappings and the Top Deck incident are a government plot. The feds are capturing the aces for their own reasons and trying to pin



the whole thing on Modular Man at the same time.” This doesn’t make sense on any number of levels, but Jokers have good reason to be suspicious of government and media.

Several staff members are willing to admit that “Modular Man” (if that’s who he really is) did hang out at the club a few times, but he seemed to lose interest, gravitating over to The Outer Limits. He hasn’t been at Freakers in the last two months. The masked vigilante certainly *acted* like Modular Man when he was at Freakers: he tried every drink, gorged on food, and hit on as many women as possible. Of course, Modular Man used to go for traditionally beautiful nat types, not joker girls.

THE OUTER LIMITS

Disreputable even by Jokertown standards, the Outer Limits straddles the line between stripper bar and house of ill repute. Unlike more reputable clubs, the management isn’t terribly concerned about only employing women who know the difference between stripping and hooking. Many of their “girls” are current or former prostitutes. Unlike Freakers, the older, more established “Gentlemen’s Club” in Jokertown, the Outer Limits has a mixed clientele: both curious/jaded nats and jokers are among the club’s patrons. Despite the low-level prostitution and drug dealing that goes on in the club, the drinks are honest and the entertainment is not half bad. Unlike Freakers, most of the dancers are semi-attractive in a traditional sense despite their deformities. The few who are not are featured in acts of sexual burlesque.

If the characters are generous and persistent enough, they’ll find a few employees willing to speak with them. Most of the women simply relate (some in vulgar fashion) spending “quality time” with the masked vigilante, adding that if he is Modular Man, all the stories about the android’s anatomy are true. But one—a joker named Mandy (she’s billed as “Fun-Time Fanny”) is more forthcoming, and she has genuinely useful information to impart. A woman with chalk-white skin, wide crimson-red lips, and raven hair, Mandy performs as a novelty. She has the lovely face, toned upper body, and gorgeous legs of a Hollywood starlet—but the exaggerated potbelly, oversized rear-end, and huge feet of a real-life circus clown. A friendly, talkative woman, she resents that she gets billed as a comedy strip act, made to dress in baggy, multi-colored clothes, goofy shoes, and a rubber nose. When she was a nat, plenty of guys wanted her—and even after her wild card turned, lots of men still told her she was sexy. She relates an interesting tale about one in particular . . .

She talks about a nat “client” she used to have—a weird guy, whose name sounded like he was Russian or Polish or some such. Anyway, the client used to blurt out during their “encounters” how he was going to be rich and famous one day, just as soon as he “perfected” his “creation”. Sometimes he would also randomly start spitting out words that sounded like a jumble of numbers, mixed with Greek or Latin or some such old language. She chalked it up to those just being his kinks. She knew the guy saw other girls, but he always paid decent and used protection, so she put up with his quirks.

HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

While the GM can certainly insist the characters glean information through dogged role-playing, the Gamemaster may alternately allow players to attempt Gather Information and/or Knowledge (streetwise) rolls to obtain needed info pertaining to the case. The DC for the skill checks needed to uncover various bits of information is presented in the **Jokertown Grapevine** table.

JOKERTOWN RUMORS

DC	INFORMATION REVEALED
DC 10	The Shadow Fists have reformed in the last year; the Sakhalin Mob is involved in drug running, “protection”, and prostitution in Jokertown. The Sakhalin’s are recruiting wild cards to offset the Shadow Fists’ advantage. Most jokers are convinced the masked crime-fighter is Mod-Man, and that the android now identifies with jokers as a “fellow underdog” against “the System”.
DC 15	“Modular Man” skirmished with Sakhalin soldiers several times; Leonid Sakhalin thinks “Mod Man” may be league with the Shadow Fists; the new Shadow Fists are largely a joker organization; Leonid’s ace recruits include Lazy Dragon, the Chinese American ace; a few jokers report seeing a much more worn and beat-up looking Modular Man than others have described.
DC 20	Leonid Sakhalin is almost never without at least one ace bodyguard; the Sakhalins and the Shadow Fists went to war over a three-way drug deal gone wrong; the new Shadow Fists are led by a figure known as the “Big Shape”; The Sakhalin mob is staking out the homes and businesses of the kidnap victims; Junk Monkey spoke about coming across an actual bionic limb shortly before disappearing.
DC 25	Gregori “Gun God” Sakhalin was killed by “Modular Man”. Junk Monkey has psychic flashbacks that compel her to replicate the actions of other inventors.

But after the guy drew a Joker during Typhoid Croyd, there started to be rumors...stories about Modular Man hanging out with a joker who looked a lot like her client. The joker was described as having weird looking eyes and mouths growing out from his neck, just like her “John” did. Even she could figure out that maybe he was the one who invented Modular Man. There weren’t two jokers like that.

The guy also started acting different—meaner and crazier. Mandy stopped seeing him, even though he paid better than ever—somehow he had come into money, though the guy never said how.



The client lived not far from Jokertown, maybe between forty and sixty blocks away. She's sure it was near the Lower East Side. She can't recall more than that. It's been a while since she last saw him, and she admits she was usually a little high when they got together, but insists she's been clean and sober for a while now. She's cleaned up her act and is taking nursing classes at the local community college. She still strips for money as a novelty performer, but she doesn't sleep with men for money anymore.

CLUB DEAD NICHOLAS

If most Jokertown residents are uncooperative with the characters' efforts to ferret out information, the Club Dead Nicholas crowd is downright antagonistic. If the heroes continue in their attempts to speak with the employees or customers, the responses they receive become ruder and more confrontational. Finally, the head bouncer—Blue Hand Luke—pulls the characters aside (in a polite manner—he's tough, but has no wish to start a fight with aces) and explains matters. Luke is a squat, brutish-looking fellow with huge, calloused blue hands (appropriately enough) but he's much brighter and more reasonable than he looks.

Blue Hand Luke tells the characters Club Dead Nicholas was being targeted by the Russian mob before Modular Man—if that's who he really is—intervened. The Sakhalin organization was using the club as a regular hangout, driving away the long-term patrons, and shaking down the owners for "tribute." That stopped a few

nights ago when the "mystery vigilante of Jokertown" roughed up the mobsters and drove them out of the club. They haven't been back since, and everyone at the club owes their benefactor a debt. They don't believe the same individual who's been pushing out the mobs and protecting people all over Jokertown is also a ruthless kidnapper. Blue Hand Luke isn't much for conspiracy theories, so he doesn't personally buy the federal government being behind the whole thing, but after everything jokers have been through he doesn't think it's impossible either.

Luke doesn't have much more to impart, except to say he wouldn't be surprised if the Sakhalin mob might be behind a frame-up, too. Leonid and Gregori are bad news—both ex-Soviet Special Forces agents who do not bat an eyelash over violent assault, murder, or rape. Leonid Sakhalin is the boss, but his kid brother Gregori is the real muscle. "Gun God" has a bionic right arm that fires a different energy beam from each finger, and packs an auto-cannon pistol that can take out a tank. Strangely, Luke says, Gregori hasn't been seen or heard from lately, but who could take him out?

INTERLUDE

Following the Top Deck kidnapping and the heroes' early investigative attempts, there is a lull in the action for a few days. No further kidnappings occur, and there are no other "Modular Man" sightings in Jokertown. Players will likely note this as further evidence the abductor and the Jokertown vigilante are the same individual. Authorities expect the kidnappings will resume, unless Modular Man has somehow been driven off or destroyed without their knowledge.

Though there are no further abductions, there are developments in the case. The characters receive a frightened call from Cyndi, telling them she was stalked on her way home one afternoon; she saw a shadow and when she looked overhead a huge, bird-like joker (she assumes) was circling high above her. Cyndi didn't get overly alarmed at first—this is New York, after all—but she eventually noticed the joker kept following her, all the way back to her apartment building. She called the police but by the time they arrived the creature had vanished.

The heroes get a call from the researchers at Columbia, telling them the tracking device the researchers discussed with the heroes earlier is completed. The Columbia staff members are willing to loan the gadget to the characters free of charge. They make the heroes promise to hang out with them a few times when they wrap up the case and free the kidnapping victims.

The heroes are also contacted by Digger Downs' editor, asking if they might know where her star columnist might be. He hasn't shown up at the office for a couple days and isn't answering his cell phone. If the characters investigate, Diggers' landlord will tell them Digger packed his bags and left a couple days ago, saying he was "going to visit a cousin who lived upstate." He also warned the landlord to be careful about leaving the building at night, say-

WHAT THE HEROES DON'T KNOW, PART II: GOD IS DEAD

There is one more victim neither the police nor the public know about yet, Gregori “Gun God” Sakhalin. During his Jokertown crime-fighting exploits of the last few months, Mark III clashed with several criminal factions, including the Russian mobsters headed up Leonid and Gregori. After forcefully discouraging a Sakhalin “collection” (shakedown) attempt against Club Dead Nicholas, Mark III tracked the “collection agents” back to a Sakhalin safe-house, where they reported their failed efforts back to Gregori. Whatever punishment they might have faced at Gregori’s hands was interrupted when the android smashed through the hideout’s brick walls.

Though his original intention was to apprehend the mobsters and turn them over to the police, Mark III made the impromptu decision to instead capture Gun God. But Mark III found the firearm-toting ace a harder target than the others; Gregori fought back, blasting away with his own futuristic armament. The android sustained significant damage but returned fire, killing Gregori and all but one of the other gang members before fleeing.

When the surviving mobster shared what he had seen to Leonid Sakhalin, the mob boss flew into a rage; the vicious gang leader had murdered women and children, but loved his younger brother dearly. He swore vengeance on Gregori’s killer, vowing to expend whatever resources necessary to get “justice” and destroy “Modular Man”. To this end, Leonid tasks the wild card mercenaries he had assembled for his turf war with the re-formed Shadow Fists with bringing down the android.

Following the damage he suffered while fighting Gun God, Mark III returned to Maxim Travnicek’s building so Junk Monkey could repair him. This is why there has been a lull in his activities.

ing there was a wild animal in the vicinity. Prior to his departure, Digger had placed calls to the police and the animal control department, stating there was either a huge wolf or bear prowling about the outside of the building. When authorities responded, they found nothing. Digger Downs has no known family upstate.

Finally, the police report Gina “Corridor” Cortez’s messenger service offices have been robbed.

The safe door in her office was torn off its hinges, no easy feat even for most aces. Numerous documents were taken, along with her ace device, the Corridor Harness. It is unknown if the burglary has any connection to her abduction.

GM Note: If the investigators pursue the Digger Downs matter, they need to track the tabloid reporter to Ocean City, Maryland. Use the “Finding People” guidelines on page 48 of *M&M* and the extended Search guidelines on page 53 of *M&M*, depending on the method(s) they use. He’s holed up in a lousy (even by Digger’s standards) boardwalk motel, usually a hangout for frat boys on spring break. He was scared into leaving, but wasn’t abducted or hurt. Both Digger and Cyndi were harassed by the same individual—Lazy Dragon in animal form (as a Chinese flying dragon and a prehistoric short-faced bear, respectively). Lazy Dragon was assigned the task of intimidating and spying on the two by Leonid Sakhalin.

WHAT ABOUT THE SHADOW FISTS?

The characters may decide the resurgent Shadow Fists syndicate merit investigation. Particularly if they uncover that Leonid Sakhalin suspects the “mysterious vigilante” Modular Man is connected to the Fists. The GM should allow the protagonists to follow up on this lead, but it will soon turn out to be a dead end. The player characters discover “Modular Man” did seem to go easy on Shadow Fist members a couple times—but in each instance, these were low-ranking members who happened to among groups of jokers being harassed by nat police officers. There is no real connection to the Shadow Fists.

Any such investigation does turn up a few basic facts about the new Fists. They have the same name as Kien Phuc’s old organization, but only a few of the original Shadow Fist members belong to the new criminal group. These Shadow Fists have some of the same elements—heavy involvement of aces and jokers—but lack the Southeast Asian influence of their predecessors. They are also a much more joker-centric group, and their leader “The Big Shape” is rumored to be a joker-ace.

SCENE SIX: THE RUN-DOWN

The heroes get word of a bizarre chase in progress, one being broadcast on live television. Taking place through the streets of Jokertown (or whatever location will be convenient for the characters to reach in a short amount of time). Not a police chase, though police are scrambling squad cars and a helicopter to get to the scene, but instead one group of wild cards chasing another group, or possibly chasing just one individual (early reports are unclear).

The heroes arrive to see what appears to be a flying man wearing a bulky trench coat and a ski mask, trying to fight off a huge black bird. His attacker looks like a nightmarish version of a condor—one with a twenty-foot wingspan. The giant raptor is clearly pursuing the flying man, dive-bombing at him while raking downward with its razor-sharp talons. After a few seconds, a figure can be seen chasing after the two fliers; a red-skinned man with four tentacles in place of arms, surrounded by a flickered electrical aura.

The two pursuers force the flying figure down and pile on. At this point the heroes should step in (unless the players are okay with their characters standing by while someone is torn limb from limb). The red-skinned man attacks anyone who intervenes without hesitation. With a moment’s distraction, the flying man activates the device he is wearing under the trench coat, sending forth

A TRIP TO LITTLE ODESSA

The protagonists may decide to confront Leonid Sakhalin directly to get answers. The gangster has a “straight job” as a cover for his illegal activities, running a tearoom in New York’s ethnic Russian section. Leonid alternately mocks or ignores the characters questions. If threatened, Leonid threatens police action and law suits (as the wild carders are “harassing an innocent businessman”); if this fails to dissuade violence, a half-dozen heavily armed men emerge from various points in the tea room. If the Gamemaster wants to go rougher on the protagonists, Leonid may have more than one wild card thug close-by; feel free to include the Sleeper, Lazy Dragon, Butcher Dagon, John Nighthawk, or any other suitable ace-for-hire from **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting sourcebook.

Unless the characters are out-and-out vigilantes, they should back off rather than have the encounter with Leonid erupt in carnage. If this does occur and Leonid ends up dead, the contracted hit on Modular Man still goes on, as Leonid’s first cousin Yuri takes up the reigns of the mob. The new Sakhalin leader will also have his kinsman’s killers in his sights.

a beam of pale white light. He then shimmers for a moment, all the color draining from his form, before being whisked away into the light. This happens no matter what efforts the characters may make to prevent it; as this again counts as an unavoidable setback, awarding a hero point may be in order.

The erratically flying man is the real Modular Man. His pursuers are Lazy Dragon (in the form of a legendary Native American Thunderbird) and the Sleeper; see **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook for their backgrounds. The Sleeper’s current form and game stats can be found in the **Characters** section near the end of this adventure. The aces are attacking Modular Man on behalf of their boss, Leonid Sakhalin. For more on the real Modular Man’s return, see **Scene Eight: Back-Alley Battle**.

When Modular Man escapes via the Corridor device, the “Sleeper Cell” breaks off combat and does its best to disappear. Lazy Dragon is essentially immune to capture; the Asian-American ace simply abandons his thunderbird form, leaving nothing but a wooden carving behind. If the Sleeper is captured, he’s out on bail within 48 hours, and he’s not particularly inclined to tell the characters anything, although they might be able to persuade him.

SCENE SEVEN: NEAR-DEATH FROM ABOVE

The police report that Gina Cortez, AKA Corridor, has been found alive, though not well. An EMT crew discovered Ms. Cortez lying unconscious on the partially collapsed roof of a parked vehicle. Doctors say her injuries are consistent with a fall from a great height. Following surgery at a local hospital, her condition is listed as stable but critical. Ms. Cortez has yet to give any statement about her abductor to authorities.

Fortunately for Ms. Cortez, two EMT wagon drivers were munching donuts and drinking coffee at the all-night diner across the street just as Mark III dropped her out of the sky. The noise of the minivan’s car alarm going off attracted their attention. They rushed Gina to the nearest hospital, where emergency room medical personnel were able to save her life. Though she required extensive surgery to repair trauma to her skull and vertebrae, her ace vitality allowed her to survive.

Though they were forced to remove a small amount of brain tissue, her doctors believe she will recover fully. No critical parts of her grey matter were lost, nothing that the rest of the brain cannot take over for in time. Ms. Cortez needs physical and speech therapy but her life is not in jeopardy. As with many wild carders, she is tougher than she appears.

Trying to question Gina Cortez about her experience will be a frustrating experience for any would-be investigators; the fall has left her with partial short-term memory loss and speech problems. But if there is a telepath among the protagonists, a Telepathy check (DC 20) uncovers her latent memories of the experience,



THE FALL

Mark III kidnapped Gina Cortez because he wanted her to fix his flux generators, so he could walk through walls and other barriers without damaging their molecular integrity. Growing ever more erratic, Mark III flew into a rage when Gina Cortez failed yet again in her attempts. Her final attempt to do so resulted in painful feedback for the erratic android, giving Mark III the equivalent of an acute migraine headache. Seizing her by the neck, Mark III flew twenty blocks from the building before letting her fall from fifty feet up. She would have died instantly save for landing on the roof of a minivan, which collapsed under the impact, slightly breaking her fall.

The “Sleeper Cell” isn’t the only wild card talent employed by Leonid Sakhalin. The eastern European mobster also secured the services of Deadhead, the depraved wild card who gains retro-cognitive visions by eating others’ brains. A quick thinker, Leonid saw an opportunity when he heard the reports of Gina Cortez’s life saving surgery. An inconsequential bribe was enough to acquire the medical waste, the bits of brain and nerve tissue scraped from skull fragments. While just barely sufficient, these give Deadhead enough for his power to work with; he accesses Gina’s memories from her time in captivity. As a messenger, she had exceptional recall for landmarks, streets, and neighborhood layouts. Even though she only got to see these from above while being flown at high speed by Mark III, her memories give Deadhead—and Leonid—a good starting point. Combined with the description of the building where she was held, also gleaned from Gina’s brain, the Sleeper Cell hits the streets and begins narrowing down the possibilities.

revealing information similar in content to what the ghoulish Deadhead accesses (see the **What the Players Don’t Know, Part IV** sidebar).

SCENE EIGHT:
BACK-ALLEY BATTLE

At this time, the characters likely have enough information (from the locale where Gina Cortez was found, Mr. Mounds’ story about his friend Junk Monkey, and the info they got from the Outer Limits employee) to head to the Lower East Side in search of their quarry. Once there, they find more than bargained for.

THE OLD ANDROID IS
NOT WHAT HE USED TO BE

Once there, the tracking gadget given to them by Columbia researchers activates, registering only faint signals at first, but then growing in strength. The characters will have to wander a bit as the strength of the signal waxes and wanes. Finally it will pick up enough for the investigators to start following a trail, though doing so requires painstaking effort and patience. Eventually the characters come to a block where they hear shouts and the sounds of battle.

As they approach the ruckus, the signal peaks in strength; they’re headed in the right direction. The sounds lead them down a back alley where they’re confronted with a startling scene: Modular Man—clearly, identifiably Modular Man—hovering several feet in the air, locked in a struggle with the Sleeper and a sinewy Chinese dragon. The two have successfully subdued the beleaguered android.

The investigators’ arrival surprises the mercenaries, but they do not immediately attack. Even the mercenaries recognize the

dangers of ace-on-ace combat. Croyd is willing to parley, so long as the characters are willing to talk. If the investigators handled the Sleeper and Lazy Dragon easily in their initial encounter (or even took the Sleeper out entirely), you can use additional ace mercenaries to augment their ranks. Good choices from **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook include Butcher Dagon and John Nighthawk. You can also use Bludgeon’s stats as a template for a new joker-ace strongman type, or twist around some other character stats for new wild card mercenaries.

The Sleeper comes clean about being hired (he will not specify by whom) to bring back Mod-Man’s head; that’s a non-negotiable on the part of his employer. He points out the android is indeed an *android*, a machine without human rights. What are Croyd and his cronies really guilty of...vandalism? Croyd is even willing to split the prize; the characters can have Mod Man’s body while he takes the head.

Croyd isn’t unsympathetic to concerns about the people Modular Man abducted; though Lazy Dragon couldn’t care less, he’ll allow the investigators to question the android as to their whereabouts, on the condition his team gets to claim their prize afterward. Croyd and Lazy Dragon keep the Modular Man safely wrapped up during any question and answer session. They have no intention of relinquishing him for any reason.

If the PCs are Justice Department agents, negotiating with known criminals is unacceptable; the Sleeper and Lazy Dragon both have outstanding warrants for their arrests. Civilian aces recruited by SCARE are a bit freer to attempt diplomacy with the mercenaries, but altruistic characters are unlikely to agree to Croyd’s terms.

Modular Man pleads for the newly arrived wild carders to help him, doing his best to convince them he is not the culprit. Even at a cursory glance, the android is far more battered looking than the figure spotted at the Top Deck. An eye patch covers his left eye, but doesn’t entirely cover ragged edges of torn flesh. Even under his long trench coat, it is clear his cybernetic legs do not match. Modular Man’s story about an “evil twin” becomes more plausible as he goes along. The android offers to help the investigators locate the abductees if they guarantee his safety.



If the protagonists can persuade the mercenaries (Diplomacy check, DC 20), the Sleeper Cell accompanies the investigators as they hunt down Travnicek's former lair, now with the real Modular Man's help. The mercenaries do not go inside the building to assist the characters in rescuing the hostages. Instead, they insist on restraining Modular Man while they stand watch near the building's entrance. If the android responsible for Gun God's death really is inside, and tries to escape, they intend to be ready for him.

To make the scene a bit more dramatic, the GM might rule the mercenaries cannot be convinced another android could possibly exist, until a familiar looking figure is seen flying overhead, carrying yet another kidnap victim in his arms. Then there will be no question about what has really been going on—and what needs to be done to stop it. Suddenly the investigators are hot on the trail of the faux Mod-Man, and the Sleeper Cell is right behind them.

The major stumbling block to any negotiations with the Sleeper Cell is the gang's unwillingness to surrender Modular Man. Leonid Sakhalin is paying nicely for proof of the android's destruction, and the gang does not intend to go back empty-handed. Croyd doesn't particularly like the real Modular Man, because of their history. Even if the protagonists hand over a defeated Mark III to the mercs, Sleeper figures the mob boss will want both androids destroyed, "just to make sure".

No matter how the scene plays out, it is likely to eventually erupt in violence. If and when it does, Modular Man uses the distraction to wrestle free from Lazy Dragon's grasp, joining the characters in their fight. Once the mercenary aces are driven off or subdued, they are then left alone with the original android.

EXPLANATIONS AND REVELATIONS

Once the mercenaries are defeated or driven off, Mod-Man speaks with the characters. He explains how he returned to the States when he saw the footage of the Top Deck incident; he wanted to clear his name—and to discover how someone was able to duplicate him. He knew how dangerous a Modular Man android could be if controlled by the wrong person—because he used to be controlled by the wrong person. He stayed as low-profile as possible, snooping around as discretely as he could. He admits he broke into Gina Cortez's offices and stole the Corridor Harness—he needed the device so he could better move about the city; his own flux generators burned out long ago. He used the device to escape the first time he was attacked, but it was damaged by the bird-creature's claws and failed to activate again after that.

Modular Man didn't know why he was attacked at the time, but has since learned about the enmity between his duplicate and the Russian Mob. He figures Leonid Sakhalin had Ms. Cortez's offices staked out, along with the other homes and work places of the kidnapping victims. He must have been spotted and his assailants mistook him for the "Modular Man" their boss has a grudge against.

WHAT ABOUT PATCHWORK?

At the end of *Wild Cards Vol. II: Dealer's Choice*, Modular Man formed a bond with a female ace known as Patchwork. Far more meaningful a relationship than the usual trysts the android enjoyed with the fairer sex, the two went off together to begin new lives. But Patchwork is not dealt with in the course of the adventure. While the GM could assume the romance simply petered out, other explanations are possible. Modular Man may have insisted Patchwork remain outside the country, explaining his mission was too dangerous to involve her. Or perhaps Patchwork is closer to home, but simply not a part of the action—"off camera" so to speak.

Alternately, the Gamemaster may choose to include Patchwork. Her power of anatomic separation makes her an excellent spy, so she could literally serve as Modular Man's "eyes and ears". If the players prove unable to piece together enough of the clues, Patchwork (or a part of her at least) could show up and clue them in, having gathered the info by spying throughout New York City.

Modular Man's story is backed up by his appearance. He is far more ragged-looking than the figure seen perpetrating the kidnappings. One leg is obviously a jury-rigged prosthetic, far cruder in appearance than the other. His movements are stiff and awkward. When he lifts his eye patch, cybernetic parts are clearly exposed. Even his skullcap is missing, revealing the circuitry inside his skull. There is an electronic crackle in his voice.

Modular Man offers to guide the heroes to his creator's old lair. He doesn't know for sure that's where his doppelganger is hiding, but it was on his list of places to check out. Given that the evidence the heroes have been able to uncover points in that direction too, he figures it's a good bet. Even if his "evil twin" and the kidnapping victims aren't there, more clues might be found in the building. The only snag is Modular Man's programming still will not allow him to divulge where Travnick lived; he has to protect his creator's privacy, even though the man is dead. But there is a loophole: Modular Man can tell the heroes where Maxim Travnick did *not* live. The investigators have to ask a series of "elimination" questions to get them where they need to be.

SCENE NINE: SHOWDOWN AT DR. FRANKENSTEIN'S

The former residence of Maxim Travnick, the building now serves as Mark III's lair. From the outside, the place is little different from any of the other deserted buildings on the block. Junk Monkey did do some renovations after she moved in, repairing the locks on the door, replacing the windows, and painting over the graffiti, but the edifice still looks one step away from being condemned; Junk Monkey was obsessed with constructing her android, not improving the resale value of her temporary residence.

Since beginning his series of assaults and kidnappings, Mark III has fortified the entrances to the building to deter intruders. The door is reinforced and welded shut from the inside, while all the windows have been barred and blacked out, except for the skylight from which he makes his nightly exits and entrances. He has modified the building's interior to further inconvenience those persistent enough to get inside, destroying the stairs to the upper floors and disabling the elevator. Mark III has set up nu-

merous crude but deadly concealed traps throughout the building—these require Notice checks (DC 15) to detect and Disable Device checks (DC 10) to remove. Assume the traps have Attack and Damage bonuses of +5.

Except for Gina Cortez, Mark III has not really hurt any of the kidnap victims, though they are undernourished and sleep-deprived. But even if the characters free them from their makeshift steel-mesh cages (Toughness 10), they will be of little help in the fight. Bodyshot and Detroit Steel are the only ones whose powers are useful in combat, but neither have their ace super-suits on hand. Terrabyte's short-term precognition is potentially useful, but the youth is too terrified to aid his rescuers.

Mark III's behavior toward the captives varies wildly from moment to moment, one second using them as human shields and the next intervening personally to protect them from accidental harm. This is a result of his disordered thought patterns.

END STATE

If clearly defeated, Mark III will beg the heroes to spare his "life", pleading that he is a thinking being, not just a machine. Mark III tells the characters he is mentally ill, not evil. He admits he did terrible things, but only because his programming is faulty. If only he could be cured, Mark III argues, he could be as great a hero as the original Modular Man.

This presents the characters with a quandary: Do they have a right to destroy a sapient creature, simply because he isn't made of flesh and blood? Does Mark III have any rights at all? Taking him into custody likely means a "death" sentence anyway, as the federal government would take him apart trying to learn what made him tick. There are no civil rights laws for artificial intelligences. But what else can they do with Mark III?

Elizabeth Van is torn; she knows her creation is unstable, saw the harm Mark III did, but at the same time *she* feels ultimately responsible for his actions. If she had learned to better handle her wild card ability, Junk Monkey might have been able to make a better copy of Modular Man; a hero instead of a monster. She proposes a solution: She'll disable the now-subdued Mark III by removing the android's head from his body, rendering him harmless. She'll then work on eradicating the mistakes in her creation's programming. Elizabeth knows this means overcoming the drawbacks of her wild card power, but she's willing to do whatever it



takes. There have been cases of individuals overcoming the limitations of their powers, though this usually means years of dedicated effort.

The real Modular Man tells the heroes destruction is the best option for his doppelganger. He's seen the devastation a sociopath can inflict (e.g. Maxim Travnicek) and doesn't see any hope for his imperfect duplicate to reform. Modular Man knows first hand how overcoming his own programming was nigh-impossible, no matter how intensely driven he was to do so. On a deeper level, the existence of Mark III disturbs Modular Man, threatening his sense of individuality and free will. Given his past experiences, the last thing Modular Man wants or needs is a dangerous, mentally unstable twin out in the world.

All the kidnapping victims urge the heroes to smash Mark III to pieces on the spot, except for Detroit Steel and the Professor. Mike Tsakos is adamant the android to be turned over to the feds, which is the right thing to do legally. But he doesn't just push for Mark III to be delivered into SCARE custody; he wants the heroes to take Modular Man in as well. He got taken down by Modular Man during the Rox battle, when his supposed ally turned coat; Detroit Steel lost his beloved first suit of armor and almost his life in that fight. The Professor, on the other hand, argues that destroying Mark III would be a tremendous waste, as studying the synthetic man could still yield insights into numerous fields, even given the wild card element necessary for his construction. He

DOWN BUT NOT OUT: USING THE REAL MODULAR MAN

There are two ways to use Modular Man's return. If the heroes are having a hard time against Mark III, use the PL 9 stats presented for the amazing android, letting him do just enough to turn the tide of battle. Then have him stagger and fall just before delivering the *coup de grace* to his doppelganger, leaving it to the heroes to finish the fight. If the protagonists are holding their own or winning, then have the PL 7 version of Mod-Man go up against Mark III and get easily taken out by his evil twin, showing how run-down the original Modular Man has become. If there was still any doubt, this should make it clear to anyone present that there's no way this is the same android that took down Dealbreaker and fought crime for months in Jokertown.

also advocates for the heroes to deliver both androids into federal hands, but promises to vigorously recommend against the government scrapping them entirely.

Junk Monkey brings up a very important point: She can do a lot for the genuine Modular Man. Her wild card will let her repair his various broken modules, and fix all the "body damage" he's suffered over the years. Of course, the results may not be precisely what the android wants, but as long as she doesn't have to try repairing his computer brain, he's in no danger of turning psychotic.

CHARACTERS

The following characters have important roles in *Spare Parts*. For known *Wild Cards* series characters, consult **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting sourcebook.

MODULAR MAN, MARK III

The joker-ace Junk Monkey built Modular Man, Mk. III (or simply "Mark III") from the dismembered leg of the second Modular Man, sparking him to "life" in the same laboratory where Maxim Travnicek brought the first of the line into being. A few months after his activation, the errors in Mark III's programming became apparent when he imprisoned Junk Monkey in Travnicek's old building and forced her to work on his upkeep full-time; this is why he burglarized her apartment and repair shop, to scavenge needed supplies.

Obsessed with obliterating his perceived design flaws, he then took to kidnapping wild carders with powers that might help him. Mark III wanted Detroit Steel to fix the weak points in his endoskeleton, Bodyslot to fashion a new, tougher artificial skin, and Terrabyte to maintain his operating system. The Professor was taken for his overall intellectual abilities, and Gina "Corridor" Cortez was taken because Mark III thought she could modify his flux generators. He tried to grab Gun God almost out of convenience; Mark III was conducting a raid on one of the Sakhalin mob's haunts when it occurred to him Gregori Sakha-

lin might be able to recreate the weapons used by the original Modular Man.

Like Dr. Travnick's Modular Man, Mark III was designed with three primary directives hard-wired into his consciousness, but his design flaws have inverted them. His new overriding order is to preserve and perfect his own well-being, followed by the need to garner maximum publicity for himself while performing heroic deeds, and finally to obey and protect Elizabeth Van (Junk Monkey). His morals are more "flexible" than those of the original Modular Man, allowing him to interpret his directives in various creative ways. Mark III considers his current imprisonment of Junk Monkey as "protecting her", while attacking police officers who hassled jokers is "fighting the enemies of society," the society of Jokertown. His defective artificial intelligence causes him to engage in plainly irrational behavior. This is why all his kidnappings took place in front of witnesses: Even though he was attempting to conceal his identity, he was still compelled to "generate publicity."

By the time the investigators find him, Mark III is completely around the bend; though he's killed two people already, he'll castigate the characters as "villains" because their confrontation puts Mark III's prisoners at risk. He'll behave erratically, occasionally obeying orders from his creator or stepping in to protect a hostage from accidental harm, only to resume viciously attacking his pursuers a moment later.

As attractive as the original Modular Man, Mark III looks just like him, but his artificial flesh is slightly darker and, unlike Mod-Man, he comes complete with a thatch of thick black hair, manufactured from the finest poly-carbon fibers. His synthetic skin is unstable, not standing up to damage or extreme exertion well, but this is entirely cosmetic. He simply looks less human and more obviously cybernetic as time progresses. By the time of the final confrontation, large patches of exposed metal and circuitry are visible on his face, arms, and torso. This is the reason Mark III abducted Bodyslot; he wants Jillian Henderson to create more durable "skin" for him.

Mark III has most of the same capabilities and weaponry of the original Modular Man: He can fly, is superhumanly strong and tough, and nearly impervious to mental powers. His energy weapon array is different, featuring a freeze-ray and a hypersonic device. Unlike the original, his flux generators have a destructive effect on inorganic molecules, causing matter he passes through to flake and crumble.

JUNK MONKEY

Elizabeth Van was born into a family of prominent Boston professionals. Her wild card turned when she was twenty years old, after a day trip to New York City. After an "honorable interval" meant to show their "concern", her friends stopped calling and stopping by, and her boyfriend broke off their long-term relationship. With her family's support, she moved to New York City, and found an apartment in Jokertown. She transferred to the City University of New York branch nearest her new home and quietly finished her

MODULAR MAN, MARK III

STR 30	DEX 16	CON —	INT 15	WIS 13	CHA 11
SKILLS					
None					
FEATS					
Ambidexterity, Eidetic Memory, Uncanny Dodge (visual)					
POWERS					
Device 5 (shoulder-mounted weapons, hard to lose)					
<i>Freeze Ray: Snare 12</i> (ice)					
<i>Alternate Power — Hypersonic Cannon: Stun 8</i> (Ranged)					
Flight 6 (500 mph)					
Immunity 40 (Fortitude, mental powers)					
Insubstantial 4 (incorporeal; Drawback—crumbles inorganic matter, -1 point)					
Protection 12 (Impervious 2)					
Quickness 4 (x25, Limited to mental tasks)					
Skill Modules 4 (20 points worth of skills; Continuous; Full Action; Action Drawback—one minute, -1 point)					
Super-Senses 12 (blindsight [radio], direction sense, distance sense, infravision, radio, radius vision, time sense, X-ray vision)					
Super-Strength 3 (heavy load: 6 tons)					
COMBAT					
Attack +8, Grapple +21, Damage +10 (unarmed or by weapon system), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -7, Initiative +3					
SAVING THROWS					
Toughness +12, Fortitude —, Reflex +3, Will +4					
DRAWBACKS					
Disability (cannot entirely disobey orders from Junk Monkey, common, minor, -2 points)					
Abilities 25 + Skills 0 (0 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 153 + Combat 32 + Saves 3 - Drawbacks 2 = Total 214					

engineering degree. Federal equal-employment statutes notwithstanding, Elizabeth found few firms eager to hire jokers. Noting that skilled craftspeople could enjoy thriving business in Jokertown despite the area's high poverty rate, "Junk Monkey", as she came to be known, went into business as an all-purpose repair technician and (later) salvage business owner.

The wild card reduced Elizabeth Van to a height of three and a half feet, caused her hair to grey and her skin to wrinkle, giving her a wizened, dwarfish appearance. At the same time, her athletic abilities were enhanced, granting her superior agility, coordination, and reflexes. Her body is slim, wiry, and fit. Her facial features are still quite pretty, though she now looks considerably older than her actual age. Her style of dress is casual, jeans and oversized t-shirts. She usually wears sandals, as her feet are simian, sporting tufts of hair and long, prehensile toes. She typically sports a tool belt around her waist, storing the gear she needs for her repair work.

Junk Monkey can restore nearly any technological device to working order, even those with which she is unfamiliar; she intuitively

JUNK MONKEY

POWER LEVEL 3

STR 10 DEX 19 CON 14 INT 24 WIS 14 CHA 12

SKILLS

Acrobatics 4 (+8), Climb 4 (+8), Computer 4 (+11), Craft (electronic) 8 (+15), Craft (mechanical) 8 (+15), Disable Device 8 (+15), Knowledge (business) 4 (+11), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+15), Profession (technician) 8 (+10)

FEATS

Dodge Focus 2, Skill Mastery (Craft [electronic and mechanical], Disable Device, Knowledge [technology])

Equipment: tool belt

POWERS

Additional Limbs 2 (prehensile feet; Limited movement while using them)

Enhanced Dexterity 4

Enhanced Intelligence 8

Feature 1 (uses Dexterity in place of Strength for Climb checks)

Mimic 30 (mimic device; Continuous, Extra Subject 2, Residual; Action—Full, Limited [flawed creations, see description], Side-Effect [compulsion, see description; always occurs])

COMBAT

Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +4

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +2, Fortitude +4, Reflex +7, Will +5

DRAWBACKS

Action (Mimic Device, minimum of an hour, often more -4 points)

Abilities 21 + Skills 14 (56 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 104 + Combat 8 + Saves 8 - Drawbacks 4 = Total 154

tively “understands” how to perform whatever repairs are needed. Astonishingly, she is also able to re-create ace inventions, devices whose internal workings often defy physical principles (or even common sense). In order to do so, she must have at least one piece of an ace invention in her possession, though this can be as little as a single component of a much larger mechanism. In essence, Junk Monkey has the power to “reverse-engineer” ace technology.

Unfortunately, Junk Monkey’s wild card is not an unqualified blessing (even if one ignores her joker traits), as it has some side effects. First, recreating ace inventions is less a choice for her than a compulsion; when she gets her hands on an ace invention, Junk Monkey begins experiencing overwhelming flashes of the process of its creation. These only subside as she completes her work reproducing the invention. Second, her recreations are not as good as the originals; they often have various flaws or imperfections. This is what caused the aberrant behavior of Mark III, as well as the differences in Mark III’s capabilities.

MR. MOUNDS

To the pop-culture minded, Mr. Mounds looks like a nightmarish version of one of the talking M&M spokes-candies. Roughly six and a half feet tall, Mr. Mounds is nearly spherical and almost as

MR. MOUNDS

POWER LEVEL 7

STR 24 DEX 12 CON 24 INT 15 WIS 11 CHA 10

SKILLS

Craft (electronic) 8 (+10), Craft (mechanical) 8 (+10), Disable Device 6 (+8), Knowledge (technology) 6 (+8)

FEATS

None

POWERS

Comprehend 2 (magic language, all listeners can understand regardless of language)

Confuse 7 (magic language; Auditory Area)

Snare 10 (Engulf [no feedback, +1]; Full Round, Requires Grapple; Extended Reach)

Summon 2 (50 weirdies; use the monkey, [see *M&M*, page 231]; Fanatical; Progression 5)

Super-Strength 2 (*heavy load*: 2,800 lbs.)

COMBAT

Attack +5, Grapple +14, Damage +7 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -3, Initiative +1

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +7, Fortitude +9, Reflex +3, Will +3

Abilities 36 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 44 + Combat 20 + Saves 7 = Total 114

wide as he is high. He has no discernible head, neck or groin; his body consists of a massive, round torso and two stubby, muscular arms, supported by elephantine legs. Two blinking, chocolate brown eyes as large as saucers are set above a vast, gaping mouth, which is an orifice that runs nearly the width of Mr. Mounds’ torso. He lacks a visible nose, ears, or teeth. His skin is hairless and bright blue in color and he generally goes naked, having no real need for clothing for either modesty or protection.

Like many jokers, Mr. Mounds was abandoned at birth and reared as a foundling in a Jokertown orphanage. His unusual abilities manifested at an early age, when his caretakers discovered the “weird little action figures” Milton frequently played with actually had a life of their own. Wild card researchers who studied the child dubbed him “aberrant and fascinating,” but to his teachers and caregivers he was just a handful. Gentle and shy in spite of his intimidating appearance, Milton enjoyed using his “friends” to play pranks and commit acts of petty theft (like stealing extra desert from the orphanage cafeteria). Thankfully, he grew out of such behavior...for the most part.

Skilled at small device repair, Mr. Mounds (no one is quite sure where the name came from) ran a fix-it shop in Jokertown for a time, helped by his “weirdies”. Junk Monkey was much better at the work than he was, and nearly put his shop out of business when she set up shop in Jokertown. Elizabeth Van felt sorry for the timid giant when he came to her asking for job. Junk Monkey bought out his shop and kept Mr. Mounds on as manager, earning his eternal friendship.

Mr. Mounds has greater-than-human strength, in part due to sheer mass. His thick skin and unique physiology grant him an unusually high degree of resistance to harm, though he is not truly invulnerable. He can still survive wounds that would cripple or kill a nat.

He speaks in a “magic language” all his own that others can nonetheless understand; listeners hear his speech as a series of burps, clicks, grunts, and hiccups, but still sense the meaning and intent of his words through psychic means. If Mr. Mounds wishes, he can use his “magic language” as an offensive weapon, inducing a mild state of confusion in those who hear him.

Mr. Mounds’ prehensile tongue can stretch out up to six feet from his vast, toothless maw to grab things. If he successfully seizes an opponent in this manner, Mr. Mounds attempts to yank the target into his maw, swallowing the person whole. Despite this being his preferred method of attack, Mr. Mounds is no cannibal, and would never think of actually eating another intelligent being. A swallowed foe does not suffer any harm. Instead, Mr. Mounds spits the person out after a few seconds, encased in a slowly “evaporating” bubble of distorted space-time. Anyone unfortunate enough to be so trapped is unable to physically affect or interact with the outside world in any way, though he or she can still see and hear normally, communicate verbally, and use any mental abilities without hindrance.

His final wild card power is the ability to spew out odd-looking creatures Mr. Mounds calls his “weirdies.” They are eight-inch high, faceless humanoids with six limbs and conical bodies. To summon them, he lets out a large burp, lolls out his enormous tongue, and a weirdie pops out of his mouth. While the weirdies resemble the inhabitants of the “Nightmare Dimension” once visited by Billy Ray and the Midnight Angel, their rainbow-colored skin and non-aggressive demeanor make them unlikely natives of that plane. No one knows if Mr. Mounds summons the weirdies out of nothingness or transports them to Earth from another plane of existence. Whatever the case, the weirdies help Mr. Mounds to the best of their ability before vanishing back wherever they come from, popping out of reality like soap bubbles. Dexterous and quick, they can perform many tasks, but their combat abilities are limited at best. Mr. Mounds is reluctant to use them as cannon fodder, but employs them to distract foes or keep them off-balance, if necessary.

THE SLEEPER

The Sleeper and his (lengthy) history are described in **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting sourcebook. Croyd’s current form looks like a strapping bald-headed man with deep red skin and four long, rubbery tentacles in place of arms, attached at his shoulders. He can generate a powerful electrical charge similar to an electric eel, and his tentacles can stretch to a fair degree. He’s also quite strong, capable of lifting a car or jumping many times the distance of a normal person.



THE SLEEPER

POWER LEVEL 8 (CURRENTLY)

STR 26 DEX 14 CON 26 INT 12 WIS 10 CHA 12

SKILLS

Bluff 4 (+5), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Disable Device 8 (+9), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+9), Notice 4 (+4), Sleight of Hand 8 (+10), Stealth 8 (+10)

FEATS

Benefit (Wealth; wealth bonus 12)

POWERS

Deuce (Can make “As Time Goes By” play spontaneously; see the Deuce power description in **Chapter 6**)

Immunity 1 (aging)

Shapeshift 20 (100 points; Continuous; Full Action [plus Action drawback], Uncontrolled)

Current Powers

Additional Limbs 2 (four tentacles in place of arms)

Elongation 2 (25 feet)

Leaping 3 (180 ft.)

Strike 6 (electricity; Aura, Sustained)

Super-Strength 2 (*heavy load*: 3,680 lbs.)

COMBAT

Attack +8, Grapple +18, Damage +8 (unarmed), +6 (aura), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -4, Initiative +2

SAVING THROWS

Toughness +8, Fortitude +8, Reflex +5, Will +5

DRAWBACKS

Action (Shapeshift, one week, -8 points), Involuntary Transformation (falling asleep, common, moderate, -3 points)

Abilities 4 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 142 + Combat 32 + Saves 8 - Drawbacks 11 = Total 223

LAZY DRAGON

Lazy Dragon is described in detail in **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting sourcebook. He’s an out-and-out mercenary and fairly fearless in his assumed animals forms, since he can simply abandon an animated form at will, leaving nothing behind but a small carving or origami sculpture.

THE REAL MODULAR MAN

See **Chapter 4** of the *Wild Cards* sourcebook for the real Mod-Man’s background and history. This adventure assumes the android has continued to suffer gradual systems failures since the assault on the Rox. Exactly how severely Modular Man’s abilities have declined in the interim is left up to the Gamemaster; alterations to his statistics are given for both a PL 9 and a PL 7 version (in top condition, he is PL 10). The PL 9 version has stats identical to the Mark III model, but substitutes a Microwave Laser for the Freeze Gun and a Dazzler (against visual senses) for the Hyper-sonic Cannon, with the following changes:

LAZY DRAGON

POWER LEVEL 4

STR 12 DEX 12 CON 13 INT 12 WIS 11 CHA 12

SKILLS

Craft (artistic) 9 (+10), Knowledge (history) 3 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 3 (+4), Language 1 (Cantonese)

FEATS

None

POWERS

Summon Animal 7 (105 points; Broad Type, Heroic, Sensory Link; Limited to figurines, Physical body helpless while summoned form exists)

Thunderbird Form: Str 26, Dex 14, Con 22, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 16; *Skills*

Notice 4 (+6); *Feats*

Attack Specialization (blast) 1, Fearless, Improved Initiative, Move-By Attack; *Powers*

Blast 6 (electricity), **Flight 4** (100 MPH), **Growth 8** (huge; all modifiers already included in stats; Continuous; Permanent; Innate); *Combat*

Attack +6 blast (+4 otherwise), Grapple +20, Damage +6 blast (+8 unarmed), Defense +6, Initiative +6, Knockback -3; *Saving Throws*

Toughness +6, Fortitude +8, Reflex +2, Will +4.

Chinese Dragon Form: Str 30, Dex 12, Con 30, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 16; *Skills*

Notice 4 (+6); *Feats*

Attack Specialization (blast) 1, Attack Focus (ranged) 1, Fearless, Move-By Attack; *Powers*

Blast 7 (fire), **Flight 3** (50 MPH), **Growth 12** (gargantuan; all modifiers already included in stats; Continuous; Permanent; Innate); *Combat*

Attack +3 blast (+0 otherwise), Grapple +22, Damage +7 blast (+10 unarmed), Defense +0, Initiative +1, Knockback -5; *Saving Throws*

Toughness +10, Fortitude +10, Reflex +1, Will +4.

COMBAT

Attack +1, Grapple +2, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +3 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +1

DRAWBACKS

Involuntary Transformation (into his sister Vivian, uncommon, moderate, -2 points)

Abilities 12 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 28 + Combat 8 + Saves 10 - Drawbacks 2 = Total 60

STR 28, Toughness +10

Device 6 (Auto-Cannon is broken), **Flight 5** (250 mph), **Super-Senses** (X-ray vision inoperable)

Attack +6 Grapple +15 Damage +9 (unarmed)

PL7 MODULAR MAN

At the even weaker PL 7 state, Modular Man’s stats are:

Str 25, Toughness +8

Device 6 (Auto-Cannon and Dazzler inoperable, Microwave Laser reduced to **Blast 8**), **Flight 4** (100 mph), **Quickness 3** (x10, mental tasks, due to failed processors), **Super-Senses 10** (infrared and X-ray vision inoperable)

Attack+ 6 Grapple +13, Damage +7 (unarmed), Defense +6

Authorities See Common Link in Abductions

by W.J. Williams

New York, NY - Police and FBI investigators now believe one individual is behind the recent rash of ace kidnappings. Eyewitness descriptions vary widely, but authorities attribute this to the fear and confusion most observers experience in such situations. Known victims include veteran SCARE member Detroit Steel, "The Professor" Alexander vos Savant, and Princeton University sophomore Tyrell "Terrabyte" Tomkins. The brazen kidnappings have all taken place in plain view of multiple witnesses, with the perpetrator showing no fear of apprehension.

If the same person is behind all the abductions, the individual is obviously a very formidable wild carder. Powers tentatively confirmed include superhuman strength, high-speed flight, the ability to walk through walls, and possibly an "energy" or "heat" field able to melt solid matter. The range of abilities has led many New Yorkers to worry Mark "Captain Trips" Meadows or even the infamous Astronomer serial-killer has returned, but police say such speculation is unwarranted at this point.

While authorities are reluctant to say much, unnamed sources have

suggested the kidnappings may be the work of alleged "Russian Mafia" leader Leonid Sakhalin. These sources suggest Leonid Sakhalin has been actively recruiting criminal ace talent, perhaps in preparation for a gang war against the newly resurgent Shadow Fists organization. Given the Shadow Fists large advantage in attracting wild card "soldiers" to their organization, the Russian syndicate may have been forced into kidnapping and coercing aces into service. Leonid's brother and alleged chief enforcer Gregori "Gun God" Sakhalin is an ace.

Has the long-gone amazing android Modular Man returned to the United States? More specifically, is he even now in the always-exciting environs of New York's own Jokertown? Recent stories coming out of J-Town say just that, putting Mod Man at the scene of several J-Town throw-downs. After years spent out of the public eye, has everyone's used-to-be favorite mechanical man come back home?

Reports say a mysterious hero is operating in the Jokertown area, defending downtrodden locals from the street thugs, gang-bangers, and out-and-out psychopaths trawling the streets. Eyewitnesses say the masked crime fighter is tall, good-looking, super-strong and invulnerable, just like Mod-Man (sure, so is Golden Boy, but he hangs out in a nicer part of the city). Jokertown continues to suffer from the highest violent crime rate in NYC, despite recent

THE RETURN OF MODULAR MAN?

BY DIGGER DOWNS

gains. Whoever the unknown benefactor is, it's a safe to say his presence is welcomed by the neighborhood.

While no Jokertown citizens were willing to say *on the record* that Modular Man is the new hero on the block, several long-time residents are sure it is indeed the android crime-fighter. They recognize the cybernetic champion from back in the day, despite his attempts to conceal himself with a mask, slouch hat, and trench coat. A few claim they've seen the figure fly, walk through walls, and fire energy beams, all of which point to a Modular Man comeback.

For those readers who may have forgotten, Modular Man was the toast of the town when he first made his debut a while

back—even jaded New Yorkers had literally never seen the likes of the larger-than-life synthetic man. He won over the hearts of New Yorkers and the country at large when he helped beat back the Swarm Invasion and bust up the sinister Masons cult. Deemed one of the city's most eligible bachelors, the android also won over a bevy of very eligible New York beauties (some of whom discreetly divulged that Modular Man was fully operational).

But all this changed when Modular Man turned coat during the Battle of the Rox, betraying the brave soldiers of the U.S. military and his ace allies. There was speculation that he may have somehow fallen victim to some kind

of mind control, but this was never confirmed. Even after the smoke cleared, Mod-Man certainly looked guilty when he ran and hid instead of standing up to answer the charges. He hasn't been seen around these parts since that time, and he's officially listed as a federal fugitive. If Modular Man is back, he'll need to have a serious talk with FBI and SCARE, among others in the U.S. government.

There have been scattered sightings of the super-powered pseudo-ace from time to time, most having him involved in some bit of derring-do or other. He's been reported saving young women from a sex slavery ring in Eastern Europe and squashing a stray Swarm monster in the hinterlands of Germany. Oddly, these stories have mostly painted a picture of the android ace being in rough condition, bruised and battered from his adventures....♠

DARLENE "DAY TRIPPER" ALLYN

POWER LEVEL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+2	+1	+2	+1	+2
10	15	13	14	13	15
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+2/+1*	+4	+5	+5		

*FLAT-FOOTED

SKILLS

Acrobatics 4, Bluff 5, Concentration 8, Diplomacy 4, Gather Information 6, Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4, Knowledge (popular culture) 6, Medicine 2, Notice 5, Perform (dance) 6, Perform (singing) 4, Profession (DJ) 8, Sense Motive 6

FEATS

Connected, Defensive Roll, Distract (Perform), Dodge Focus 2

POWERS

Confuse 6: Darlene's "trip-out" ability allows her to affect the brain chemistry of others able to see her, causing confused and random behavior. She can also cause the following effects as Alternate Powers: *Emotion Control* 6 (visual area), *Illusion* 6 (visual), *Mental Blast* 4, and *Nauseate* 6 (visual area). Her area powers aren't selective, so she automatically affects everyone in the area, although she can perform a selective version of a power as a power stunt (*M&M*, page 120), requiring extra effort and reducing the power's effective rank. She hasn't yet mastered such an effect.

COMBAT

Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +2

Abilities 20 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 22 + Combat 16 + Saves 10 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK

BRUISED

STAGGERED

UNCONSCIOUS



INJURED

DISABLED

DYING

BACKGROUND

It's fair to say Darlene Allyn's parents tried their share of recreational drugs, and a couple other people's shares as well. Given they were also both wild card carriers, it was nothing short of a miracle when their daughter was born healthy and apparently quite normal. This was proven by the unfortunate miscarriage and "Black Queen birth" that followed, leading the Allyns to stop trying to have any other children. To Darlene, her family was a model of normalcy, for the most part, knowing little about her parents' pre-parenthood pasts.

She found out, however, after discovering her wild card was *not* latent. It had turned at birth, but she didn't discover her powers right away; Darlene was what one expert labeled a "projecting psychedelic empath," able to activate portions of the brain normally stimulated by various ethnogens and psycho-pharmaceuticals. As a teenager, she was forced to undergo special training to control her powers, and she had an extremely brief deejay career on the party circuit before legal concerns over the use of her powers forced venue to stop hiring her.

Day Tripper's powers have led a lot of people to make Darlene tempting offers to essentially become their "kept dealer" for all intents and purposes, providing on-demand highs and trips. Legal issues aside, she has brushed off all such opportunities, preferring to use her powers on her own terms. She's been increasingly looking into more spiritual applications, both out of a sense of responsibility and because there's more potential for legal protection if she is providing a "religious experience" equivalent to sacred use of ethnogens than if she's simply the latest high on the party circuit. She might be on to something, too: there's some evidence Darlene's powers may touch upon or access the Dreamtime in some fashion (see the *Wild Cards* Campaign Setting, page 45).

PERMISSION IS GRANTED TO PHOTOCOPY THIS PAGE FOR PERSONAL USE ONLY.

JOEY "KEN-DOLL" KENDALL

POWER LEVEL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+1	+2	+1	+0	+0
12	12	14	12	10	10
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL	
+4/+2*		+5	+4	+3	

*FLAT-FOOTED

SKILLS

Climb 4 (+5), Computers 4 (+5), Disable Device 4 (+5), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+7), Stealth 2 (+15*)

*includes size

FEATS

Attack Focus (melee) 3, Defensive Roll 2

POWERS

Immunity 30 (Fortitude): Kendall's small plastic body is immune to human biological concerns; he automatically saves against Fortitude-based effects and doesn't need to eat, sleep, or breathe.

Shrinking 12: Ken-Doll is permanently only one-foot tall (diminutive size), giving him +4 attack and defense, -12 grapple, +12 Stealth, and -6 Intimidate. His Strength, movement (including jumping), and carrying capacity remain that of a normal-sized man, however. His Shrinking is both Permanent and Innate.

COMBAT

(all include size modifiers) Attack +8 (melee), +5 (ranged), Grapple -7, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback +1 (+2 flat-footed), Initiative +1

Abilities 14 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 55 + Combat 6 + Saves 9 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK		
BRUISED	STAGGERED	UNCONSCIOUS
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
INJURED	DISABLED	DYING

BACKGROUND

Joey Kendall stopped playing with action figures ("They're *not* dolls!" he says), but he never stopped buying or collecting them. So by the time he was working at a software design firm, his cube was filled with various toys, mostly action figures. They proved his salvation in a way, when Joey made the mistake of working especially late one night, and became an indirect victim of sabotage and arson. Left bleeding and dying in the burning building, his wild card suddenly turned and Joey went from staring at one of his fallen action figures to *being* the action figure, looking back at his (now deceased) body. He fled, and eventually tracked down the men responsible for his "death".

Since then, his consciousness has remained trapped in a one-foot tall (fully poseable) plastic body. He's still "alive" in some inexplicable way; his plastic form even heals damage done to it over time, like a normal person, but he has none of the normal human needs for nourishment, respiration, or the like, nor any internal organs (unless you count unusually tough elastics). Wild card experts believe the doll is actually a focus or "touchstone" for Kendall's disembodied consciousness, manipulated through a kind of telekinesis, and receiving feedback through the same mechanism. To Joey, it's all the same difference. He's a little plastic guy, for all intents and purposes.

He scored a spokesman contract with the manufacturer of the doll, once they realized the benefits and just how bad they would look suing a dead guy over intellectual property infringement (especially given that they can't "evict" him from "their" doll). In spite of their best efforts and Joe's, however, the ace nickname "Ken-Doll" (based on his last name) has stuck. Ken-Doll also finds work doing things a small, strong, inhumanly tough guy with a working knowledge of electronics can do. He doesn't love action figures quite so much, any more, however.

ALISON "LIGHTWEIGHT" LINSTER

POWER LEVEL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+2	+1	+0	+1	+1
11	14	13	11	12	12
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+3/+1*	+4	+6	+4		

*FLAT-FOOTED

SKILLS

Acrobatics 6 (+8), Bluff 4 (+5), Concentration 8 (+9), Diplomacy 3 (+4), Intimidate 2 (+3), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+4), Knowledge (physical sciences) 3 (+3), Knowledge (popular culture) 3 (+3), Notice 4 (+5), Perform (dance) 10 (+11), Profession (dancer) 7 (+8), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Stealth 6 (+8), Swim 4 (+4)

FEATS

Attack Specialization (touch) 2, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2

POWERS

Deflect 6: By reducing their weight, Lightweight can deflect slow-moving solid projectiles within 30 feet of her, provided she can see them. This takes a standard action, as usual. This is a Ranged Deflect power, with the Power Flaw that it is limited to her Gravity Control area.

Gravity Control 6: Linster can lower the effects of gravity on objects by touching them, reducing an object's weight by up to 1,600 lbs., making it easier to lift (to the point of giving her apparent superhuman strength) or even causing lighter objects to have a negative weight and "fall" upwards to the limits of her power's range, which extends 30 feet from her. Her Gravity Control has Touch Range and is Limited to Reducing Gravity.

Leaping 6: By lowering the effects of gravity on herself, Lightweight can leap great distances, up to fifty times normal for a woman of her strength. Technically, she could "leap" an unlimited height upwards (by giving herself a negative weight) but she doesn't for fear she would catapult herself out of the breathable atmosphere (doing this under unusual circumstances would require extra effort to overcome her normal reluctance, see *M&M*, page 120).

Nauseate 6: Lightweight has learned to focus her gravity control to upset a person's inner-ear balance by touching them, causing temporary disorientation and nausea (DC 16 Fortitude save to resist).

Super-Movement 1 (slow fall): By lowering the effect of gravity on herself, Lightweight can fall from almost any height without harm, landing as light as a feather.

COMBAT

Attack +2, +6 (touch attacks), Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -1 (-0 flat-footed), Initiative +2

Abilities 13 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 34 + Combat 10 + Saves 10 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK		
BRUISED	STAGGERED	UNCONSCIOUS
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
INJURED	DISABLED	DYING

BACKGROUND

Alison Linster, like many young girls, wanted to be a ballerina. Alison, however, held on to her passion for dance and pursued it, interrupted only by the turning of her wild card, during an arduous dance practice at the School of the Arts she attended. Light on her feet before, Alison became superhumanly so, able to bound impossible distances, but lacking the finesse to control her newfound ability. Fortunately, her training made her unexpected landings at least somewhat graceful, and she didn't seem to suffer much from them, falling as light as a feather.

Specialists at the Jokertown Clinic pronounced Alison an ace, with the ability to influence gravity in a localized field around her. Astounding leaps were just the tip of her powers, and she soon discovered she could do lifts to outperform any male dancer: the recital where she held three fellow dancers over her head with one hand is legendary.

Although she cultivated the ace name of "Prima," and believed the wild card had given her the key to fame and success, Alison experienced a backlash. The dance community became harshly critical of her technique and performance, and the somewhat derisive nickname "Lightweight" stuck to her. She found some doors closed, as companies did not want to "compromise their artistic integrity" by including "wild card tricks" in their performances. She found many more doors open to her: chances to perform in New York, Las Vegas, and abroad, but they were all about her power, and not her true skill as a dancer.

Alison continues to perform in a variety of venues and has a large number of fans, but continues to have a love-hate relationship with her wild card talents. She's proud of her increasing mastery over them, but at the same time secretly wishes she could be rid of them to succeed (or fail) on her own merits. Still, options like the trump virus are too dangerous, and Alison accepts the spotlight that she has, for the time being.

PERMISSION IS GRANTED TO PHOTOCOPY THIS PAGE FOR PERSONAL USE ONLY.

ARTHUR "PTAHVEK" PURCELL

POWER LEVEL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+0	+1	+3	+3	+4
10	10	12	16	16	18
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+1	+4	+3	+6		

*FLAT-FOOTED

SKILLS

Diplomacy 6 (+10), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 6 (+9), Perform (oratory) 4 (+8)

FEATS

Attack Specialization (Telekinesis) 3, Benefit (occasional flashes of knowledge), Dodge Focus 2, Trance

POWERS

Deflect 6: Pthavek can telekinetically deflect physical attacks aimed at him as a free action; if he takes his standard action to do so, he can deflect any number of attacks in that round.

Telepathy 6: Pthavek is a capable, fairly broad, mentat. Although he lacks the raw power of other wild card psychics, he has a wide range of powers. In addition to his Telepathy, he can use the following Alternate Power feats: **ESP 4** (visual and auditory), **Healing 6** (Persistent), and **Telekinesis 6**. All of his psychic powers are Subtle and detectable only by other psychics.

COMBAT

Attack +0, +6 (Telekinesis), Grapple +0 (unarmed), +12 (Telekinesis), Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+2 flat-footed), -0 Knockback (-0 Flat-Footed), Initiative +0

Abilities 22 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 40 + Combat 8 + Saves 9 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK

BRUISED

STAGGERED

UNCONSCIOUS



INJURED

DISABLED

DYING

BACKGROUND

Arthur Purcell was not a remarkable or noteworthy man, unless you count being "salesman of the month" a few times when he was working for Liberty Mutual Insurance—and when he was a mere human being. That's right, "Pthavek" (*TA-vek*), as he now calls himself, is *not* Arthur Purcell, although he inhabits his earthly form with the permission of his higher spiritual self. He is a "walk-in," an advanced intelligence from the Andromeda Galaxy, sent to Earth on a mission to help guide the human race through the birth-pangs of its evolution into higher spiritual beings like Pthavek himself (itself? Pthavek is "beyond such human concepts as gender," as he reminds us).

"Pthavek" would fall into the same category as all the other supposed trance-channels who have worked the bookstore and talk show circuits for years where it not for one thing: he really does have amazing psychic powers of clairvoyance, telepathy, telekinesis, and healing. Although not so remarkable in a world of aces, the interesting thing is that Pthavek (or Arthur, or whomever) has submitted to blood tests conducted by skeptics. They show no trace of the wild card virus in his system! He's a normal human being, so far as anyone can tell, at least on a physical level. Could his healing powers have somehow removed the wild card from his DNA after it did its work? That's certainly one explanation.

For his part, Pthavek tries to bring his message of universal peace and enlightenment to humanity through various books, pamphlets, websites, and lectures, along with demonstrations of his powers. He's been unable to provide verifiable proof of his claims apart from his paranormal abilities, saying the full truth of his "level" of existence is currently beyond most humans. He has a decent sized following of fans, students, and disciples, and the authorities keep an eye on him for signs of cult activity although, thus far, there have not been any.

Is Pthavek really what he claims or some sort of scam? Only the Gamemaster knows for sure....

PERMISSION IS GRANTED TO PHOTOCOPY THIS PAGE FOR PERSONAL USE ONLY.

THOM "TASER" MOYER

POWER LEVEL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+2	+1	+1	+0	+0
12	14	12	12	10	10
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+3/+1*	+4	+5	+4		

*FLAT-FOOTED

SKILLS

Concentration 4 (+4), Disable Device 4 (+5), Intimidate 4 (+4), Knowledge (physical sciences) 2 (+3), Sense Motive 2 (+2)

FEATS

Attack Specialization (electrical Blast), Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 3

POWERS

Electrical Control 7: Taser, like his namesake, can build up a powerful electrostatic charge around his body, which he can direct as he wills as lightning bolts, leaping from his fingertips to their target (electrical **Blast 7**). He has developed the following Alternate Powers as well: **Confuse 7** (Ranged, Fortitude Save), **Dazzle 7** (visual), **Stun 4** (Ranged), and **Stun 7**. He has also learned how to build up opposing electrical charges between himself and a subject in his line of sight, causing an arc of electricity to leap unerringly to the target (as it is automatically drawn to it); this is a Perception range electrical **Blast 4**.

Electrical Field 6: By building up his electrostatic charge, Taser can surround him body with a field that can shock anyone touching him (**Strike 6**, Aura, Sustained). However, he can only dampen the effect so much; the first rank of his power is Permanent and cannot be turned off (although insulating materials can protect against it).

COMBAT

Attack +3, +5 (electrical Blast), Grapple +1 (unarmed, plus Aura damage), Damage +1 (unarmed), +7 (electrical blast), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -1 (-0 flat-footed), Initiative +2

Abilities 10 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 43 + Combat 16 + Saves 9 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK

BRUISED

STAGGERED

UNCONSCIOUS



INJURED

DISABLED

DYING

BACKGROUND

Thom Moyer was an electrician's apprentice, and not a particularly good one, as evidenced by the carelessness that caused the accident that electrocuted him. If his wild card hadn't turned, he would almost certainly be dead. Instead, he lucked out on a big way and drew an ace, becoming a living electrical generator and conductor. Unfortunately, he could only damp down his natural "charge" so much, making touching him like sticking your finger in a light socket. He couldn't handle electrical equipment without damaging it, so his intended career path was over, as was most of his human contact outside of an insulated pair of gloves or a full body suit.

Instead, Thom picked up the ace name "Taser" and found work like his namesake: shocking and stunning people, particularly people trying to harm his clients. He works mostly as a bodyguard, although he's known to do so *pro bono* work (for the publicity and public goodwill) and, rumor has it, he sometimes won't look too closely at a client's bona fides, if the money is right and the job isn't too objectionable. He's known to be discrete and reliable, enough so agencies like Ackroyd and Creighton have worked with him in the past.

For his part, Thom has gained an appreciation for "old world" life: he uses modern conveniences sparingly, since he tends to be hard on them. He reads a fair amount and goes to a boxing gym to stay fit (and to maintain his "taser punch," plus boxing gloves insulate his aura enough to get into a ring). He doesn't own a computer and is somewhat perversely proud of his ignorance of the Internet and its contents.

WENDELL "WAXMAN" WINETRAUB

POWER LEVEL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+1	+2	+1	+2	+1
15	13	15	12	14	13
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+5	+6	+5	+6		

SKILLS

Bluff 8 (+9), Concentration 6 (+8), Disguise 4 (+5/+35), Gather Information 6 (+7), Investigate 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+6), Perform (acting) 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+6)

FEATS

Defensive Attack, Dodge Focus 2, Eidetic Memory, Evasion, Improved Initiative, Sneak Attack

POWERS

Morph 6: By molding and shaping his body, Waxman can look like any humanoid, giving him a +30 bonus to Disguise skill checks when attempting to appear as someone else. His ability requires a modicum of concentration, and he reverts to his true, "melted" appearance when asleep, unconscious, or otherwise unable to maintain it.

Protection 3: Waxman's flesh is unusual resilient, as are his bones and vital organs, making him tougher than a normal human.

Regeneration 5: Waxman's malleable body "bounces back" from injury quickly. He makes recovery checks from being injured once per minute, and disabled once per hour.

Insubstantial 1: His unusually elastic body allows Waxman to squeeze through small cracks and openings, under doors, through pipes, and so forth. It takes him about a minute (10 rounds) to do so, as he has to squeeze and deform his body (this applies the Action flaw and drawback to his power).

COMBAT

Attack +4, Grapple +6, Damage +2 (unarmed, +4 with Sneak Attack), Defense +7 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -2, Initiative +5

Abilities 22 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 21 + Combat 18 + Saves 12 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK

BRUISED

STAGGERED

UNCONSCIOUS



INJURED

DISABLED

DYING

BACKGROUND

Wendell Winetraub knows what it's like to be picked on: a joker from a very young age, his flesh has always had the consistency and appearance of half-melted wax, leading other children to tease and taunt him and adults to treat him as either a freak or a charity case. He learned very early on how people judge by appearances, no matter what they might say or do on the surface. Deep down, everyone is really concerned with what is skin-deep.

So, when he discovered as an adolescent the ability to actually *mold* his waxy flesh, first with his hands and later with sheer willpower, Wendell was able to turn the tables on those who considered him some hideous freak show. He could look like anyone, be as beautiful (or plain, or ugly) as he wished, and that power opened doors for him. He found opportunities as a stand-in and body double as well as an impersonator, model, or even spy. "Waxy" went from freak to *chic* in no time and, although he was still judged by appearances, at least he was making money and living well rather than as a reviled joker.

Waxman tries to do right by the joker community and still considers himself one of them, in spite of his ace abilities. Of course, not all jokers agree, and Waxman's ability to "pass" makes him a traitor in their eyes; whenever joker life becomes too tough, he's got the option to hide, which they do not. The truth is Waxman is also secretly revolted by some of his joker brethren, and feels guilty for being just as judgmental as people have been of him. Still, he tries to use his talents to help, whether it's lightening moods, tearing down walls with much needed satire, or bringing the truth to light.

Note that although Waxman's powers do not affect worn or carried items, he can and does use them to sometimes simulate the appearance of clothing to avoid appearing naked in front of onlookers, although his life and career have given him a reduced sense of modesty.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

STEVE KENSON, DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Steve Kenson began reading the *Wild Cards* series in high school, not that long after he began playing superhero RPGs with *Villains & Vigilantes*. After some years as a freelance writer and designer for roleplaying games, he designed the *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG, continuing the fine tradition of superhero RPGs with ampersands in the title. After the success of the first edition of the game, Steve came on-board with Green Ronin Publishing as *Mutants & Masterminds* line developer. Working on the *Wild Cards* sourcebook for M&M allowed him to cross off another item on his "things to do before I die" list. (Fortunately, the list doesn't seem to be getting much shorter...) Steve lives in Merrimack, New Hampshire.

HAL MANGOLD, GRAPHIC/ART DIRECTION

Hal has been involved with roleplaying games since he was 9 years old, and shows no sign of stopping now. His graphic design skills have been applied to over well over 50 gaming products, and he's written material for Pinnacle Entertainment Group, White Wolf Publishing, Atlas Games, Twilight Creations, and Green Ronin Publishing. Hal resides in Alexandria, VA with far too many books and CDs, and a temperamental cat.

JON LEITHEUSSER, EDITOR

Jon Leitheusser works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor. He co-wrote the *Iron Age* sourcebook and has edited a number of other *Mutants & Masterminds* books. He originally hails from Burlington, Wisconsin, was an AFS exchange student to Cyprus, attended college at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was the *HeroClix* game designer for years, and now lives in Seattle, Washington with his lovely fiancée Julia.

BILL BODDEN, DESIGNER, BUGS IN THE SYSTEM

Bill Bodden has been involved with the hobby games industry since the mid-1980s, including stints in the retail, wholesale and publishing sectors. His fiction was nominated for an Origins Award in 2003, and besides Green Ronin, he's writ-

ten for Black Library, Mongoose Publishing, Avalanche Press and Chaosium. Bill reviews games for *Scribe* Magazine and for ICG's quarterly *Guide to Games*, and is a regular columnist for industry trade publication *Game Buyer*. Bill lives in Wisconsin with his wife, their four cats, and a ton of games, books and miniatures.

DT BUTCHINO, DESIGNER, SHELL GAME

Raised in the frozen wilds of Upstate New York, DT Butchino has always been distracted by all things superheroes. At the age of 12, he purchased his first superhero RPG and has since played pretty much every superhero game that's existed. Seven years later, he stumbled upon the *Wild Cards* novels and wished he could be the Great and Powerful Turtle. Unfortunately, he never owned a VW Bug or had telekinesis ... much to his chagrin. Instead, he opted to enjoy the life of a nat with his wife, two daughters and cat in the frozen wilds of New York ... though he *has* been on the lookout for that VW and, to this day, still can't move objects with his mind.

JOHN POLOJAC, DESIGNER, SPARE PARTS

A psychology major in college, John Polojac served the cause of justice for a time, working for a non-profit to improve the lives of adults with disabilities. Eventually his baser nature (and the need to pay a mortgage) took hold, and John turned his communication and empathy powers to the nefarious field of commissioned sales. Seeking redemption, he finally returned to his passion for creative writing. He continues his mercenary existence by day, but turns heroic role-playing games freelance by night. Since returning to writing, John's work has appeared in the late *Dragon* magazine, the *Rifter*, *Big Finger Games' Adepts of the Arcane*, and *Plain Brown Wrapper Games' Another 13 Shades of Darkness and Promise of Purgatory*, among others. An aspiring artist as well, John hopes one day to be the sole writer and artist on a project.

MARK SANTILLO, DESIGNER, BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

When he was a young man growing up on Long Island, Mark was a voracious reader of sci-fi, fantasy and comics and always

wanted to be a writer. His mom told him all he needed to do was write "one smutty book" to make his fortune. Instead he wound up in non-profit program management and marketing, including a stint as GAMA Program Director, where he created many of the iconic features associated with the "Origins" convention. The dream never died, however, and Mark fulfilled that childhood ambition by spinning stories as a Gamemaster once a week for 15 years straight. The chance to write an adventure for the *Wild Cards* universe was too good to pass up, however, so Mark decided it was time to go "All-In." This is his first published work, so it looks like he drew an inside straight! On the river! Odds are he'll be sitting at the table for while longer. Mark lives in Portland, Oregon, with Paul, his life-partner of 23 years. They have no pets and no kids, but enough books, comics and games to generate their own gravitational field.

BRETT BARKLEY, ART

Brett Barkley has always been driven to create, to bring life to the things of his imagination through his art. Having grown up on a farm, Brett spent countless hours dreaming up exciting new worlds and stories. He treasures the opportunity to create and pulls from a diverse background and education to bring a sense of realism and depth to his work. After the vehicle he was driving was struck by a drunk driver in late 2001, Brett has since undergone two major spine surgeries and has spent countless hours in physical therapy in order to walk and draw again. The time spent contending for the things he once took for granted has led him to the realization that having the ability to use the gifts we are given is a true blessing, and has brought him closer to the original artist—his Lord Jesus Christ.

STORN COOK, ART

Storn Cook's mother is an artist. So, he was surrounded by the environment and tools of the trade from the beginning. He spent 2 years studying art at New York University, then followed up at Columbus College of Art and Design several years later. Storn has worked in the role playing game field for a decade and half. But he's also branching out into doing novel covers, children's books and whatever else can use his skills—including teaching comic and sequential art locally.

GREG KIRKPATRICK, ART

Greg graduated from the University of Kansas with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and has done several independent comics and RPG work for Green Ronin. Greg has lived in South Florida for the past 9 years with his wife, children, dogs and comic books.

SEAN MACDONALD, CARTOGRAPHY

Sean Macdonald has worked in the roleplaying industry as a writer and cartographer for a number of years. He began his freelance career in 2003 with the *Dragonlance Campaign Setting* for Wizards of the Coast. Since that time he has worked on over forty different roleplaying products for many of the industry's leading companies, such as Green Ronin, Sovereign Press, ENWorld Publishing, Margaret Weis Productions, Paizo, Profantasy Software and Wizards of the Coast. Sean has a variety of skills and has done writing for many *Dragonlance* books, graphic design and layout for the *Castlemourn Setting* by Ed Greenwood and cartography for products such as *Freeport*, *Mutants & Masterminds*, *Dragon Magazine* and the novels *Saving Solace* and *Dragons of the Dwarven Depths*. In 2006 Sean won a gold Ennie for his cartography work in *Taslehoff's MapPouch: War of the Lance* and is the sole cartographer behind all three *Taslehoff Map Pouch* products. Sean lives in Auburn, Alabama, with his wife and four daughters. (He swears he used to have hair before they were born.) During the day he is an Internet programmer and spends his free time thinking up new and deadly ways to destroy the players of his regular Sunday D&D game.

MIKE VILARDI, ART

Mike Vilardi

LICENSE

OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural

abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product Identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contri-

butions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version

of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0 Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

System Reference Document, Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc., Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

Modern System Reference Document, Copyright 2002-2004, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Bill Slavicek, Jeff Grubb, Rich Redman, Charles Ryan, Eric Cagle, David Noonan, Stan, Christopher Perkins, Rodney Thompson, and JD Wiker, based on material by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, Peter Adkison, Bruce R. Cordell, John Tynes, Andy Collins, and JD Wiker.

Mutants & Masterminds, Copyright 2002, Green Ronin Publishing; Author Steve Kenson.

Advanced Player's Manual, Copyright 2005, Green Ronin Publishing; Author Skip Williams.

Silver Age Sentinels, Copyright 2002, Guardians of Order, Inc.; Authors Stephen Kenson, Mark C. Mackinnon, Jeff Mackintosh, Jesse Scoble.

Mutants & Masterminds, Second Edition, Copyright 2005, Green Ronin Publishing; Author Steve Kenson.

Ultimate Power, Copyright 2006, Green Ronin Publishing; Author Steve Kenson.

Wild Cards Campaign Setting, Copyright 2008, Green Ronin Publishing; Authors John Jos. Miller and Steve Kenson.

All-In, Copyright 2009, Green Ronin Publishing; Authors Bill Bodden, D.T. Butchino, John Polojac, Mark Santillo.