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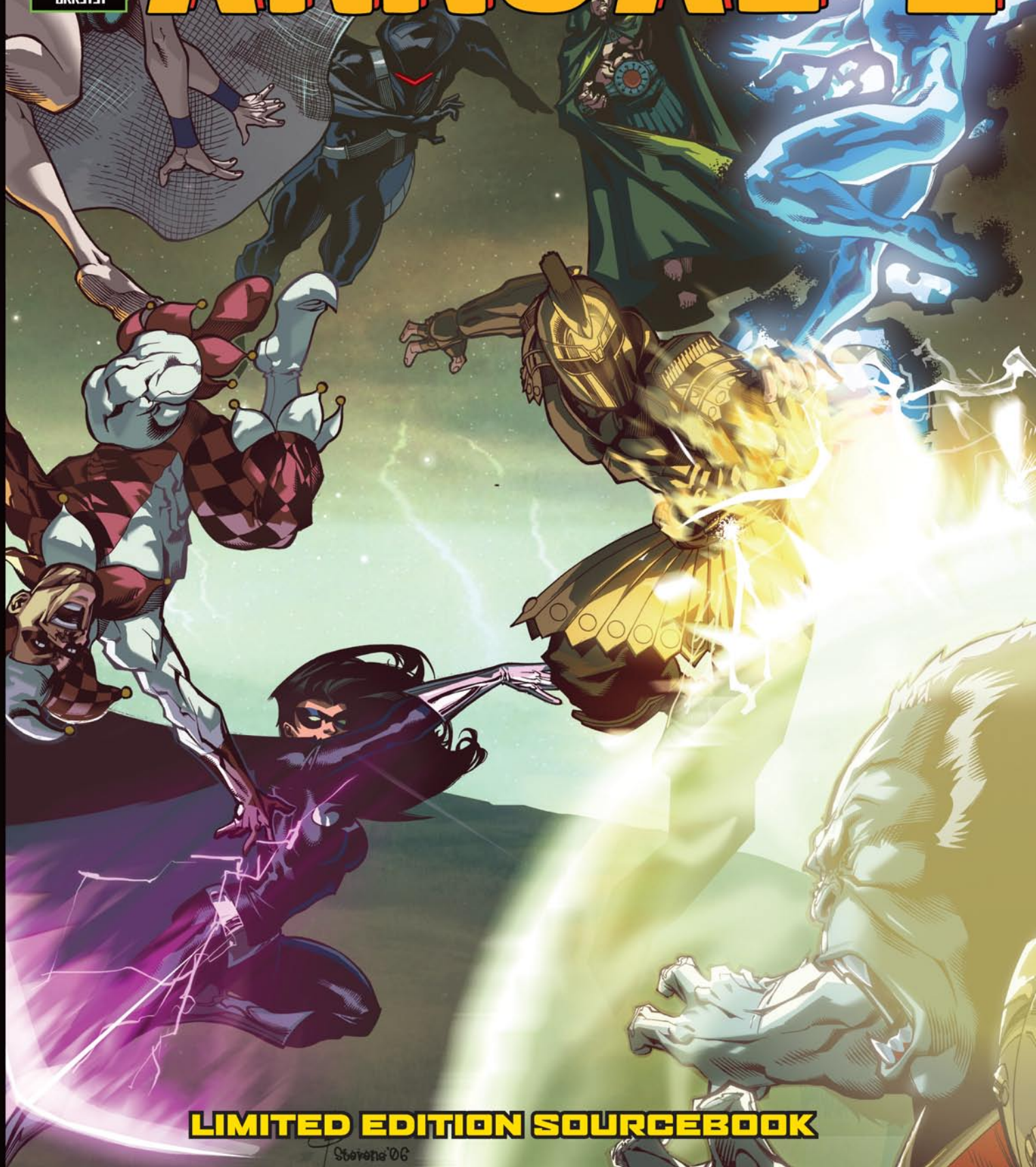
GREEN RONIN
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MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS

ANNUAL #2



LIMITED EDITION SOURCEBOOK

Storons'06

A THOUSAND THANKS...

Welcome to the *Mutants & Masterminds Annual #2*, a title, and a project, that's special for a number of reasons. The first *M&M Annual* was released in 2004 under the guidance of Super Unicorn, the design and development team who worked on the first edition of *Mutants & Masterminds*, and helped give the game its distinctive look and stunning presentation. It was conceived as a grab bag of articles for the game to showcase new writers, some new to *M&M*, others to RPGs in general. Some of those original articles appear in this volume, updated to the second edition of *M&M* for use by players new and old.

Despite its name, the *M&M Annual* was a stand-alone product; #2 did not follow it in 2005, since instead, Super Unicorn moved on, the principals working with Paizo on *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. Green Ronin moved on as well, re-launching *Mutants & Masterminds* with a second edition in the summer of 2005. First edition products like *M&M Annual* went out of print as the new second edition line burst onto the roleplaying scene.

What began as a great success faced a serious setback when Green Ronin's fulfillment company suddenly and unexpectedly went out of business with a substantial amount of unpaid debt. The income from sales of numerous Green Ronin titles was simply gone, with no means of recovering it any time soon (if ever). It was a serious blow to the company and could have spelled the end of Green Ronin Publishing. Fortunately, with the aid of understanding professional colleagues and fiercely loyal fans, that did not come to pass, and that's where this book comes in.

One effect of the loss of revenue was difficulty in paying creators—writers, artists, editors, and other professionals—for their work on time. Although we were fortunate to have many understanding people willing to wait their turn, it wasn't a situation any of us liked. So we conceived of a way to get some additional funds to our patient and hard-working freelancers. We offered two special limited edition products, one for d20 the other for *M&M*. Proceeds from these products would go directly to compensating the creative people involved in making our games. We also held a survey to see what the *M&M* product should be, and the idea of a second edition *M&M Annual* won in a vote of fans who pre-ordered the limited edition book.

Thus this volume, entitled *Mutants & Masterminds Annual #2*, has a noble history, both an updated edition of some fine first edition material as well as the fulfillment of a pledge to our freelancers and fans to provide them both with something: gaming professionals with what was rightly owed them, and our fans with a special "thank you" for their support. While we appreciate every sale of every one of our products, if you've bought this book, then a special thanks to you for your loyalty and support. We truly wouldn't be here without you.

Steve Kenson,
January, 2008



ANNUAL #2

A GREEN RONIN PRODUCTION

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Special Thanks To all the players and fans of Mutants & Masterminds who supported Green Ronin with the purchase of this book. We couldn't do it without you!

Christopher McGlothlin's Dedication To Jackson Publick & Doc Hammer, Edward D. Wood, Jr. & Friends, and most of all, Tanith.

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STREET JUSTICE

BY KEITH BAKER

It seems the city is in constant peril. Hardly a week goes by without an alien invasion, an insane mastermind holding a nation for ransom, or an ancient demon calling down the apocalypse. And yet, there is still hope—for it is a time of heroes. Armored demigods and master magicians stand shoulder to shoulder with cosmic champions and grim detectives. These heroes possess immense power, courage, and skill, and every day they manage to save the world again.

Problem is—you're not one of them.

Sure, you have powers. You're faster than the average guy. You can lift a ton or two, and you can fly—a little, at least. But you don't measure up to Captain Thunder or Dr. Metropolis. You go toe to toe with the Factor Four and you're going to end up a stain on the pavement. So what do you do? Ignore your powers and do your best to live a normal life? Or do you try to help when and where you can? Because there are challenges the Freedom League doesn't have time to handle. And when you're on the streets, you can see problems that just aren't visible from the heights of Freedom Hall.

In this day and age, there are dozens of ways to become a superhero. Governments around the world are developing super-soldier programs. As science becomes more advanced, people have greater access to amazing gadgets with powers beyond those of mortal men, or bizarre radioactive isotopes that cause such powers to spontaneously manifest. Mutation is becoming increasingly fashionable, both in the form of human evolution and other creatures adapting to the world of man. You could be an alien orphan, an immortal hero plucked from ancient legends, or a student of the secret arts of sorcery. Power is there, waiting to be had. But no one necessarily said you'd get an equal share.

This article examines the life of the low-powered hero, and considers the various paths you could follow. It begins with an examination of power in *Mutants & Masterminds*, continues with a look at different series models you can use, and concludes with a rogues' gallery of villains designed for a "street-level" series.

LOW-POWERED LIFE IN A HIGH-POWERED WORLD

In *Mutants & Masterminds*, heroes typically begin at Power Level 10. This makes you the equal of Johnny Rocket or Star Knight in *Freedom City*, and not so far removed from the rest of the Freedom League. Goons with guns are more an inconvenience than a threat; you must deal with them before they hurt innocents, but you aren't really worried about a mook with a Mauser taking you out of the fight. You can't take on Omega on your own, but you can certainly join in the battle.

The *Freedom City* sourcebook features few characters below PL10. Even normal humans like the Silencer and the Warden have skills or equipment allowing them to go toe-to-toe with true superhumans. *Street Justice* deals with what the film *Mystery Men* would refer to as "the other guys," the people with powers beyond those of mortal men, but not by a whole lot. For purposes of character creation, welcome to Power Level 6.

POWER LEVEL 6: AN OVERVIEW

While you're no Captain Thunder, a Power Level of 6 does make you a pretty remarkable individual. At Power Level 6, you receive 90 starting power points. Combined with the ability to purchase powers, you are far more versatile than the average PL1 or 2 citizens. But what can you get with those 90 points, and how do you stack up to the big dogs of PL10 and higher?

The good news is a lot of your power choices aren't limited by power level at all: so you can still have tremendous movement powers, for example, if you're willing to put the points into them, the same with things like Super-Senses. You're also not limited in terms of things like Super-Strength, although your actual Strength modifier is limited by power level, so while you might be able to *lift* as much as a PL10 character, you won't hit quite as hard as one.

Your most significant limits are attack, defense, save DCs, and Toughness, all limited to +6 by default, unless you use trade-offs. Even then, you've only got a limited amount to work with; a trade-off by more than 2 or 3 points is probably not worth it, since it tends to leave you with very little on the other side of the equation. Still, a +6 damage or Toughness modifier is nothing to scoff at, easily the equal to a high-powered rifle or the best personal body armor (maybe even a bit more).

Those 90 power points also don't go quite as far, since you're still spending roughly the same amount of points on ability scores as some of the higher-PL heroes, and you still want some skills, combat abilities, and maybe a few feats to go along with those powers. Generally speaking, you're better off coming up with a more focused concept than the broader range of powers you see at the higher power levels. An array of Alternate Powers can still go a long way, but it's a bit harder to be a jack-of-all-trades at this power level.

What do these limitations mean in terms of the series? Let's take a look:

PROBLEMS WITH THE MOB

Against other supers of your power level or lower-powered goons, you should be able to hold your own. But get used to worrying about the goon with the gun or the mob with clubs and knives. Even if you have a good defense—and with trade-offs, you can still do okay for yourself—if a gang can flank you or if a sniper catches you by surprise, you can't simply rely on sheer Toughness to pull you through.

THE TROUBLE WITH DRUGS

Another problem with being a low-powered hero: it's easier for the thugs to match your powers artificially. A guy with a gun and a bulletproof vest can already counter your Blast and Protection. But there are other ways to mimic powers. Drugs like zoom, max, and zombie powder (*Freedom City*, page 81) all grant temporary superhuman abilities, for example. Max provides a +4 boost to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution—bringing a goon a lot closer to PL6 than PL10. Of course, a hopped-up goon won't possess the range of powers you do and in all likelihood won't have your natural ability scores or feats—but it's still something to watch out for.

THE GOLIATH SYNDROME

Quite often, heroes must tangle with villains who possess superior powers and abilities. But the gap between PL6 and PL10 is considerably wider than that between PL10 and PL15. When you're at the bottom of the power levels, almost any full-fledged villain will dwarf your abilities. So what do you do when you have to face the Atom-Smasher?

To begin with, be prepared to find answers beyond direct force. With enough ranks of Impervious Protection, a powerful villain will shrug off your strongest attacks. Dazzle, Stun, Fatigue, Snare, and similar powers can bypass Protection, although high saving throws can still prove to be a problem. Aside from changing the types of attacks you use, consider indirect attacks and ways to make your environment work for you. You can't injure Granite with your energy blast or your fists. But can you blast the floor beneath him? Trick him into wading into fresh concrete, or walking in front of a subway train? Such tricks may require the use of a combination of powers and teamwork—make certain to evaluate your abilities as a team, instead of just fighting solo!

LIFE ON THE STREETS

Power level is only part of what distinguishes *Street Justice* from a traditional *Mutants & Masterminds* series. Life on the streets is often darker than the view from high above the Earth in the Lighthouse; in our world, compare the tone of *Daredevil* or *The Punisher* to *Superman* or *Wonder Woman*. If you are preparing to run a street series, there are a number of things that you should consider. What is the tone of the series? What motivates the heroes? Is the focus on action or mystery? Is there a theme that ties the characters together?

SETTING THE TONE

In a traditional *Mutants & Masterminds* series, the world is painted in four bright colors. The villains wear black hats and engage in nefarious schemes that can usually be stopped before any permanent harm is done. There are obviously exceptions to all of these rules; even though Omega was defeated, he still left death and destruction in his wake. But in general good and evil can be easily identified and frequently clash in colorful battles. Innocents rarely die, and heroes are usually recognized and revered for their service to the world. In short, in spite of the constant threat posed by mighty supervillains, it's a better world than the one you actually live in.

In a street-level series, any or all of these rules can be thrown out the window. Street supers typically inhabit a more realistic world—a place where things don't always end happily and where the lines between good and evil are often blurred. When developing your own street-level series, consider the following issues.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

So, a giant in a rubber suit is attacking Tokyo? Sounds like a job for the Freedom League. As a low-powered super, you're going to have enough trouble getting across town in a hurry. The typical street setting is focused on the micro-level as opposed to the macro-level; most likely, you'll be dealing with local gangs and crimelords instead of taking trips to the Terminus or Sub-Terra. As a result, it can be useful to focus the series on a specific part of town. Over time you'll get to know the locals and be able to spot things that escape the notice of the Freedom League monitors, or problems the police just aren't interested in dealing with. In Freedom City, both Southside and the Fens are low-rent neighborhoods where the crime rate is high, and either one can be an excellent stepping-stone for adventure. The police are

working to restore order to these depressed regions of the city, but it's a slow process and not every officer is interested in upholding the law. That's where you come in.

Of course, if a series is tied to a specific location, it raises an important question: Why? Why do your characters care so much about the Fens? Perhaps you grew up in the neighborhood, and you've been trying to protect it for years. Maybe you work or live there in your civilian identity; you might as well fight crime close to home. Perhaps your uncle was shot in the Fens. Or maybe you know something about the area no one else knows. You've discovered the Fens are a focal point for supernatural disturbances, and you have been charged with a sacred mission to defend the region. Having a strong tie to your area can add a great deal of drama to the game. Suddenly, you're not just defending a city or country full of strangers—you're protecting your neighbors. It's your home—keep it clean.

A MAN WITH A MISSION?

The question of location is just part of a great issue: what do you do, and why do you do it? Are you trying to wipe out crime, and if so, are you a sentinel or an executioner? Do you want vengeance against a specific enemy—SHADOW, the Mafia, the Brotherhood—or are you battling a general concept like greed or crime itself? Or are you just looking out for yourself and your friends?

Equally as important is the question of what binds you to the other characters. Unlike the Freedom League, you probably don't have a state-of-the-art headquarters and the respect of the international community. So what brought you together, and what are you trying to accomplish as a team? Do you have a shared background and mutual goals, or are you an assortment of loners who only come together when you run into problems you can't handle alone?

Needless to say, these questions are relevant to PL10 supers as well as lower-powered characters. But when you're on the street, they are especially important. You're not the appointed defenders of the Earth, or even of the city. So who are you, and what are your goals?

TO MASK, OR NOT TO MASK

Another question is the degree to which you embrace the role of superhero. Do you wear a costume and use a colorful alias, or are you an urban warrior who strikes from the shadows, unseen and unknown? Does the public at large know of your existence, and if so are you considered to be a valued local protector or a dangerous vigilante? What's your relationship with the more powerful superheroes of the city? Have you teamed up with the Raven in the past, or do you consider the members of the Freedom League grandstanding glory hounds who can't handle the dirty reality of the Fens?

LAWS OF THE URBAN JUNGLE

Are you a hero, or a vigilante? This is another question with major impact on the tone of the series. Most superheroes are technically vigilantes, operating without the authority of a recognized law enforcement agency. But most fight to uphold the law, even if they operate outside it. Such heroes bring down the villains society cannot bring to justice on its own, but they respect the laws of the land and above all strive to preserve life. Murder is murder, even if performed in the name of justice.

But there are some who believe the quest for justice overrides all other concerns. Some say the government is too lenient on crime. Others believe the legal system was made to handle humans—and superhumans must be judged by a harsher code. Of course, if you choose to follow the path of the vigilante, you may find yourself on the wrong side of the law, no matter how noble your intentions may be. Sooner or later you may run afoul of the police or STAR Squad.

If things go too far, other superheroes may come to put an end to your "reign of terror." You may mean well, but the road to Blackstone Prison is paved with good intentions.

MORALITY AND MORTALITY

So far the questions have been about you: who are you, where are you, what do you do, and why you do it. But now it's time to look at the world around you, and what makes the setting itself different from the typical *Mutants & Masterminds* series.

In a street-level series, the setting is almost as important as the villains you will face. As a low-powered hero you have much more in common with the man on the street than the typical superhero. You may never fight an alien invasion or battle a conqueror of worlds, but you probably see poverty, addiction, and insanity every day. In the four-color world, it's always easy to tell the heroes from the villains; on the streets, the lines are less clear. Consider the following situations:

- If a pregnant woman uses zoom, the mutagenic drug may alter her child. The result is a *zoom baby*. These mutant infants experience reality far faster than normal humans, achieving adulthood in the space of a few months. But a zoom baby has limited intellectual capacity, and it can't slow down its thought processes; as a result, it cannot learn to communicate or empathize with the sluggish humans who share its world. To make matters worse, many zoom babies turn to cannibalism; human flesh is a plentiful source of nourishment, and a zoom baby is always hungry. So what do you do when you encounter a pack of zoom babies? These unfortunate creatures are victims of fate and their parents' mistakes. Do you strike without mercy? Or do you try to take them alive and hope ASTRO Labs or the Claremont Academy can find a way to get through to them? A wrong choice may cost you your life!
- Someone is killing the members of the mob—and murder is murder. But when you track down the killer, you find it is a teenage boy trying to avenge his murdered family. Do you turn him over to the police? If the Mafia discovers his identity he's as good as dead, and there are certainly leaks on the force. Or do you let him go, in which case he will almost certainly kill again?
- A kindly old man—a homeless veteran, a fixture of the local community—flies into a berserk rage and kills three people, then disappears. You soon find out that he was part of the World War II-era program that produced the Patriot (*Freedom City*, page 71). At the time the experiment was judged a failure. But now something has triggered his powers while also turning him into a homicidal maniac, an engineered killer who believes he's fighting a war to save the United States. Can you capture him alive and find a way to restore his reason? Even if you do, will he be able to live with the blood now on his hands? What if he is killed by an angry mob wanting vengeance for their murdered friends and loved ones? Sometimes there are no easy solutions.
- When the Grue launch a full-scale invasion of Earth, the Freedom League and the Atom Family are out on the front lines, taking the battle to the alien mothership. You? You're in Freedom City, which is being bombarded from orbit. You can't reach the aliens. You can't fight alongside the Atoms. But what you can do is try to maintain order in the shattered city. Greed and fear are two of the most powerful human emotions, and the city is certain to collapse into a morass of riots and looting. The Freedom League will save the city from the Grue. But can you save Freedom from itself?

As these situations show, death plays a more prominent role in a street-level game. You're dealing with normal, fragile people—and even you must be careful around a madman with a gun. This brings a much darker tone to the game. Even if you capture Death and Taxes or bring Esquire to justice, you can't bring back their victims or undo the harm they have done to the community. You may dream about being the defender of the world, but you'll breathe a sigh of relief that you aren't really the defender of the Fens. A street series gives us a chance to look at the dark and ugly reflection of our world—to face the fears we'd rather ignore and the horrors of everyday life.

MYSTERY

When Doctor Stratos holds the city for ransom, it's a fairly straightforward situation. You know who he is. You know what he wants. The only questions are whether you can find him in time, and if you can kick his butt when you do.

In a street series, mystery often plays a greater role. The nature and motives of the villain may be complete enigmas, and a great deal of the action of the game may revolve around finding these details. When homeless people start disappearing, is it the work of a pack of zoom babies? Esquire? Grue scouts performing horrible experiments? Eventually you are able to identify it as the work of carnivorous zoom babies, and in time you are able to track, trick, and trap the hyper-infants. But is that the end of the mystery, or are there more secrets to be found? How is it so many zoom babies were born at the same time, and what brought them together? The ultimate truth is that the sinister Monkey is at the center of the web. He has been studying the effects of zoom on human gestation, and encouraged the cannibalistic impulses of the killer babies. But how long will it take you to discover this connection, and what new horrors will the Monkey unleash in the interim?

Because of this focus on mystery, there are many skills and feats that may be more useful in a street series than in most *Mutants & Masterminds* adventures. Connections, Track, Computers, Sense Motive, Gather Information, Investigate, Search, Bluff, and Diplomacy can all be invaluable tools for the super-detective, and the various breaking-and-entering skills may prove to be useful as well; you never know when you might need to sneak into a SHADOW stronghold without alerting its deadly cyborg guardians. This is one area in which the street hero often has an edge over his more powerful counterparts. Many of Freedom City's greatest champions possess astonishing powers. But only a handful of heroes (like the Raven) have the skills required to solve mysteries.

ALTERNATE SERIES FRAMEWORKS

While the gritty vigilante is a time-honored tradition, you may want to take a different approach to your low-powered series. Teen angst? Gritty cop drama? Super-wrestling? The choice is yours!

BLUE COLLAR HEROES

"Look, Sam, I'd love ta help ya out, but I promised Sarah I'd spend tonight with the kids. Dontcha know somebody else who can lift 10 tons?"

Just because you have superpowers doesn't mean you have to be a superhero. In a world filled with mutants, bizarre radioactive isotopes, alien abductions, and government conspiracies, there may be a lot of people with powers they just don't want to use. Perhaps your abili-

ties frighten you. Perhaps you need to keep a low profile to prevent the people who gave you your powers from finding you. Maybe you actually used to be a supervillain, and got sick of getting the @\$\$% kicked out of you by all the heroes; you're on parole and trying to walk the straight and narrow. Or maybe you just want to live a quiet normal life, to use your powers in a way that doesn't involve constant fights with madmen and murderers.

As long as you don't have an aversion to using your powers, there are hundreds of ways that a low-powered paranormal could find work in our world. Impervious Protection? You'd excel as a stuntman or bodyguard, and if you add Immunity (fire, suffocation) you'd be the ideal firefighter. Super-Strength can be quite useful around the construction yard. A Healing touch would certainly land you a spot at the local trauma center or street clinic, while Enhanced Charisma is a boon for any would-be lawyer, actress, or used car salesman. Super-Speed has dozens of applications. Aside from your obvious value as a courier (let's see a bicycle messenger match your 700 MPH sprint!), with just 5 ranks of Super-Speed you can perform mundane tasks 50 times faster than a normal individual. Data entry? Filing? Freelance RPG writing? Never miss a deadline again!

In this style of game, you and your friends have taken a pass on the life of the superhero. Perhaps you all work for a temp agency that brokers paranormal services. Perhaps you're just old friends (or former cellmates) who get together to play poker every Wednesday. The real question is: if you don't want to be a superhero, what do you actually *do* in an adventure? Here are a few ideas to consider.

- So you and your friends have normal 9-to-5 jobs. Well, what if those jobs are with the police department? You may have hung up your cape (if you ever had one), but you're still trying to make a difference. This gives you a location to work with—the jurisdiction of your precinct—and a clear mission. Needless to say, you are expected to work within the confines of the law! This path works especially well if you are a former superhero fallen on hard times. Perhaps you used to be PL10, but most of your power was permanently siphoned away in a battle with your arch-foe. You may not be able to go toe-to-toe with Baron Samedi or Doctor Stratos anymore, but you're still doing your part to make the city a safer place. If you like this idea but don't want to be held to tight police standards, you could be private investigators—heroes for hire who work to keep the neighborhood clean, but only when the price is right.
- Although you want a normal life and don't wear your underwear on the outside, sometimes you've just got to stand up for yourself or your friends. The Monkey is spreading drugs throughout your old neighborhood. Death and Taxes have arrived in the area and killed a friend of yours—and you may be next in line. Why don't you just call the Freedom League? Because it's personal—the big-time superheroes don't understand what life is like in Southside.
- Following the traditions of *film noir*, things could be a little murkier. Someone offers you a lot of money for a job, and you need the cash to pay for little Timmy's operation. The job sounds on the up and up, but what isn't the boss telling you? Alternately, the job sounds dirty but you don't have a choice; your loved ones are being held for ransom, you really need the money, you've been poisoned and will die in 24 hours if you don't get the antidote... and the only way you can pull it off is if you can get your friends to lend a hand.

Perhaps action is not the central focus of the series. Instead, it's more of a soap opera. Can you keep your fledgling super-powered construction company afloat amidst vicious competition, corporate

sabotage, unexpected expenses, surprise inspections, and other challenges? What happens when the Mafia or SHADOW tries to muscle in on your business? In the end, this style of game is largely about people trying to live normal lives in spite of (or in addition to) their powers, and this needs to be at the heart of things. You may be able to lift 10 tons, and you're ready to take on Esquire if it will keep your family safe—but you'd rather have a couple of brews and watch the game with the guys.

JOE SUPERHERO

"Meet Dynamo, Zephyr, Chili Pepper, Steel Monkey, Coppertop, and the Living Cuisinart. Over the next six weeks, these wannabe heroes will live together in a tenement in the Fens as they undergo a series of brutal tests and challenges. In the end, one of them will get to be the newest member of the Freedom League. At least, that's what we've told them..."

If mutants and other paranormals started popping out of the woodwork, how long would it be before Madison Avenue and Hollywood got involved? Consider the following:

- **The XFL, take two:** Superhumans and sports make an interesting combination. What if all those colorful professional wrestlers actually had powers to go with their costumes? What about a football league in which the wide receivers could fly and the linebackers had superhuman strength (and no calls for unnecessary roughness!)? On the darker side, what if someone started an underground fight club where the jaded rich could pay to see paranormals fight to the death?
- **The Unreal World:** Sooner or later, the reality show craze will find a way to cash in on superhumans. In *American Sidekick*, paranormals compete for a chance to work with one of the city's greatest heroes. A production company provides a group of striping supers with a headquarters and everything they need to fight crime in exchange for the rights to videotape their every move; critics believe that the producers are arranging for supervillains to "escape" from Blackstone to create challenges for the novice heroes. And then there's *Survivor: The Terminus...*

FREEDOM CITY 90210

"C'mon, Blackjack—when do you think we'll ever be invited to another party at FCU? I know the headmaster doesn't want us out at night, but what could possibly go wrong? It's just a party."

Perhaps there just aren't enough paranormals in the world to support Joe Superhero or even Blue Collar Heroes. But there's one place in Freedom City where you can always find a crop of fledgling heroes: the Claremont Academy. To reduce it to a sentence, the concept here is *"Dawson's Creek meets Harry Potter, with superheroes."* You're young, you're free, and you've got superpowers. What could possibly go wrong? The action here is generally going to be more about rivalries within the Academy. The Next-Gen get all the attention and glory—can your gang of super-powered misfits show them up? And then there are love triangles, athletic or academic competitions, evil twins, and forbidden parties that turn into fights with Dr. Sin's supervillains-in-training. It's not a setting for everyone, but it can be an entertaining change of pace. And who knows? After a very special adventure, you all might just learn a valuable lesson.

The *Hero High* sourcebook is an invaluable resource for this kind of low-powered *Mutants & Masterminds* game.

ROGUES GALLERY

If you're playing in a street-level series, most of the standard villains of Freedom City are a bit out of your league—and few of them are going to have an interest in stirring up trouble in your neighborhood. Here are a few villains designed with street-level adventures in mind.

These villains also work well in a *Paragons* series with a bit of adjustment: the Monkey might still be the result of scientific experimentation, but by someone other than SHADOW. The Scarlet Lady might be a "real" ghost or just some sort of "psychic echo" created by a paranormal breakout at the moment of death, and so forth.

THE MONKEY

"I'll do the thinking for both of us."

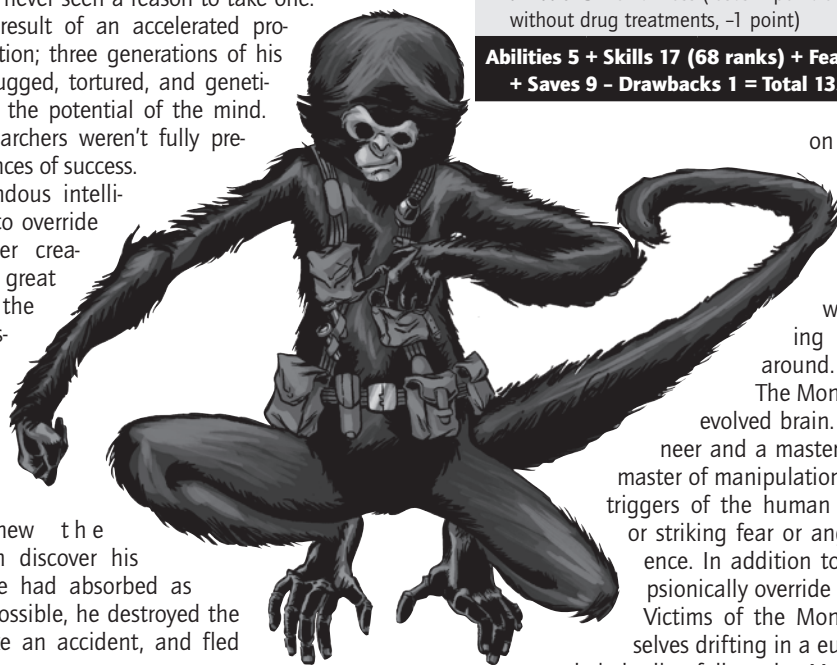
Drugs like max and zoom don't just invent themselves. SHADOW has invested millions in developing drugs to create superhuman soldiers, and when an experiment isn't as successful as they'd like, they pass it along to the underworld as a way to recoup costs. But it takes time to determine whether a new substance is a success or a failure—time and a great number of test subjects.

The Monkey was born in a SHADOW research facility. He was never given a name, and he's never seen a reason to take one. The Monkey was the result of an accelerated program of artificial evolution; three generations of his ancestors had been drugged, tortured, and genetically twisted to unlock the potential of the mind. Unfortunately, the researchers weren't fully prepared for the consequences of success.

Possessed of tremendous intelligence and the ability to override the thoughts of lesser creatures, the Monkey took great pleasure in forcing the scientists to slowly eviscerate one another, reenacting the horrors inflicted on his ancestors. He was able to learn a great deal from the SHADOW laboratory, but knew the Penumbra would soon discover his mutiny. As soon as he had absorbed as much information as possible, he destroyed the lab, making it look like an accident, and fled into the concrete jungle.

Since arriving in Freedom City he has become a major supplier in the drug trade, using his chemical genius to produce and sell a wide variety of unusual pharmaceuticals. Many of his products contain a secret ingredient called NdT. When combined with a second chemical trigger, NdT causes the victim to devolve into a Neanderthal-like creature with superhuman strength and resistance to injury. The question is, how many people have already been tainted with the Monkey's vile formula? Is there a way to rescue those who have fallen prey to NdT—to get the Monkey off their backs?

The Monkey is a nihilistic creature. He hates all humans, especially scientists; he holds humanity as a whole responsible for the horrors he suffered. Unlike Doctor Simian, however, he has no love for other monkeys. He is a species of one, and a miserable species at that. He is addicted to a wide variety of drugs. The quantities he ingests



on a regular basis would kill any normal human, and only his Immunity allows him to survive. He hates his life, but before he allows himself to die he intends to make the world share his suffering; nothing helps misery like spreading it around.

The Monkey's greatest asset is his highly evolved brain. He is a brilliant chemical engineer and a master of computers, but he is also a master of manipulation. He can play on the emotional triggers of the human mind, commanding obedience or striking fear or anger into the hearts of his audience. In addition to his oratorical abilities, he can psionically override the thoughts of other creatures. Victims of the Monkey's Mind Control find themselves drifting in a euphoric daze, only able to watch as their bodies follow the Monkey's commands. Weak-willed people may find this pleasure and total lack of responsibility an addictive combination, and may return to serve the Monkey even if they are freed.

At a glance the Monkey looks like a normal spider monkey; he has dark red fur with a black stripe that runs down its back to the tip of his tail. On closer examination, his cranium is unusually large. His eyes are completely black; staring into them is like looking into an icy void. His only garment is a harness with small hip pouches, which contain various drugs and equipment.

The Monkey has set itself up as a supplier of drugs. Depending on the needs of the series, the Monkey could work with existing criminal organizations or simply operate on his own. He enjoys using human test subjects for new drugs he is developing, and this provides a variety of story ideas:

THE MONKEY

POWER LEVEL 6

Str 6	Dex 21	Con 10	Int 18	Wis 20	Cha 18
Skills (*includes size modifier): Acrobatics 6 (+11), Bluff 6 (+10), Climb 6 (+11), Computers 8 (+12), Craft (chemical) 8 (+12), Diplomacy 6 (+10), Intimidate 6 (+8)*, Knowledge (physical sciences) 8 (+12), Notice 4 (+9), Sense Motive 4 (+9), Stealth 6 (+19)*					
Feats: Attack Specialization (pistols), Benefit (uses Dex rather than Str for Climb checks), Defensive Roll 4, Eidetic Memory, Equipment 6, Evasion, Minions 5 (up to 10 thugs), Taunt Equipment: pistol (+3 damage), utility vest (equivalent of a utility belt, <i>M&M</i> , page 137, without boomerangs)					
Powers: Additional Limbs 1 (prehensile tail), Enhanced Charisma 14 , Enhanced Intelligence 14 , Enhanced Wisdom 8 , Immunity 1 (poison), Leaping 3 (x10), Mind Control 6 , Shrinking 8 (tiny; Continuous, Permanent), Super-Movement 1 (wall-crawling)					
Combat (includes size modifiers): Attack +7, +9 (pistol), Grapple -5, Damage -2 (unarmed), +3 (pistol), Defense +8 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -2 (-0 flat-footed), Initiative +5					
Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (+0 flat-footed), Fortitude +3, Reflex +8, Will +8					
Drawbacks: Power Loss (loses 1 point of each Enhanced Ability per day without drug treatments, -1 point)					
Abilities 5 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 20 + Powers 63 + Combat 22 + Saves 9 - Drawbacks 1 = Total 135					

- The first encounter with the Monkey will probably relate to small-scale experiments: test-runs of NdT, or trials of other drugs (like the zoom baby trials mentioned earlier). When people start dying or turning into monsters, can the heroes track the drugs to their source? Is there any way to save the people transformed by NdT?
- Given time, the Monkey will spread NdT throughout the narcotics community. Once a certain level of saturation has been reached, he release the trigger drug. Can the heroes find a way to stop the spread of tainted drugs before rave-goers and junkies become ravaging hordes? The Monkey has no desire to create an organized army; as a nihilist, he is pleased to spread anarchy, chaos, and death throughout the city. Catching the Monkey may be the only way to stop the spread of the NdT plague.
- The Monkey's plans could cause him to cross paths with Baron Samedi (*Freedom City*, page 186). Will the loa see the Monkey as a threat to his plans, or will the two form an alliance? The Monkey might enjoy working with a spirit of death, and with his help Samedi could potentially enhance the effectiveness of his zombie powder. Such an alliance would prove very dangerous for bush league heroes, who won't have the power to simply take on Samedi in an open battle.

THE MONKEY'S THUGS

One or more thugs often accompany the Monkey. These may be people who work for him in exchange for drugs. The Monkey's hallmark is NdT, which causes a potentially permanent physical transformation in its victims. An NdT goon looks like a Neanderthal: sloping forehead, heavy brow ridges, and a massive musculature that has been enhanced to superhuman proportions. NdT goons lose memories of their prior lives, including their language skills; the Monkey commands them telepathically. Left to their own devices NdT goons are savage and aggressive, and if a large group of people fall under the effects of NdT, violence is sure to follow.

NdT goons use the Thug archetype (*M&M*, page 229), but lower Int to 6 and gain **Protection 2** and **Super-Strength 2**. They have a heavy load of 700 lbs. and Toughness +5.

DEATH AND TAXES

In a world filled with mutants and magic, is it such a surprise that sooner or later a serial killer would go gunning for superhumans? Rick Davis and Dana Cortez are both cold-blooded sociopaths, and each has their own reasons for killing superhumans. When they met in an asylum, it was love at first sight. Breaking out, they began a cross-country killing spree. As Death and Taxes, they have avoided tangling with any top-drawer superheroes; instead, they look for the weakest paranormals, people who may not even realize they have powers. Rick and Dana both believe these murders strengthen their own powers. They've just arrived in the city and they're planning to work their way up the food chain—starting with latent paranormals and other unknowns and slowly working their way up to the true heroes.

Death and Taxes seem like quiet, normal folks (unless you set off their quirks). Taxes uses her powers to locate superhuman targets. She then uses Bluff to lure the victim to an isolated area; she is a skillful manipulator and adapts her approach based on her evaluation of the victim. As soon as she reaches the target area, she strikes the victim with her Transfer attack, at which point Death emerges from hiding and seeks to finish the fight as quickly as possible. When facing multiple foes, Death and Taxes still attempt to tag-team opponents. Taxes' Transfer strips away defensive powers, leaving victims vulnerable to Death's attacks.

The pair can be quite deadly. If they target a character, it may be best to have a reason for the victim not to be killed on the spot.

Taxes may have come up with some sort of ridiculous ritual or device she believes will permanently grant her the powers of her victim; this could require enough of a delay to make a rescue possible.

Here are a few adventure ideas to explore:

- Death and Taxes begin by striking at the weakest paranormals they can find. In the Fens, there are a few homeless people who are generally ignored—schizophrenic war veterans always rambling on about crazy visions. The truth is these veterans were victims of an attempt to recreate the Patriot in the Vietnam era; they do actually possess minor powers, but the program unhinged their minds. Now these veterans are being picked off one by one. Can the PCs find the link between the victims in time to catch the killers? And can anything be done to help the surviving veterans?
- In the *Paragons* setting, Death and Taxes may hunt newly awakened paranormals, or even haunt spark parties and similar events in hopes of catching a new paragon victim in a moment of vulnerability. They might become willing disciples of Ravana (*Paragons*, page 177), hoping to partake in power like his, or see him as a dangerous rival.
- Of course, the characters are themselves low-level superhumans. As a result, they—or any allies or comrades-in-arms—can become targets of Death and Taxes. If the heroes are too well organized for a hit and run attack, loved ones or dependents may be captured and used to lure them into a trap.
- In a tag-team situation, Death and Taxes can be a match for more powerful superheroes. Perhaps the pair kidnap one of the members of the Next-Gen. Can the heroes find the sociopaths before they kill their prey?
- Death and Taxes are murderers, and any adventure involving the pair should be fairly grim. At the same time, they are both criminally insane. Should they be held responsible for their actions? Can they be helped or rehabilitated? Is anyone willing to try and risk even more deaths?

DEATH

"Time to die, dude."

Rick Davis was a normal white-trash kid—a scrawny runt who got beat up on the playground one too many times. When his mutant powers manifested, he suffered a schizophrenic break; he's been killing ever since.

Rick suffers from a number of psychotic delusions. He is a true sociopath, utterly without empathy for other living creatures. More than that, he believes superhumans are involved in an apocalyptic conflict. This battle will continue until there are only two left: a new Adam and Eve who will give birth to the superhuman race of the future. He further believes he gains power with each victim that he kills—yes, he watched *The Highlander* a few too many times when he was a kid. This belief makes him more than a little paranoid. After all, every other superhero in the world undoubtedly wants to kill *him*, even if they say they don't. The only person he cares about is Taxes; despite his overall lack of empathy, he truly loves her and will do anything to protect her.

While Death has a variety of little quirks—hey, he's a paranoid schizophrenic sociopath—his primary obsession is "the War of the Powers," as he calls it. Someone who learns about his beliefs may be able to use them to their advantage, claiming to know rules Rick is unaware of. For example, someone drained by Taxes could claim that "the Rule of the Open Circle" requires both combatants to have full use of their powers.

Fighting is all Rick knows. He's not terribly bright and has never even had a job. He is an urban predator, and relies on his murderous instincts to guide him through the world.

DEATH				POWER LEVEL 6		
Str 22	Dex 22	Con 22	Int 10	Wis 10	Cha 9	
Skills: Acrobatics 6 (+12), Climb 6 (+12), Notice 4 (+4), Stealth 4 (+10)						
Feats: Attack Focus (unarmed) 2, Evasion, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Uncanny Dodge (visual)						
Powers: Leaping 4 (x25), Super-Strength 2 (heavy load: 1 ton)						
Combat: Attack +6 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +14, Damage +6 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -3, Initiative +10						
Saving Throws: Toughness +6, Fortitude +8, Reflex +8, Will +3						
Abilities 35 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 8 + Combat 24 + Saves 7 = Total 85						

Rick Davis is a nineteen-year-old Caucasian. He is 5'11" tall and rather gangly; his scrawny build belies his true strength and speed. His short brown hair is generally scruffy and matted, and he usually has traces of a five o'clock shadow. His eyes are an unusually dark shade of blue; his right eye is slightly lazy and out of sync with the left. Death dresses in a long, stylized black leather coat, often wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the logos of metal bands or shock rockers.

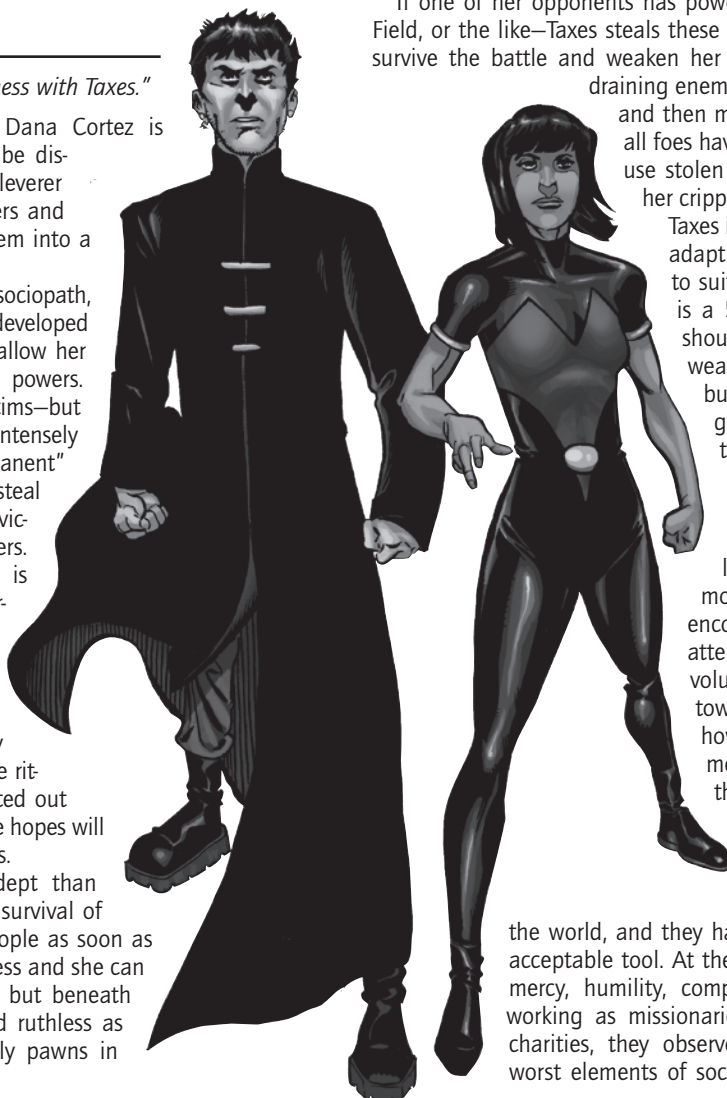
TAXES

"Sorry, baby—you shouldn't mess with Taxes."

Where Death provides muscle, Dana Cortez is the brains of the pair. She may be disturbed and unstable, but she is cleverer than Rick. Dana plans the murders and approaches the victims, luring them into a deadly ambush.

Like Rick, Dana is a delusional sociopath, pushed over the edge when she developed paranormal abilities. Her powers allow her to sense and drain superhuman powers. She gains the abilities of her victims—but these powers do not last. She is intensely jealous of those who have "permanent" powers, and believes her ability to steal superhuman abilities proves her victims do not "deserve" their powers. Unsatisfied with her ability, she is determined to find a way to permanently siphon off the powers of her victims. She hopes killing one of her victims will allow her to keep their powers, but so far it's never worked. She's constantly coming up with new ideas: strange rituals, bizarre "inventions" constructed out of junk, and other odd schemes she hopes will provide her with permanent powers.

Dana is far more socially adept than Rick, and handles the day-to-day survival of the pair (Rick would kill most people as soon as talk to them). She is a skilled actress and she can feign a wide range of emotions, but beneath this mask she is just as cold and ruthless as Death. Other creatures are simply pawns in her quest for greater power.



TAXES

Str 8	Dex 16	Con 8	Int 10	Wis 14	Cha 14
Skills: Bluff 8 (+10), Disguise 8 (+10), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+4), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Stealth 8 (+11)					
Feats: Attack Specialization (touch), Defensive Roll 6					
Powers: Super-Senses 3 (sense powers, ranged), Transfer 6 (all powers; Slow Fade 2 [1 point per minute])					
Combat: Attack +4, +6 (touch), Grapple +2, Damage -2 (unarmed), Defense +8, Knockback -2, Initiative +3					
Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (-2 flatfooted), Fortitude +1, Reflex +6, Will +5					
Abilities 10 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 41 + Combat 24 + Saves 9 = Total 100					

Under normal circumstances Dana is swift but physically frail, relying upon victims for drained physical power. She also possesses the ability to sense paranormal energies and the use of psychic powers, which she uses to locate potential victims. Taxes is patient, and spends time observing a potential victim in order to determine the most effective way to lure him into an ambush.

If one of her opponents has powerful defenses—Protection, Force Field, or the like—Taxes steals these powers immediately to help her survive the battle and weaken her foe. In general she focuses on draining enemies, hitting each opponent once, and then moving on to a new target. Once all foes have been weakened, she begins to use stolen offensive powers to take down her crippled opponents.

Taxes is a social chameleon, capable of adapting style, posture, and demeanor to suit the needs of the moment. She is a 5'5" Latina with dark eyes and shoulder-length black hair she often wears up. She is extremely slight of build, but she moves with athletic grace. Her outfit varies based on the needs of the moment.

THE MEEK

It's the quiet ones you have to look out for. The Meek are the most genteel vigilantes you'll ever encounter. They give to charity, attend church every Sunday, perform volunteer work in the worst parts of town... and kill people. You know how the New Testament says the meek shall inherit the Earth? Well, they've gotten tired of waiting.

The Meek see themselves as crusaders. It is their sacred calling to eliminate unrighteous and evil forces from the world, and they have concluded lethal force is an acceptable tool. At the same time, they must act with mercy, humility, compassion, and righteousness. By working as missionaries and volunteering with local charities, they observe the streets and identify the worst elements of society—and when the opportunity

presents itself, a Meek assassin eliminates these targets. Typical victims include drug dealers, muggers, mobsters, and rapists.

However, the Meek are prepared to take things beyond street crimes. From domestic violence to corporate crime, the Meek intend to wash the world clean—even if it must be cleansed in blood.

The Meek are a grassroots organization. A woman known as the Witness started the movement. Wherever her words take root, Meek cells spring up. So far, however, these cells have not been working together. This means heroes never know how many Meek agents they are dealing with and what sort of resources they possess. It also means the group is almost impossible to stamp out. It is a belief, and every day a new person may be swayed by its vision. If heroes face the Meek twice, it would be unusual for them to deal with the same people.

In a series, the Meek fill the role of Good People Doing Bad Things. Meek vigilantes target the worst elements of society, and there will certainly be people who feel they are doing the community a service. But the fact remains they are acting as judge, jury, and executioner—and no matter how vile their victims are, they have rights under the law of the land.

The Meek are best used as a long-term mystery. Over the course of multiple adventures, the body count in the area slowly grows: first dangerous criminals, then branching out: a slumlord, a wife-beater, even a local shock jock. Perhaps a friend of the heroes is killed—someone with a questionable past but who was working to turn her life around. When the characters do get involved and finally track down the killer, they should be shocked by what they find: A nun, the man who runs the local soup kitchen or free clinic, or a similar individual—someone they have gotten to know

as a quiet, friendly, and supportive member of the community, who may have even helped the heroes in the past. Perhaps the heroes rescued the Meek killer from a mugging on the street, little realizing they were actually saving the lives of the muggers.

First there is the question of what to do with the killer. What if she is a single mother? A pillar of the community?

Next there is the aftermath. There may be members of the community who will be angry if the Meek killer is sent to prison; even if she was a murderer, she always did right by them, and any “hero” who would turn her in is just no good. And, once enough time has passed, a new Meek killer can appear to start the whole thing over again...

Another possibility is the Witness will be released from prison. Incarcerated, her ability to exert her incredible charisma is limited. If she is released, the influence of the Meek could spread like wildfire. But the Witness herself may not commit any crimes at all. So what do the heroes do about her?

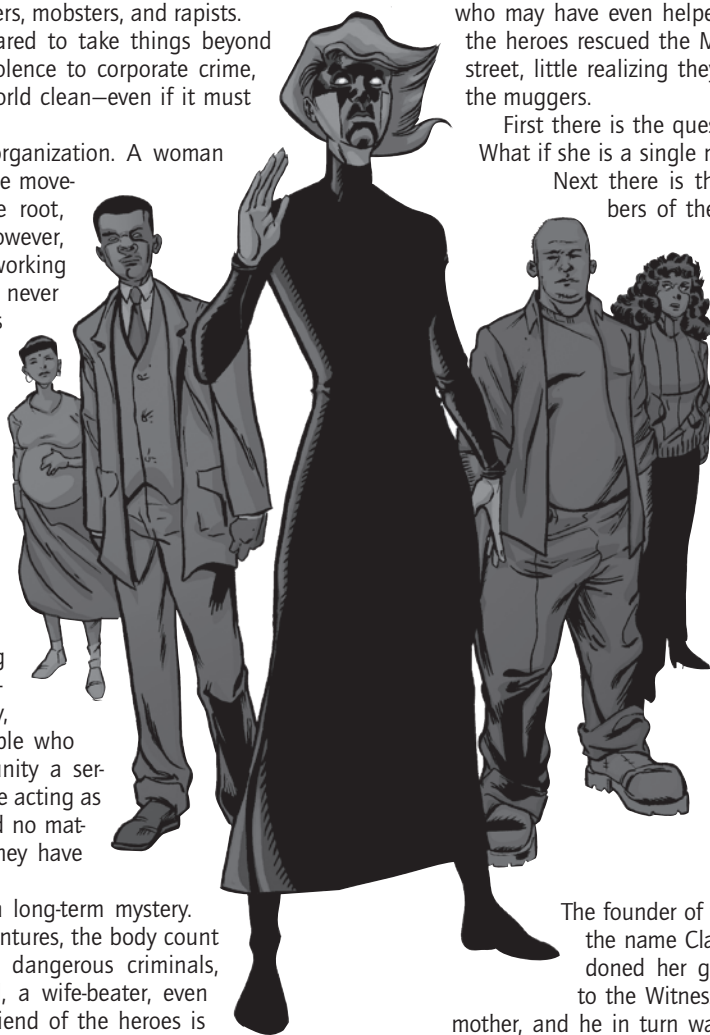
THE WITNESS

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for in the end, we will make a peaceful world.”

The founder of the Meek movement was born with the name Claire Corinn, but she has since abandoned her given name and now answers only to the Witness. Her abusive father murdered her mother, and he in turn was killed during a bungled robbery. Young Claire was sent to an orphanage, and it was there she had the dream that changed her life—a vision of a world filled with peace and love, where all people were kind, generous, and humble. And in her dream she saw there was only one way to reach this perfect world: to smite those who had no place in it—the unrighteous—until only the pure were left behind. The Bible says blessed are the merciful, and blessed are those who mourn; well, she would show as much mercy as possible to her victims, and mourn the passing of each and every one of them.

Claire took to the streets and began her one-woman crusade. But she was not a skilled killer, and it was not long before she was caught—though it was long enough for her to murder six people and earn multiple life sentences behind bars. In prison, she found her true calling. As the years passed she developed an astonishing talent for oratory. She considers her unnatural Charisma and power to sway people a divine gift, and it is truly superhuman in scope. Trapped in prison, she has been unable to use her gift to their full potential. But from the beginning she drew a great deal of attention from the media, and occasional TV interviews and visits from outsiders have allowed her to develop a small but loyal corps of believers across the world. The Meek are getting ready: training, acquiring supplies, and identifying those who must be eliminated. Soon, the crusade will begin.

The Witness is gentle and polite, and it is difficult to reconcile her humble demeanor with her message of bloody justice. She is completely convinced of the righteousness of her cause; she is on a divine



THE WITNESS

POWER LEVEL 6

Str 8 **Dex 14** **Con 12** **Int 14** **Wis 16** **Cha 22**

Skills: Bluff 11 (+17), Diplomacy 11 (+17), Gather Information 11 (+17), Intimidate 11 (+17), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 9 (+11), Notice 8 (+11), Sense Motive 11 (+14)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 3, Defensive Roll 3, Equipment 2, Leadership, Second Chance (Will saves vs. mind control), Taunt, Well-Informed
Equipment: pistol (+3 damage)

Powers: **Emotion Control 6** (Perception Area [hearing])

Combat: Attack +5 (melee), +8 (ranged), Grapple +3, Damage -1 (unarmed), +3 (pistol), Defense +8 (+4 flatfooted), Knockback -2, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (+1 flat-footed), Fortitude +3, Reflex +4, Will +6

Abilities 26 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 12 + Powers 18 + Combat 26 + Saves 7 = Total 107

mission, and answers to a power beyond any earthly state. It is almost impossible to argue with her, both because of her fanatical devotion and because anyone who engages her in conversation runs the risk of being converted to her viewpoint.

The Witness's superhuman powers are her astonishing charisma and strength of mind. As a result, she is far more dangerous as a demagogue than she is on the battlefield. The Witness's ability to inspire fear, anger, or obedience is a deadly tool.

After spending the last seven years in prison, the Witness is 26 years old. She is a slightly built Caucasian woman with bright blue eyes and short red hair, 5'2" in height. She is beautiful, but much of this beauty comes from her confidence and her gentle demeanor; you can somehow sense her purity of spirit and kind heart just by looking at her. If she is encountered in the outside world, she will dress in simple, conservative clothing, typically a long dark dress.

TYPICAL MEMBERS OF THE MEEK

The Meek cover a wide range. At the bottom level are those who support the cause but are not prepared to act, Bystanders, essentially (*M&M*, page 226); these agents keep an eye on the community and pass information to the crusaders. These often include children, who have been raised in accordance with the values of the Meek and who know no other way of life.

The next level includes people who are prepared to kill and who have basic combat training; use the police officer archetype (*M&M*, page 228) for these Meek "soldiers." Finally, there are a handful of elite killers—people combining fanatic devotion to the cause with remarkable skills and abilities. These Meek killers are the foes that heroes are likely to cross swords with. Use the Assassin archetype (*M&M*, page 226) for them, or create a suitable set of game stats for each agent.

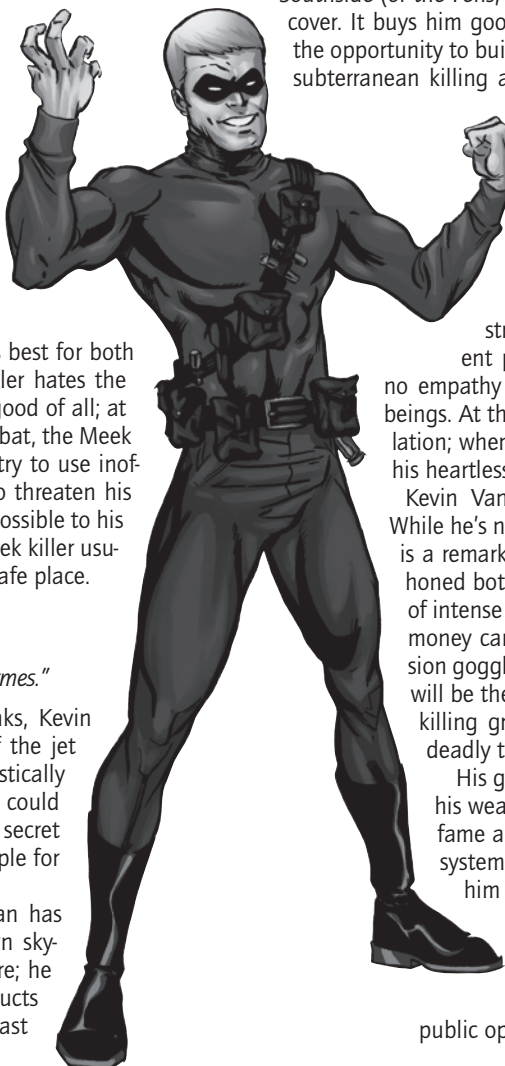
When using the Meek, it is important to remember their devotion to their cause and their belief that they are doing what is best for both the community and the world. A Meek killer hates the act of murder, but it must be done for the good of all; at least he kills with mercy in his heart. In combat, the Meek rely heavily on surprise. A Meek killer will try to use inoffensive appearance (disguised, so as not to threaten his place in the community) to get as close as possible to his victim. Faced with an extended battle, a Meek killer usually attempts to break away and hide in a safe place.

ESQUIRE

"Try not to get blood on my tie—it's a Hermes."

Sole heir to a vast empire of oil and banks, Kevin VanDuran is one of the media darlings of the jet set. Young, athletic, handsome, and fantastically wealthy, VanDuran has everything a man could want. Of course, in his case, this includes a secret playground where he can hunt and kill people for his own amusement.

Since arriving in Freedom City, VanDuran has established two headquarters. His Midtown skyscraper is a haven for business and pleasure; he lives in the luxurious penthouse and conducts business on the lower floors. Over the last



ESQUIRE

POWER LEVEL 6

Str 14	Dex 18	Con 14	Int 11	Wis 12	Cha 18
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Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+12), Bluff 6 (+10/+14), Diplomacy 6 (+10/+14), Disguise 6 (+10), Drive 6 (+10), Gather Information 8 (+12), Knowledge (business) 8 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+6), Notice 8 (+9), Profession (business) 8 (+9), Ride 6 (+10), Search 6 (+6), Sense Motive 8 (+9), Stealth 6 (+10), Survival 8 (+9)

Feats: Attractive, Benefit (wealth) 5, Connected, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2, Equipment 4, Improved Aim, Improved Initiative, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Track

Equipment: heavy pistol (+5 damage), survival knife (+2 damage), nightvision goggles, plus up to 6 points in miscellaneous equipment

Powers: None

Combat: Attack +7, Grapple +9, Damage +2 (unarmed), +3 (knife), +5 (pistol), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -2, Initiative +8

Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (+2 flat-footed), Fortitude +5, Reflex +7, Will +4

Abilities 27 + Skills 26 (104 ranks) + Feats 21 + Powers 0 + Combat 30 + Saves 9 = Total 113

year, he has invested a considerable amount of money in renovating Southside (or the Fens, as suits your series). But this charity work is a cover. It buys him goodwill within the city, and has also given him the opportunity to build a hidden fortress in the bad part of town—a subterranean killing arena designed for the ultimate hunter. Over the last few months he has been kidnapping vagrants and slaughtering them in his private killing ground. But he is beginning to tire of this game, and may soon seek more challenging prey.

VanDuran is a smug, arrogant man. He is a born predator, and takes equal pleasure in physical combat and economic or political struggles. He believes his wealth, looks, and talent place him above the common man, and has no empathy or compassion for those he considers lesser beings. At the same time, he is a master of media manipulation; when dealing with the press, he certainly conceals his heartless and brutal nature.

Kevin VanDuran has no actual superhuman powers. While he's no match for the Raven or Orion the Hunter, he is a remarkably gifted athlete, actor, and hunter, having honed both mind and body over the course of a decade of intense training. He has access to the best equipment money can buy, ranging from simple guns and nightvision goggles to military gear. But his greatest advantage will be the terrain. If he manages to lure heroes into his killing ground, they will have to deal with a host of deadly traps in addition to Esquire.

His greatest power is not his strength or speed: it is his wealth. Between his vast personal fortune and his fame and connections, VanDuran can twist the legal system to work for him, evading attempts to bring him to justice. Likewise, his media connections quell any "libelous rumors" about his murderous activities. It's possible he will manage to shift the blame for his actions to the heroes themselves, at least in the court of public opinion.

Kevin VanDuran is a handsome Caucasian man, 30 years old. He is six feet tall and has the muscular build of a gifted gymnast. He has brilliant blue eyes (well, colored contacts over his less dazzling brown ones), short blond hair, and perfect teeth. He has the looks of a movie star, and is a favorite target of paparazzi. As Esquire, he wears a simple black mask and a harness for his weapons, worn over an expensive suit.

The challenge with Esquire is not defeating him in battle—it's defeating him *after* the battle. There are a few ways the heroes could first encounter Esquire. They might be tipped off to his activities after people in the area begin to go missing. Perhaps one of VanDuran's victims manages to escape and reach one of the characters before dying. Or perhaps Esquire decides to take superhuman prey and lures the heroes into his hunting ground—a mistake that costs him dearly.

But once he has been exposed, the heroes find VanDuran's wealth not only shields him from justice, but also enables him to turn the tables and make *them* look like the threat in the media. How will they respond? Will they go outside the law to take out Esquire, or will they find a way to bring him down once and for all within the rules?

THE SCARLET LADY

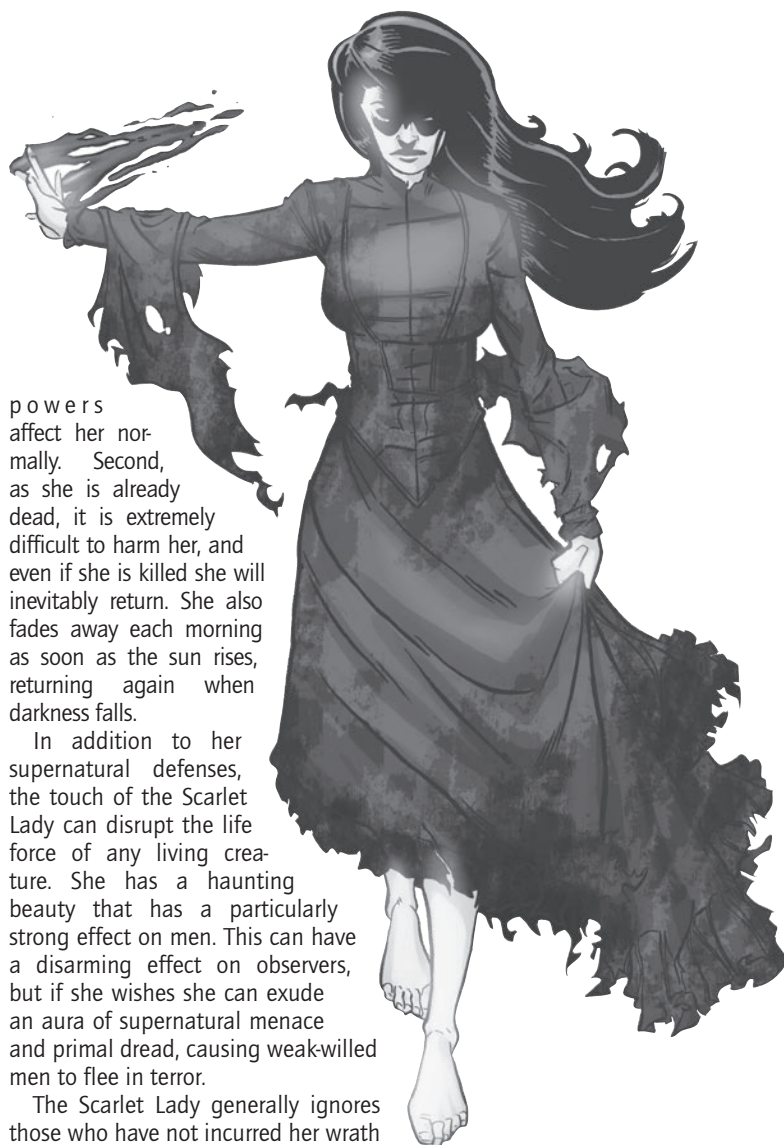
"Drown in your vile lusts!"

The Scarlet Lady is a legend of the Fens turned deadly reality. In the last years of the nineteenth century, a young woman named Mary James fell on hard times. Slandered and disinherited by her family, she ultimately found herself on the streets of the Fens. After a short career as a streetwalker she was considering ending her own life, but someone beat her to it; Mary a victim of the murderous Jack-a-Knives. While some credit Lantern Jack with the end of the killer's reign of terror, others say it was Mary who put an end to the murderers—that when he passed over the place where he had killed her, Mary's ghost rose up and struck him dead with her bloody touch.

Recently, on the anniversary of the murder of Mary James, a prostitute was killed on the same street. This convergence drew Mary's spirit from its rest. Now she wanders the streets at night, killing those who would prey on streetwalkers or draw innocent women into this sordid life to begin with.

The Scarlet Lady is completely focused on her mission of vengeance. She is not fully aware of her surroundings, and ignores anything that does not fit her Victorian frame of reference (cars, television, microwaves, etc.). It is difficult to engage her in conversation; as soon as she has accomplished her current task, she drifts through a wall or floor, in search of a new victim.

As a ghost, the Scarlet Lady has a number of powers. First, she is permanently incorporeal. Most attacks pass right through her, although mystical



powers affect her normally. Second, as she is already dead, it is extremely difficult to harm her, and even if she is killed she will inevitably return. She also fades away each morning as soon as the sun rises, returning again when darkness falls.

In addition to her supernatural defenses, the touch of the Scarlet Lady can disrupt the life force of any living creature. She has a haunting beauty that has a particularly strong effect on men. This can have a disarming effect on observers, but if she wishes she can exude an aura of supernatural menace and primal dread, causing weak-willed men to flee in terror.

The Scarlet Lady generally ignores those who have not incurred her wrath (by harming prostitutes or women in general). She has no desire to kill the innocent, and her deadly touch is an all-or-nothing attack. She concentrates on a single victim, using her Fearsome Presence to try to drive off other attackers. When she has eliminated her targets, she uses air walking and her spectral nature to evade pursuit, slipping away through solid walls.

The Scarlet Lady has pale white skin and long, wavy black hair. Her eyes are pools of shadow. She wears a tattered Victorian dress that appears to be made of crimson silk, but on closer inspection this is revealed to be a white dress soaked in blood; she leaves a smear of wet blood any time she uses her Strike attack. It is clear that she is a ghost; she is slightly translucent, and she tends to float a few inches off the ground.

The Scarlet Lady is yet another tragic murderer. She begins by preying on rapists, pimps, madams, and other people who victimize and abuse women. In time, however, she may start to kill the relatively harmless johns. It's possible she will even begin killing prostitutes herself, seeking to "free" streetwalkers from their grim lives—in the process, becoming as great a threat as Jack-a-Knives ever was. As she continues down this path, the Scarlet Lady moves from being a legend and folk heroine to an object of terror. Can the heroes find some way to finally lay her spirit to rest? If not, she simply rises again to haunt the Fens once more.

THE SCARLET LADY

POWER LEVEL 6

Str 10 **Dex 12** **Con 10** **Int 10** **Wis 13** **Cha 16**

Skills: Intimidate 8 (+11)

Feats: Attack Specialization (touch), Fascinate (Intimidate), Fearsome Presence 4

Powers: **Concealment 4** (visual), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude), **Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal; Continuous; Permanent), **Mind Shield 6**, **Strike 6** (ghostly touch; Affects Corporeal, Fortitude Save), **Regeneration 2** (Resurrection, 1/day; True Resurrection), **Super-Movement 2** (air-walking)

Combat: Attack +6, Grapple +6, Damage +6 (ghost touch), Defense +6, Knockback -0, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude +0, Reflex +1, Will +2 (+8)

Abilities 11 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 90 + Combat 24 + Saves 1 = Total 134

AGAINST THE GODS

BY RODNEY THOMPSON

Throughout their history, comic books have drawn inspiration from the mythology of cultures from around the world. As a modern form of storytelling, comic books frequently reinterpret classical mythology in order to tell a new story using familiar elements. One of the most well known sources of mythology is the collection of stories that came from ancient Greece and Rome. Although each civilization was its own unique culture, the overlap in religion and myths common to both societies allows us to draw upon what is called Greco-Roman mythology as a single source of inspiration. Rather than try to distinguish which tales come from which civilization, it is simpler to consider them a unified source for inspiration when comic books, and by extension superhero roleplaying games, are concerned.

Greco-Roman mythology is full of amazing stories featuring incredible heroes and villains. Tales of danger and quests for power, glory, love, and riches are commonplace in ancient mythology. Each of these stories centers around protagonists and antagonists that are larger than life; battle-hardened soldiers, heroes born of divine union, and even the gods themselves are often the tales' central characters. But what if the heroes and villains of ancient myth weren't gods at all, but rather were merely the first generation of superheroes? What if early civilizations were too wrapped up in religion and mythology to realize that their gods and heroes were really just normal humans who had been altered in some way? This article is built on the assumption that the myths of the ancient world were not based on divine intervention but rather on the exploits of superheroes born thousands of years before the world was ready to accept them.

This article serves two functions: to illustrate the ways in which Greco-Roman myths can be translated into comic book terms, and then in turn to show how those same myths can be brought into the modern world of comic heroes. After finishing this article, you should have a good idea of how to create an epic hero, run a series inspired by ancient myth, create a superhero for a modern comic book roleplaying game based on heroes and villains from mythology, and have a good idea how to run adventures (or even entire series) set in the adventure-filled world of ancient Greece or Rome.

THE EPIC HERO

The stories of ancient myth aren't about dastardly villains or the corruption of mankind as much as they are about the epic heroes who must endure such evil. The epic hero is one of the central elements of the stories of ancient Greece and Rome, a concept that translates well into the realm of comic book heroes. Throughout the history of comic books, the most popular and recognizable characters have been the heroes who rise above the rest of the world and prevail through adversity.

When translating the world of ancient mythology to a *Mutants & Masterminds* series, the heroes will likely be the central focus of all stories. Much like classic tales of Greco-Roman myth, the heroes should be unique and stand out from humanity in some way. Listed below are four archetypes found in ancient mythology that can help in the development of new superheroes as well as sample characters that typify each archetype. Additionally, since many villains are born of the same circumstances as their heroic counterparts, villain options

have been included for each sample character to further flesh out the available uses for the gallery of characters.

THE CHILD OF THE GODS

There are many examples in ancient myth of gods coming down to earth and breeding with humans. In fact, as fallible as the ancient deities were, such god/mortal relations weren't even considered uncommon. The children resulting from such unions frequently go on to become the focus of great events of epic importance. The child of the gods frequently has powers that other mortals do not possess, but does not come close to the gods themselves in terms of abilities. The powers of the child of the gods are usually very focused along one theme or type of power, whereas the gods themselves often display a vast array of powers.

The union of a mortal and a god (or, in this case, a human and a superhero or villain) frequently results in a child with superpowers. When creating this kind of character, one should be mindful to keep in mind the character's heritage; if the father is the god of fire, the child will probably have some ability to control flames. Drawing the distinction between the god's powers and the child's powers can be tricky; in the above example, the child might be able to control flames while the father can control, create, and extinguish flames. At least in low- to mid-range power levels, a child of the gods will likely have only a single power possessed by the parent, or have versions of many of the parent's powers reduced significantly in effect.

HERCULES

"Hmph. Still not a real challenge, but you'll have to do."

One of the most popular figures throughout the entire ancient world, Hercules is also one of the most well known in modern times. Zeus, leader of all the gods, fathered Hercules with a human woman named Alcmena during a night of indiscretion. Zeus' wife Hera was so overcome with rage at the birth of Zeus' illegitimate child she sent a pair of serpents to slay Hercules in his bed. The already powerful Hercules killed the serpents instead, and thus began his road to heroic status in ancient myth.

Growing up, Hercules was a formidable warrior and soldier for his hometown of Thebes. He was so successful in repelling the forces of the neighboring city-state, Orchomenus, that he was rewarded with a wife, the daughter of King Creon, with whom he had several children. Hera was not so quick to give up her quest for vengeance, and waited until just the right time to strike at Hercules once more. She managed to drive Hercules insane and forced him to kill his wife and children. Realizing what he had done, Hercules set out to atone for his sins and spent the next twelve years performing arduous tasks, which came to be known in mythology as the Twelve Trials of Hercules. After performing several miraculous deeds, from slaying dangerous lions to capturing the Cerberus, Hercules finally redeemed himself.

Years later, Hercules was forced to save his second wife from the clutches of the Centaur Nessus. As he died, Nessus told Hercules' wife that if her husband ever began to lose his interest in her that she could win him back by placing the centaur's blood on Hercules' skin. When she attempted to win Hercules back by coating his robe in Nessus' blood, Hercules was wracked with horrible pain upon don-



ning the clothing and attempted to kill himself by building a pyre atop Mt. Oite. As the robe burned off, Hercules discovered that his father's heritage had made him immortal and he joined the other gods on Mt. Olympus.

Like the other immortals from ancient Greece, Hercules continues to live even in modern times. As one of the foremost heroes from ancient times, Hercules continues to fight against the villains that plague the world. Hercules is one of the few superheroes to truly enjoy a normal life in addition to the adventurous life of a superhero. Hercules prefers to walk the streets of America as a normal person, remembering his humble origins as the son of a mortal woman. During World War II, Hercules joined the ranks of the military (as did many other superheroes) and continued the tradition he started as a defender of Thebes by fighting on the European front to liberate countries captured by the Axis powers.

Hercules, who goes by Harry Coles in modern times, is one of the few superheroes who really gets along with the common people. Hercules knows he's the strongest man around, and isn't afraid to toy with an enemy when he has him in his clutches. Hercules is incredibly devoted to his home (wherever that may be at any given time), and protects it with every ounce of his devotion. Powers and Tactics: Hercules is best known for his amazing feats of strength, which are legendary even in the modern world. Hercules rivals even the toughest of superheroes in raw physical strength and also possesses limited invulnerability. Although he cannot die of natural causes and never appears to age, Hercules is not completely immortal and could be killed under the right circumstances. In combat situations, Hercules makes use of his immense physical strength by hurling vehicles, tearing down lamp-posts, and using manhole covers as discuses. Hercules is prone to wade into battle with fists and weapons flying, only ceasing his sometimes-reckless assaults when innocent lives are in danger.

HERCULES

POWER LEVEL 14

Str 46 **Dex 12** **Con 30** **Int 10** **Wis 14** **Cha 14**

Skills: Climb 4 (+22), Concentration 4 (+6), Handle Animal 4 (+6), Knowledge (tactics) 8 (+8), Swim 4 (+22)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 2, Endurance, Improved Grapple, Improved Pin, Power Attack, Takedown Attack, Ultimate Effort (Strength checks)

Powers: **Device 2** (Nemean lion-skin, hard to lose), **Super-Strength 10** (heavy load: 12,500 tons)

Lion-skin: Protection 8 (Impervious 2)

Combat: Attack +10 (melee), +8 (ranged), Grapple +38, Damage +18 (unarmed), Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -10, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +18 (+10 without lion-skin), Fortitude +15, Reflex +6, Will +7

Abilities 66 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 28 + Combat 40 + Saves 14 = Total 163

Hercules appears to be a muscular man who could pass for an Olympic champion. When taking on the role of the hero, he wears a golden breastplate and wristbands and a lion's head and pelt over his back and head. The remainder of his outfit appears to be the standard uniform of a soldier of Thebes, reminding himself and others of his Greek heritage.

Hercules is something of a loner, not owing allegiance to any superhero organization or group. He wants to see himself as an everyman, but his powers and heritage set him apart from the rest of mankind. Still, for fledgling heroes he makes a powerful ally and a friendly way to ease into the superhero community. His engaging personality has earned him many friends and contacts, and a group of beginning heroes would do well to assist Hercules (or ask for his assistance) whenever things get tough.

VILLAIN OPTION

Like the other heroes born of ancient Greece, Hercules is as fallible as anyone. In the times of his birth, Hercules enjoyed fame, fortune, and the adoration of many. The villainous version of Hercules seeks a return to the days when he was idolized and is not above forcing others into servitude. He is paranoid and sees the rest of the world as out to get him, envisioning a return to his youth when Hera plotted against him at every turn. Hercules uses his immense physical strength to press other heroes into his servitude by beating them into submission.

THE EXPLORER

Many great stories from ancient literature revolve around the idea of a quest or journey. The heroes of these stories are often soldiers and warriors, but always they are explorers who navigate uncharted waters and overcome terrible obstacles in their quest for glory or merely for something of personal value. The explorer usually seeks something, whether it is riches, a new trade route, a lost love, or even just a way home. The explorer (and usually his faithful crew) journeys across the world and through peril in search of his goal.

Many explorers are heroes who use their talents and abilities in order to better achieve their goals. As modern heroes, explorers are frequently scientists and thrill-seekers, always looking for the next discovery or the next adventure. They come in many forms, but as heroes they become stronger over time and complete their journey more powerful than they were before. A hero's journey is a trial that forges him into something great, and the explorer is the master of such journeys.

ULYSSES

"I have seen many things in my days, but few were as low as you."

One of the greatest explorers of ancient myth is Ulysses (also known as Odysseus), from Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. As a leader of Greek forces in the Trojan War, Ulysses made himself known as a great general and, when the war ended, was to be brought home as a hero. Unfortunately, he could not return home so quickly. Blown off course and hurled across the sea, Ulysses and his crew repeatedly encountered strange creatures and even some of the gods themselves on their journey to return to Ithaca.

With his wife Penelope at home being courted by a house full of suitors and his son Telemachus unsure of his father's fate, Ulysses raced home only to find himself beset by obstacle after obstacle. He encountered monsters and villains, from the sirens to the Cyclops, and even had his raft destroyed by the one of the original supervillains of the ancient world, the angry Poseidon. His men were lured away by the Lotus Eaters, transformed into pigs by the enchantress named Circe, and eaten by giants, but still Ulysses pressed onward toward his home in Ithaca.

Finally, under the protection of Athena and with the aid of a kind king, Ulysses returned home in the guise of an old man. With the aid of his son, Telemachus, he snuck into the palace where the suitors pined after Penelope and answered a challenge to fire an arrow through twelve axe-heads, a feat which none of the other suitors could muster. A great battle ensued, with Ulysses, Telemachus, and a pair of herdsmen defeating fifty suitors while Athena distracted the would-be husbands of Penelope and caused them to falter and their weapons to miss their marks. With his wife safe and his household his own, Ulysses regained his rightful position as a hero of Ithaca.

Many years later, a new superhero rose to fame using the name of Ulysses. Larry Grant, a former pilot for the U.S. Air Force, was an astronaut flying the first solo mission to the moon when his shuttle was hurled off course and all contact was lost. After days of not hearing from the intrepid astronaut, the U.S. government officially declared him killed in action. Much to everyone's surprise, six months later the shuttlecraft entered the atmosphere and landed safely. Grant appeared unharmed and had no memory of his time in space; in fact, as far as he knew he had successfully completed the mission and returned to Earth.

After the doctors gave him a clean bill of health and he was released, Grant began to notice significant changes. His reflexes were sharper, he possessed an innate sense of direction, and time and again he found himself more than a match for any opponent in the sparring ring. In addition to his newfound abilities, Grant began to periodically have visions or flashes of knowledge that helped him avoid danger or prevent harm to others. As the weeks passed, his abilities increased to the point where he could actually track people across a crowded city hours after that person had passed by, and soon he became one of the foremost crime-fighting superheroes of modern times.

Ulysses is a cunning and deceptive hero whose knowledge and wisdom give him an edge over criminals. A solemn man who is dedicated to his work, Ulysses works to rid the world of the kinds of evils that kept the original Ulysses from returning home to his family. Ulysses is particularly obsessed with keeping women from being harmed, and deals harshly with all those that do. Ulysses is a brutal hero and is not afraid to use his superior combat skills and other powers to bring about justice, even if it means taking a life with his own hands.

Ulysses possesses an innate direction sense and the ability to track almost anyone or anything simply by instinct. He has incredibly sharp reflexes that border on precognition and is one of the world's foremost students of martial arts and melee combat. Ulysses prefers to move in close during battle and is capable of dealing out lots of damage up close so that enemies cannot attack him as easily from a

ULYSSES

POWER LEVEL 10

Str 17	Dex 17	Con 14	Int 15	Wis 24	Cha 13
Skills: Bluff 12 (+13), Climb 4 (+7), Concentration 4 (+11), Diplomacy 6 (+7), Escape Artist 4 (+7), Gather Information 4 (+5), Intimidate 6 (+7), Investigate 6 (+7), Knowledge (tactics) 12 (+14), Notice 4 (+11), Profession (sailor) 4 (+11), Profession (soldier) 4 (+11), Search 4 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+11), Stealth 7 (+10), Survival 4 (+11), Swim 7 (+10)					
Feats: Assessment, Distract, Elusive Target, Evasion, Fascinate (Bluff), Improved Disarm, Improved Grapple, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Second Chance (Bluff checks), Set-Up, Taunt, Track, Uncanny Dodge (visual), Well-Informed					
Combat: Attack +14, Grapple +17, Damage +3 (unarmed) or by weapon, Defense +14 (+7 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +3					
Saving Throws: Toughness +2 (up to +6 with armor), Fortitude +5, Reflex +6, Will +10					
Abilities 40 + Skills 23 (92 ranks) + Feats 15 + Powers 0 + Combat 56 + Saves 9 = Total 143					

distance. Appearance: Ulysses is a middle-aged man with gray hair at his temples and a chiseled jaw. He wears a dark blue pilot's jumpsuit that covers a Kevlar vest, with a cape of similar coloration. Taking a page from his namesake, Ulysses wears one of the plumed helmets so often associated with the soldiers of the ancient world.

Ulysses is, above all things, an explorer and an investigator. Any time a space launch center is threatened, every time an underwater colony is attacked, it is a sure bet that Ulysses will be on hand to foil whatever villain has launched the attack. Ulysses is more than willing to work with others, but prefers to handle the most dangerous jobs himself. Ulysses is also an excellent choice for asking assistance when someone or something needs to be found.



VILLAIN OPTION

As a villain, Ulysses wants to lead the world into the future, and sees himself as the only one with the confidence and daring to push humanity to its limits. He is reckless with human life and would hurl innocents to their deaths in order to plunge deeper into the unknown. He is driven by a maniacal desire to learn more, even if that means sending a shuttle full of innocents into a black hole in order to better understand the phenomenon.

THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION

The people love a winner. The People's Champion is the target of public adoration because he is a leader, a warrior, and a winner. Such champions are often not only valiant and capable combatants but are also typically strong public figures and visible personalities. They do what they do not only for victory but also to boost the morale of their people. When the People's Champion enters the field of battle, his allies are immediately inspired to fight harder and with greater fervor.

The People's Champion is almost always a physical combatant of some kind. Like many superheroes, the People's Champion is as much a symbol as a savior, and the power of what he represents is almost as powerful as that which he wields. These champions are paragons of valor, virtue, and victory and are universally regarded as someone to be looked up to and admired.

ACHILLES

"Go on, take your best shot. I dare you."

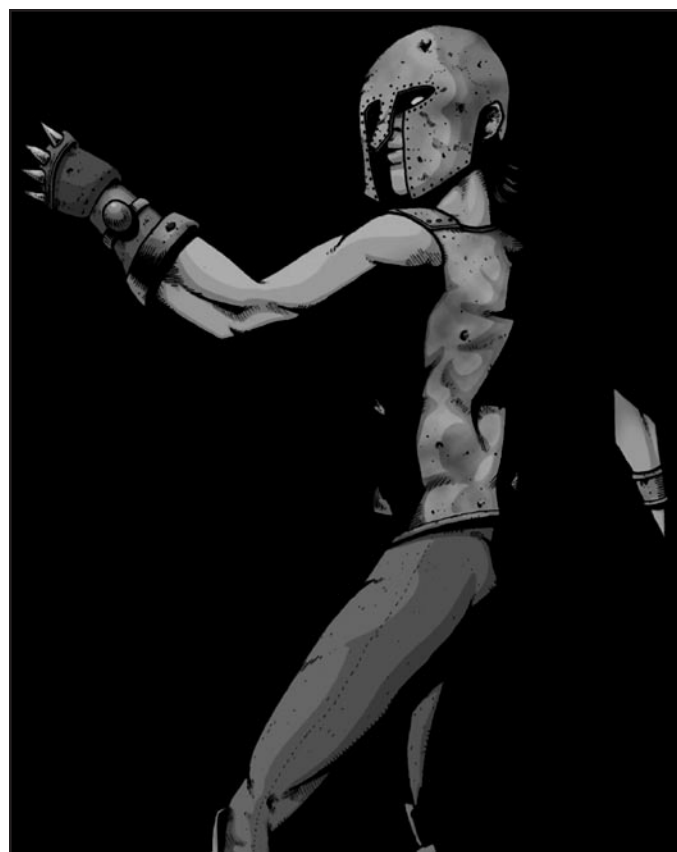
One of the most prominent warriors of the Trojan War, Achilles is the perfect example of a People's Champion. As a member of the mili-

tary, all his fellow soldiers looked up to him as a shining example of what the perfect warrior should be. Achilles never took a wound in battle and never came into any real danger. His companions always suspected that he was watched over by the gods themselves and was protected by a sheltering hand from Mount Olympus.

The truth is that when Achilles was an infant his mother held him by his heel and dipped him in the Styx, the river that passes through the Underworld. When Achilles was withdrawn, he was almost completely invulnerable. No arrow could pierce his hide, no sword could slice his flesh, and he never once suffered any injury in combat. The dangerous truth, however, was that Achilles could be harmed by striking his heel, the only part of his body that was not submerged in the river by his mother. Centuries later, the story of Achilles would be repeated by a young mother who studied ancient mythology as well as supposed new age mystic techniques. For years she studied dusty tomes and ancient stories, trying to find the secret of immortality. Taking her newborn son, she ventured deep into the sewers until she found the place where the river Styx flowed into the mortal world. She dipped her son in the water by his heel, just as Achilles' mother had done in ancient times. When she withdrew her son, he was equally invulnerable. Unfortunately for her, Hades was not pleased at having his domain violated, and so he sent his minions to kill the young woman.

Her son survived the attack, and was raised by a foster family under the name of David Kaleth. Growing up, David knew he was different from other children. He never fell ill, never got hurt during youthful roughhousing with his friends, and never was injured playing football. In high school he was a star quarterback known for his ability to take a hit without ever seeming to suffer any injury. He became cocky, and it ended up costing him deeply. During a date with his high school sweetheart, a group of muggers attempted to rob the couple. Believing he could take the thugs out without any problem, he attacked. Their bullets and knives bounced off him, but his girlfriend was not so lucky. At her funeral, he vowed to never again allow innocents to come to harm because of his irresponsibility. David adopted the name Achilles and chose to fight to clean up the streets. Knowing that he cannot be injured, he faces down criminals with no fear and can never be intimidated. Only a few of his closest friends know his secret identity, and no one but David himself knows his weakness. By night, David becomes Achilles, the champion of the people and defender of the streets.

David still mourns the death of his girlfriend and is occasionally morose when he is reminded of her. Otherwise, Achilles strives to be



ACHILLES

POWER LEVEL 10

Str 18

Dex 15

Con 30

Int 10

Wis 15

Cha 16

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+6), Climb 6 (+10), Concentration 4 (+14), Drive (chariot) 6 (+8), Intimidate 8 (+11), Knowledge (tactics) 8 (+8), Notice 4 (+6), Profession (soldier) 8 (+10), Ride 8 (+10), Survival 4 (+6), Swim 4 (+8)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 2, Endurance, Fast Overrun, Fearsome Presence 4, Inspire, Leadership, Power Attack, Rage, Takedown Attack

Powers: Impervious Toughness 8

Combat: Attack +12 (melee), +10 (ranged), Grapple +16, Damage +4 (unarmed) or by weapon, Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -9, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +10, Fortitude +12, Reflex +5, Will +6

Drawbacks: Weak Point (heel, -1 point)

Abilities 44 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 13+ Powers 8 + Combat 40 + Saves 9 = Total 130

a symbol of what is right and just and fights crime in order to redeem himself and prevent others from experiencing tragedy like his. Achilles knows the difference between right and wrong and doesn't believe in gray areas. He dedicates most of his life to putting villains behind bars and protecting good, innocent citizens from harm.

Like his namesake, Achilles is invulnerable to almost all attacks. He can take damage like no other, although he does not possess any other extraordinary powers. Achilles has trained himself to be an Olympic-level athlete and is an expert gymnast and fighter. Achilles is not afraid to leap headlong into battle and hurls himself against any enemy no matter how dangerous. His weak spot on his heel is his only concern, and Achilles has gone to great lengths (such as reinforcing the heel of all his boots with durable metals) to ensure that he remains protected from harm.

Achilles is a young man with a muscular build and curly brown hair. He is considered handsome by any standard and has a chiseled jaw and bright blue eyes. Achilles uses his good looks and powerful presence to make himself a paragon of heroism, and as such has adopted a unique costume to make himself stand out. Achilles wears a suit of lightweight metal armor painted to look like gray and white marble. His helmet covers his eyes and nose (with slits cut out the front so he can see) and his gauntlets are adorned with spikes on the knuckles.

Achilles is more than willing to help out young heroes in need. He has taken a number of young heroes under his wing and always wants to teach the next generation of super-powered beings the right way to protect the city. Though technically a vigilante himself, Achilles does not approve of heroes who use brutal or morally ambiguous means to capture a villain. Achilles makes an excellent mentor for most heroes and a solid ally for all.

VILLAIN OPTION

As a villain, David Kaleth's girlfriend is never killed and he goes on to become one of the most feared criminals in the world. Since no one can harm him, Achilles does whatever he pleases, like robbing banks or working as a hired assassin. Achilles is mad with the invulnerability of youth, only in his case he truly is invulnerable, making him that much more dangerous.

THE UNDERWORLD

One staple of ancient mythology that translates very easily into a modern superhero game is the concept of the Underworld. Many comic books make use of alternate dimensions, and the Underworld of Greek myth offers many roleplaying opportunities. In ancient myth, the Underworld is the domain of the god of the dead, Hades, where the souls of the condemned were relegated for eternity. The Underworld is a dangerous place for mortals, though some were able to venture there on particular quests, and it is guarded not only by the hand of Hades but also by his minions, such as the Lost Souls and the Cerberus.

The Underworld did not simply vanish as time passed, enduring even to the modern era. Although few know of its existence and even fewer ever venture there, occasionally a hero will be forced to journey into the Underworld to rescue the soul of a fallen comrade. In the Underworld, fire, steam, and magma flow as readily as water in the real world. The Underworld appears to be a series of caves, some of them so small that even a normal man can barely squeeze through, while others are so massive and empty entire cities could fit inside with room to spare. None but the bravest or the most foolish will even venture into the Underworld, and even they must have a compelling reason to do so. The Underworld is not to be taken lightly under any circumstances lest one become trapped there for eternity.

THE RIVER STYX

A massive river filled with poisonous water and dangerous toxins, the River Styx flows from one end of the Underworld to the other and is one of the only points of entrance and exit accessible to most heroes. The boatman Phlegyas, who can be paid to ferry mortals into and out of the Underworld, navigates the river at all times. It was the river Styx that gave Achilles his invulnerability, though for most people touching the river means certain death.

HADES

"You can have her soul back...for a price."

Few names from classical mythology are more recognized than that of Hades. The original villain and lord of the dead, Hades rules over the Underworld as his domain. Hades, whose name has even become synonymous with the Underworld, cares for and controls all the souls condemned to an eternity of despair. In ancient times he worked both with and against the other "gods" in dealing with mortals and was always trying to find new ways to win the souls of his enemies. Nothing gave Hades more satisfaction than claiming the soul of a particularly valiant foe. Hades is truly the first supervillain, and even today remains one of the most formidable opponents a hero can go up against.

Hades continues to reign over the Underworld as its lord of the dead. In modern times, however, the number of new souls coming into the Underworld has diminished greatly as religions changed over the years. As such, Hades has been forced to take a more active role in hunting down new souls for his dominion and has adapted to the modern world. In fact, Hades has built a business empire with himself at the head, using his position of power and influence to tempt and lure victims into his domain.

Hades is far more than just a crooked businessman. He frequently sows the seeds of dissent, spreads chaos and anarchy, and arranges tragic "accidents" in order to spread despair. His philosophy is that the more desperate and fearful the people of the world are, the more likely they are to accept his "bargains" and sell their souls. Hades revels in random violence and wanton destruction and is a truly dangerous villain who has no qualms about performing even the vilest deeds.

HADES

POWER LEVEL 15

Str 34 **Dex 14** **Con 36** **Int 15** **Wis 40** **Cha 40**

Skills: Concentration 8 (+28), Diplomacy 4 (+24), Gather Information 4 (+24), Intimidate 4 (+24), Knowledge (arcane lore) 16 (+18), Knowledge (history) 12 (+14), Sense Motive 4 (+24)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 4, Fearsome Presence 4, Ritualist

Powers: **Device 2** (helm of invisibility, easy to lose), **Immunity 15** (aging, death effects, life support), **Magic 18** (Dynamic; spells (all Dynamic): **Animate Objects 12**, **Darkness Control 18**, **ESP 8** (all senses, Dimensional), **Hellfire Control 18**, **Morph 12** (any form), **Summon Undead 7** [Broad Type, Horde, Progression 8 (up to 500)], **Super-Movement 1** [dimensional, Affects Others, Progression 4]), **Protection 6** (Impervious), **Regeneration 15** (+9 recovery, injured 1/5 minutes, disabled 1/hour, resurrection 1/day; Regrowth; True Resurrection), **Super-Strength 5** (heavy load: 45 tons) **Helm of Invisibility: Invisibility 2** (all visual senses, Close Range)

Combat: Attack +16 (melee), +12 ranged, Grapple +28, Damage +12 (unarmed), +18 (hellfire), Defense +11, Knockback -12, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +19, Fortitude +16, Reflex +5, Will +20

Abilities 119 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 111 + Combat 46 + Saves 6 = Total 304



Hades is both brooding and at the same time charismatic, a combination that makes him attractive and mysterious. Hades constantly has a slight smirk and speaks as though privy to some great joke or secret that no one else knows. His sardonic attitude and peerless wit can be quite engaging until one realizes the horrible atrocities he is capable of. Although

Hades is very likable and interesting most of the time, he displays a fury unmatched by even the blackest of human hearts when his ire is raised. Powers and Tactics: Hades possesses a number of powers related to magic and sorcery that make him a tough opponent to deal with. He can "sidestep" into and out of the Underworld at will, teleport from one place to another (appearing in an inky black mist out of nowhere), and summon fire and brimstone at will. Despite his considerable power, Hades actually prefers not to fight at all, usually relying upon his charm and charisma to smooth over difficult situations. If push comes to shove, Hades is more than capable of stepping in and bringing hell down upon his enemies. Appearance: Hades is a slender man with dark black hair. Always immaculately dressed, Hades would be indistinguishable from any other upscale businessman if it weren't for the pair of ram's horns that protrude from his temples. Hades occasionally carries a small cane that he uses to punctuate his words with gestures.

Hades is a very strong villain that can be dropped into almost any series. What greater challenge is there than to fight the devil himself? Hades is capable of committing horrible atrocities, but he can in some ways be an ally. Hades controls the Underworld, and can bring those souls under his control back from the dead, something that can be very useful should a superhero die. Heroes should beware, though; Hades' favors never come without a steep price that rarely turns out to be a bargain. Plots: Hades is primarily concerned with strengthening his own holdings and expanding the influence of the Underworld. The more souls he possesses, the stronger his powers. Most of his plots involve bargaining for souls and wreaking havoc on innocents, though

only occasionally in an overt way. Hades has long been trying to figure out a way to merge the Underworld and the mortal world, creating a true hell on Earth. Although he has yet to expand his power to such a level, he constantly searches for ways to do so. If he were to succeed, everyone on Earth would be completely under his control.

LOST SOULS

POWER LEVEL 4

Str 10	Dex 10	Con 10	Int 10	Wis 10	Cha 10
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Skills: None

Feats: None

Powers: **Drain Constitution 2** (Affects Corporeal), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude), **Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal; Continuous, Permanent, affected by magic)

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +4, Damage – (Drain only), Defense +4, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude +0, Reflex +0, Will +0

Abilities 0 + Skills 0 + Feats 0 + Powers 54 + Combat 16 + Saves 0 = Total 70

As the domain of the dead, the Underworld is littered with souls. Among these are the Lost Souls, those who have neither been condemned nor elevated and retain a certain degree of autonomy. The Lost Souls feed on travelers passing through the Underworld and are capable of draining the life force of any living being. They appear to be ghastly caricatures of humans whose color has faded to a milky green, and make no noise other than the occasional scream of anguish. They frequently move through the Underworld in packs.

With few people maintaining the religions of old, the number of Lost Souls wandering the Underworld has diminished. Some Lost Souls have escaped to the surface world and have begun to haunt major cities in search of food. Many reports of ghosts or vampires in the modern world are the result of attacks by Lost Souls, who see cities as a rich feeding ground where life is abundant and energy plentiful.

MYTHIC BESTIARY

Greek myth is littered with examples of strange beasts and creatures from nightmare. These make excellent opponents for heroes, especially those with a mythological theme, and also are good sidekicks and minions for villains from ancient times. The following four creatures are but a few examples of how the monsters of mythology can be brought into a superhero series.

CEREBUS

POWER LEVEL 8

Str 26	Dex 12	Con 24	Int 8	Wis 16	Cha 9
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Skills: Notice 8 (+11), Search 8 (+7)

Feats: Attack Specialization (bite), Second Chance (Notice checks)

Powers: **Duplication 8** (two extra heads; Innate, Progression [2 extra heads]; Continuous, Heroic; Limited to heads, Permanent), **Growth 8** (huge, +16 Str, +8 Con; Innate; Continuous, Permanent), **Protection 3** (Impervious), **Super-Senses 7** (darkvision, low-light vision, magical awareness, scent, tracking, ultra-hearing)

Combat: Attack +6, +8 (bite, includes –2 size), Grapple +22, Damage +8 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+2 flat-footed, includes –2 size), Knockback –7, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +10, Fortitude +11, Reflex +5, Will +8

Drawbacks: Disability (mute, very common, moderate, -4 points), Disability (no hands, very common, moderate, -4 points)

Abilities 11 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 56 + Combat 40 + Saves 13 - Drawbacks 8 = Total 118

One of the most feared beasts of all time, the Cerberus was the three-headed hellhound that guarded the underworld at Hades' request. The Cerberus was capable of breathing fire and had massive claws that could rend a man's flesh. The Cerberus could withstand large amounts of damage and was notoriously good at keeping others out of the Underworld. In modern times, the Cerberus still stands vigil at the gates of the Underworld; perhaps the fire-breathing canine lives deep in the underbelly of a major city, guarding the secret gates to the domain of Hades, or conversely is kept as a pet by a powerful supervillain who uses the Cerberus as a watchdog and guardian.

HARPY

POWER LEVEL 5

Str 10 | Dex 15 | Con 10 | Int 7 | Wis 12 | Cha 17

Skills: Bluff 8 (+11), Intimidate 4 (+7), Notice 6 (+7), Perform (singing) 6 (+9)

Feats: Dodge Focus, Fascinate (Perform), Move-By Action

Powers: **Flight 2**, **Mind Control 5** (captivating song; Conscious, Perception Area [hearing], Selective Attack; Hearing Dependent, Limited to One Command ["come to me and surrender"]), **Protection 1**, **Super-Senses 2** (darkvision)

Combat: Attack +7, Grapple +7, Damage +0 (unarmed) or by weapon (up to +3), Defense +7 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +1, Fortitude +3, Reflex +7, Will +6

Drawbacks: Power Loss (Flight, if wings are restricted, -1 point), Power Loss (Mind Control, if unable to sing, -1 point)

Abilities 11 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 22 + Combat 28 + Saves 13 - Drawbacks 2 = Total 81

Harpies are dangerous winged creatures that plagued heroes of the ancient world. Harpies appear to be a bird of prey with the head of an old woman, and are notorious carnivores with a taste for human flesh. They often attacked sailors on quests in the mythological epics, and were a major concern for heroes on the water. In modern times, the harpy sounds a good deal like the result of genetic experimentation, leading the heroes to not only combat the bloodthirsty beasts but also discover who is behind their creation.

HYDRA

POWER LEVEL 8

Str 26 | Dex 12 | Con 20 | Int 2 | Wis 10 | Cha 9

Skills: Notice 4 (+4), Swim 8 (+8)

Feats: Attack Specialization (bite)

Powers: **Duplication 8** (extra heads; Innate, Progression 3 [up to 10 heads], Triggered when a head is severed without the use of fire; Continuous Duration, Heroic, Survival; Limited to heads, Uncontrolled), **Growth 8** (huge, +16 Str, +8 Con; Innate; Continuous, Permanent), **Immunity 1** (drowning), **Protection 7**, **Regeneration 16** (+4 recovery bonus, bruised 1/round, injured 1/round, resurrection 1/5 hours, but not if all heads are severed and burned), **Super-Senses 4** (darkvision, low-light vision, scent)

Combat: Attack +4, +6 (bite, includes -2 size), Grapple +20, Damage +8 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+1 flat-footed, includes -2 size), Knockback -6, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +12, Fortitude +10, Reflex +6, Will +2

Drawbacks: Disability (mute, very common, moderate, -4 points), Disability (no hands, very common, moderate, -4 points), Weak Point (-1 point)

Abilities -5 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 82 + Combat 24 + Saves 11 - Drawbacks 9 = Total 107

One of the most terrible creatures from ancient myth is the hydra, a massive dragon-like beast with multiple heads. The hydra is particularly dangerous due to the fact that whenever one of its heads is cut off, the creature grows two more in its place. The hydra is not an intelligent beast and thinks of little but its own survival. In modern times, the hydra makes an excellent monster to throw at a party in need of a little violent diversion. The hydra also makes a good choice for giant monster attacks, such as those seen in Japanese kaiju films, and can provide the heroes with challenges like defending the city's infrastructure and rescuing innocent bystanders.

SIREN

POWER LEVEL 5

Str 10 | Dex 12 | Con 14 | Int 12 | Wis 14 | Cha 18

Skills: Bluff 4 (+8/+12), Notice 4 (+6), Perform (sing) 8 (+12)

Feats: Attractive, Fascinate (Perform), Improved Initiative

Powers: **Mind Control 5** (captivating song; Conscious, Perception Area [hearing], Selective Attack; Hearing Dependent, Limited to One Command ["come to me"])

Combat: Attack +6, Grapple +6, Damage +0 (unarmed) or by weapon, Defense +6, Knockback -1, Initiative +5

Saving Throws: Toughness +2, Fortitude +5, Reflex +4, Will +5

Drawbacks: Power Loss (Mind Control, if unable to sing, -1 point)

Abilities 20 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 15 + Combat 24 + Saves 9 - Drawbacks 1 = Total 74

Able to lure men to their deaths, the Sirens are creatures of ancient myth that once used their enchanting voices to lure sailors into dangerous waters where their ships would be crushed against the rocks. Sirens appear to be otherworldly, even ghostly women, and have occasionally been mistaken for mermaids. In modern times, the Sirens take pleasure in wreaking havoc on travelers, from inciting plane crashes to causing massive wrecks on interstate highways.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Certain key elements of mythology help when translating ancient myths into superhero terms. Although it's impossible to distill all of mythology into a few small aspects of storytelling, certain mythological themes can be translated into modern terms while maintaining the feel of classical mythology. The following concepts and stories can be used as adventure hooks when designing series based on ancient myth, either set in the ancient world or in modern times.

UNIQUE CULTURES

Many ancient stories deal with unique cultures and societies that challenge the normal standard. Some societies have strange rules, others are composed of only one type of person, and others are simply barbaric or are cannibals. The idea behind these strange societies is that they take a normal concept, like a community or a family, and twist them off of the norm somehow. Comic books do this often as well; for example, instead of a society of normal people protected by the occa-

sional superhero, some cities have enough superheroes (and villains) to make seeing a super-powered being an everyday occurrence.

To take an example from Greek myth, the Amazons are a very different twist on traditional male-dominated society. Though in modern times an island of empowered warrior women might not seem quite as strange, in ancient times it would have been almost unheard of. For a superhero series, perhaps instead of the Amazons being a tribe of warrior women they are really a society of nothing but super-powered beings. When the party arrives on a secluded island/planet only to find that everyone possesses superpowers, they will encounter a drastically different society. There are no unpowered "innocents" in such a society, and everyone is capable of defending themselves. Super-powered characters are not held to a higher standard, nor are they feared or have to face prejudice. It is the twist on the society that makes for a good backdrop for a story out of ancient myth.

BRUTAL VIOLENCE

Looking back on ancient times, most modern people would consider many of the practices of the ancient world to be both brutal and barbaric. In a time before technology and luxury were standards that everyone lived with, violence and brutality were commonplace. In fact, war and violence were considered sports to many people just as much as athletic competition. Even in modern times, sports like football and rugby rely heavily on violence for the purpose of victory. A series based on ancient myth should not be afraid to pull any punches, and while this does not mean that excessive gore should be injected into the game it does mean that the heroes and villains should be in real danger of being hurt.

A perfect example of this can be found in the gladiatorial arena. The arena represents violence, but it also represents competition, victory, glory, and entertainment. Even in modern times the concept of gladiators is somewhat enchanting, if only for the primal urge that many people have to see or experience violence. In a superhero series, villains love to pit two heroes against one another in the arena. Imagine if two members of the party who were once the closest allies must fight to the death in order to save another comrade from a villain's sadistic plot. Perhaps it's not an arena at all, and instead the heroes must duke it out in the middle of a crowded metropolitan area. Gladiatorial combat between two heroes can be a great way to inject a staple of the ancient world into any series.

FALLIBLE DEITIES

Unlike those in many modern religions, the gods in ancient myth were as fallible as the humans they ruled over. The gods, or in this case the superheroes and villains, are just as susceptible to human emotion and often not only succumb to their emotions but make mistakes because of them. They consequently fight amongst themselves, and even supposed friends of the people (i.e. heroes) sometimes accidentally cause the deaths of innocents. The heroes of ancient myth are not the squeaky-clean heroes of many modern comic books.

In series terms, storylines featuring morally ambiguous heroes can represent this quite well. Each character in the game should have their own range of emotions and question what is right and wrong. Unchanging, temptation-free characters are not only boring, but also are unlike the heroes from ancient mythology. This is not to say that every hero must be an anti-hero, but the ability to make mistakes and then learn from them is just as admirable as never making mistakes at all.

HERO'S TRIALS

Perhaps one of the most common storylines in ancient mythology is the idea of a hero's trial. These are tests put before a hero to gauge his strength, willpower, and morality. The concept of a series of trials

can be a powerful storytelling technique and also a great hook to encourage an entire party of heroes to stick together. Trials do not have to be aimed at a single character but can encompass an entire party if need be.

The most famous example of a hero's trials comes in the form of the Twelve Trials of Hercules. A famous collection of stories about the legendary Hercules, the Twelve Trials were separate adventures that were thrown at Hercules to distract him as well as to prove his worth. In a superhero series, the trials need not be some divine mission but can instead be a series of challenges hurled at a given hero to wear him down. A particularly devious supervillain tactic is to unleash all of a hero's nemeses on him in succession, one right after the other so that by the time the hero has vanquished them all once more he is exhausted and unable to put up as good of a fight as he normally would. Each villain represents another trial, and each one serves the purpose of wearing the hero down for a final encounter with the true villainous mastermind.

EXOTIC LOCALES

While an urban setting is common for most comic books, occasionally the hero must venture into the world, or even the universe, and encounter strange sights and amazing vistas. One of the primary attractions of the stories of ancient myth is that they paint portraits of locations unlike anything we have ever seen before, with vast caves and hellish oceans, sprawling temples and homes atop towering mountains. An exotic locale is more than just an interesting backdrop, but also provides a sense of wonder and otherworldliness that ancient myth captures so well.

The Maze of Minos is a perfect example of an exotic locale from Greek myth. The maze was constructed by Daedalus and was guarded by a minotaur; not only was it dangerous, but also nearly impossible to navigate. In modern times, the Maze can easily be translated to a subterranean sewer system where a notorious supervillain is hiding. A sewer system isn't exactly what one would call exotic, however, so instead of sewers perhaps the maze is a series of tunnels carved out of the inside of a mountain where a villain has imprisoned an important political figure. Not only must the heroes rescue the politician from the villain, but perhaps the maze itself is wrought with traps and dangers, or even other minor villains. Regardless of its form, the concept of a maze is quite different from the standard urban series setting and becomes an exotic location pulled from myth.

TOTAL WAR

Many of the stories that truly stand out as the prime examples of what mythology really is rely upon war to set the premise; the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, and other epic poems focus on events that take place during or because of a war, and almost everyone has heard of the Trojan Horse, one of the most famous stories from all of Greek myth. War brings out the best and worst in heroes, and can bring out the best and worst of superheroes. What would war be like with superheroes and villains fighting on either side? War with a cause, an epic cause, can be a powerful motivator for both heroes and villains.

The Trojan War is a good example of a war that breeds good myth. When enemy forces captured Helen of Troy, it sparked a crusade to rescue her that escalated into a full-scale war. In a modern comic story, perhaps a high profile and beloved superhero or heroine is captured by a villain and taken back to his sanctuary on the moon. This sparks a war after public outcry demands that the government do something to rescue the captured hero and the government responds by launching an attack on the villain's base. When both sides continue to trade blows in battles across the globe, new heroes have the perfect chance to rise and prove themselves to be worthy of the mantle of superhero.

LEGACIES

BY STEVEN E. SCHEND

Legacy—a simple word. It's "something passed down from a previous generation or ancestor." But when put into the context of a superheroic universe, it means so much more to both those who bear such inheritances and those who look up to them.

In Freedom City alone, many legacies loom large over the cityscape and its history past and present. The Daring Duo encompasses the most dominant legacy, of whom there have been four men named Bowman and three Arrows respectively. Other well-known heroes who left a legacy and have modern namesakes include Johnny Rocket, Lady Liberty, and Raven. Some of Freedom's heroes, Seven and Sonic for example, carry a legacy of sorts, even though the public at large does not know about the heroic histories that motivate them.

In the world beyond Freedom City, there are dozens more legacies that span generations or even centuries. Most of the longer-standing legacies tie to the mystical worlds and powers of magic, though a few are connected by lost Preserver technologies. The most famous world-spanning modern legacies include Beacon, Scarab, and Britannia, for starters.

Below are a wide variety of examples that underscore all the ways a hero can leave a legacy behind or continue one from heroes of the past. While legacies rarely have direct impact upon a *Mutants & Masterminds* game, they do have wide effects on heroic origins and provide many potential stories for GMs to use in play.

EFFECTS OF LEGACIES

Legacy heroes allow the public a sense of continuity and a reinforced sense of safety; "after all, we've always had Lady Liberty around when the country truly needed her." In general, continuing a legacy across generations brings with it as many pressures as benefits:

- There is a level of implicit trust between the public, other heroes, and the legacy hero, based on her name or powers or background.
- The public knows to expect a certain demeanor, code of ethics, and potential actions from the hero, simply based on the way the hero's predecessor performed.
- City governments provide more allowances for legacy heroes, especially if their well-liked mentors or predecessors vouch for them.
- The continuity provided by a constant heroic presence over the years provokes a sense of community pride and devotion far beyond the loyalty fans have for local sports teams. Whether the hero is the same, changes names or genders, or goes by different names, the public acknowledgement of the legacy provides the continuity and the feeling of safety.
- Unfortunately, with a legacy also comes a certain level of expectation from the public. The public measures every action against the hero's predecessor.
- For the hero, there is the constant psychological pressure of having to fill someone else's boots and not dishonor the memory of those who wore the cowl before them.

If a GM so wishes, legacy heroes could gain Charisma bonuses based upon their predecessor's reputation. Alternately, heroes could be saddled with penalties if their predecessor left the public with bad memories; this most often comes into play if a hero tries to redeem a heroic legacy from failures in the past. Lastly, heroes with a legacy who actively betray the public's expectations or who become villains can suffer a serious change in public opinion. These various benefits and drawbacks are generally best considered situational, not worth any power points in character creation or advancement, unless the GM considers the legacy an overall advantage or disadvantage, in which case it might qualify for a Benefit feat or a minor Drawback.

LEGACY OF BLOOD

While not always the most common legacy, the easiest of heroic origins comes from inheriting one's powers from a parent or ancestor. Consequences of the heroic life often travel through this legacy, so fighting radioactive heroes definitely can have an impact on future generations! This can cross over with many other legacies (name-sake, power, reputation) but if publicly known, this legacy draws more influence with many. After all, the world assumes that the children of heroes will be "raised right" and shall become heroes themselves.

Examples of blood legacies in the Freedom Universe include Bowman IV (grandson of Bowman I, son of Bowman III), Eldrich (power and memories of his previous incarnation, an Atlantean master mage), Nereid (granddaughter of Siren I), Seven (seventh in her family line to inherit true witchcraft), and Shrapnelle (great-granddaughter of World War II dynamo Sarge Shrapnel). Note, this kind of legacy does not apply to those powers inherent to all members of a race. Thus, while Nereid counts as a blood legacy for her water powers, her amphibious abilities are common among all Atlanteans and are not considered a legacy as such.

LEGACY OF NAMESAKE

Carrying on the name and identity of a well-known (or not so famous) hero has a power all its own. Some legacies gain power and notoriety by hiding the fact that the mantle is inherited, so the hero seems immortal and unstoppable. Others more openly acknowledge the passing of the torch from one generation to the next, but the name still holds expectations and acceptance a new hero would never ordinarily receive. Whether the name is the same or not, also using the costume of a former hero carries some weight and responsibility as well. Again, this can easily cross over with other legacies; some blood legacies also inherit the name and mantle of their predecessor.

Most examples of this legacy carry the same name, as evidenced by the multiple heroes carrying the names Arrow, Bowman, Britannia, Johnny Rocket, Raven, and Siren. One of the few to continue with a legacy costume but not the name was Arrow, just after he became Archer; he later significantly modified the original costume to suit his new identity.

LEGACY OF INSPIRATION

Some heroes are so revered most believe a direct legacy might sully their memory. To date, there have been no heroes daring or confident enough to claim the venerable mantles of Doctor Tomorrow or the Centurion (although in the former's case it may be because the time-traveling Doctor is still active, in some regards). While they did leave compatriots and some related heroes in their wakes, no one has yet voiced that the modern world needs to have a Centurion in it. That's not to say these heroes didn't leave legacies in other ways.

The Centurion's mark on Freedom City proves more social than the standard heroic legacy. His legacy has been one of his exemplary ethics and morals, and he is the paragon against which most other heroes have been compared since the 1940s. His comparatively recent death in 1993 still sees many pilgrims visit Freedom City each year to visit the Sentry Statue memorial and share stories of his deeds and accomplishments. Freedomian mothers chastise misbehaving children with scolds of "What do you think the Centurion would say if he saw you right now?" Even in death, the Freedomian Fury's presence influences many across his former home.

Doc Tomorrow's leadership through the war years still inspires the current Freedom League through his strategies and even his writings in the team's old mission logs. Castle Comics produced graphic versions of his writings on tactics and fighting techniques in 1943, and they have remained in print for sixty years. Some of the modern technology still used at Freedom Hall works off of the Doc's early designs from the 1940s, barring later streamlining from replacing tubes with transistors or microprocessors.

LEGACY OF PATRIOTISM

Some heroes, either by action or by design, become symbols for their nation or their peoples. These legacies carry a heavy weight, as these heroes must uphold the ideals and hopes of a nation or group at all times. Likewise, as a paragon of a race or group, this legacy hero must live up to the highest standards or risk impugning a nation's pride. Another constant problem is that patriotic heroes must draw distinctions between representing a people or representing a current government; once one gets mired among government influence or control, the legacy of the hero can be subsumed by politics, influence peddling, and things far less heroic.

Lady Liberty stands for the American Dream rather than any political party or group within the government. All the incarnations of le Rogue Reynard fought against becoming political puppets, choosing to represent the free French people, their culture, and their dreams. Lady Celtic and Spitfire Jones were points of patriotic pride for the British people during World War II, as were the Human Tank and Gunner for Freedom City especially. Other current pride legacies (intentional or not) include Britannia (the national heroine of the United Kingdom), Daedalus (the pride of Greeks worldwide), Johnny Rocket and San Francisco's Gatekeeper (spokesmen for the gay community), or el Matador (Spain's hero of the people).

LEGACY OF POWER

Often times, heroes come into power from one source or another, and the power changes very little with each successive user. The legacy

lies in the transfer of the power (and oftentimes the name or the associations with the names). These power legacies can span decades if not centuries, and sometimes they slip away from heroism when a less scrupulous person inherits the powers, depending upon the conditions and methods of transfer. Eldrich carries a legacy of power from long-dead Atlantean mages. Langston Albright, the former Beacon, seeks to pass on his power, as he gained it from the passing of White Rose in 1945. Megastar is an unwitting recipient of a power legacy from the stars, while Star Knight is a successor to the power as well as the name of the Silver Age star-spanning hero.

A legacy of power is also a temptation of sorts, since criminals and unworthy supplicants might try to claim that power for themselves. Some powers cannot be passed on to those unworthy of them, but others can, and it can be difficult to reclaim them if the holder makes a poor choice of successor.

LEGACY OF REPUTATION

The greatest example of a reputation legacy would be Centurion, as his reputation is nigh impossible to live up to. In general, the legacy carries through a heroic reputation and at least one other link (name, blood, etc.). Reputation legacies are those heroes who try to fulfill the high expectations that come with a past hero's reputation. They can also try to redeem a legacy rather than continue in failure or disgrace due to someone's past actions. These often link to the legacy by name, though not always directly or explicitly, and not always in the same form.

Modern examples of reputation legacies in Freedom City include the continuing adventures of the Atom Family, Archer's quest to be a hero despite his failed association with Bowman III, Sonic as the hero of Southside (following in the footsteps of Black Avenger), or the works of the Danger International Foundation, which build on Johnny Danger's reputation as a good man who did what needed doing at all times.

LEGACY OF RESPONSIBILITY

Sometimes legacies reach out and brand you with a sense of responsibility and urgency from the get-go. A hero with such a legacy must complete something that defeated a predecessor, whether as a point of honor or to fulfill some karmic need. Often, this legacy saddles heroes with nemeses they've never faced but who hate them all the same. It can also involve vengeance, if a hero dies in the line of duty and the inheritor of the legacy wants to avenge his death.

Legacies of unfinished business include Raven's quest to defeat her grandfather's criminal empire, Lantern Jack's eternal quest for peace as he walks Lantern Hill, or Siren's eternal battle against the loa Baron Samedi. The most expansive modern example of this may be Daedalus and his protégés. Daedalus' actions led to the restoration of Talos and the eventual creation of the Foundry. Thus, some (including Daedalus himself) consider him indirectly responsible for the many ills the Foundry has unleashed on the world. The same holds for the anti-heroines the Furies Three, created by Daedalus and now gone rogue. This legacy motivates him to fight to exorcise those sins that haunt him. Other heroes may be motivated by a similar failed legacy of their own.



M&M DESIGNER'S NOTES

BY STEVE KENSON

A *d20 System* superhero game? I'll admit, I was dubious when Chris Pramas first approached me about writing a superhero RPG for Green Ronin Publishing based on the *d20 System* from Wizards of the Coast. I mean, sure, *d20* worked fine for the new edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, even worked surprisingly well for *Star Wars* and a number of other games, but a superhero game? I told Chris I would give it a go and started taking the *d20* rules apart and putting them back together again in various forms, looking for the best ways to do superheroes using the same familiar system. I was pretty surprised at what I found out.

The first thing I decided right off the bat was *Mutants & Masterminds* (as we decided the game would be called) would focus on using the core elements of the *d20* system. If it came down to a choice between an existing rule and a new one that made the game feel more like a superhero comic, I'd go with the new rule. Overall, I didn't have to rely on this rule as much as I thought I would. As I worked on the game and continued to tinker with the *d20* system, I was surprised by its adaptability and the different ways it could be turned around to do what I needed it to do.

TOUGHNESS SAVES

One of the first things I had to tackle was how damage would be handled in *Mutants & Masterminds*. The conventional system of hit points could work for a superhero game (and many superhero RPGs have used it), but the number of dice players would need to roll for damage was considerable, easily 10d6, maybe 20d6 or more for common attacks! While there was a certain visceral thrill to rolling that many dice for damage, counting and adding them all up slowed combat down more than I liked. I wanted combat to be as fast-paced as it was in the comic books, with heroes and villains trading blows back and forth until that final knockout punch came, rather than slowly wearing down each others' hit points.

Looking at the existing *d20* mechanics, I saw saving throws fulfilled the sort of function I was looking for. Rather than giving characters hit points, they instead had a "Toughness saving throw," which they rolled against a Difficulty Class based on an attack's damage value, with the result of the save determining the attack's effect. Weak attacks have no effect or make future damage saves a bit harder, while more powerful attacks can stun, knock-out, or even seriously injure the target, all with one roll. Now there were no dice to add up, just a *d20* and a few modifiers. Characters with higher Toughness saves were similar to those with higher hit points, with the added effect that it was harder to "nickel and dime" them with tiny hits of damage; attacks below a certain point simply had no effect on them.

In the first edition of the game, Toughness saves were known as "Damage saving throws." I changed them in the second edition to better reflect saving throw terminology: saves were named after the *resisting* ability: your Fortitude, Reflexes, or Will. So I wanted saves against damage to be the same, thus "Toughness save."

An early playtest of the system had the DC for Toughness saves set at 10 + modifier, like

all other saves in the game, with a bruised/injured result if you made the save, and no damage if you beat the DC by 5 or more. Playtesters didn't like this, however, since it seemed like you were penalized (suffering damage) for succeeding on the save. So I changed it to DC 15 + damage modifier instead.

ONE ROLL TO RULE THEM ALL

With the need for multiple damage dice removed from the game, I discovered I could do *everything* in *Mutants & Masterminds* using the core *d20* mechanic of *d20* + modifiers versus a Difficulty Class! So I resolved to use the core mechanic as much as I possibly could, making *Mutants & Masterminds* the first *d20* game I knew of that required *only* a 20-sided die to play.

With other sorts of rolls removed, everything in the game is based on action checks. There are ability, skill, and power checks, attack rolls, and saving throws. That's it. Everything is based off of it. Better yet, everything except power checks were already familiar to players of other *d20* games, and power checks are similar enough to ability checks that they're easy to understand. Even Toughness saving throws, which are the major new mechanic in the game, are easy to pick up on and use. That meant fewer rules to explain and more room for special abilities like powers, which was good, because we were going to need it!

CLASS, BUT NO CLASSES

With the basic mechanics in place, it was time to look at characters. The general character creation system for *d20* games at the time was class-based. While it was possible to break superheroes down into archetypes suitable for classes, the divisions seemed artificial. Worse yet, there were those oddball characters that just didn't seem to fit into any particular class, which almost required classes of their own. Instead of trying to shoehorn characters into pre-fabricated classes, and requiring weird amounts of multi-classing for certain concepts, I decided to drop the idea of character classes, allowing player as much freedom as possible to design their characters. In essence, all *Mutants & Masterminds* characters belong to the same generic "class," with totally customizable abilities.

A NEW LEVEL

The *d20* concept of character levels, on the other hand, fit in with a superhero game. After all, super-powered characters come in all different levels of power and ability. It was just a matter of deciding how to apply the idea of levels to *Mutants & Masterminds*. Should characters start out at 1st level? What were the benefits of gaining levels? And so forth.

Mutants & Masterminds characters don't start out at 1st level. That's for the mere mortals of the setting, the ordinary people. The recommended starting level in the rulebook is 10th, which gives the heroes a considerable amount of power, but also some room in which to grow and develop during the series.

This article originally appeared in the Pyramid online e-zine, following the publication of the first edition of M&M. It has been updated to reflect developments since then, including the publication of the second edition of the game.

Power level (as we termed it to separate it somewhat from conventional d20 "character level") determines how many power points characters start with, 15 points per power level. So starting characters in *Mutants & Masterminds* have 150 power points. Players spend these points on their characters' ability scores, skills, feats, and powers, with spending limits set by power level. This helps to keep the characters balanced and stops players from putting all their points into a single overwhelming power. The rulebook does talk about bending (and even removing) the power level limits for some series, for Gamemasters who find them too restrictive.

Power points are also the "experience points" that heroes earn in play. A successful adventure earns the characters involved a power point (maybe 2 or 3 for a particularly long and harrowing adventure). They can spend these points just like the ones that they start with to improve various abilities. Players are thus encouraged to diversify their characters and the increase in power is kept at a slow and fairly steady rate.

In the first edition of the game, power points were tied to power level; your power level was always power point total, divided by 15, rounded down. In the second edition, power points are entirely separate from power level: you still have (PL x 15) in recommended starting points, but there's no requirement for a character of X power points to be Y power level. This solved a lot of issues with NPCs, who don't really need power point values anyway, and provided some additional flexibility for other sorts of games where low-PL characters might have more points, such as pulp adventure or agent-level games.

SUPER-POWERS MADE SIMPLE

The heart of any super-hero roleplaying game is how it handles the nearly infinite range of super-powers found in the comic books, while

keeping those powers reasonably under control in game terms. I wanted *Mutants & Masterminds* to be able to reasonably simulate any character from the comics, but I also wanted the super-powers to be as simple as possible.

So I came up with some general power-creation guidelines. Powers start out with effects, given point costs per rank based on what they do. Then come *extras*. These expand a power's effects, such as allowing it to affect an entire area, have a greater range, and so forth. Each extra adds one to the power's cost per rank. Conversely, *flaws* reduce a power's effects and subtract one from the cost per rank.

Finally there are *power feats*. These are minor additions to the power's utility or effect. An Alternate Power is an additional effect, a power with multiple attack effects, for example, or multiple modes of movement. An Alternate Power is a separate "mode" of an existing power, so it costs less. Likewise, a power feat provides a small bonus or allows a power to be used in a different way.

Using a combination of effects, extras, flaws, and power feats, it was possible to create nearly any super-power, and *Mutants & Masterminds* has over 100 pre-designed powers. The use of extras and power feats also make describing a power fairly simple. A character might have the power of Fire Control at rank 10, which is a basic attack effect (the ability to shoot flames at someone). But they may also have an Alternate Power of creating a blinding flare of light.

THE QUALITY OF HEROES

With the character creation systems in place, *Mutants & Masterminds* was starting to come together. The only thing missing was that special spark, the quality that separates the heroes from the innocent bystanders and masses of humanity they're sworn to protect. Something to let the players overcome some of the whims of the dice and perform the sorts of heroic feats seen in the comic books. That quality comes in the form of hero points. Hero points allow characters to do a number of things:

- Re-roll poor rolls with a certain minimum guaranteed result. This gives heroes a finite amount of "luck" they can use whenever they need it.
- Shake off damage and injury, getting that "second wind."
- "Push" a hero's abilities in various ways.

Hero points also have a couple other useful effects on the game. The first is that players can spend them to give their heroes a one-time use of a particular power stunt that suits their hero's idiom but which the hero doesn't normally have as part of his or her powers. That means heroes in *Mutants & Masterminds* can duplicate the comic book hero trick of pulling out an innovative new use for a power in the midst of an adventure, but there's a limit to how often they can do it (until they run out of hero points). It also works well for character concepts with a lot of flexibility, like gadgeteers, sorcerers, utility-belt wearing detectives, and anyone else who has a lot of odd-ball powers. The player gets the option of breaking out just the right power, spell, gadget, etc. for the situation, but at a cost.

There's also the option of using hero points to give players more control over the flow of the adventure and the setting, letting them "edit" things slightly or using them as "get a clue" points for those times when they're stuck and the action is bogging down. They're very much the Gamemaster's friends when it comes to deciding whether or not to let the players pull off some stunt. For example, while fighting a collection of carnivorous plants, a player asks if there's any herbicide around. You say, "sure, spend a hero point" and the hero finds just what he needs to overcome the plants!



Initially, hero points were based on power level, but in the first *M&M Annual* a variant appeared based on plot, where the GM awards points as the heroes face various setbacks and complications. This approach better simulated the flow of a comic book story, so it was incorporated into the second edition of the game.

ARCHETYPES

After all the work that went into giving *Mutants & Masterminds* a flexible and open-ended character creation system, pre-generated character archetypes might seem like a step backward, but I wanted to include them for a number of reasons.

First, creating a *Mutants & Masterminds* character still takes a bit of time. Greater freedom of choice also meant a little more effort in character creation. Character classes lock you in to certain choices, but they also do some of the work of making and balancing those choices for you. The archetypes take advantage of the classic comic book character types, presenting them as pre-created starting characters. So while you *can* create any character in the game, you can also get started instantly by just picking an archetype, giving your hero a name and costume, and you're ready to go.

The archetypes also offer examples of how to create different sorts of characters for players looking for a particular type. They're also handy for demos and pickup games. When I run *Mutants & Masterminds* demo games, I give the players their pick of the archetypes. All they have to do is come up with a name and a description, which lets us get right to the game without limiting the players to pre-conceived character backgrounds, personalities, and so forth. Seeing the variations players would spin on the different archetypes is great: a martial artist might be an old Chinese master, a Native American brave, a modern ninja, or a genetic supersoldier (all characters from demo adventures).

Finally, the archetypes give *Mutants & Masterminds* Gamemasters a quick and easy source of NPCs. Need a villain team to take on the heroes for that night's adventure? Take a group of archetypes, tweak their stats as needed, give them names and unique descriptions, and you're ready to go. Having the archetypes on hand has been very helpful to me when I've needed a new villain or NPC hero at the last minute.

PUTTING IT TO THE TEST

Once the initial draft of the rules was complete, it was on to the crack Green Ronin playtesters to fold, spindle, and mutilate the *Mutants & Masterminds* system to their hearts' content. The months of playtesting resulted in a number of changes to the game:

- The addition of an optional hit points system for those players who favored the use of hit points (and big damage rolls) and wanted a system more directly compatible with various d20 games. This was included in a sidebar in the first edition. After the Toughness save system proved its worth (and popularity) in that edition, the option for using hit points was shifted over to the *Mastermind's Manual* with the other optional rules.
- The addition of the power level limits on power ranks to provide more balance in character creation, and the addition of a rule limiting the stacking of power bonuses, giving the GM the option of ignoring or bending either rule to suit the series. This approach was further refined in the second edition with trade-offs to allow for both balance and variety among characters.
- More examples, and clarifications of various parts of the rules.
- The addition of some powers that were overlooked and numerous adjustments and fixes to various existing powers.

- Adjustments to the Toughness save system to make it a bit more intuitive and easier to use, like the aforementioned change in the base Difficulty Class from 10 to 15.

I was pleased (and relieved) the game met with generally excellent reviews from the playtesters, who had a great time with it and offered valuable feedback. Ideas were exchanged back and forth; adjustments made, optional rules offered, and character and series ideas shared. Then came time to prepare the final draft for submission to Green Ronin.

THERE SHALL COME... AN EDIT!

Green Ronin hired the Super Unicorn design studio to handle the production of *Mutants & Masterminds*, folks with considerable experience with both comic book-style art and d20 games. Erik Mona, then editor of *Polyhedron*, took on the task of editing the final *Mutants & Masterminds* manuscript. Since *Polyhedron* featured a new d20 minigame in every issue at the time, Erik had probably been responsible for the development and editing of more d20 games than just about anyone.

He dove into the manuscript and, by the summer convention season, had piles of copious notes. He and I met at both Origins and GenCon to go over the book chapter by chapter, with Erik asking insightful questions and pointing out places where things needed to be clarified or revised.

He compiled a list of all of the oddball and unusual super-powers he could find from his own comic collection. During one GenCon meeting we worked our way down the list, making sure all of them could be done using the *Mutants & Masterminds* rules. We needed a few new powers, and some expansions of a few existing ones to show their strengths and potential. The system held up to powers like mind-controlling pheromones, spinning like a top, and the dreaded "Legion Challenge," where Erik wanted to be sure the powers of DC Comics' entire Silver Age *Legion of Super-Heroes* were in the game. (Matter-Eater Lad was easy, just a variant of the Corrosion power, but we needed to revise Leaping somewhat to account for Bouncing Boy.)

Then it was another round of revisions for the final editorial draft. Then changes to correct minor errors and inconsistencies. Then more edits and more tweaks. Then more polish and fine-tuning. As Sean Glenn produced the game's stunning layout and design, Erik continued the editing process. The strength of the game's final presentation owes a great deal to his tireless efforts.

THE NEW CHALLENGE

Then, it was over. The months of testing, development, editing, concept sketches, initial layouts, meetings, online conferences, and phone conversations. *Mutants & Masterminds* was off to the printer and there was nothing left to do but wait, perhaps the hardest part of the process for me.

Fortunately, *M&M* found an interested and dedicated audience of players who embraced the game along with the various support product that followed. So much so, in fact, that *Mutants & Masterminds* quickly became Green Ronin's flagship product. What began as a dubious experiment I wasn't sure would work now demanded a robust and complete RPG line. So the new challenge was when Green Ronin offered me the job of line developer to retool *M&M* for a new edition and a complete game line.

With the strength of lessons learned, we were able to make *M&M* more complete, balanced, and playable than ever before, and set up an aggressive series of support products. Since taking on the job of developer, I've overseen eighteen products for the line, including this one, and I can tell you, so far as *M&M* is concerned, we're only getting started!

THE ANNOTATED FREEDOM CITY

BY STEVE KENSON

The *Freedom City* series setting is an amalgamation of everything I have enjoyed in superhero comics over the years. So it includes more than a few homages to classic comic stories, characters, and the creators who brought those comics to life. Fans of the book have enjoyed hunting for the various "Easter eggs" scattered throughout.

For folks who might enjoy the Easter eggs, but aren't quite so fond of hunting for them, I've prepared this collection of notes. It's a peek behind the scenes of the creation of *Freedom City*, offering some insight into the homages hidden in its pages and some of the ideas I had while writing the book, as well as the development of the project.

If you're the sort of person who doesn't care to have the mystique of a setting spoiled by knowing its origins, or you don't like in-jokes or homages in your settings, read no further! You can enjoy *Freedom City* just fine without knowing any of the stuff described here. On the other hand, if you want some insight into the four-color saturated thoughts that led to the first series setting for *Mutants & Masterminds*, then read on, true believer! How many of these did you have figured out right from the start?

THE ANNOTATIONS

AEGIS: In Greek mythology the Aegis is a shield bearing the image of the Gorgon's head. A type of "shield" seemed appropriate for the name of a super-agency in Freedom City, as an homage to Marvel's *SHIELD*. I'd previously used AEGIS as an agency in my own games.

ALEX: The Atom Family's robot butler was inspired by both HERBIE from *Fantastic Four* and Pneuman from *Tom Strong* (America's Best Comics), with some C-3PO for good measure.

Angel Androids. Doc Otaku's favorite creations are a blond, a red-head, and a brunet whose names all begin with the same letter, just like *The Powerpuff Girls*. They're also inspired by *Charlie's Angels* and various *anime* featuring cute, but unstoppable, girl androids.

Argo: The *Argo* was a ship that carried the heroes of Greek myth, so it seemed a fitting name for a construct that carried the powers of modern heroes. The similarities in appearance between Argo's features and those of Amazo in the episode "Tabula Rasa" of the *Justice League* animated series (tall, bald, gray skin) are kind of interesting, given that Amazo partially inspired Argo, but his animated appearance came *after* Freedom City was published. Argo's other main inspiration is Marvel's Super-Adaptoid.

ASTRO Labs: An homage to both Kurt Busiek's *Astro City* and STAR Labs from DC Comics. "Astro Lab" is also a bit of a pun on "astro-labe," a navigational instrument.

Atom Family: Their name is something of a pun both on the atomic nature of many Silver Age characters and *The Addams Family*. Dr. Atom was loosely inspired by a character named "Dr. Warlock" that a friend played in a *Torg* series. (Dr. Warlock was, of course, a pulp hero from that game's "Nile Empire" realm.) Jack Wolf was inspired by another character from the same series. The family was originally named "the Warlocks" and they were more weird/mystical, but become more super-science over time. The Atoms are two incarnations of what's come to be known as a "Kirby Quartet" in

the comics, best exemplified by the *Fantastic Four*: a smart guy, a tough guy, a young hothead, and a girl. The original Atom Family was Dr. Atom, Jack Wolf, Mentac, and Andrea Atom. The current generation breaks the mold a bit by having two girls; Tess Atom fills the "smart one" role.

Bands and Musicians: The Boy Wonderz are a play on Robin's "Boy Wonder" nickname. The Kings in Yellow are named for an element from the Cthulhu Mythos (a potential adventure hook if the band is also tied in with, say, the Brotherhood of the Yellow Sign). Promoter Frank Mills is named for comic creator Frank Miller.

Battle Brutes: The violent magical constructs were an homage to the Mindless Ones of *Dr. Strange*, as well as various animated suits of armor in fantasy settings. Their alternative name, "The War-born," was inspired by the warforged of the *Eberron* setting for *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Beaudrie Opera House: Named after Valerie Beaudrie, alias Wonder Woman's enemy the Silver Swan. Note that Battlecry (Clarence Beaudrie) in *Hero High* has sonic powers, appropriately enough.

Black Avenger: A character inspired by the slate of '70s African-American characters whose names all *had* to start with "Black" (Black Goliath, Black Panther, Black Lightning, etc.). The name Wilson Jeffers was inspired by Jefferson Pierce (DC's Black Lightning).

Bowman & Arrow: Were intended as the classic adult hero and kid sidekick combo for the World of Freedom. They become a legacy, too, with Arrow "graduating" to become the new Bowman, choosing and training a new Arrow, much in the style of the *Generations* story from DC's *Elseworlds* imprint. They partake of some inspiration from both Batman & Robin (especially in the origin of Ethan Keller as Arrow) and, naturally, Green Arrow & Speedy, although it's Fletcher Beaumont, Jr. who develops an addiction as *Bowman*, rather than as a kid sidekick.

Brotherhood of the Yellow Sign: Based on elements from the Cthulhu Mythos, and from the similar cult in Green Ronin's *Freeport* setting. As it happens, Freeport was also the inspiration for Freedom City's name. The setting was originally called "New Century City," but the name was scrapped and, looking for something to loosely tie together Green Ronin's settings, I hit on the "free" element of Freeport and thus "Freedom City" came about.

Captain Kraken: A Cthulhu homage, primarily, along with some more pirate goodness inspired by *Freeport*. Strangely enough, Cap'n Kraken came along well before the second *Pirates of the Caribbean* film presented a very visually similar character.

Captain Thunder: Ray Gardener is named for Silver Age comics writer Gardener Fox. Daniel Cloud, "Captain Thunder's Pal," is an homage to both Jimmy Olsen and Tom "Pieface" Kalmaku (Green Lantern's young sidekick), with some of Wyatt Wingfoot from the *Fantastic Four* thrown in. Cap'n Thunder's southwestern origins and test-pilot background are also homages to the Silver Age Green Lantern.

Centurion: Inspired by the first real superhero, Superman himself. Centurion's career, rogues gallery, and background loosely follow the Man of Steel, although with some variations. His first appearance is the same as *Action Comics* #1, while his death occurred at the same time as the much-publicized "Death of Superman" storyline, although Centurion has *stayed* dead. This was always intended to be the case, as Centurion is more interesting, from an RPG perspective, as an inspiration to new heroes, rather than having a powerful, experienced, and respected NPC hero around to solve all their problems. "Mark Leeds," Centurion's civilian identity, is a play off of "Clark Kent," Mark and Clark rhyme, while Leeds and Kent are both places in England.

Champions Restaurant: Named for the *Champions* roleplaying game, of course. The joke about its extensive menu is a reference to the equally impressive array of choices in the *Hero System*.

Claremont Academy: Named for Chris Claremont, longest running writer on *X-Men* (the original "School for Gifted Youngsters"). The two unnamed characters in the middle of the illustration on page 130 look like teenaged versions of young mutants Artie and Leech from the *X-Men* comics. Ironically, that illustration was done before we decided to make Claremont exclusively a school for young supers and so was somewhat inaccurate at the time.

CODE: The Citizens for Order, Decency, and Ethics is based off the Comics Code Authority, a self-imposed regulatory body the comics industry used to avoid unwanted scrutiny from the U.S. Congress.

Cosmo the Moon Monkey: An homage to the many super-pets of the comics, particularly Lockjaw (the Inhumans' teleporting dog) and the space monkeys Gleek (from *Super-Friends*) and Blip (from *Space Ghost*). Cosmo has proven to be one of the most popular characters in *Freedom City*!

Daedalus: Daedalus always struck me as one of the underused figures of Greek myth, and he almost never shows up in comic interpretations (although technically every Greek hero other than Hercules tends to be B- or C-list in the comics). Daedalus naturally suggests the Minotaur as his arch-foe, creating the Daedalus/Taurus conflict. Obviously one of Daedalus' inspirations is Marvel's *Iron Man*, the original power-armor hero, but his mythological background gives him an interesting twist.

Danger International: Johnny Danger is based on a character from an unrelated pulp heroes series while the name of the company is also an homage to Hero Games' modern spy/thriller RPG.

Ditko Street: Named for Steve Ditko, early Marvel artist on *Spider-Man* and *Dr. Strange*.

Doc Otaku: A poster on the *Mutants & Masterminds* forum of the Green Ronin message boards used the handle "Doc Otaku" before *Freedom City* was published. The character was invented independently, but I almost changed his name because of the coincidence. I'm glad I didn't; he's a fun character and his name is part of his charm. The real Doc Otaku online has since adopted the *Freedom City* character as his online avatar.

Dr. Metropolis: Perhaps the most unique of the Freedom League characters. Dr. Metropolis evolved from an idea Jason Schneiderman and I discussed for the original incarnation of Freedom City about a "city elemental," a being embodying the essence of the city itself. In *Freedom City*, he filled the role of explaining how it was the city recovered so quickly from the Terminus Invasion and how it was a place like Freedom City always got fixed-up so fast after all those super-battles. In the Freedom League he also filled the "inhuman observer" role, being a character like the Vision from *Avengers*. He later took some inspiration from Jack Hawksmoor from *The*

Authority, another "city elemental." In addition to a general term for cities, his name is an homage to that kind of fictional comic book cities, Superman's Metropolis.

Dr. Simian: A fun tribute to all those various ape villains of the comics, including Gorilla Grodd, the Ultra-Humanite (in at least one incarnation), and even Mojo Jojo from *Powerpuff Girls*.

Dr. Sin: An homage to every sinister oriental mastermind from the pulps and comics, notably Fu Manchu, DC's Tzin-Tzin, and Marvel's Yellow Claw and the Mandarin. This makes it likely Dr. Sin has crossed swords with Daedalus as well as the Raven.

Dr. Tomorrow: Loosely based on a player character from a Golden Age superhero game. His "guardian of time" role was inspired by some of DC's *Rip Hunter*, *Time Master*.

Dust Devil: An homage to the "elemental guardian" version of *Swamp Thing* from DC, as well as Marvel's *Man-Thing* and the Nexus of Realities located in a Florida swamp. Magic Mesa fills a similar role in the World of Freedom, with a different locale.

Eldrich: The Master Mage is primarily a *Dr. Strange* riff, although he partakes of some of Dr. Fate in his origins, and some pulp mystic characters in his lengthy history and background. His Egyptian manservant Sallah is named for John Rhys-Davies' character from *Indiana Jones* (and, yes, he does wear a fez).

Envoy: Sarlyn is based on a player character from an old, long-running superhero series of mine. He operated under a different name, but the Utopia Isle background and abilities are pretty much the same.

Factor Four: A villainous version of Marvel's *Fantastic Four*, complete with elemental themes. Granite is loosely named for my home state of New Hampshire (the "Granite State").

Farside City: A Kirby-style "hidden civilization," primarily inspired by Marvel's Inhumans and their relocation to the Blue Area of the Moon.

FORCE Ops: The team's name was loosely inspired by Marvel's *Force Works* (a renamed West Coast Avengers) and *X-Force* (a renamed New Mutants), the Iron Age's tendency towards acronyms (e.g. WildCATS), and the popularization of paramilitary terms like "ops" (for "operative").

Freedom Eagle: Although the anti-gravity harness and wings are pure Golden Age Hawkman in style, his origin is actually inspired by *The Rocketeer*.

Freedom League: The League was originally called "The New Centurions" (in honor of the fallen hero Centurion) but I decided "Freedom League" was a more classic-sounding team name, and gave them continuity with a previous Freedom League team (which Centurion belonged to).

Gamma the Atom Smasher: Named for both the gamma radiation that spawned so many Marvel heroes and villains and the modern-day inheritor of the mantle of the Golden Age Atom in *JSA*. Naturally, he's green like the other major gamma-spawned character, the Hulk. His real name, Adam Ward, is after Adam West and Burt Ward, who played Batman and Robin in the 1960s TV series. Why I didn't name him David Bannerman or the like, I'll never know.

Gigantosaur: Gigantosaur is a big, purple dinosaur, similar to the saccharine, singing host of a particular children's program. It's another reason why heroes enjoy beating him up so much! His primary inspiration is naturally Godzilla and all the other inhabitants of Japanese monster movies, along with Marvel's early comic monsters like Fin-Fang-Foom.



Grue Empire: The Grue are originally named after comic author Mark Gruenwald (note their homeworld is named Gruen Prime, or "Gruen-World"). They're inspired by both Marvel's shape-shifting Skrulls and the telepathic, transforming White Martians of the DC Universe, along with various other shape-shifting, bodysnatching aliens. The Grue Metamind is ironically based on the Kree Supreme Intelligence (archfoe of the Skrulls in Marvel Comics) and the Imperium from the *Justice League* animated series.

Henri "Lupus" LeBlanc: "Lupus" LeBlanc is, of course, a "White Wolf," suitable for a horror-oriented foe.

Hunter Museum of Natural History: Named for *Rip Hunter: Time Master*. Who better to be the patron of a museum of history?

Jerry Jonas: An homage to comic book newspaper editors Perry White and J. Jonah Jameson.

Johnny Rocket: Johnny Wade is named for fellow "hot-head" Johnny Storm (the Human Torch) and Mark Waid, long-time *Flash* author. His coming-out is an homage to another other gay speedster, Marvel Comics' Northstar.

Julie Streeter: A street is another name for a "lane" and Ms. Streeter is a star reporter...

Kirby Museum of Fine Arts: Named for Jack "the King" Kirby, the most influential comic book artist ever.

Labyrinth: Drs. Peter Hank and Victor Reeds are named for Hank Pym (Yellowjacket) and Dr. Doom and Mr. Fantastic of Marvel Comics.

Lady Liberty: Beth Walton is named for Elizabeth (Betsy) Ross and that most American of families, the Waltons. Her husband is named for Steve Trevor, Wonder Woman's long-time romantic interest, and is, of course, literally "Mr. Right" (Wright).

Lady Tarot: Her first name, Alicia, is the same as Alicia Masters from *Fantastic Four*, who is also the daughter of a criminal (the Puppet Master).

Law Firms: Cabot, Cunningham & Crowley is named after Laurie Cabot, Scott Cunningham, and Aleister Crowley, all well-known occultist authors. The Grayson in Hartford, Grayson & Cole is an homage to the Earth-2 Dick Grayson, who was a partner in a law firm. The Nelson in Nelson & Bannerly is after "Foggy" Nelson from *Daredevil*.

Lighthouse: The Freedom League's orbiting headquarters is inspired primarily by the Justice League's orbiting satellite, including the "Watchtower" version from the animated series.

Master Lee: Named for two masters: Bruce Lee and Stan Lee.

Mastermind: A somewhat underplayed *Freedom City* villain, Mastermind partakes of elements of Magneto, Vandal Savage (the immortal villain aspects), plus some of Dr. Doom and "The Master of the World," from early issues of *Alpha Flight*.

McNider Memorial Hospital: Named for Dr. Charles McNider, the Golden Age Dr. Mid-Nite.

Megalodon: An homage to the various "animal man" were-villains of the comics, Megalodon is named for two of them: Curt Connors (the Lizard) and Kirk Langstrom (the Man-Bat).

Megastar: Christopher Beck is named for C.C. Beck, early *Captain Marvel* artist. He's inspired by both versions of Captain Marvel: the DC one (where a boy transforms into a super-strong hero) and the Marvel one (an alien hero from an interstellar empire visiting Earth).

Meta-Grue: An homage to Marvel's Super-Skrull, right down to his duplication of the powers of the Atom Family (Freedom City's resident Kirby Quartet).

Next-Gen: Primarily a play on the sound of "X-Men" and some inspiration from John Byrne's *Next-Men* series, along with *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Nightclubs: Many named for comic book mini-series:

Eclipse = Originally called "Final Night," after the DC limited series, then changed to an homage to the supervillain Eclipso.

Fourth World = Jack Kirby's "New Gods" stories.

Infinity, Legends, Millennium = Comic mini-series of the same name.

The Secret Bar = Named for the Secret Wars and inspired by the Safehouse, a spy-themed bar in Milwaukee (and in past years a regular spot for gamers visiting for GenCon).

Pinnacle Path: Named for Pinnacle Entertainment Group, publishers of *Deadlands* and *Brave New World*, among others.

Patriot: Jack Simmons is named for Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, the creators of Captain America, a major inspiration for the Patriot (and all other star-spangled heroes).

Preservers: The Preservers owe some of their origin to both the Ancients from *Traveller* (who similarly "seeded" humans on various worlds) and the Seeders from *GURPS International Super Teams* (responsible for the potential for super-powers in humanity), but are mainly inspired by Marvel's Celestials (originated by Jack Kirby in *Eternals*, but now a significant part of the history of the Marvel Universe).

Providence Asylum: Its founder is Howard Phillips, after H.P. (Howard Phillip) Lovecraft, pulp horror author in the 1920s famed for his "Cthulhu" stories, who lived in Providence, RI. Randolph Carter was a character from Lovecraft's fiction (who also mysteriously disappeared).

Pseudo: The telepathic alien shape-shifter is primarily an homage to J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter, although some of the visual inspiration came from DC Comics' *Jemm*, *Son of Saturn*.

Quirk: The "Q" name comes from both Aquaman's impish foe Quisp and Q from the *Star Trek: the Next Generation* series (and its spin-offs).

Radio Stations: A bunch of comic book homages here:

WBTO = Batman and the Outsiders

WJLA = Justice League of America (classical indeed)

WLSH = Legion of Super-Heroes

WNTT = New Teen Titans

WJSA = Justice Society of America (the "oldies" station)

WBNB = Brave and the Bold

WNCC = New Century City (the original name of Freedom City)

Raven: Callie Summers is named after Callieach, a Celtic raven goddess. She's at least partially inspired by the Earth-2 Huntress in DC Comics, who was the daughter of Batman and Catwoman, as well as by Batman's relationship with Talia, daughter of his foe Ra's Al-Ghul. Much of Raven's Silver Age rogues gallery is filled out with characters inspired by the works of Edgar Allen Poe (author of the famous poem, "The Raven"). Duncan Summers keeps a pet raven named Edgar, after Poe.

Scarab: The name Alexander Rhodes comes from the city of Alexandria (itself named after Alexander the Great) and the Colossus of Rhodes in the ancient world. The Scarab has elements of heroes like Hawkman and Dr. Fate (both reincarnated Egyptians) in his background.

Security Companies: Stronghold Security is named after the super-prison from the *Champions* RPG while Titan Security Services is named after the Teen Titans (and shares the same circled-T logo as the 1980s incarnation of the group).

Seven: Vervain is an herb associated with witches and witchcraft. It's the same root name as "Verberna" (used in White Wolf's *Mage* RPG).

Siren: A portion of Siren's inspiration comes from a desire to do a "non-lame" aquatic character in *Freedom City*, and also to treat the Voodoo mythos much like DC did Greek mythology (with Wonder Woman) or Marvel did Norse myth (with Thor). Siren has some elements of characters like Aquaman and the Sub-Mariner, but partakes just as much of Marvel's Thor and Storm, with a bit of Wonder Woman for her magic net.

Sonic: Lemar Phillips is named for Phil LeMarr, voice actor on cartoons like *Justice League* and *Static Shock!* Sonic owes much of his inspiration to Static (from DC Comics' *Milestone* imprint).

Stadiums: Schuster Arena is named for Joe Schuster, one of the creators of Superman. Stone Stadium is named for Victor Stone, Cyborg of the Teen Titans (who was a college athlete).

Stan's Super Heroes: Named for Stan Lee, of course.

Star Knights: A'Lan Koor, Earth's former Star Knight, is named after Alan Scott, the original Green Lantern. The Star Knights themselves are inspired by the Green Lantern Corps (and their predecessors, the Manhunters) but also by Marvel's Spaceknights (of *Rom: Spaceknight*, fame). Note that the Star Stone is an icosahedron (the shape of a 20-sided die). One can't help but wonder if the Preservers' other power-crystals are 12-, 10-, 8-, 6-, and 4-sided....

Star-Khan: At least partly inspired by Ricardo Montalban's Khan from *Star Trek*. He should probably be played with a similar Latin accent and deep voice.

Superior: "Kal-Zed" is, of course, an homage to Superman's Kryptonian name, particularly the original tendency to use letters of the alphabet as Kryptonian surnames. "Zed" is a common way of saying the last letter of the Roman alphabet.

Tess Atom: Although it isn't stated in the book, Tess is short for "Tesla" (after both inventor Nikolai Tesla and Tesla Strong from *Tom Strong*). It's also similar to Tessa, or Sage from *X-treme X-Men*.

Wayne Clark: Publisher Wayne Clark is, of course, named after Bruce (Batman) Wayne and Clark (Superman) Kent.

Toy Boy: "Lettam" is the name of a particular major toy manufacturer spelled backwards.

Ultima: The Ultima are primarily inspired by Marvel's *Eternals*, although Ultima Thule is taken from real-world mythology and fit in nicely with the Thule Society and established Golden Age history of the setting.

UNISON: Primarily named because there are only so many UNI- acronyms out there (although Scott Bennie did his level best to use them all in *Agents of Freedom*). Jennifer Ellis, the hard-bitten British commander, is named for comics writer Warren Ellis and his character Jenny Sparks, leader of the Authority (herself a tough British Colonel).

Utopia Isle: A riff off of various advanced hidden civilizations in the comics. Although it partakes a fair amount of Paradise Island from *Wonder Woman*, Utopia is a technologically advanced civilization rather than a mythic paradise from ancient Greece.

X-Isle: Inspired by comic book beings like Ego, the Living Planet and Hexus, the Living Corporation (from *Marvel Boy*), both from Marvel Comics.

M&M LITE

BY STEVE KENSON

The *Mutants & Masterminds* game system is fast-paced in terms of game play, but the process of character creation can take a bit of time, especially if dealing with characters built on a large number of power points or possessing involved or complex traits. Players need to allocate power points and balance the totals to ensure the character comes in "under budget," which requires some amount of work. While there are some options for speeding things up—such as character creation software or the unlimited points approach from *The Mastermind's Manual*—these do not suit all groups, especially if they want to keep characters on a somewhat even footing.

M&M Lite is a variant intended for fast character creation so you can jump immediately into play. It falls somewhere in between the standard *M&M* options for custom designing a character from scratch and choosing a pre-designed archetype to play: some of the design choices are simplified for you, and *M&M Lite* removes the need for power points and accounting to balance characters, relying instead on basic power level and some built-in assumptions.

This approach is not for everyone, and you should consider and test it out before adopting it for your *M&M* game. In particular, it does not provide for the same level of cost accounting and balance as the point system, so it relies on a greater level of trust and GM-player cooperation. Still, it suits groups interested in fast and easy character creation and is well-suited for pick-up games and demonstrations of the *M&M* game system, where you don't want to spend a lot of time on character generation. It's also good for coming up with quick non-player characters for an *M&M* game, where exact point accounting isn't nearly so important.

CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation in *M&M Lite* has five simple steps, outlined here and then described in detail in the following section:

- 1. Power Level:** Choose power level and set attack, damage, defense, and toughness accordingly, using trade-offs if desired.
- 2. Abilities:** Assign modifiers to ability scores, with a total of 5 plus power level.
- 3. Skills & Feats:** Choose a number of trained skills and feats equal to one-half the power level (rounded up).
- 4. Powers:** Choose an attack power, a defense power, and a miscellaneous power, plus one additional miscellaneous power per 5 power levels (rounded down).
- 5. Saving Throws:** Determine Fortitude, Reflex, and Will save bonuses by adding one-half the power level (rounded up) to the appropriate ability modifier. Trade-off save bonuses as desired, with a maximum of bonus of 1.5 x power level.

1. POWER LEVEL

Start by defining the character's power level: for player character heroes, this is the overall power level chosen by the Gamemaster for the game. For non-player characters, including villains, this is the power level the GM has chosen to assign to that character. So, for

example, the GM might choose to run a Power Level 10 game (the default starting level for *M&M*), in which case the player characters are all PL10 and villains and NPCs are assigned PLs by the GM.

Power level sets your character's attack bonus, defense bonus, damage, and Toughness bonus, all equal to the power level. You can use trade-offs (*M&M*, page 24) to shift these bonuses, with a recommended limit of ± 5 , so no bonus can be more than 5 over or under the power level. Note, unlike standard *M&M*, power level doesn't just set the *limit* of these bonuses, it actually provides them. So a starting PL10 character has a +10 attack, defense, damage, and Toughness bonus by default, without any need to "purchase" them.

2. ABILITIES

Next assign your character's ability modifiers. *M&M Lite* ignores ability scores, using only the modifiers; in cases where scores are called for, figure them out normally (twice the modifier, plus 10), otherwise, simply use the modifiers. You can convert any standard modifications to ability *scores* into ability modifiers by simply dividing them by 2; so something that applies a -4 to Strength score, reduces Strength modifier by 2 (one half of 4).

Characters start out with modifiers of +0 in all six ability scores (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma). They may have a total of up to (power level + 5) in modifiers. So a PL10 hero can have ability modifiers that add up to 15 total. Negative modifiers *subtract* from the total, allowing additional points to apply elsewhere.

The maximum bonus you can have in an ability score is equal to the power level, except for Strength and Constitution. Strength is limited to a bonus equal to your damage bonus, if you traded attack bonus for damage, or vice-versa. Constitution is limited to a bonus equal to your Toughness bonus, if you traded defense bonus for Toughness, or vice-versa.

3. SKILLS & FEATS

Rather than ranks, skills in *M&M Lite* have only two ratings: untrained and trained. Untrained characters have a skill modifier equal to the key ability plus half their power level (rounded down). Trained characters have a +5 bonus to that value.

Choose a number of trained skills equal to half your power level and feats equal to half your power level (rounded up). So a PL10 character can have five trained skills and five feats. At the GM's option, you can trade a trained skill choice for a feat choice or vice versa.

4. POWERS

Choose an attack power and a defense power, plus miscellaneous powers: two for PL1-5, three for PL6-10, four for PL11-15, and five for PL16-20, so a PL10 hero gets five powers: attack, defense, and three miscellaneous. You can use miscellaneous powers to acquire more skills or feats instead, if you wish. See the following **Powers** section for more details.

The ranks of the hero's attack and defense powers are set by the PL limits, including trade-offs and other modifiers, such as abilities. So, for example, if you choose Protection as the hero's defense power, its

rank is based on the hero's Toughness PL limit, including the hero's pre-existing Constitution modifier. Similarly, attack powers are ranked based on the hero's attack PL limit. Miscellaneous powers have a rank limit of the PL by default, but the GM may modify this as needed.

5. SAVING THROWS

Add half your power level (rounded up) to the appropriate key ability to determine your character's saving throws: Fortitude (Con), Reflex (Dex), and Will (Wis). Trade-off save bonuses as desired, with a maximum of bonus of 1.5 x power level. So a PL10 hero can have a maximum save bonus of +15 (10 x 1.5).

MODIFIED TRAITS

A few traits are slightly modified in *M&M Lite* to make things simpler and easier. These modifications are described in the following sections and recommended for use with this system of character creation, although the GM is free to further modify or adjust them as desired to suit the series and the feel of the game.

SKILLS

M&M Lite skills are as described in **Chapter 3** of *M&M*, except the Climb and Swim skills are combined into a single Athletics skill (also based on Str). Gamemasters wanting further simplification of skills can use the Broad Skills option from *Mastermind's Manual*, but may wish to reduce the number of trained skills characters receive according to reductions in the skill list.

FEATS

In addition to the feats from **Chapter 4** of *Mutants & Masterminds*, *M&M Lite* uses the following additional feat:

SKILL FOCUS (SKILL)

Choose a skill; you gain a +5 bonus when making checks involving that skill. You can take Skill Focus multiple times; each time, it applies to a different skill.

POWERS

In addition to the powers from **Chapter 5** of *Mutants & Masterminds*, *M&M Lite* uses the following additional powers:

ENHANCED ABILITIES

You have a number of additional points to add to your ability modifiers equal to your power level, although you are still limited to the same maximum ability modifiers (your power level, or modified attack and Toughness for Str and Con).

ENHANCED FEATS (GENERAL)

You have additional feats equal to half your power level (rounded up).

ENHANCED SKILLS (GENERAL)

You have additional trained skills equal to half your power level (rounded up).

EXAMPLES

The following are two examples of hero creation using *M&M Lite*.

SENTINEL

Mark wants to create a hero who's a dark avenger type, someone with no super-powers, but great training and skill, along with various crime-fighting gadgets. The hero is intended for a Power Level 10 game.

Following the guidelines, Mark gives his hero Attack +10, Damage +10, Defense +10, and Toughness +10 automatically. Looking over those values, he decides he wants his hero to be stronger on Attack and Defense than on Damage and Toughness, so he lowers the latter two by 3 and raises the first two by the same amount, for Attack +13, Damage +7, Defense +13, and Toughness +7.

Mark then looks at ability scores. He wants his hero to be capable both physically and mentally. So he assigns +4 to Dexterity, Wisdom, and Charisma, to make his hero quick, agile, perceptive, and imposing, with a forceful will. He puts +3 in Strength, Constitution, and Intelligence, making his hero well above average in those abilities, but not quite as much as the others. That's a total of 21 in ability modifiers, or 6 more than Mark has for a PL10 hero.

However, he notes the Enhanced Abilities power, and decides to take that as one of his hero's powers, giving him another 10 points. So he bumps Dexterity, Wisdom, and Charisma up to +5 and Intelligence up to +4 to get a total of 25 points in modifiers, noting he's used up one of his hero's miscellaneous powers.

Next, he looks at skills. He wants his adventurer to be quite skilled and makes a wish list of all the skills he wants: Acrobatics, Athletics, Bluff, Disable Device, Intimidate, Investigate, Notice, Sense Motive, and Stealth. That's nine skills, and a PL10 hero only gets five trained skills, so Mark clearly needs to apply another of his powers to Enhanced Skills. That gets him a total of ten trained skills, so he adds Gather Information to the list. His hero has a bonus of (10 + key ability) in those skills.

On to feats: Mark wants a fair number of feats as well, so he takes the Enhanced Feats power as his hero's third miscellaneous power, giving him a choice of 10 feats total. Mark chooses Equipment 4, Evasion, Jack-of-all-Trades, Power Attack, Skill Mastery, Takedown Attack, and Uncanny Dodge.

The only powers left to choose are the hero's attack and defense powers. Mark decides to go with Strike (for enhanced unarmed combat) and the Defensive Roll feat for avoiding damage. Since his hero already has Str and Con +3, and a Damage and Toughness limit of +7, both traits have rank 4, bringing him up to the limit.

Lastly, Mark figures out his hero's saving throws: one-half power level (or 5) plus the appropriate key abilities: Fortitude (5 + 3) or +8; Reflex (5 + 5) or +10; and Will (5 + 5) or +10. Those values look good to Mark, so he leaves them as-is, although he has

the option of swapping some points around. His final character looks like this:



SENTINEL			POWER LEVEL 10		
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+5	+3	+4	+5	+5
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+7*	+8	+10	+10		
*+3 without flat-footed					
Skills (untrained bonus 5 + ability): Acrobatics +15, Athletics +13, Bluff +15, Disable Device +14, Intimidate +15, Investigate +14, Gather Information +15, Notice +15, Sense Motive +15, Stealth +15					
Feats: Defensive Roll 4, Equipment 4, Evasion, Jack-of-all-Trades, Power Attack, Skill Mastery, Takedown Attack, Uncanny Dodge					
Powers: Strike 4 (martial skill; Mighty)					
Combat: Attack +13, Grapple +16, Damage +7 (unarmed), Defense +13, Knockback -4 (-2 flat-footed), Initiative +5					

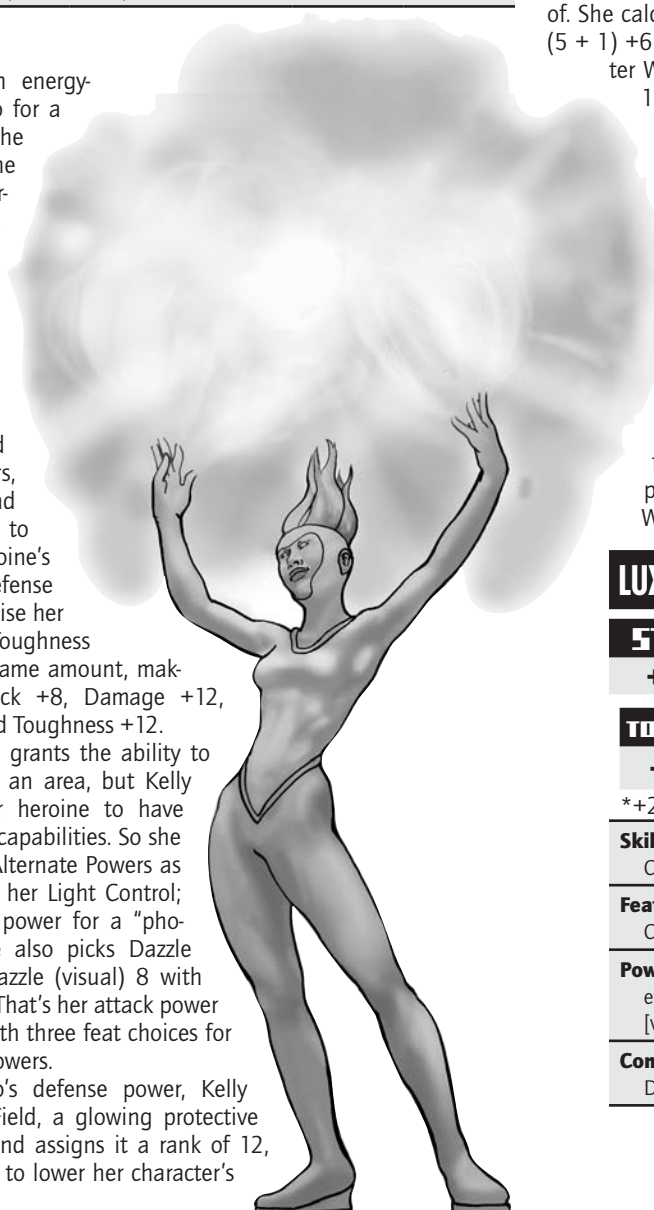
LUX

Kelly wants an energy-controlling hero for a PL 10 game. She starts with the idea of a character with Light Control and goes from there.

Since Kelly wants her heroine to have fairly powerful offensive and defensive powers, she asks for and gets permission to lower her heroine's attack and defense limits by 2 to raise her damage and Toughness save limits by same amount, making them Attack +8, Damage +12, Defense +8, and Toughness +12.

Light Control grants the ability to shed light over an area, but Kelly also wants her heroine to have some offensive capabilities. So she chooses some Alternate Powers as power feats for her Light Control; first, the Blast power for a "photon blast." She also picks Dazzle (visual), and Dazzle (visual) 8 with the Area extra. That's her attack power choice along with three feat choices for the Alternate Powers.

For her hero's defense power, Kelly picks a Force Field, a glowing protective aura of light, and assigns it a rank of 12, since she chose to lower her character's defense bonus.



To finish things off, she gives her character the miscellaneous power to fly and Immunity to light-based attacks and powers, taking up two of her three miscellaneous power choices.

Kelly goes back and looks at ability scores now. She decides her character has excellent Dexterity, being quite nimble and agile, and assigns it a bonus of +4. She also assigns a Charisma of +3, since she wants her heroine to be both a forceful and engaging personality. She puts +1 each into Strength and Wisdom, above average, but not extraordinary, and decides her character is of average Intelligence, leaving it at +0. That's +9 in ability modifiers, well within the limit of +15 for a PL 10 hero.

When she gets to Constitution, Kelly wants to make it better than average, since she sees her character as somewhat tough. The problem is an increase in Constitution will also increase her Toughness saving throw, which is already at it maximum bonus. So Kelly decides to lower her Force Field rank to 10, leaving room for a +2 Constitution bonus. That brings her ability total to +11 (still well within the +15 limit).

Now she looks at saving throws. Toughness is already taken care of. She calculates Fortitude (5 + 2), +7, Reflex (5 + 4), +9, and Will (5 + 1) +6. Kelly decides she wants her hero to have a slightly better Will save, so she lowers Reflex by 1 to +8, raising Will by 1 to +7.

Picking out the skills she wants for her character, Kelly gets exactly five, the allocated number for PL 10: Acrobatics, Bluff, Concentration, Notice, and Profession.

She picks out some feats to round out her character's capabilities: Accurate Attack, All-Out Attack, and Power Attack provide plenty of options in combat. Precise Shot allows her to fire blasts into melee easily. Quick Change lets her get into costume (and into action) fast, while Taunt allows for some fun roleplaying as well as giving her an extra edge in a fight. Takedown Attack lets her finish off groups of minions with her power blasts. With her three Alternate Power feats, that's ten feats, so Kelly puts her last miscellaneous power into Enhanced Feats, giving her a total of ten.

Writing it all down, her character looks like this:

LUX, LADY OF LIGHT				POWER LEVEL 10	
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+4	+2	+0	+1	+3
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+12*	+10	+8	+8		
*+2 without Force Field					
Skills (untrained bonus 5 + ability): Acrobatics +14, Bluff +13, Concentration +11, Notice +11, Profession +11					
Feats: Accurate Attack, All-Out Attack, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quick Change, Takedown Attack, Taunt					
Powers: Flight 10 , Force Field 10 (Impervious), Immunity 5 (light effects), Light Control 12 (Alternate Powers: Blast 12 , Dazzle 12 [visual], Dazzle 8 [visual, Burst Area])					
Combat: Attack +8, Grapple +9, Damage +1 (unarmed), +12 (blast), Defense +8, Knockback -11, Initiative +4					

TROUBLEMAKERS, INC.

BY CHRISTOPHER MCGLOTHLIN, M ED.

In August 1953, six Freedom City-based super-criminals united in pursuit of greater ill-gotten gains and decreased likelihoods of jail. Despite their apparent sense of concord, the supervillain-sized egos involved made agreement on a team name difficult. In the end, Calendar Girl's repeated suggestion "Troublemakers" won out once the other members grew tired of continually rejecting it ("Incorporated" was added at the Bee-Keeper's insistence).

Troublemakers, Inc. lived up to the name with a series of daring robberies over the next six years. Though its getaways were usually foiled by the few costumed heroes still active at the time, the team's incarcerations rarely lasted long. This was due in part to their collective ingenuity, but mostly to the Amazing Rando's considerable jail-breaking skills.

The team's last recorded exploit took place in late 1959. After that, some of the members (like the Bee-Keeper) continued on as solo supervillains, while others either returned to civilian life (like Teen-Age Caveman) or disappeared completely (like Calendar Girl). Whatever their individual fates, the members of Troublemakers, Inc. remain emblematic of a time in Freedom City's history when larger-than-life criminals remained a threat—albeit a degraded one—opposed only by heroes who continued to do the right thing in the face of growing postwar public indifference.

"I was one of the founding members of Troublemakers, Incorporated! You know—there was me, the Amazing Rando, Calendar Girl, the Smoker, Teen-Age Caveman, and Doctor Zorka. We were in all the papers. On the radio, too!"

— The Bee-Keeper (Brian Nisbet), in *Time of Vengeance*.

The Amazing Rando is the matchless Master of Himalayan Arcane Arts. Just ask him. He'll tell you all about it. At great length.

Rando claims to be from a secret lost city in the Himalayas occupied by mystics similar to himself, "just not as *amazing*."

He persists in this assertion despite his obvious non-Asian ethnicity and Southside Freedom City accent. However, he *does* wear a turban, and for most people in the 1950s, that's proof enough.

In truth, Rando really *is* pretty amazing, despite having been born in one of the more mundane neighborhoods in Freedom as plain ol' Randall Schmook. Inspired by a circus performance he once saw as a kid, Schmook dedicated himself to mastering the incredible physical and mental feats displayed by the legendary fakirs of India. Through many years of traveling the subcontinent, sheer determination and dumb luck, Schmook eventually realized his lifelong goal. He then directed his astonishing new abilities towards a new end, one more indicative of his rough-and-tumble upbringing: knocking over Freedom City banks.

While alone Rando is more than a match for a typical bank guard, and there's no brag, all fact when he boasts no jail can hold him, he's still outclassed by the likes of Centurion. Learning this the hard way led to his joining Troublemakers, Inc., seemingly the one villain team willing to put up with his pretentious and condescending manner. Sure, it is grating for the others to be constantly reminded just how amazing he is, but Rando keeps the team's incarcerations short. For its members, that's more than enough compensation.

THE AMAZING RANDO

POWER LEVEL 7

Str 26 **Dex 12** **Con 24** **Int 8** **Wis 16** **Cha 9**

Skills: Bluff 12 (+15), Climb 8 (+9), Concentration 8 (+13), Escape Artist 12 (+16), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+9), Language 4 (Hindi, Mandarin, Nepalese, Tibetan), Notice 4 (+9), Search 8 (+9), Sleight of Hand 12 (+16), Stealth 12 (+16), Survival 8 (+13)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Defensive Roll 3, Distract (Bluff), Dodge Focus 3, Fascinate (Bluff), Quick Change, Redirect, Trance, Skill Mastery (Bluff, Escape Artist, Sleight of Hand, Stealth)

Powers: **Magic 7** (**Illusion 7** [visual], *Alternate Powers:* **Blast 7** [flame], **Dazzle 7** [visual, explosive flash], **Obscure 7** [visual, smoke cloud], **Telekinesis 7**, **Teleport 7**, **Transform 2** [anything into anything else, Continuous, Touch, Progression 2 (10 lbs. mass)])

Combat: Attack +5 (melee), +7 (ranged), Grapple +6, Damage +7 (Blast), +1 (unarmed), Defense +7 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -2 (-1 flat-footed), Initiative +4

Saving Throws: Toughness +5 (+2 flat-footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +5, Will +6

Drawbacks: Power Loss (Magic, when unable to cast spells, -1 point)

Abilities 32 + Skills 24 (96 ranks) + Feats 14 + Powers 20 + Combat 18 + Saves 4 - Drawbacks 1 = 111

THE BEE-KEEPER (GOLDEN AGE)

POWER LEVEL 7

Str 10 **Dex 14** **Con 16** **Int 26** **Wis 18** **Cha 16**

Skills: Bluff 8 (+11), Craft (chemical) 10 (+18), Craft (electronic) 10 (+18), Diplomacy 8 (+11), Handle Animal 12 (+15), Knowledge (life sciences) 12 (+20), Knowledge (tactics) 6 (+14), Knowledge (technology) 10 (+18), Notice 4 (+8)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged), Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll, Dodge Focus, Inspire, Inventor, Leadership, Master Plan, Taunt, Skill Mastery (Craft, Knowledge [life sciences, technology])

Powers: **Device 3** (Bee Belt, hard to lose), **Device 3** (Stinger-Ray Gun, easy to lose), **Immunity 1** (poison)

Bee Belt: **Environmental Control 7** (trained bee swarm, DC 10 distraction; Selective), **Stinger-Ray Gun:** **Blast 7** (Accurate)

Combat: Attack +4 (melee), +5 (ranged), +7 (Blast), Grapple +4, Damage +7 (Blast), +0 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -2 (-1 flat-footed), Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (+3 flat-footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +5

Abilities 40 + Skills 20 (80 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 22 + Combat 14 + Saves 4 = 110

"Excuse me, but Rando will do all the magic in this heist!"

"You've entered the hive of the infamous Bee-Keeper!"



Ever since his youth, Brian Nisbet admired the fuzzy yellow-and-black perfection that is the bee. The socially awkward and bullied boy envied their ability to work together in perfect harmony and—if provoked—to sting with a ferocity that belied their size. The insects became the focus of his scientific genius, and in all the fields he excelled in, his studies and inventions all centered around bees.

By the 1940s, Nisbet was among the world's leading bee experts, and yet was somehow neither rich or famous. As he saw it, instead of celebrating and rewarding his achievements, the human race chose to plunge itself into madness and the most devastating wars it had ever fought. In time what began as simple jealousy and resentment on his part gradually turned to mania, of the sort that leads someone to don a fuzzy yellow-and-black business suit with matching mask.

As the supervillainous Bee-Keeper, Nisbet resolved to use his knowledge to make the world feel the sting of his vengeance. Once all mankind feared and respected him, he would then teach humanity to live as the bees do: working long and hard for the betterment of all, and for its unchallenged leader most of all.

Unfortunately, his plans—in addition to being completely insane—required lots of cash; much more than even the best-paid apologists had, in fact. As a result, Nisbet was forced to put world domination on hold in favor of knocking over a few liquor stores, banks, and jewelers. In the process, Hepcat, the famed Freedom City beat poet/costumed vigilante became the Bee-Keeper's very first archenemy.

The defeats suffered at Hepcat's hipster hands prompted a chastened Nisbet to take the initial steps towards founding Troublemakers, Inc. Though not its most powerful or brilliant member, the Bee-Keeper devised the team's criminal schemes and was the essential beeswax holding its members together. The Bee-Keeper was the only one who never threatened to punch out the Amazing Rando, and whose leadership kept up Calendar Girl's courage and focus. He alone had Dr.

Zorka's respect as a scientific peer, and joined the Smoker for post-heist beers. Without Nisbet's coelacanth-finding acumen, there would have been no Teen-Age Caveman around to do the team's grunt work.

(Unlike his teammates, the Bee-Keeper remained an active supervillain throughout most of the "Silver Age" of the 1960s, becoming one of Centurion's regular foes. During this phase of his career, he boasted an upgraded arsenal and better employed the lessons learned during his time with Troublemakers, Inc., making him a much more formidable threat. The game statistics above reflect his powers and abilities prior to this time.)

CALENDAR GIRL

POWER LEVEL 7

Str 12 **Dex 16** **Con 14** **Int 10** **Wis 10** **Cha 18**

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+7), Bluff 4 (+8), Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+4)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee), Attack Specialization (Paralyze), Attractive 2, Defensive Roll 5, Dodge Focus 4, Evasion 2, Instant Up, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Quick Change 2

Powers: **Super-Movement 2** (temporal, one month forwards or backwards), **Time Control 7** (Touch Range; Rapid Attack, *Alternate Powers:* **Deflect 7** [all ranged attacks, reaction], **Paralyze 7** [Contagious, Affects Insubstantial 2, Reversible])

Combat: Attack +5 (melee), +4 (ranged), +7 (Paralyze), Grapple +6, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +7 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -3 (-1 flat-footed), Initiative +31

Saving Throws: Toughness +7 (+2 flat-footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +2

Abilities 20 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 20 + Powers 49 + Combat 14 + Saves 5 = 111

"Hey everybody! I've got a real gone idea how to get us some bread!"

Anna Cline was a mere child on that fateful December 7th back in 1941, completely unaware of the day's momentous events. On that day Anna, running home ahead of her siblings, nearly collided with a strange man appearing before her out of thin air. The man quickly flew away from the scene, but not before young Anna was bathed in the strange energies released during his emergence from the time/space continuum. At the time, she was startled, but seemed otherwise unaffected.

This changed not long after her sixteenth birthday, after she made a sincere wish to find out what was going to happen on tomorrow's episode of her favorite radio soap opera. Without warning, Anna found herself instantly thrust forward in time a whole day!

Initially frightened by it all, she soon found her curiosity overcoming her fears. Through gradual trial and error experimentation, Anna discovered because of her chance childhood encounter with Dr. Tomorrow, she had the power to control the flow of time around herself. After that, the teenager soon learned another important lesson: the squares' rules no longer applied to her.

Her powers could be put to dire use by an evil soul, but Anna was at worst mischievous. At times she gave in to the temptation and committed some petty crime. Almost as often, she succumbed to guilt and tried to make restitution once she realized any real harm had been done by her actions. Such pangs of conscience eventually drove her to turn herself in to the authorities, but two minutes in police custody awaiting the dreaded phone call to her parents was all it took to get her to reconsider going straight.

She then leapt back a day in time, suddenly appearing before a just-arrested super-criminal, creating a distraction that allowed him to escape custody. Inspired by the super-crook's daring and resourcefulness, she resolved to follow his example and become a supervillain in turn, dubbing herself Calendar Girl. Her time-traveling powers offered nearly unlimited potential, but as a consequence she had no clear idea what crimes to commit with them. Soon tiring of her own lack of focus, she used her powers to seek out the other few remaining active supervillains, and located the Bee-Keeper just in time to be recruited into Troublemakers, Inc.

Despite her turn to crime, Calendar Girl remains first and foremost a teenager, full of wants, uncertainties, anxieties, slang, energy and inexperience in great equal measures. Although her teammates are occasionally frustrated and annoyed by her youth and exuberance, they all remain very protective and fond of "the kid" on their team. Almost unconsciously, they're teaching "the kid" supervillainy is fun and consequence-free, as well as providing her guidance and direction on bigger larcenies than swiping movie-star gossip magazines off the newsstand.

DOCTOR ZORKA

POWER LEVEL 7

Str 8 Dex 10 Con 10 Int 30 Wis 20 Cha 12

Skills: Bluff 8 (+9), Computer 12 (+22), Concentration 8 (+13), Craft (chemical) 12 (+22), Craft (electronic) 12 (+22), Craft (mechanical) 12 (+22), Disable Device 12 (+22), Knowledge (physical sciences) 12 (+22), Knowledge (technology) 12 (+22), Language 4 (English, French, German, Russian), Notice 8 (+13), Sense Motive 8 (+13)

Feats: Assessment, Dodge Focus, Fascinate (Bluff), Improvised Tools, Inventor, Master Plan, Minions 3 (Medium Robot, see *M&M*, page 235), Skill Mastery (Computer, Craft, Disable Device, Knowledge)

Powers: **Device 3** (Death-Ray Gun, easy to lose), **Device 2** (Devisualizer Belt, hard to lose), **Device 5** (Exploding Spider Drones, easy to lose)
Death-Ray Gun: **Blast 7** (Accurate), *Devisualizer Belt:* **Invisibility 2** (all visual senses; Close Range), *Exploding Spider Drones:* **Blast 7** (Burst Area; Improved Range 2, Indirect, Triggered)

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

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude +2, Reflex +2, Will +6

Abilities 30 + Skills 30 (120 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 32 + Combat 6 + Saves 5 = 114

"They don't want the classic giant robots anymore. Today it's all giant bugs, giant spiders...Who will believe such nonsense?"

Little is known about the background of Doctor Alex Zorka beyond his status as a naturalized Hungarian-American. He appears tall and frail, and in his early 70s, with a fondness for dark suits, dark cloaks, and black cigars. Most remarkably, he is a quasi-sane super-scientific genius, with a penchant for building bizarre and homely robots designed (however improbably) for world conquest.

Zorka's reputation as an erratic criminal genius was well-known in the underworld, and in the Bee-Keeper's estimation, it made him a perfect candidate for membership in his abhorring association of crooks. Once invited, Dr. Zorka realized the value his erstwhile allies would have as stooges, bodyguards and potential test subjects. Some might even prove worthy of serving as lieutenants in the forthcoming Zorka World Order. Thus, he accepted the Bee-Keeper's offer and joined "the coalition" (Zorka utterly refuses to use the team's proper name) as its mad scientist in residence.

Despite himself, Zorka also became the team's slightly irascible, slightly mad grandfather figure. He still occasionally glances at his fellow members as if he's wondering how they'd fare as disembodied brains in a tank, and remains capable of annoyed outbursts unquotable in a 1950s comic book. Underneath it all, however, in his own crazy way, he's come to enjoy the companionship of his fellow supervillains. To be sure, he hasn't backed off one bit from his plans to conquer the world with ugly giant robots and exploding mechanical spider drones. Dr. Zorka's simply learned the joys of having some people to share such a wacky triumph with.

THE SMOKER

POWER LEVEL 7

Str 14 Dex 12 Con 14 Int 10 Wis 12 Cha 18

Skills: Bluff 10 (+14), Drive 4 (+5), Gather Information 10 (+14), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+8), Notice 8 (+9), Profession (soldier) 5 (+6), Sense Motive 10 (+11), Survival 8 (+9), Swim 5 (+7)

Feats: All-Out Attack, Attack Specialization (Suffocate) 2, Contacts, Dodge Focus, Jack-of-All-Trades, Move-by Action, Well-Informed

Powers: **Gaseous Form 9** (Concealment 2 [all hearing, Close Range], **Flight 2**, **Immunity 9** [life support], **Insubstantial 2**, **Suffocate 7**), **Obscure 5** (visual)

Combat: Attack +3, +7 (Suffocate), Grapple +5, Damage +2 (unarmed), Defense +3 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +2, Fortitude +4, Reflex +3, Will +3

Drawbacks: Weakness (strong winds, common, major, affects every minute, -6 points)

Abilities 20 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 55 + Combat 10 + Saves 6 - Drawbacks 6 = 110

"Prepare to die, hero! Nah, I'm just messin' with ya. You're all right."

Like many other men in post-WWII Freedom City, Ted Daniel got his "Greetings from the President" letter and soon after wound up wearing G.I. green. Once inducted, his fellow soldiers all seemed to take an immediate liking to the good-natured and devilishly charming Ted, just

as people had his whole life. As a result, Ted was able to shmooze his way out of being shipped over to the fighting in Korea, instead finagling his way into a "special duty" assignment stateside in New Mexico.

Unfortunately for Ted, his "special duty" put him uncomfortably close to an A-bomb test, designed to gauge the effects of such a blast on nearby ground troops. While the other dogfaces worried aloud about being nuclear guinea pigs, Ted just did as he always did and wrapped his crooked smile around a chain of Chesterfield cigarettes. His nonchalance seemed vindicated, as afterwards he showed no adverse effects from the radiation exposure.

It wasn't until after Ted had been discharged and settled into an amiable but aimless civilian life back home in Freedom that he first discovered what the long-term consequences really were. Under strain and facing down a violently irritated fellow bar patron, Ted first discovered he could avoid a punch by turning his body into a coherent cloud of smoke.

Most people would've been shocked or horrified by such a transformation, but Ted immediately saw its potential, embarking on a career of using his uncanny abilities to win bar bet after bar bet. He was in the process of winning yet another drunken wager when he first encountered a plain-clothed Bee-Keeper, out to drown his sorrows after his latest foiled scheme. Impressed by Daniel's truly superhuman abilities, the two became fast friends, and between brews the Bee-Keeper first suggested to Ted he give costumed supervillainy a shot.

Trying his criminal luck as "The Smoker," Ted quickly discovered that while his powers made intruding and escaping a cinch, they also made it nearly impossible for him to carry away any loot. He needed help, and fortunately for him, his pal the Bee-Keeper had come to the same conclusion at the same time. Having just sprung himself from jail, the Bee-Keeper made a beeline for his old drinking buddy with an invitation to form a villain team.

The Smoker became an integral part of Troublemakers, Inc. from its inception. However, despite his new criminal vocation, he remained the same easy-going guy he'd always been, and any pretension to true villainy on his part is invariably just a prelude to a joking refutation. While his teammates aspire to quick riches and world conquest, the Smoker is in it for laughs, and because his skill-set that doesn't qualify him to do much else. Sure, robbery is illegal, but just as long as no one gets killed and it keeps the drinks and smokes coming, it's as good a living as anything else as far as Ted's concerned.

TEEN-AGE CAVEMAN

POWER LEVEL 7

Str 25 | **Dex 16** | **Con 22** | **Int 6** | **Wis 10** | **Cha 8**

Skills: Intimidate 8 (+11, includes +2 size), Notice 8 (+8)

Feats: All-Out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 5, Chokehold, Endurance, Fast Overrun, Fearsome Presence 5, Improved Critical (punch) 5, Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Power Attack, Takedown Attack 5

Powers: Growth 4 (large), Leaping 6, Super-Strength 7 (heavy load: 50 tons)

Combat: Attack +7 (melee, includes -1 size), +2 (ranged, includes -1 size), Grapple +25, Damage +7 (unarmed), Defense +7 (includes -1 size), Knockback -7, Initiative +3

Saving Throws: Toughness +7, Fortitude +8, Reflex +8, Will +2

Abilities 15 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 27 + Powers 32 + Combat 22 + Saves 10 = 110

"RARRR! Smashing puny freshmen is so easy a caveman can do it!"

Bobby Vaughn became a Freedom College freshman by virtue of a work-study scholarship, and spent his free hours helping out the school's biology department. One day, Bobby was carrying a rare coelacanth (a

fish previously thought extinct for millions of years) to the campus laboratories. Unbeknownst to him, the specimen had been sterilized with radiation prior to shipment, and when Bobby accidentally cut himself on the coelacanth's teeth, he became infected with its irradiated blood.

This infection triggered a startling transformation in the young man, causing him to revert to the form and mentality of his prehistoric ancestors. Enraged and uncomprehending in his primitive state, the new Big Monster on Campus went on a destructive rampage, nearly destroying the big Homecoming Dance in the process. However, thanks to Centurion, the Teen-Age Caveman was apprehended and restored to his former All-American boy self with no memory of what he'd done in the interim.

News of the incident made all the Freedom City dailies, but was soon forgotten by anyone not looking for recruits to his new supervillain team. Unfortunately for Bobby Vaughn, the stories prompted the Bee-Keeper to procure his own rare irradiated coelacanth and arrange for the young man to come into close contact with it. Improbable as it was, it was an occurrence that repeated itself throughout the 1950s, whenever the Bee-Keeper needed muscle for Troublemakers, Inc.'s next big score.

Normally mild-mannered, patriotic, school-spirited and prone to saying "Gosh!" a lot, Bobby reverts to an easily angered, easily confused brute when in his Teen-Age Caveman form. While the junior Neanderthal's natural inclination is to flee from noise and strife and go in search of wild game, the Bee-Keeper is ever-ready to fool him once again into becoming his criminal pawn.

Even when he's too furious and/or stupid to follow orders otherwise, his schoolboy Neanderthal crush on Calendar Girl still prevails. Teen-Age Caveman always does whatever she asks of him, and he remains fiercely dedicated to her happiness and well-being.

CAPERS

The following are some possible capers involving Troublemakers, Inc. in the Freedom City setting, which you can also adapt for use in your own *M&M* game setting.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO CALENDAR GIRL?

Time in Freedom City suddenly becomes as unpredictable as the weather, and various neighborhoods begin to skip randomly backwards and forwards in history. The city's heroes are powerless to stop it, but with an assist from Dr. Tomorrow, they become aware the key to the disruption is the 1950s era supervillain Calendar Girl, now missing for over four decades. While trying to corral the dinosaurs roaming down 40th Avenue and skirmishing with the British Redcoats landing in Riverside, the heroes must piece together the clues of where (and when) she is, as well as what she may have done to unhinge history itself.

THE GREAT STUDEBAKER CAPER

As mentioned in *Time of Vengeance*, the apex of Troublemakers, Inc.'s thievery was in 1953, when the team simultaneously robbed every Studebaker dealership in the Freedom City area. In a post-WWII *Golden Age* series set in Freedom City, the heroes may be moved to try to foil their scheme. Covert- and/or detective-inclined heroes may try to infiltrate the villains as they plan the elaborate heist, trying to maintain their covers long enough for its final details to be divulged.

Instead of (or perhaps in addition to) this, the heroes may get caught up in the pursuit and apprehension of the frantically fleeing villains, with the tenor of the times as an added complication. Catching crooks (even less-than-world-class ones like Troublemakers, Inc.) is a whole different matter in an era when the authorities and the public at large look at costumed heroes with a mixture of derision and suspicion. Will Teen-Age Caveman make good his escape while the heroes explain to the authorities for the umpteenth time they are not now-and never have been-members of the Communist Party?

CON SEASON

BY DT BUCHINO

When the fans of Castle Comics convene for the popular CastleCon in Freedom City, they're in store for more than the average guest, as Doc Otaku decides to crash the con! Now it's up to the heroes to stop him and his mad plan, but what exactly is the anime-inspired mastermind up to?

Con Season is an adventure for the *Mutants & Masterminds* role-playing game. It is intended for a group of four to six Power Level 10 heroes, although the Gamemaster can scale the adventure to make it suitable for higher or lower level heroes by increasing or decreasing the power levels of the challenges as appropriate.

The adventure is set in Freedom City (described in the second edition of the *Freedom City* sourcebook available from Green Ronin Publishing). Although Freedom City is recommended for running this adventure, it is not required. All the necessary material is included here and in the *Mutants & Masterminds* core rulebook.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Every year, fans from around the country and the world gather in Freedom City for "CastleCon," one of the most successful comic book, game, and anime conventions. This year, CastleCon has invited the characters as guests of honor, as well as procuring an original copy of the anime, *Akataiyo*, a rare "cult" film depicting a heroic Crimson Katana.

As the heroes sign autographs and show feats of power, their limelight is dimmed by the appearance of the villainous Doc Otaku and his Angel Androids. Otaku has come to the con to steal the copy of *Akataiyo* and has brought some surprises with him just in case the heroes interfere. Once he's acquired the movie, he intends on fleeing through the con hall, causing as much chaos as he can to cover his escape.

SCENE ONE: CON-VINCING HEROES

Every year, Castle Comics holds "CastleCon", one of the largest pop-culture conventions in the world. Held in Freedom City's Liberty Dome, the con has asked you to be this year's guests of honor.

As you arrive at the convention, you notice several posters with comic-styled drawings of your team, as well as an anime video called Akataiyo: The Crimson Sun.

If any of the heroes achieve a result of 15 or greater on a Knowledge (pop culture) check, they know *Akataiyo* is an anime from the early '70s featuring a heroic version of the Crimson Katana. In many circles, this anime is considered valuable and a cult classic because of its rarity and controversial content.

As you walk into the Liberty Dome, a slender man in his mid-twenties with dark hair, wearing a Captain Thunder T-shirt, approaches you. He smiles at you and says, "I'm really glad you could make it. I'm Anthony Capella, the convention coordinator

... we spoke on the phone. If you'll follow me, we'll get you set up." With that, he begins to lead you into the main hall.

The conference room the heroes have been assigned is a large area with a quick-built stage that holds a long table, a projection system and some microphones. Wandering around are a few people with the word "TECH" on their back. Anthony will be happy to answer any questions the heroes may have, especially concerning any tasks they may be responsible for.

Some answers to common questions include:

"So, what should we do here?": "You know, sign photos, answer questions, attend a seminar or two and maybe show the public some of your abilities."

"What type of people should we expect?": "Many fans of the superhero set show up, as do comic book fans, game fans and anime fans."

"What if there's trouble?": "We have a full-alert security team but, in the event of something they can't handle, I'm sure fans would love to see you in action!"

As you look around the room, you hear a chirp come from Anthony. He reaches for a cell-phone and says, "Anthony. Yes ... yup, they're here now. Okay. Okay, I'll take care of it ... thanks." With a snap, he closes the cell and looks in your general direction with a smile. "That was one of the event coordinators," he says, "There seems to be a problem with one of the displays in the game room and I have to tend to it. If you have any further questions or needs, please just ask anyone on-staff and they'll get in touch with me. Thanks again for doing this ... I hope you have as great a time as your fans do." He then turns and walks out towards one of the side hallways.

SCENE TWO: OPENING ACT

As the convention opens its doors to the public, fans flood the Liberty Dome within a short time. Within an hour, the seminar you're hosting has begun to fill up with a wide variety of folks. Looking around, you see people of all ages, from the kid with a Johnny Rocket action figure to a man in the late prime of his life wearing a Green Ronin T-shirt. The doors eventually shut and an Asian man in his mid-twenties comes onto the stage. He's wearing a white suit and a red tie. "Hello CastleCon fans!" he screams over a mic. "Are you ready to meet the heroes?" The crowd's applause roars in your general direction.

Akira will go on to introduce every member of the team, offering each a chance to wave or say something quickly if they'd like. Anyone who'd like to show off for the crowd can make a Charisma or Perform check, but otherwise Akira opens the floor for questions. Possible questions (and the people asking them) include:

Gentleman in his early twenties in a homemade Atom Family costume: "How did you form together to fight injustice?"

WHAT IF THE HEROES DON'T GO?

It's possible some or even all the heroes may not want to attend the show. In this case, there are a few ways to get them involved:

Perhaps, in their secret identities, they've been hired to cover the convention in some way. Reporters would have a good reason to be there, as would police officers, hired security or even a public figure (who may have their own panels to attend).

If anyone in the group plays a comic book, gaming, or anime fan, it's possible they're attending in their secret identity. In a similar situation, maybe one of the characters' family members wants to go and they've been chosen to chaperone, an excellent way to set up a complication during the adventure.

Older gentleman wearing an outdated Freedom League T-shirt: "In your original roster, did you not have a robot as a member? I distinctly remember a robot ..."

Young girl in a "NoBoro Ninja Donkey" shirt to a random character: "You're my absolute favorite hero... do you need a sidekick?"

Woman in her late-teens/early twenties dressed like an anime Magic Girl: "Who's your toughest villain?"

Give the heroes a chance to respond to a battery of questions, giving them a sense that they've got a real fan-base in Freedom City. As the questions begin to die down, one last gentleman stands up...

As many of the fans begin to tire of all the questions, a gentleman with long, blonde hair and wearing a red suit stands towards the back of the room. "Excuse me," he says with a smile, "I have one last question. How many more minutes do you expect to live?"

With the gauntlet thrown in their direction, the blonde-haired man waits for an answer. Either once he receives it or is attacked, he rips the sleeves off his suit and stands ready to fight. What the players don't know is that both the red-suited man and Akira are examples of Doc Otaku's new FighterBot series of combat drones and the room is locked, trapping the crowd in the room with them. While the heroes are busy with the red-suited bot, Akira bides his time and waits for an opening, ripping his sleeves off and preparing for battle as well.

FIGHTERBOTS

Use the Medium Robot archetype from the *Mutants & Masterminds*, page 235, but add: Attack Specialization (Melee) 2, Power Attack; Blast 8, Leaping 2, Super-Strength 2 (Groundstrike, Shockwave).

After the FighterBots are defeated, they begin to smolder and sizzle, almost as if they're going to self-destruct. Instead, they melt down to synthetic ooze, erasing any traces. As soon as this happens, the crowd goes wild, much like a movie audience at a summer blockbuster. The heroes are mobbed as rabid fans ask for autographs and photo opportunities. But, as they attempt to gain some coherency amidst the chaos...

Just as you begin to get some order from the crowd, the projection system in the room spring to life. On the screen appears a close-up of a teenage boy with almost cat-like glasses and an anime-looking hairstyle. He smiles and says, "Ah, I see you've managed to defeat poor Akira and Kevin. That's a shame, they were fun to see fight. But, anyhow, they proved to be an excellent distraction." He holds up a film reel with the word "AKATAIYO" written on a piece of

tape stuck to it. "See you later, Space Cowboys," he taunts right before the projector clicks off.

Otaku is still in the building, accompanied by his Angel Androids and making a break towards the cosplay section of the con. Unless they have a movement power like Teleport, the heroes will have to open the lock on the door (Disable Device, DC 20) or smash their way out of the room. Once in the main con hall, they may make a Notice check (DC 17) to catch a fleeting glimpse of Otaku as he vanishes into another section of the con.

SCENE THREE: CHASE SCENE!

As you pursue Doc Otaku into the anime section, you stop and notice the entire room is filled with people dressed in various costumes. While most are media characters, there are a few sporting actual hero costumes, as well as several Doc Otaku outfits! It may be a bit difficult to find Otaku among this crowd.

Doc Otaku is purposefully hiding in the crowd, using his appearance and height to his advantage. His strategy is a simple one, while the heroes search for him, he's having Aki, Ako and Aya flank them as they also use the crowd for cover. While the androids keep them busy, he's hoping to find his way out and make his escape.

If the heroes search the hall, they can make Search checks (DC 18) to notice Otaku or his androids. After a round, Aki, Ako and Aya attack the heroes. If the heroes fail a Notice check (DC 15), they are surprised by the attack. During the fight, it's possible someone may catch a glimpse of Otaku fleeing (Notice, DC 20) and attempt to pursue. If they don't notice him, after the battle, they may talk to the crowd (Gather Information, DC 12) and learn that he escaped into a Space Borders LARP next door.

You run into the next room and find yourself on a small sound stage. Looking around, you see several people dressed in a variety of uniforms and costumes, wearing official Space Borders nametags and in the midst of a game. A crowd of them dressed as winged gorilla-men look at you and say, "Jah'rek! How dare you break the treatise with our Coalition! This means war, Captain Sork! Bring out the war-mech!" They then turn to a large cutout of some retrofitted robot from the 60s.

One of the "humans" in the LARP runs up to you and whispers, "Guys ... you're kind of breaking the fourth wall here. This is an official sanctioned LARP tourney by Mages in the Mountains... you know... the guys who bought out MSG games a while back."

Give the players a few moments to interact with the LARPer, noting they are upsetting the balance of the game. If asked, the gamers don't know anything of Doc Otaku, though, if any of the heroes have any interesting gadgets, there are a few LARPer who might try and trade with them. As the cardboard mech is moved from its stationary spot, the heroes may notice (Notice, DC 14) Doc Otaku hiding behind it in a mini-mech of his own creation (he's using Growth at rank 6).

As the gamers move the stand-up into position, you see a glint of metal behind the cardboard placeholder. Suddenly, you hear Doc Otaku's voice boom, "G'Vek! (In Kazirean that means 'Die Heroes!')" He raises the arm on the mech and motions in your general direction."

Otaku isn't actually aiming for anyone other than the heroes, hoping it may provide him some cover for another escape. If escape is not an option, he'll attack the heroes and attempt to defeat them.

SCENE FOUR: ENDGAME

If the heroes defeat Otaku, read the following:

With the final hit, Doc Otaku falls to the ground, the film can rolling out from under his arm. Around you, several con members begin to gather, cheering your victory over Doc Otaku. Anthony Capella wanders over and grabs the film can, shaking your hands. "Wow ... never would've imagined we'd get a real supervillain here! Thanks for recovering Akataiyo for us; it's a major draw this year."

If the heroes investigate Otaku's body, they discover (Medicine, DC 5 or Search, DC 10) that this isn't the real Doc Otaku, but another sophisticated android. The police show up and, after taking any of the heroes' statements, take the evidence away.

If Doc Otaku defeats the heroes, read the following:

You fall to the ground and begin to have problems staying conscious. As your eyes drift between blackness and the light, you see Otaku turn to the wall and blasts a hole in it. "Heroes?" he says, mockingly, "More like Dweebles. Later chumps... I'll think of you when I'm watching Akataiyo on my big plasma TV."

You awaken to find several con goers looking at you in a bit of shock. As you shake off the effect of the beating you took, Anthony Capella approaches you and says, "Are you okay? Looks like Doc Otaku made off with Akataiyo... um, maybe you'll catch him next time?"

With that said, the medics check the players over, helping them with any injuries and eventually sending them out with a clean bill of health. Will the heroes avenge their defeat and recover the rare film? Only you can decide that...

THE ANGEL ANDROIDS (AKI, AKO & AYA)

Aki, Ako, and Aya are Doc Otaku's most enduring and most well known creations. They are sophisticated androids that look like teenage girls dressed in Japanese school uniforms. Aki looks Japanese, Ako is a redhead with freckles, and Aya is a blond with big blue eyes.

Other than their cosmetic differences in appearance, all three Angel Androids are identical in size and abilities. They are all superhumanly strong and fast, resistant to most forms of harm, and immune to biological needs like air, food, or rest. All three have giggly, girlish personalities and they all adore Takashi (as they are programmed to do).

The Angel Androids are intelligent and capable of independent thought, although they would never do anything that would harm their beloved Takashi or make him upset. They're relentlessly cheerful and pleasant, even while they're pounding opponents into the pavement, and they always leave a scene with a smile, a wave, and a happy, "Have a nice day! Buh-bye!"

Doc Otaku maintains plans for the Angel Androids and backs-up their memory files on a regular basis, so he can easily re-create any or all of them if they are destroyed. They are his favorite agents, and he often uses them to help carry out his plans. Otherwise the Angels act as his bodyguards and see to his every need.

DOC OTAKU

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-1	+3	+0	+12	+3	+0
8	16	10	34	16	10

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+10/+0*	+10	+3	+3

*without armor

Skills: Computers 8 (+20), Craft (electronic) 10 (+22), Craft (mechanical) 10 (+22), Disable Device 12 (+20), Drive 6 (+9), Knowledge (physical sciences) 8 (+20), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+18), Knowledge (technology) 12 (+24), Language 5 (English, French, Latin, Spanish, Russian), Notice 4 (+7), Pilot 7 (+10), Sense Motive 4 (+7)

Feats: Defensive Attack, Eidetic Memory, Equipment, Inventor, Sidekick 29 (Progression 2, the Angel Androids)

Powers: Device 23 (MechOtaku battlesuit, hard to lose)
MechOtaku Battlesuit: **Blast 10, Communication 7** (radio), **Flight 5** (250 MPH), **Growth 16, Immunity 9** (life support), **Protection 10** (Impervious), **Super-Senses 1** (low-light vision)

Combat: Attack +8, Damage -1 (unarmed), +10 (blast), +7 (with Growth), Defense +10, Initiative +3

Abilities 34 + Skills 23 (92 ranks) + Feats 35 + Powers 92 + Combat 36 + Saves 9 = Total 229

ANGEL ANDROIDS

POWER LEVEL 10

Str 30	Dex 34	Con -	Int 11	Wis 12	Cha 14
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Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+16), Notice 4 (+5), Sense Motive 8 (+9)

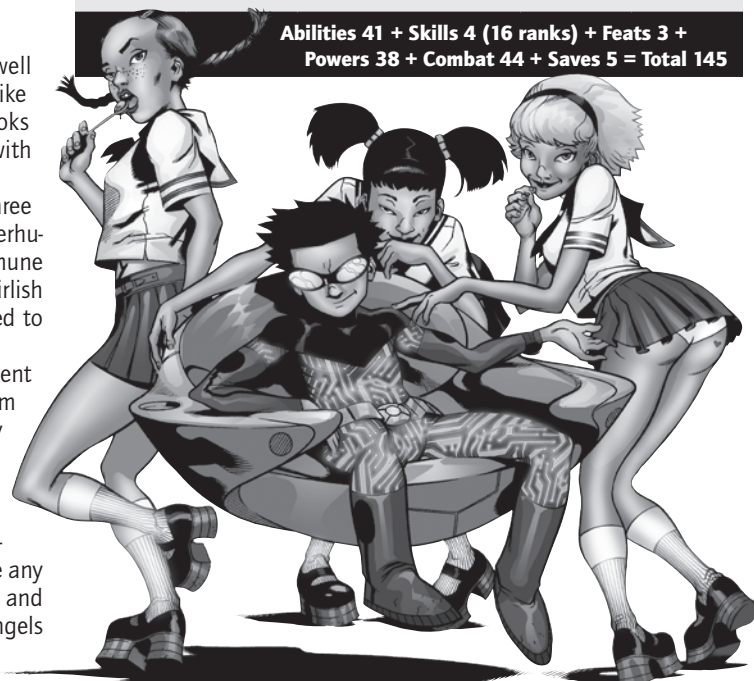
Feats: Attractive, Set-up, Teamwork

Powers: Immunity 40 (Fortitude, mental powers), **Protection 8**

Combat: Attack +10, Damage +10 (unarmed), Defense +12, Initiative +12

Saving Throws: Toughness +8, Fortitude -, Reflex +12, Will +6

Abilities 41 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 38 + Combat 44 + Saves 5 = Total 145



CHARGE OF THE FREEDOM BRIGADE

BY CHRISTOPHER MCGLOTHLIN, M ED.

Charge of the Freedom Brigade is designed for six to eight Golden Age *Mutants & Masterminds* heroes in the Power Level 8-10 range. It can accommodate a Power Level 12 hero as part of the group, but any more such powerful do-gooders are going to require the Gamemaster to ratchet up the opposition, either in numbers, power level, or both to provide a sufficient challenge to the heroes.

This adventure is set in Freedom City at the start of America's involvement in World War II (described in the *Golden Age* sourcebook from Green Ronin Publishing). It can, however, be used in the sea-board series city of the Gamemaster's choice simply by changing the proper names.

Although the *Golden Age* and *Freedom City* sourcebooks are recommended for running this adventure and capturing the feel of the era, they are not required. The adventure contains everything you need to run it using just the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook.

Players intending to play in this adventure should read no further. The rest of the text is for the *Gamemaster only*!

FROM THE BACK-ISSUE BINS

On December 8, 1941, the day *after* the "day that will live in infamy," a group of Freedom City-based heroes called the Freedom Brigade left their home metropolis bound for Tokyo on a mission of vengeance. They have not been seen or heard from since.

Unbeknownst to anyone stateside, the brave heroes did in fact reach their destination, but despite their valor found themselves overwhelmed by the might of the Imperial war machine. All six heroes were captured by a Japanese military deeply embarrassed that anyone, even superheroes, could successfully attack the home islands. Therefore, the Freedom Brigade's fate was kept a closely guarded secret, its members scheduled for beheading by samurai sword.

A call from the German embassy in Tokyo changed their fate, as interested parties in the Third Reich saw more potential use in live heroes than dead ones. Thus, at the request of their Nazi allies, the Japanese government secretly handed the Freedom Brigade over to German authorities, with the captured heroes reaching occupied Europe not long after Hitler's declaration of war on the United States.

Once inside the Reich, the Freedom Brigade found themselves prisoners of the nefarious Aryan Ape, who wanted to examine the sources of the team's superhuman capabilities for anything that might help him repair his wrecked time machine and

return to his home parallel Earth. When this proved fruitless, the Ape decided to use the Freedom Brigade as test subjects in his ultimate "human see, human do" experiment.

The Ape's advanced brainwashing techniques transformed the Freedom Brigade into Axis sleeper agents, Trojan horses in his plan to score a major propaganda victory for the Reich inside America's own borders. At the same time, the Ape wants to test his latest invention and acquire some much-needed cash for further repairs on his time machine.

That's what the characters are up against, Gamemaster. Can they put a stop to the evil monkey scheme, for the sake of America and democracy?

SCENE ONE: ON THE WATERFRONT

This adventure begins in late March 1942, with Freedom City and America as a whole still reeling from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Revenge is on many people's minds, but it is accompanied by the grim realization the war is not going well.

The U.S. Army is months away from entering the fray in Europe, and in the meantime German U-boats sink Allied ships right off the U.S. coast, seemingly at will. In the Pacific, the "Battling Bastards of Bataan" have retreated to Corregidor Island, America's last toehold in the Philippines. Though no one wants to believe it, word is no help is on the way for them, and they are on the verge of surrender.

Though things look bleak overseas, the characters have been busy winning the war on the home front against Axis infiltrators, spies, and saboteurs. Despite these successes, the enemy never rests, and rumor has it they're up to something big.

GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

If the characters are all part of the same hero team (playing members of the Liberty League, for instance), their streetwise contacts have passed along enough information to convince them Axis subversives in Freedom City are about to do something subversive down at the Freedom City dockyards, and soon. This should be enough to get all the heroes in the right place at the right time, but if it isn't, the local FBI office has heard the same scuttlebutt,

"Did I tell you about the time we stopped the Aryan Ape and his Storm-Gorillas from kidnapping Bob Hope at the big war-bond rally in Liberty Park back in March of '42? It all started on a typical day in Freedom City, not long after Pearl Harbor.

"I remember it all like it was yesterday: the scrap with the giant Nazi robot—sixty feet tall, it was—that almost flattened downtown. Didn't even see the Look magazine photographer who shot the famous picture of me leading the counterattack against them. Yeah, the one from all the recruiting posters: me flying and carrying the flag all unfurled... all 48 stars shining big and bright as nighttime.

"Not all of our missions are as well-known as that one, but I'm proud of everything the Liberty League did during its time. For instance, we didn't get a lot of press for shutting down the Crime League's counterfeited ration-coupon scheme, but I believe that wound up being a tremendous help for the war effort.

"Even after 60 years, it's all so easy to remember because everything we did—I mean everything—mattered in the utmost. Mankind was either gonna build a better world for himself once the war was over, or we were all going to have to live the next thousand years with a jackboot pressed against our necks. It was that simple."

—Excerpt from the *Freedom Ledger* interview with the Freedom Eagle, published as part of their special series "A Tribute to Heroes: The Story of the Liberty League's War Years."

and can officially request that any recalcitrant heroes look into the matter on behalf of their government. The characters are scheduled to attend a war-bond rally in Freedom City's Liberty Park the next day, but there's no reason they can't do two patriotic things in the same 24 hour-period.

Since this is an introductory adventure, it is entirely possible the heroes may not have met before. If this is the case, the Gamemaster can have their contacts (and the G-Men, if necessary) lead them all to the proper starting point. In fact, it may be the FBI who first brings the characters together, assembling them as a team to investigate rumors of an Axis plot. When the team (hopefully) elects to stay together on a permanent basis after this adventure, the FBI can continue to serve as a patron and contact.

PIER-SIX BRAWL

The right place and time previously mentioned is the Freedom City dockyards, pier number six in particular, just after midnight. Once there, a casual glance from a safe distance reveals nothing out of the ordinary: just a ship being unloaded by longshoremen and its cargo being moved inside a nearby warehouse. That's about all distant observation reveals, as there are too many lead-painted walls for X-Ray Vision to see through, and any Mind Reading reveals nothing more than men thinking really hard about not wanting to drop any of the really heavy crates.

When the characters finally decide to move in for a closer look, they can approach openly or stealthily. If they opt for the former, they know immediately something is afoot, as the "longshoremen" all start yelling in German and shooting at them. They all carry German-made weapons—another tip off for canny players.

There are two Nazi agents for every hero. Half are genuine German spies (use the Terrorist archetype on page 229 of *M&M*) and are armed with .32 Walther PPK holdout pistols and "potato masher" hand grenades (+2 ballistic damage and +5 explosion damage, respectively). The rest are just wannabe's (use the Thug archetype on page 228 of *M&M* 2e) armed with 9mm MP-40 "Schmeisser" light submachine guns (+3 ballistic autofire damage).

To successfully sneak up on the subversives, each player must make an opposed Stealth skill check against their (untrained) Notice skill (Sure, there are a lot of bad guys, but it's dark and they're busy, so it's a wash modifier-wise). The Gamemaster should of course reward or punish any especially brilliant or foolish plan for getting the drop on these suspicious characters, as appropriate.

If they roll well and act reasonably cleverly, the heroes can sneak right inside the warehouse where most of the activity is taking place. It's sufficiently full of stacks of crates and shadowy areas to hide the heroes almost indefinitely, but even close observation reveals nothing more than a busy pier.

Sooner or later, the players get antsy and make a move, and the fight can begin. Should they need a nudge in that direction, have them overhear the supposed longshoremen conversing in fluent German, or catch a glimpse of the Kraut-made guns they're packing. If the heroes get the drop on the fascists, they of course reap the benefits of surprise before combat.

In the fight, the Nazis are caught with their lederhosen down, and their plan of quickly unloading the cargo then getting back aboard

This adventure was originally written for the Golden Age sourcebook, but the overall plot worked better in conjunction with Dr. Tomorrow's nemesis Doktor Geistmann (aka Zeitgeist), so it was modified to use the Liberty League and Allies of Freedom, and the Freedom Brigade became truly "forgotten heroes." The adventure was released online as a "DVD extra" of sorts and fans liked the Freedom Brigade, enough so one artist brought them to life with illustrations! We later revealed the Freedom Brigade did exist in the Freedom omniverse, recruited by Dr. Tomorrow to aid his homeworld of Erde, as detailed in the Worlds of Freedom sourcebook.

ship and away from Freedom is pretty much history. Despite their obliviousness, the enemy agents are smart enough to take full advantage of the (Toughness 8) crates that are good for cover. The Ratzis attempt a fighting retreat back to the freighter, and then try to make it to sea before the authorities can intercept them.

Of course, a sharp hero could make short work of that plan by smashing up the (Toughness 3) gangplank connecting the dock up to the ship's deck. A more powerful (or more dense) hero could also sink the freighter, but the government's bound to frown on such wanton destruction without good cause. *Somebody* will get stuck putting out the blazing hulk and then raising the wreck to unblock access to the dock, you know.

V FOR VICTORY

In the most likely outcome, the good guys win, and the bad guys are in FBI custody en route to the nearest military tribunal. Ambulances and doctors arrive for those who need them shortly thereafter.

The FBI allows the heroes to question any captured infiltrators, just so long as they don't maim or kill any of them, and a Special Agent is always present on the Bureau's behalf to listen for anything useful. Unfortunately for the good guys, the Nazi agents don't know all that much. The bad guys appropriated the freighter in South America, and secretly loaded some additional cargo during a mid-ocean rendezvous with a U-boat. Their orders were to leave the crates in this warehouse for "future operations" and then return to South America to await new assignments.

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR VICTORY

If the maybe-not-all-that-super superheroes manage to lose to the Nazis, the good news is they suffer no further harm other than extreme embarrassment. They wake up an hour or two after being knocked out, with almost everything of interest gone, including the Kraut agents, their mysterious cargo, and the ship they sailed in on. The humbled heroes probably want to look around a bit just to confirm these facts, which takes us to the next scene.

WE HAVE TOP MEN WORKING ON IT...TOP MEN

Looking for the items the Nazis off-loaded (whether they're still there or not) is a needle-and-haystack deal. Any captured Krauts can be browbeaten into helping, but they followed their orders to the letter and scattered the contraband crates amongst the legitimate cargos. Since neither they (or the ship's phony manifest) are of any real assistance, the characters are left with their Search skills, looking through one 5-foot area per check.

The heroes are bound to grab a cup o' joe before spending the rest of their night opening crate after crate. However, before the characters come across anything more useful a leg-shaped lamp (inside a crate bearing the Italian word "FRAGILE," of course), the piercing sound of air-raid sirens echoes through the night, giving them quite a start. Characters with any ranks in Knowledge (current events) know there was no drill scheduled for tonight, meaning enemy planes are about to bomb Freedom City!

SCENE TWO: LOOK! UP IN THE SKY!

A quick glance at the night sky seems to confirm this terrible hypothesis. Searchlights sweep the night sky from all directions, but even without their aid, the sight and sound of a large flaming object streaking across the night sky is readily apparent. For a moment, it looks like it will take the tops off the city's skyscrapers, but it passes safely over the city, headed towards the Wharton State Forest.

Succeeding at a DC 20 Notice check confirms the skies to be otherwise empty, though all the trappings of a full-blown air raid drill continue: searchlights, sirens, nervous white-helmeted air-raid marshals, and a city-wide blackout. Flying characters may wish to go aloft and confirm Freedom City is not about to be hit by Axis bombers, but lacking an IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) system, they are bound to draw some antiaircraft fire from trigger-happy ground crews. It's just for in-game effect, though, to remind the players of how panicky the city (and country) are at this bleak time; a DC 15 Stealth check sees them safely to the ground without further incident.

A huge flaming object crashing near their home city is all it takes to get most heroes to go investigating, especially if they recall the infamous radio dramatization of *The War of the Worlds* back in '38. It won't be long before the stern-faced G-Men (who've secured the warehouse) and the insistent air-raid marshals begin asking when exactly the costumed folks are going to check out the flaming maybe-a-bomb, maybe-a-Martian-invasion thing. When the players take the hint, events move on to **Sea Hawk Down**.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

But of course, some players won't believe you, Gamemaster, and they just *have* to see for themselves what's in the crates. After ten long hours of opening many, many boxes (or less time, if any hero has the Quickness power, becoming the team's most popular member as a result), the characters find themselves surrounded by a mountain of packing material, and a big metal mystery (Assuming of course the characters defeated the Nazi agents; otherwise, they find zip).

What the Nazis smuggled in amounts to roughly 5 tons of machine parts. A successful Craft (mechanical) check against DC 15 confirms the components are intended for some sort of heavy lifting, rather like crane or bulldozer parts. Beating the DC by 5 yields an even more fascinating bit of information: the components resemble those used by Westinghouse to build the 1939 World's Fair Elektro robots, only much, much larger. Workaholic or obsessive-compulsive characters can try to put the thing together, but events progress to **Any Bonds Today?** long before they've done much more than connect the hipbone to the thighbone.

Have each character involved in the Christmas morning-like box opening make a Search skill check against DC 20.

Success turns up a box full of smaller, more delicate parts. A successful Craft (electronic) check against DC 15 correctly identifies the mass of vacuum tubes and other components as belonging to a radio transmitter of some kind. Putting it together (DC 20 check with Craft (electronic)) doesn't add anything beyond the fact it's a weird radio-type gadget sending out a weird signal to receivers unknown. At that point, Bulova Watch Time says the characters are due to show up at the big war-bond rally, as described in **Any Bonds Today?**

The heroes' presence at the warehouse also prevents the Aryan Ape and his Storm-Gorillas from making their scheduled landfall. It's an inconvenience to him at most, but being the temperamental sort, he won't forgive them this slight when they encounter one another later in the adventure.

SCENE THREE: SEA HAWK DOWN

Curious heroes who rush off to find what all the outside commotion's about have no problem finding the crash site. Just heading in the same general direction as the object's descent reveals a large pillar of smoke rising from Wharton State Forest. The attached column of fire and downed treetops can lead them the rest of the way.

At first glance, it appears to be a crashed airliner or medium bomber, but it's hard to be sure with the flames all around. Extinguishing them is likely the characters' top priority, and heroes with the right powers (for instance, Weather Control, Water Control) have only to counter the rank 6 blaze to make that happen.

Otherwise, the heroes either must brave the flames to search inside for survivors (being charred by the fire each turn spent in or near the crashed vehicle), or run away like cowards before the fuel tanks explode. If the players opt for the latter, pimp-slap them, and have their characters proceed to **Any Bonds Today?** in disgrace once they're done watching an old-growth forest burn and fruitlessly searching the ashes for clues.

Once inside the wreck, the characters discover the passenger compartment remarkably intact, and any character trained in the Pilot skill can tell instantly it's not configured like any sort of aircraft cockpit they know. Six unconscious passengers are strapped into their seats. If the heroes aren't dodging flames (and it's a DC 15 test of their Notice skills if they are), they pick up on the fact the passengers are all wearing different superhero costumes. It's too dark to recognize anyone in particular inside the wrecked compartment (unless it's still on fire, but in that case, the impending fuel-tank explosion makes it advisable to save the positive IDs for later).

One of the passengers is cloaked from head to toe (it's the Invisible Agent, sooty and visible at the moment, but the heroes won't identify him until later), and the character who attempts to rescue him gets to make a Notice skill check against DC 15. If the hero succeeds, he catches sight of an attaché case protruding from underneath the seat in front. Whatever's inside, the cloaked passenger's body positioning suggests he was reaching for the case (or had just lost his grip on it) when the crash occurred.

HEROES' WELCOME

If the heroes are acting heroically and urgently, the impending fuel-tank explosion is nothing more than a source of steadily growing tension for them. So unless they're being extremely stupid and lazy, the downed craft doesn't blow up until they get the last passenger out, just in the nick of time.

Once in a place of safety, the characters can attempt a Knowledge (current events) skill check (DC 15) to recognize the passengers as the believed-dead Freedom Brigade, probably from one of their newspaper and newsreel appearances. Recalling details about any given member is a little trickier (DC 20), but success reminds a character of a particular Brigadier's hero-name and general capabilities. Any character recognizing Sea Hawk also recognizes the crashed vehicle as her trademark flying submarine.

Anyone rendering first aid to the unconscious Brigadiers can revive each of them with a Medicine skill check against DC 15. For each successful attempt, the character also takes note of the fact the Brigadiers should be a lot more injured than they actually are (but aren't thanks to the Aryan Ape's remote guidance of the crash).

Other characters may busy themselves checking out the recovered attaché case. It is neither locked nor booby-trapped (though feel free

to ask the players to make some meaningless rolls to check, just to make them nervous). Its contents consist entirely of electronic parts, identical to the ones described in the last paragraph under **What's in the Box**. Said parts can be examined or assembled in a similar fashion, using the same skills and DCs.

A WHALE OF A TALE

At some point, the heroes should ask the Brigadiers about their seemingly miraculous return. Depending on the circumstances, the conversation can happen near the crash site (once the Brigadiers are successfully revived), over a cup of coffee before the warbond rally, or both.

Most of the team is grateful for the rescue and thus happy to talk to the characters—all except for the Invisible Agent, who (no pun intended) disappears from the crash site at the first opportunity. The other Brigadiers are in no way surprised or alarmed by the Agent's vanishing, saying (truthfully) "He always does that."

When asked, the Brigadiers all tell the same story. Once they reached the Japanese-controlled areas of the Pacific, they found the Imperial Navy a much more formidable foe than anticipated, so much so they never got close to Tokyo. They did, however, pick up some valuable intelligence on the deployment of Japanese forces, and decided to return home with this information (which has now, alas, been lost in the fire and the explosion).

Due to the Japanese ships and planes on their tail they were forced to maintain radio silence and come home the long way, across the Indian Ocean and Africa. Still, a lucky shot from a German U-boat's deck gun brought them down just before they reached Freedom City.

The inevitable Sense Motive checks (DC 20) to evaluate the situation, if successful, indicate these accounts are a little too pat, a little too rehearsed. All the details hold up and there are no inconsistencies in their stories, but that just causes any character who made their skill roll to be all the more suspicious. They can't put their fingers on any specific falsehoods, but their gut instinct says the whole thing just doesn't ring true.

If the characters escalate matters and use their Sense Motive skills to notice influence, all their attempts come up empty (since the Aryan Ape's brainwashing machine is a plot device). This could only heighten the tensions, because the players may then conclude the Freedom Brigade—the city's sainted heroes—are deliberately lying to cover something up!

The Brigadiers won't consent to any sort of super-powered scrutiny (like Mind Reading), and in fact resent it highly. Who are the stateside-bound heroes to question *their* motives and patriotism? Involuntary mental searches (in addition to being less than heroic) turn up nothing incriminating in any event.

If asked about the attaché case, the Brigadiers claim to know nothing about it. Some may speculate it contains yet another piece of enemy technology liberated by the Invisible Agent, but no one claims to have any real idea. Since it doesn't belong to them, none of the Brigadiers object to the characters keeping the case and its contents, examining them, or whatever.

Before things get too heated between the hero groups (or the game starts to drag), the Freedom City Police and Fire Departments, freed from the now-cancelled air raid alert, arrive on the scene. If the characters couldn't, the professionals see to the fire and the medical needs of the Freedom Brigade (as well as any injured rescuers). Once they realize who they've helped, the cops and firemen give a heroes' welcome to Freedom's bravest costumed champions who've now returned home to a city in need of some good news. The characters suddenly get treated like chopped liver by comparison, and since the adulation pretty much halts any further interrogations, that's as good a time as any for them to exit, stage left.

THE FREEDOM WHO?

Readers of the *Golden Age* sourcebook for *M&M* will quickly realize: the Freedom Brigade is not a part of "official" *Freedom City* history: the only two Allied super-teams active during the WWII era of the World of Freedom were the Liberty League and the Allies of Freedom. This adventure therefore takes the form of an "alternate history" of the Freedom City setting. There may be any number of explanations for this, choose the one that best suits your game:

- The Freedom Brigade is a part of Freedom City history, but one that's been largely forgotten by the present-day due to what happened to the Brigadiers during this adventure. It's not difficult to image the Brigade fading into obscurity, considered "damaged goods" by many due to their brainwashing. After all, even if they *seem* to overcome the Aryan Ape's influence, who knows for sure?
- The adventure takes place on an alternate Earth (*Freedom City*, page 106-107); the 1940s of Erde (Dr. Tomorrow's home timeline) is one possibility, but it could be a previously unknown parallel. In this case, the Freedom Brigade might replace the Liberty League in local history, and the characters could replace or join the Brigade following the events of the adventure.
- The adventure is the result of some disturbance in the space-time continuum, causing the Freedom Brigade to exist where they did not before or, alternately, causing them to *cease* to exist once things have been put right. Freedom City's Golden Age era already features meddling time-travelers in the form of Dr. Tomorrow and Dr. Geistmann, the Aryan Ape might be just one more such visitor from another world, tampering with the past in some fashion.
- If you want to run *The Charge of the Freedom Brigade* as an alternate world story, the characters could be accidentally catapulted into this world. They learn of unusual activity down at the docks, or of the disappearance of the Freedom Brigade, and the adventure begins! If you wish to run *A Date That Will Live in Infamy* from the *Golden Age* book, you can run this adventure as a follow-up where the heroes are sent to an alternate Earth. It explains the similarities between the two adventures as "parallel development" although the heroes have to be careful not to get caught up in their preconceptions, as many things are *not* the same! The Freedom Brigade can then help to send the otherworldly heroes home at the end of the adventure.
- For a fun change of pace, the characters in this adventure can be simian heroes from Earth-Ape (*Freedom City*, page 107), either its present-day or its own Golden Age, come to bring the Aryan Ape back to their world to face justice. They not only have to thwart the villain's schemes, but also stay out of sight or somehow disguise themselves as humans, since even in the world at war a group of super-powered gorillas is going to attract some attention!

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

The characters' most likely destinations are home to bed, or back to the warehouse to open more crates. The former gets them some much-needed rest, while the latter just leads to more trouble. Back at the pier, the characters find the Fire Department there, just having failed to prevent the warehouse from burning to the ground.

Poking around the scene turns up an ambulance crew tending to a handful of battered but conscious G-Men. If questioned, the agents recount how they were left to watch over the crime scene while their colleagues whisked the German smugglers off to jail. Not long afterwards, they were all knocked out by unknown assailants, and awoke to find the warehouse ablaze.

There's not much else for the characters to do but wait until the firemen finish their work. Once that happens, there are still clues to be found. First, a Search check (DC 20) locates the source of the blaze, and an Investigate check (DC 26) confirms the fire was deliberately set by someone to whom arson was no idle hobby.

Second, if the characters failed to recover the attaché case from the crash site, a successful Search check (DC 20) locates the now-charred box of electronic parts described previously under **What's in the Box?** Said parts can be examined or assembled as described in that section once the soot's been cleaned off.

Though the players won't know it until later, the Aryan Ape and his Storm-Gorillas came ashore from a U-Boat during the confusion sewn by the Freedom Brigade's crash-landing (which the Ape orchestrated). Finding G-Men at the pier instead of the German agents they expected, the evil monkeys ambushed the Special Agents and then burned down the warehouse to keep their spare secret weapon from falling into enemy hands. A regrettable choice for the Ape, but it was also the only one time and circumstance allowed.

SCENE FOUR: ANY BONDS TODAY?

After the characters' eventful night gives way to the morning after, they awake to find the newspapers and radio abuzz with news of the Freedom Brigade's amazing return. To their likely chagrin, the reports contain only sporadic, vague mentions of "other costumed heroes involved in the rescue." (If the characters elected to remain at the warehouse all night, the Gamemaster can assume the police and firemen managed to rescue the Brigadiers in time.)

The characters' spotlight is further diminished at the war-bond rally later that day, as they find themselves the opening act at an event they were supposed to co-headline, with the top spot now occupied by the newly returned Freedom Brigade. Unfortunately for the characters, the only thing that could make matters worse would be skipping the rally entirely, so despite any wounds to their pride, they are left with little choice but to put on a happy face and do their patriotic duty.

Once there, the characters find Liberty Park filled to capacity, as the whole city seems to have turned out for the gala event. The characters are the rally's curtain-jerkers, a role never to be envied. To make matters more difficult, they either have to come off as heroic in light of the Freedom Brigade's return, or seem charming and funny at an event headlined by Bob Hope, Frances Langford, and Jerry Colonna.

Still, players are players, and if the characters want to do more than just say "Buy Bonds!" and quickly get off-stage, let them try. On the Interaction Table, the crowd is Indifferent to the B-list heroes the characters now seem to be. From that starting point the heroes can try to inspire the crowd with a patriotic speech (Diplomacy), tell a few jokes (Bluff), or show off their superabilities (Perform). Based on the results, it may save the heroes' bruised egos, or make them feel even more like also-rans.

They may feel that way regardless once the Freedom Brigade makes its grand entrance in the Sea Hawk's flying submarine (it's a spare she had stored, in case you're wondering). When the amazing craft sets down next to the stage and the team (seemingly minus the Invisible Agent—he's there, just invisible) disembarks, the crowd gives them a tumultuous welcome, almost drowning out announcer Bill Goodwin's introduction.

At that point, the characters may be sorely tempted to slink off in embarrassment, but events soon take a turn for the interesting, as the Freedom Brigade reveals the hairy hitchhikers they picked up on the way to the rally. From out of the Sea Hawk's flying submarine comes a squad of gorillas in full Nazi SS regalia. To the shock and horror of the audience, the members of the Freedom Brigade greet them with a raised-arm salute and a hearty "Heil Hitler!"

THEY CAME TO ROB THE WAR-BOND RALLY!

In standard movie-Nazi idiom (dust off your worst stereotypical German accent, Gamemaster), the Aryan Ape informs the crowd he has come to America's own shores to show the superiority of the Third Reich. He then fires a few warning shots in the air to emphasize his point. With that, the crowd goes into a full-blown panic, blocking any additional help from arriving and putting the job of saving the day squarely on the previously snubbed heroes' shoulders.

The Ape's plan is a simple one. He wants to grab the big barrel of war-bond money off the stage, take it back aboard the flying submarine, and escape back to Germany with both the cash and a propaganda victory in paw. Of course, he doesn't really think it's going to be that easy, what with all the superheroes running around Freedom City, but that's what the brainwashed Freedom Brigade is there for.

Therefore, defeating the Nazis' plan means besting the Freedom Brigade, the Storm-Gorillas (there's one present for every character), and the Aryan Ape himself. A tall order to be sure, but the characters do have an edge in that the brainwashed Freedom Brigade is incapable of using any sort of tactics or team coordination. There's no doubt from the Brigadiers' robotic mannerisms and zombie-like expressions that they are not of their own wills. They attack individually, directly and unimaginatively, and thus are far less formidable a team than usual.

The evil monkeys are all trained soldiers, and use cover, coordination, combined attacks, and any other tactical trick in the book. In addition, they are all well versed in underhanded tactics, like taking hostages. Unfortunately for the heroes, the rally means there's no shortage of innocent bystanders for the hairy villains to endanger.

THE HINGE OF FATE

If things are going badly for the heroes, you can give them a chance to break through the Ape's brainwashing of the Freedom Brigade. Talking a Brigadier back to normal requires a Diplomacy skill check (DC 20). Alternatively, the Gamemaster can allow the use of Mind Control or a similar power, with the same DC.

Should the attempt succeed, the targeted Brigadier gets to make a Will save against DC 20 to return to his old All-American self. They've been fighting against the brainwashing for some time (and overcame it long enough to sneak the attaché case aboard the flying submarine), so anyone who escapes the Ape's control is ready to join the fight on the heroes' side.

In a pinch, the Gamemaster can have some on-leave soldiers in the crowd join the fray. They're not armed, but on numbers andchutzpah alone they can take out some of the Storm-Gorillas and even the odds at least that much.

GIANT NAZI ROBOT RAMPAGE

If the battle seriously turns against the evil monkeys and their puppet allies, the Aryan Ape moves to phase two of his scheme, which involves testing his latest invention. Before the heroes move in to gang up on him, the Ape produces a paw-sized metal box with visible antennae and vacuum tubes protruding from it.

Any character who assembled the electronic parts (either the ones found in the warehouse or recovered from the crash site) immediately recognizes the Ape's device as a twin of the one they put together. A

character who examined the dissembled parts but didn't actually put them together comes to the same conclusion if they can make a Craft (electronics) skill check against DC 15.

The Ape presses a large red button on the device (using his last effort before going unconscious, if necessary), which causes it to light up, whirl, and spark dramatically. Shortly thereafter, a great commotion in the city becomes noticeable from the direction of the dockyards, the source of which soon becomes quite visible: a 60-foot-tall Giant Nazi Robot. The Aryan automaton is headed for Liberty Park, crushing parked cars and scaring the bejeezus out of hundreds of innocent bystanders as it goes.

Whether or not the Aryan Ape himself is conscious to direct it, the robot's actions are the same. It makes its way to the Park and tries to rescue the Ape, placing him inside a secure compartment in its torso. After that, it starts leveling as much of Freedom City as possible.

The Park is largely empty by the time the robot arrives, so the heroes can attack with much less concern about innocent bystanders. It's an edge they're going to need, as they soon find out the robot is made of tough stuff (use the Colossal Robot archetype on page 235 of *M&M*).

SCRAP METAL DRIVE

Defeating the clanking metal fascist is not easy, but it can be done using brains, brawn, or a combination of the two. The most difficult way is a frontal attack, because (even reinforced by members of the Freedom Brigade) the well-armored robot is not easily damaged.

Clever thinking on the players' parts and a lot of combined attacks just might be able to do the trick before the robot crushes them all. If the robot accumulates a -10 penalty (or more) to its Toughness saves, the Ape (if he's inside the thing) decides to run away and fight another day, attempting to walk north into the Wading River and then to the sea to rendezvous with a waiting U-boat.

The heroes can pursue the robot if they wish, but they've pretty much saved the city at that point. There are plenty of men, women, and children who need aid and comfort after the robot's rampage, so the heroes' proper place at this juncture is helping them. The heroes can also be grateful their actions at the warehouse the previous night kept the Ape from having *two* such robots at his command!

ON THE AIR

Clever characters who have access to an electronic control device (either found at the warehouse, recovered from the crash site, or taken from the Aryan Ape) can attempt to take over the robot themselves. Some of the characters may have to race back to their base of operations to get the device, and may even have to put it together while the robot rampages, forcing their teammates to battle the iron menace until they get all the tubes and wires connected.

Once they've gotten their act (and the device) together, characters can attempt to seize control of the robot. If the Aryan Ape is not in control of the tin-can terror, it takes a successful Knowledge (physical sciences or technology) check against DC 25 to make the robot obey. The device must be in line of sight of the robot, but if the check succeeds the character can make the robot sit up, beg, roll over, or put the star atop the tallest Christmas tree—whatever the hero's heart desires. Otherwise, after any failed attempt to seize control of it, the robot focuses on crushing whoever's holding the device-holder. Lucky him.

If the Ape is pulling the levers himself, control is decided by an opposed check between the evil monkey and the character, using Knowledge (physical sciences or technology) skills. The winner controls the robot for that round, and if it's the Ape, he focuses his efforts on eliminating the hero who has the competing device.

Merciful Gamemasters whose characters are getting pulverized by the evil monkey and his giant robot can have a free-willed member of the Freedom Brigade mention the control device they smuggled out while

temporarily resisting the Ape's brainwashing. If a device is still available to the heroes, they can act accordingly. Otherwise, they're going to have to build one from scratch, requiring a Craft (electronics) skill check against DC 20 and 12 hours' time (or, more likely, a DC 25 and 10 rounds' time when the heroes try to jury-rig one, see page 131 of *M&M*).

EPILOGUE

If the characters save the city from destruction by pretty much any acceptable means, it counts as a major victory in the eyes of Freedom City's citizens. The heroes get all the public adulation they've earned, though it stops short of a ticker-tape parade (there is, after all, a war on). However, any hard feelings the players had about being slighted by the public should be more than assuaged by newspaper headlines, magazine covers, newsreel footage, and mentions on the radio.

In fact, if the heroes saved the day and kept both the innocent bystanders and contributions at the war-bond rally safe, they earn a real accolade: a favorable mention on *The Bob Hope Show* from the star himself. That sort of positive notoriety is truly a memory to be grateful for, even in the face of a war still to be won.

If the heroes are defeated, the Army Air Force shows up while all the costumed types are still in dreamland, and the P-40 fighters manage to drive the Giant Nazi Robot into the sea before too much of the city gets reduced to rubble. The mood in Freedom City is glum for weeks afterwards, with the citizens' mood not improving until news of the daring Doolittle Raid on Tokyo reaches them. The beaten heroes, on the other hand, keep a more realistic view of things after learning firsthand about the long, bitter struggle against formidable foes that lies ahead.

In any case, the heroes now have some allies they can call on for help. Grateful to the characters for the rescue(s) and ashamed of their actions while under the Aryan Ape's control, the Freedom Brigade regards the characters as friends, and true heroes to be emulated—something the Brigadiers won't be shy in telling the press.

THE MAJOR AWARD

The players each get a power point for stopping the Giant Nazi Robot from destroying Freedom City, even if they technically did so by taking the villains down so fast it never had a chance to enter the fray.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Depending on the outcome, there may be unresolved plot threads the Gamemaster can follow up on. Freedom City still has a major enemy-agent problem on its hands, as the two Giant Nazi Robots can attest to. There's also the question of where exactly the Aryan Ape was able to hide out awaiting the war-bond rally, and who in Freedom City helped him do so. Lastly, there's the Ape himself, who (if he escaped) will surely return to plague the heroes and their beloved home city.

THE FREEDOM BRIGADE

Formed in July 1941 to protect Lend-Lease shipments from Axis saboteurs, the Freedom Brigade became one of the earliest (if not best-known) teams of Freedom City's costumed heroes. Their most famous exploit was seemingly their last, when on December 8, 1941, the Brigade's outraged leader Commander USA publicly declared the team was on its way to Tokyo to take revenge for the Pearl Harbor attack.

The Freedom Brigade departed the same day aboard the Sea Hawk's flying submarine to great fanfare, but the team was not heard from afterwards. At the start of this adventure, they remain missing and presumed dead, honored as the first of America's costumed heroes to give their lives in World War II.

COMMANDER USA

POWER LEVEL 10

Str 18	Dex 18	Con 20	Int 12	Wis 12	Cha 20
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Skills: Bluff 6 (+11), Craft (chemical) 4 (+5), Diplomacy 6 (+11), Intimidate 6 (+11), Knowledge (physical sciences) 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (chemist) 4 (+5), Stealth 6 (+10)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 4, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 3, Dodge Focus 3, Elusive Target, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Improved Block, Inspire, Leadership, Power Attack, Takedown Attack

Powers: **Transform 8** (inanimate objects into other inanimate objects; Continuous; Touch Range)

Combat: Attack +8 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +12, Damage +4 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -4 (-2 flatfooted), Initiative +4

Saving Throws: Toughness +8 (+5 flatfooted), Fortitude +6, Reflex +5, Will +3

Abilities 40 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 19 + Powers 40 + Combat 18 + Saves 4 = Total 131

Right after boot camp, young Army draftee James Hendricks was assigned to guard duty at a top-secret government research lab. One night while making his rounds, Hendricks came upon a group of Nazi spies attempting to make off with an experimental chemical mixture. Caught by surprise and outnumbered, Hendricks did the only thing he could to keep the concoction out of enemy hands: he drank it.



The spies left the seemingly poisoned Hendricks for dead, and after he regained consciousness, he was honorably discharged for medical reasons. In time, however, he not only regained his former vigor, but found his body elevated to near the peak of human physical perfection. Even more incredibly, he found the experimental alchemical solution he'd swallowed had given him the power to transmute elements by touch.

Still angry at the enemy saboteurs hiding in his beloved country but unable to re-enlist, the patriotic Hendricks donned a red, white, and blue costume and dubbed himself Commander USA, leader of America's war against home front subversion. To that end, the charismatic Hendricks put together the Freedom Brigade, and serves as its leader when not pursuing his other career as a neophyte industrial chemist.

DR. X

POWER LEVEL 8

Str 12	Dex 12	Con 16	Int 24	Wis 14	Cha 12
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Skills: Concentration 8 (+10), Craft (electronic) 8 (+15), Craft (mechanical) 8 (+15), Disable Device 8 (+15), Knowledge (physical sciences) 8 (+15), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+15), Notice 8 (+10), Search 8 (+15)

Feats: Accurate Attack, Attack Focus (ranged) 7, Dodge Focus 3, Improved Tools, Inventor, Power Attack

Powers: **Flight 8** (2,500 MPH), **Force Field 8** (Impervious; Limited: physical attacks), **Magnetic Control 8** (Dynamic, Alternate Powers [all Dynamic]: **Animate Objects 8** [Limited: machines], **Blast 8**, **Blast 5** [metallic projectiles; Autofire; Accurate], **Deflect 8** [slow and fast projectiles], **Environmental Control 8** [flying metal objects, distraction, DC 10], **Magnetic Control 8** [magnetic field; Burst Area; Touch Range], **Nullify Electronics 8** [electro-magnetic pulse, all effects; Nullifying Field, Toughness Save], **Obscure 16** [radio], **Snare 8** [metallic bonds], **Transform 4** [reshape metal; Continuous])

Combat: Attack +1 (melee), +8 (ranged), +10 (Autofire Blast), Grapple +2, Damage +8 (Blast), +5 (Autofire Blast), +1 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+1 flatfooted), Knockback -9 (-1 without Force Field), Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +11 (+3 without Force Field), Fortitude +4, Reflex +3, Will +4

Abilities 30 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 14 + Powers 61 + Combat 6 + Saves 5 = Total 132

Freedom City University professor Dr. Jerry Xavier is one of the country's leading experts on electromagnetism, and was one of many researchers looking into ways of improving radar systems, vital to America's defense network. One late night, a power surge triggered an overload in Xavier's experimental cavity magnetron, bombarding him with powerful electromagnetic rays.



When he regained consciousness, Dr. Xavier discovered his body could generate those same rays, and he could manipulate the Earth's magnetic field and fly. At first, Xavier was unsure what to do with his newfound abilities, until he read of Commander USA's call for costumed heroes to join him in fighting enemy agents in Freedom City.

Seeing an opportunity both to continue his research and use his strange gifts for the greater good, Xavier created the identity of Doctor X, Master of Magnetism. In that guise, he became one of the founding members of the Freedom Brigade.

THE INVISIBLE AGENT

POWER LEVEL 8

Str 14	Dex 14	Con 14	Int 24	Wis 16	Cha 16
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Skills: Bluff 6 (+9), Craft (chemical) 10 (+17), Diplomacy 6 (+9), Disable Device 6 (+13), Drive 6 (+8), Escape Artist 6 (+8), Gather Information 6 (+9), Intimidate 6 (+9), Investigate 6 (+13), Knowledge (current events) 10 (+17), Knowledge (physical sciences) 10 (+17), Knowledge (technology) 10 (+17), Language (Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish) 8, Notice 8 (+11), Search 8 (+15), Sense Motive 6 (+9), Stealth 10 (+12)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 4, Chokehold, Contacts, Defensive Roll 4, Distract (Bluff), Dodge Focus 4, Equipment 4, Improved Aim, Improved Critical (punch) 2, Improved Disarm, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Inventor, Power Attack, Sneak Attack 3, Takedown Attack, Well-Informed
Equipment: Binoculars, caltrops, camera, concealable microphone, flashlight, gas mask, handcuffs, heavy pistol, knife, multi-tool

Powers: **Device 2** (Invisibility Suit, hard to lose)
Invisibility Suit: **Invisibility** (all visual senses; Close Range, Selective)

Combat: Attack +8 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +10, Damage +4 (heavy pistol), +3 (knife), +2 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -3 (-1 flatfooted), Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +6 (+2 flatfooted), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +4

Abilities 38 + Skills 32 (128 ranks) + Feats 32 + Powers 8 + Combat 16 + Saves 5 = Total 131

Little is known about the man aptly known as the Invisible Agent. He claims his real name is Frank Raymond, and his transparency comes from a secret chemical formula only he possesses. The invisibility solution works on contact, and Raymond wears a hooded cloak, mask, gloves, and other items of clothing saturated in the mysterious concoction.



Raymond is rarely visible, even around his teammates, but his mission seems clear. The Invisible Agent is a true man of secrets, and that includes keeping America's confidential information safe at home and acquiring that of its enemies.

While the Freedom Brigade is never sure of his comings and goings, the Invisible Agent always seems to be around when he's most needed. It is speculated he spends at least some of his time overseas operating behind enemy lines, because much of the information he passes along to his teammates and the FBI could come from few other places.

THE MAGISTER

POWER LEVEL 8

Str 16 **Dex 16** **Con 16** **Int 16** **Wis 24** **Cha 18**

Skills: Diplomacy 9 (+13), Drive 6 (+9), Gather Information 8 (+12), Intimidate 9 (+13), Investigate 6 (+9), Knowledge (civics) 9 (+12), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+11), Notice 6 (+13), Profession (lawyer) 9 (+16), Sense Motive 8 (+15), Search 6 (+9), Stealth 8 (+11)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Specialization (Strike), Connected, Contacts, Dodge Focus 3, Equipment 2, Fearsome Presence 3, Improved Block, Power Attack, Startle, Takedown Attack, Well-Informed

Equipment: Roadster (Strength 25, Speed 5, Defense 9, Toughness 7, Large Size, Features: caltrops, oil slick, smokescreen)

Powers: **Device 6** (Magisterial Raiment, easy to lose), **Device 1** (Judge's Robes, hard to lose)

Gavel of Justice: **Deflect 8** (slow projectiles), **Strike 3** (Extended Reach, Mighty, Thrown), **Prison Bars:** **Snare 8**, **Judge's Robes:** **Protection 5**

Combat: Attack +5, +7 (Strike), Grapple +8, Damage +6 (Strike), +3 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -4 (-1 without Robes), Initiative +3

Saving Throws: Toughness +8 (+3 without Robes), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +8

Abilities 46 + Skills 23 (92 ranks) + Feats 17 + Powers 22 + Combat 20 + Saves 3 = Total 131

Assistant District Attorney James Carrott grew tired of watching Freedom City's most notorious mobsters beat the rap time and time again due to their illicit power and influence, and in time resolved to do something more about it. Driven by his thirst for justice, by night Carrott became the costumed vigilante known as the Magister, and he began to stalk the criminals the law could not touch.



In a short time, the lawless grew to fear the very sight of the Magister and his mighty Gavel of Justice. The police were soon busy finding once-untouchable criminals helpless in his Prison Bar snares, the evidence needed to convict them always nearby. Eventually, the law became so grateful for his help they more or less stopped chasing the costumed vigilante's trademark jet-black 1940-model roadster.

With the mob on the run, the Magister began to dedicate his efforts towards rounding up the enemy saboteurs who brazenly flaunted the freedoms they'd come to America to destroy. Therefore, with his goals overlapping with Commander USA's, the Magister accepted the invitation to join the Freedom Brigade.

THE MYSTERIOUS MADAME RADIUM

POWER LEVEL 8

Str 10 **Dex 18** **Con 18** **Int 14** **Wis 16** **Cha 18**

Skills: Bluff 5 (+9), Knowledge (current events) 5 (+7), Notice 5 (+8), Profession (secretary) 5 (+8)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 3, Attractive, Beginner's Luck, Defensive Roll 3, Dodge Focus 3, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Taunt

Powers: **Flight 7** (1,000 MPH), **Immunity 10** (radiation effects), **Radiation Control 8** (Dynamic, Alternate Powers [all Dynamic])

Dazzle 8 [visual], **Dazzle 4** [visual; Sustained Duration], **Drain Constitution 4** [radiation poisoning; Disease, Ranged], **Environmental Control 8** [light, eliminate concealment], **Nauseate 5** [radiation sickness; Ranged; Affects Insubstantial], **Nullify Genetic Powers 8** [genetic damage; Fortitude Save], **Obscure 16** [radio]

Combat: Attack +5 (melee), +8 (ranged), Grapple +5, Damage +8 (Blast), +0 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -3 (-2 flat-footed), Initiative +4

Saving Throws: Toughness +7 (+4 flat-footed), Fortitude +5, Reflex +5, Will +4

Abilities 34 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 15 + Powers 55 + Combat 20 + Saves 3 = Total 132

Samantha Luck had it all: looks, brains—everything but a rewarding career. Tired of her dead-end, thankless secretarial job, Samantha accompanied a group of friends on a long shot get-rich-quick hunt for radium deposits.



During the trip, a cave-in separated Samantha from her companions, and left her trapped inside a chamber full of radium uncovered by the collapse. By the time the land's rightful owners showed up and rescued her, she'd been exposed to the rays of the wonder-element for several hours, but showed no ill effects. It wasn't until she returned home to Freedom City she discovered she now possessed the power of radium itself!

Though still stuck in her boring secretarial job, Samantha drew upon the examples of Freedom's other costumed heroes and became the Mysterious Madame Radium, the atom-powered crime-fighter. Sure enough, the life of a costumed adventurer was just the tonic for her formerly dull life, and it was only natural for her to take the next step and join the Freedom Brigade. From then on, boredom became the least of her worries, and Samantha wouldn't have it any other way.

THE SEA HAWK

POWER LEVEL 8

Str 10 **Dex 14** **Con 14** **Int 24** **Wis 18** **Cha 14**

Skills: Bluff 4 (+6), Craft (electronic) 7 (+14), Craft (mechanical) 7 (+14), Disable Device 7 (+14), Drive 6 (+8), Knowledge (technology) 7 (+14), Notice 5 (+9), Pilot 6 (+8), Profession (businesswoman) 6 (+10), Search 5 (+12), Swim 8 (+8)

Feats: Accurate Attack, Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Attractive, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 3, Distract (Bluff), Dodge Focus 3, Equipment 16, Grappling Finesse, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Pin, Improved Trip, Inventor, Stunning Attack

Equipment: Flying Submarine (Strength 40, Speed 5 [50 MPH water and 250 MPH air], Defense 6, Toughness 11 [Impervious 2], Gargantuan Size, Features: hidden compartments, navigation system, remote control, **Blast 8** [torpedoes, Penetrating, Homing], **Blast 7** [machine guns, Autofire], **Concealment 1** [radar], **Immunity 9** [life support])

Powers: **Device 4** (equipment, easy to lose), **Device 3** (costume, hard to lose) **Ray Gun:** **Blast 8** (Accurate, Improved Range), **Grappling Line:** **Super-Movement 1** (swinging), **Costume:** **Flight 4** (100 MPH; Gliding), **Immunity 9** (life support), **Protection 2**

Combat: Attack +4 (melee), +6 (ranged), +8 (Blast), Grapple +6, Damage +8 (Blast), +0 (unarmed), Defense +7 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -3 (-2 flat-footed), Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +7 (+4 flat-footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +5

Abilities 34 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 35 + Powers 24 + Combat 16 + Saves 5 = Total 131

When Katherine Cline inherited her family's shipyards, she gained the financial security to do as she pleased. Running a boardroom didn't appeal to Katherine, who was a thinker and a builder by nature, so she left the day-to-day business deals to some trusted subordinates and went back to building her advanced prototype gadgets.

Watching German U-boats "accidentally" sink the ships she'd so carefully and lovingly designed—not to mention the loss of innocent lives—angered her, and she vowed to use her great resources and technical gifts to put a stop to their cowardly acts of wanton murder and destruction. So she secretly donned her distinctive protective garb and boarded her experimental flying submarine, with the aim of making the marauding Nazi wolf packs the hunted.

Dubbed "the Sea Hawk" by the press, Katherine's costumed alter ego became the toast of Freedom City, hailed as a hero unafraid to take the fight to the Nazis lurking just off of America's shores. Despite all the positive ink, Katherine soon realized she'd taken on quite a responsibility, and welcomed joining the Freedom Brigade for its much-needed assistance.



THE ARYAN APE & HIS STORM GORILLAS

Oberst Julius was one of the greatest scientific and military minds in Nazi Gibbony, a totalitarian country on the parallel world of Earth-Ape. On December 8, 1941, he prepared to win his world's ongoing global war by using his newly built time machine to journey into the

past and sabotage the enemy's war capabilities before they were ever put to use.

However, while making his way through space and time, Julius' machine collided with that of another extra-dimensional traveler, severely damaging both their conveyances and stranding them all on Earth-Prime. The man he collided with hailed from a parallel Earth known as Erde, but soon found a home on Earth-Prime as the costumed hero Dr. Tomorrow. In a similar fashion, Julius was made welcome in Nazi Germany, and after affirming his loyalty to this Earth's *Führer*, became known as the Aryan Ape, the perfect simian Nazi.

In his heart of hearts, Julius most wants to repair his time machine and return to his Earth. His present position offers the best chance for that to happen, since he enjoys both the Nazis' patronage and the chance to steal scientific secrets from the Allied powers. Regardless of what Earth he's on, the Ape remains a crafty and ruthless foe.

THE ARYAN APE

POWER LEVEL 10

Str 20 **Dex 14** **Con 14** **Int 24** **Wis 18** **Cha 16**

Skills: Acrobatics 5 (+7), Climb 8 (+13), Craft (electronic, mechanical) 8 (+15), Intimidate 8 (+11), Knowledge (physical sciences, technology) 8 (+15), Language 4 (English, French, Italian, Japanese), Notice 8 (+12), Sense Motive 7 (+11)

Feats: Acrobatic Bluff, Improved Pin, Inventor, Power Attack, Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack

Powers: **Device 9** (auto-cannon, easy to lose: **Blast 10** [Autofire, Penetrating, Accurate 2, Improved Range 2]), **Growth 4** (Large, Permanent, Innate), **Super-Senses 2** (low-light vision, scent)

Combat: Attack +6 (includes -1 due to size), +10 (auto-cannon), Grapple +15, Damage +10 (auto-cannon), +5 (unarmed), Defense +10, Knockback -3, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +6, Fortitude +7, Reflex +7, Will +8

Abilities 34 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 38 + Combat 36 + Saves 18 = 150

STORM GORILLAS

POWER LEVEL 4

Str 20 **Dex 14** **Con 14** **Int 12** **Wis 13** **Cha 10**

Skills: Acrobatics 5 (+7), Climb 8 (+13), Intimidate 3 (+3), Knowledge (tactics) 2 (+3), Notice 2 (+3), Profession (soldier) 6 (+7), Stealth 3 (+5), Survival 3 (+4)

Feats: Equipment 6

Equipment: camo clothing, gas mask, knife, steel helmet (+1 Toughness), service rifle, hand grenades

Powers: **Growth 4** (Large, Permanent, Innate), **Super-Senses 2** (low-light vision, scent)

Combat: Attack +4 (includes -1 due to size), Grapple +12, Damage +6 (service rifle or knife), +5 (hand grenade or unarmed), Defense +4 (includes -1 due to size), Knockback -2 (-1 without helmet), Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (+3 without helmet), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +2

Abilities 11 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 9 + Combat 20 + Saves 6 = 60



The Storm-Gorillas are fanatically loyal Nazi primates who accompanied the Aryan Ape on his journey through time and now find themselves stranded along with him. Since Julius is their only hope of ever getting home, they obey his orders without question.

CRISIS ON CHRISTMAS

BY STEVE KENSON

What the heroes hope to be a peaceful holiday season turns decidedly strange when Mr. Infamy threatens the beliefs and hopes of children across the world, by holding Santa Claus hostage! If something isn't done, the world may be denied the hope and joy of the Christmas season.

Crisis on Christmas is a lighthearted holiday adventure for the *Mutants & Masterminds* Superhero RPG. It is intended for a group of four to six Power Level 10 heroes, although the Gamemaster can scale the adventure to make it suitable for higher or lower level heroes by increasing or decreasing the power levels of the challenges as appropriate.

The adventure is set in Freedom City (described in the second edition of the *Freedom City* sourcebook available from Green Ronin Publishing). Although *Freedom City* is recommended for running this adventure, it is not required. All the necessary material is included here and in the *Mutants & Masterminds* core rulebook.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Mr. Infamy is a mysterious granter of wishes and dark desires, provided those wishes are selfish or have the potential to cause harm or mischief in the world. While the sinister salesman's victims are usually adults, Mr. Infamy does not discriminate; he seeks out despair and anger wherever they may be. In this particular case, they're found in the heart of Heather Combs, an eleven year-old girl who lost her family the previous Christmas. Alone in an orphanage, she fervently wishes the holiday would never come at all, and finds her wish granted when Mr. Infamy gives her the power to hold Christmas hostage, making the whole world forget it even exists!

Fortunately for the world, Earth's Master Mage, Adrian Eldrich is safeguarded from such manipulation. He seeks out the heroes and asks for their aid in overcoming this threat, by sending them into the realm of dreams and myth to rescue Christmas from the clutches of the mysterious woman called Desparia. But if they fail, they may be trapped forever in her cold clutches.

PLOT-DEVICE CHARACTERS

As noted on page 211 of *Mutants & Masterminds*, it's often easier to treat some characters as plot-devices rather than defining (or limiting) them with game stats. Mr. Infamy is one such character; he's an instigator, rather than a foe the heroes confront directly. Although Eldrich has game stats in *Freedom City*, they're not relevant in this adventure and he can also be treated as a plot-device character.

SCENE ONE: T'WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE...

Read or paraphrase the following to the heroes:

Late December and winter have settled upon Freedom City like a dark, grey shroud. The leaden sky sprinkles a layer of grimy snow onto the streets and creates a chill that settles into your bones and spirit. It's clear the people of the city

feel it, too, as they huddle into coats and scarves, scuttling about their business, scarcely even looking up to the grey sky above. Night is coming, and there seems little to look forward to except another evening of patrolling the streets for signs of trouble, which have become increasingly common, but really, what else can you do?

If any of the players ask exactly when in December it is, mention it's the early evening of December the 24th. If any of them note that it's Christmas Eve, or ask about the holiday season or Christmas in any fashion, just give them a blank look and say, "Christmas? What's that?" Indeed, make it clear the heroes, at least, have no recollection of any such holiday or time of the year, nothing that breaks up the endless monotony and bleakness at the start of the long, dark winter months.

Before the players have too much time to wonder about this oddity, read the following to them:

Sure enough, you haven't long to wait for trouble to arise. An alarm sounds from the Eastern Seaboard Bank at the corner of Nelson & Bridwell downtown and police sirens whine in the distance. There's trouble!

A group of six thugs (thug archetype, *M&M*, page 229) are robbing the downtown branch of the E-Sea Bank. They're armed with pistols and wearing stocking masks and their getaway car is running outside the building. Needless to say, the robbers are not prepared to deal with an entire team of superheroes; treat them as minions, meaning one hit is enough to take them down. The encounter isn't really meant to challenge the heroes, just give them a little warm-up and the opportunity to show off their powers.

If you want to make things a bit more of a challenge, you can have the thugs assisting a supervillain or two. Possibilities include Rant & Rave (from the *M&M* demo adventure *The Heist* on page 236), Downtime, Fear-Master, or one or more of the members of Larceny, Inc., from *Foes of Freedom*, or any of the lower power level villains from *Freedom City* Second Edition. The Kung-fu Killer or Sinister Simian from **Chapter 11** of *M&M* are also good options.

SCENE TWO: SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS' PAST

Once the heroes have mopped up the bank robbers, read the following aloud:

There is a shimmer in the air in front of you, and you brace yourselves for more trouble. What could it be now?

The shimmer takes the form of a man in a long, flowing cloak of dark blue, clasped at the throat with a circular silver amulet with a triangle inscribed inside it. You recognize him immediately: Eldrich, the Master Mage! His image remains translucent, as he spreads his cloak and holds out a hand towards you.

"My friends," he says in a hollow and spectral voice, "I have paused this moment in time to reach out to you." Indeed, as you glance around, you see everything and everyone else frozen, motionless. Even scatterings of snowflakes hang still in the air.

"There is a great disturbance in the natural order," the master mage says. "Some force has disrupted reality and things are not as they should be. I have been barred from returning to Earth's dimension, flung into the nether realms, but I have managed to send my astral form to you. I need your aid to right this disturbance and restore the cosmic balance. If you help me, then quickly take hold of my cloak."

If the heroes refuse Eldrich's call for aid, the master mage's astral image fades away, and time returns to normal. Feel free to add some scenes where the heroes deal with increasing levels of crime, violence, and neglect in the city on what should be Christmas Eve. Make it clear that any spirit of joy, charity, or kindness seems to be bleeding away, leaving Freedom City grey and lifeless. Then you can have Eldrich's astral form reappear to make a last, desperate plea for help.

EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

If you want to make *Crisis on Christmas* more of an extended adventure, you can give the heroes additional things they need to do before they're capable of taking on Desparia and her minions and freeing Santa and Mrs. Claus. Rather than the elves having magic corn on-hand to restore the heroes' powers, perhaps they need to seek out other places in and around the North Pole. They might also need special items or magic to take on Desparia and win. The elves can tell them where to go, and can perhaps even loan them some flying reindeer to get them there, but it's up to the heroes to get the job done.

Possible additional scenes include:

- Finding and freeing Santa's flying reindeer, perhaps so they can carry the heroes to their other destinations.
- A visit to the Island of Misfit Toys to recruit allies against Desparia or even find the one special misfit toy in need of a friend who can melt the ice-maiden's heart and help her reject Mr. Infamy's "gift."
- Seeking out the snow-witch or winter-wizard of the North who can cast a spell to restore the heroes' powers. Such aid may come with a price tag attached (sending the heroes off on yet another quest).
- Finding the Abominable Snowman (a yeti-like monster) and getting a bit of its fur (perhaps for the aforementioned spell). Alternately, the heroes might need one of the Snowman's teeth (in which case Herbie's dentistry skills may come in handy). The Snowman could be a terrible monster or actually just misunderstood and in need of some friends.
- Rescuing a little girl who represents Desparia's lost childhood innocence. When she's brought into the presence of the ice-maiden, then her cold heart melts and she regains some of the hope she has lost.

Feel free to include other scenes to extend the adventure and customize it to suit your group and your *Mutants & Masterminds* series.

When the heroes touch Eldrich's cloak, it feels only faintly substantial. The world swirls around them like a blizzard and they are instantly whisked... elsewhere. Read the following aloud to the players:

A chill wind swirls around you and the world fades as if behind a wall of snow and mist. When it clears, you find yourselves standing outside on snow-covered ground in a mountain pass of some sort. Eldrich's phantasmal form hovers above, a look of strain on his face.

"I have expended my energies," the master mage says. "I must return to my physical body at once, in hopes of navigating the netherworlds. The forces that have upset the natural order are close at hand. It is now up to you, my friends. You must put things right once more!"

Before you can respond, Eldrich's astral form fades and is gone. A cold wind swirls through the pass, whipping up the snow, and thunder rumbles somewhere in the distance.

Although he hasn't time to explain to the heroes, Eldrich has in fact transported them to another plane of reality, a kind of deep "dream realm" where the archetypes of human myth and consciousness are real. In particular, they are near a mythic representation of the North Pole, the home of Santa Claus! Initially, the world appears quite normal, but things quickly make it clear the heroes are *not* in Freedom City any longer.

One particular thing the heroes discover immediately is their movement powers don't work: they can't fly, teleport, run at superspeed, and so forth. This is because of the unique nature of the realm. The same is true of any unusual sensory powers like ESP or Telescopic Vision, which allow the heroes to sense beyond their immediate area. There's no immediate explanation why these powers don't work, they just don't. So, for the time being, the heroes have to make their way through the pass on foot.

SCENE THREE: ELF-HELP PROGRAM

As the heroes make their way through the pass, they're affected by Desparia's increasing influence over the realm and set upon by her hobgoblin minions. Fortunately, they get some aid from an unexpected quarter.

Read the following aloud to the players:

The air is freezing cold in the mountain pass and you're wishing Eldrich provided you with some winter gear before he disappeared. The snow reaches up to your knees and it's slow going trudging through it to who knows where. It's rapidly growing darker as night begins to set in and you have the disturbing feeling that you're being watched.

As the rough stone sides of the pass loom up overhead, the wind whistles and moans through the narrow gap. Suddenly, burning red eyes gleam from the shadows and a pack of grey-furred wolves with eyes like burning coals rushes to attack!

The winter-wolves are Desparia's minions, ordered to keep intruders away from the North Pole and the Workshop. Use the wolf archetype on page 232 of *M&M* as a basis, with Immunity 10 (cold effects) and Protection 5 (for a total Toughness of +7). There are at least twice as many of them as there are heroes, at least. What's worse is the wolves' attacks appear to ignore mundane defenses. Powers like Force Field and Protection are useless against them, providing no

reduction to their damage. The heroes should discover this the first time they are scratched by a wolf's claws or teeth. The creatures are not immune to counterattack, but they are supernaturally tough. The heroes should put up a good fight, but they should also feel outnumbered and out of their depth.

If the fight against the wolves begins turning against the heroes, or if the heroes gain a significant edge over their opponents, read the following aloud:

Suddenly, from the rocky crags up above, comes a volley of missile fire! One wolf is struck by a half dozen darts tipped with suction cups and falls over in the snow. Another is pelted by water balloons, which begin instantly freezing its fur, while others are bombarded by snowballs, foam-darts, wiffle-balls, footballs, soccer balls, and a variety of other things. Howling and shying away from the rain of attacks, the wolves quickly withdraw.

"That's got 'em," a high-pitched voice says from above you, "but they'll be back soon enough."

You glance up to see a small figure, about three feet tall, standing on an outcropping of rock, hands on his hips. He's dressed in a bright green coat with brass buttons, red and white striped stockings, and curly-toed green shoes. A jaunty green hat rests on his shock of red hair, supported by a flaring pair of pointed ears. Similarly dressed little figures emerge from cover behind the rocks.

"What's the matter?" the little fellow asks with a broad smile. "You look like you've never seen an elf before."

The heroes' rescuers are indeed Santa's elves, or at least those elves that escaped Desparia's takeover of the Workshop. They've been hiding out in the wilderness and organizing resistance, but haven't been able to do much more than evade the sorceress' minions. With outside aid, however, they may be able to do more.

The red headed elf and leader of the small band of rebels introduces himself as Herbie, although the other elves all call him "Doc." (If any of the heroes happen to ask Herbie what he's a doctor of, he curtly answers "dentistry.") The elves are holed-up in a nearby cave in the mountains, where they've stockpiled various toys they use as weapons against Desparia's minions.

More importantly, the elves have a small amount of Santa's magic corn, which Herbie correctly suspects will restore the heroes' powers, at least temporarily. It tastes like candy-corn and allows normal use of any movement or sensory powers and makes the heroes' protective powers fully effective against Desparia's minions and magic.

SCENE FOUR: ASSAULT ON SANTA'S WORKSHOP

Once the heroes are ready for action (either due to the elves' magic corn or by completing their quests), Herbie tells them the situation. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

"It all happened just a few days ago, but it seems like forever. We were getting things ready for the big Christmas run when she showed up. Came right out of a swirling blizzard, she did, with those wolves and her hobgoblin soldiers. We tried to protect the Workshop, of course, but she's a sorceress and her power..."

Herbie sighs deeply. "She calls herself Desparia. She captured Santa, and Mrs. Claus. He told us to run, to save ourselves. We went out into the storm, and all you could hear was her laughter on the wind, mocking us. We need to free Santa and the Missus, but we need your help."

Herbie explains the basic plan: the heroes create a distraction, drawing out Desparia and her minions, while an elite group of elves slip into the Workshop to free Santa and Mrs. Claus. Let the players offer suggestions and their own plans. They can investigate or attempt some reconnaissance, if they'd like.

When the heroes want to create a distraction, all they need to do is offer a show of power, or even just appear within sight of Santa's Workshop, to draw the attention of Desparia and her minions. The sorceress confronts the heroes, proclaiming loudly how they cannot defeat her and Christmas will never come. Her not-inconsiderable Toughness and Magic power rank make Desparia a formidable foe. Feel free to use GM Fiat to provide Desparia with enough successful saving throws to weather the heroes' initial attacks, and to allow her to overcome some of the heroes with her powers.

Keep in mind Desparia's minions will also be acting to trap the heroes and protect their mistress. While they are just minions (unlike the winter-wolves in the first encounter of the adventure) the sorceress effectively has as many of them as she needs.

DESPARIA

Use the Corrupt Sorcerer archetype on page 214 of *M&M* with the following spells as Magic power feats: Blast 18 (icy cold), Cold Control 18, Emotion Control 18 (despair and fear), Fatigue 12 (ranged),



Obscure 18 (visual, swirling snow), Paralyze 12 (ranged), Snare 18 (icy bonds), Suffocate 12 (ranged), Summon (her hobgoblin and winter-wolf minions), and Weather Control 18 (winter weather only).

HOBGOBLINS

Use the Gargoyle monster archetype on page 233 of *M&M*, with-out the Flight or Immunity powers. The hobgoblins are vaguely ape-like creatures, with thin limbs, distended bellies, and heavy green fur. Their faces are distorted with rage and their eyes burn with an unholy yellow glow.

SCENE FIVE: IN THE (SAINT) NICK OF TIME

Let the fight against Desparia and her minions play out for as long as it's interesting, or until one side clearly gains the upper hand, then read the following aloud to the players:

Suddenly, the howling wind dies down, the growls and grunts of Desparia's minions are silenced, and a single voice booms out.

"Ho, ho, HO!" laughs the jolly old elf in the red suit trimmed in white fur. "What have we here? You've been a very, very bad, sad girl Heather. Do you want to ruin Christmas for all the boys and girls out there?"

"Why not?" Desparia cries out, face twisted with anger. "It was ruined for me! Why did my mommy and daddy have to die? Why?"

Desparia's tall, pale form seems to shrink in on itself, becoming more like a thin little girl with a tear-streaked face. In a burst of black smoke smelling of brimstone, a dapper man dressed in a dark suit appears, one eyebrow raised in a sardonic expression.

"Because life isn't fair, my dear," he says. "Not for you, anyway, so why should it be for anyone?"

This is primarily a roleplaying scene. Once Mr. Infamy appears, the players should have some idea of what's going on. If they don't, play out the conversation between Heather, Santa, and Mr. Infamy a little longer, until they understand "Desparia's" motives better.

The two main openings for this scene are the heroes losing and the heroes winning. If the heroes are losing to Desparia when Santa Claus makes his appearance, then the sudden arrival is enough to disrupt her concentration on any spells and free the heroes from any snares or other malign magical effects. It also halts the attacks of Desparia's minions for the time being. If the heroes are winning, having struck Desparia with an attack powerful enough to stagger her, for example, then the appearance of Father Christmas (and then Mr. Infamy) puts a stop to further hostilities for the moment. The revelation that the "evil sorceress" is just a sad little girl should restrain the heroes' desire to simply beat her into submission.

The ideal way of handling the problem is, of course, to encourage Heather to deal with her pain and reject Mr. Infamy's gift of power of her own free will. While interaction checks are entirely appropriate, you don't have to make it all about which character has the higher Diplomacy or Charisma bonus. Let the players offer heartfelt speeches on the true meaning of the holidays, family, and forgiveness.

Mr. Infamy, naturally, plays devil's advocate (literally), counter-arguing the heroes' arguments and encouraging Heather to take up the power at her command and wipe out Christmas once and for all. Still,

the terrible tempter's words ring hollow sooner or later. All he really has to offer Heather is vengeance and power over her monstrous minions. He can't give her real happiness or a family to replace the one she lost.

In game system terms, Desparia has an initial attitude of hostile (toward everyone). The heroes need to get her to a helpful attitude, a DC 45 interaction skill check. You can allow them to do things in stages, if you want. For example, a check result of 25 gets her to indifferent, where it only takes another DC 25 check to reach helpful. But, as mentioned previously, it shouldn't all be about die rolls and skill bonuses. Encourage players to use the hero points they earned during their battle earlier to help persuade Heather to help them.

If the players falter, or seem intent on using brute force to solve the problem, you can have Santa Claus step in to offer a word or two of fatherly advice. The old fellow certainly won't condone the heroes using violence against a confused young girl, and you can be certain that Mrs. Claus will soundly scold anyone who even contemplates it! It's best to allow the heroes to do the convincing rather than having Santa step in to save the day, but it's an option, if you want a quick and easy ending the scenario.

EPILOGUE: A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

Ideally, the heroes manage to convince Heather to reject Mr. Infamy. He vanishes in a puff of smoke, telling the heroes they haven't heard the last of him. Santa and Mrs. Claus invite the heroes and Heather into their home while the elves quickly get to work preparing Santa's sleigh. After all, it's still Christmas Eve, and there's a lot to be done!

You can find ways for the heroes to help out, perhaps using their powers to get things ready for Santa's late-night run. For an additional twist, perhaps Mr. Claus needs some assistance this Christmas Eve, or is even unable to make the trip himself and in need of a "pinch-hitter" in the form of the heroes! You can describe the superheroes circling the globe to deliver toys and good cheer to people around the world, all in a single night.

When it's all said and done, Santa, Mrs. Claus, and the elves all thank the heroes for their help. A swirl of snow seems to rise all around them, and the characters suddenly find themselves in their own headquarters (wherever it might be). It's Christmas morning, and the sun is shining brightly over a pure white blanket of new-fallen snow as the world seemed filled with holiday good cheer. The heroes friends and loved ones are on-hand to welcome them and wish them a happy holiday, and they catch a glimpse of the ghostly astral form of Eldrich, offering them a wink and a nod of congratulations before fading from sight.

Industrious heroes may follow up on the question of what become of Heather Combs. Checking with the Danvers Orphanage in the city reveals Heather has been placed with a foster family intent on adopting her. If the heroes don't follow up on the matter, they get a hand-written note from Heather not long thereafter, thanking them for their help in overcoming her sadness and moving on with her life.

If you want, you can even offer one or more of the heroes the opportunity to adopt Heather as a ward or foster child. If Mr. Infamy merely awakened some latent psychic or mystical powers in her, then Heather could even become an apprentice or kid sidekick to a hero!

Wrap things up with the heroes sharing some holiday cheer with their loved ones, and perhaps offering to do the same with the children of the Danvers Orphanage, extending the joy of the season, and wishing everyone a happy holiday!

HATE IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD

BY DT BUCHINO

What starts as a peaceful day in Freedom City slowly turns into a lesson in tolerance, as the heroes must defend the city from a hate-monger and his followers. Can the heroes stop him? Or will freedom become a word no longer associated with Freedom City?

Hate is a Four-Letter Word is an adventure for the *Mutants & Masterminds* roleplaying game. It is intended for a group of four to six Power Level 10 heroes, although the Gamemaster can scale the adventure to make it suitable for higher or lower level heroes by increasing or decreasing the power levels of the challenges as appropriate.

The adventure is set in Freedom City (described in the second edition of the *Freedom City* sourcebook available from Green Ronin Publishing). Although Freedom City is recommended for running this adventure, it is not required. All the necessary material is included here and in the *Mutants & Masterminds* core rulebook.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Professor Marko Worth is a hate-monger who spreads his ideas like a disease across America, infecting the citizens of larger cities and gathering followers whenever and wherever he can. He's decided to make Freedom City an example of his power and gathered his disciples for a March of Hate around City Center, gleefully spreading his message to all who listen.

Mayor O'Connor has asked the heroes to help contain the situation for the extent of Worth's visit. It won't be easy: not only do the heroes have to deal with Professor Worth and his followers, but with the White Knight, who's a fan of the Professor's ideas.

SCENE ONE: BANKING ON IT

It's a warm, spring weekend in Freedom City. The trees have begun to bud, grass is regaining its emerald hue and many citizens have traded their weather-battered cars for bicycles. But even on days like this, crime doesn't take a vacation.

If any of the heroes have access to a police band radio, read the following:

In a squawking voice, you hear: "Unit Five ... we have a break-in at CDE National over on Madison. Please respond to the alarm and report in, over."

"This is Unit Five," responds a male voice. "We are en route, over."

In the distance, you hear the scream of a police siren. What do you do?

If the heroes don't have access to a radio, with a successful Notice check (DC 11), read the following:

Your day is interrupted by the squeal of tires and the familiar cry of a police siren. From the sound of it, the car may be heading towards Midtown. What do you do?

If they respond to the break-in, they come onto the scene right as a small band of thugs overpower the cops and jump in their squad car.

You arrive at the CDE National Bank right in time to see five men, all dressed in jeans and jackets with various horror-movie masks on, jump into a police squad car and peel down the street. There's an officer wounded on the street and another lying by the entrance.

The heroes have two choices at this point, they may check on the officers that are down or chase after the stolen squad car. If the heroes decide to pursue the car, use the stats for a police cruiser on page 143 of *M&M*. Once the car's disabled, the thugs attempt to scatter, hoping to group up later and split the loot. For the thugs' stats, use the Thug archetype on page 229 of *M&M*.

Any heroes staying behind to check on the downed officers notice the wounded officer has taken a gunshot to his left leg, while the unconscious one seems to have taken a blow to the head. If any of the heroes have the Medicine skill or the Healing power, they may attempt to treat them. Otherwise, one of the bank workers calls an ambulance onto the scene.

After the heroes have captured the thugs and tended to the other officers, another officer approaches them.

As you finish reporting what you saw, another officer approaches you and says, "We're lucky you folks showed up... thanks. Oh, by the way, Mayor O'Connor is looking for you. The police department was asked to let you know he'd like to speak with you at City Hall."

SCENE TWO: ADMINISTERING A REQUEST

You enter the Mayor's office and are greeted by his secretary, who informs you the Mayor has been expecting you.

Mayor O'Connor is in his office, on the phone. He nods in your direction and motions towards a few chairs for anyone who wants to sit.

"That's right," he says to the person on the phone. "I understand, but is there any way we can limit the route to a shorter distance? I see. Well, we'll see what we can do." With that, he shakes his head and hangs up the phone, looking towards you as he does.

"Thanks for coming so soon... I appreciate it. Freedom City needs you."

"Professor Marko Worth is a professor of psychology and sociology known as a hate-monger for his "theories" on racial and cultural superiority. His appearances are usually bereft of any tolerance and filled with a wide scope of prejudices. Since he's started to gain attention in the

media and on the Internet, he's begun gathering a following of people he calls "The Worthy", fanatically devoted to his beliefs.

"It seems Professor Worth is coming to town tomorrow to have some kind of march supporting his divisive beliefs. I want to make sure it doesn't become violent. That's where you come in... I need to make sure someone doesn't make a martyr out of this guy, and that his followers stay exactly within the letter of the law, so I'd like you to help keep an eye on things."

If the heroes have questions, Mayor O'Connor answers to the best of his ability. If asked why the Mayor's letting him perform the march in the first place, O'Connor says:

"Honestly, if I had my way, I'd tell Worth exactly where he could put his "theories" and his so-called following. But it's a free country and I support the right for him to speak his mind and for his people to assemble peacefully, not matter how much I disagree with his message. The important thing is to ensure it stays peaceful."

If anyone declines the offer, O'Connor gets a sour look on his face and says:

"I see. Well then, Freedom City's finest will just have to handle this on their own. I appreciate your time, good day."

He then ushers them out of his office with excuses of being "busy" or having some "meetings". Upon their exit, O'Connor attempts to get other local heroes to help and the characters may hear about events in later scenes on the news (and choose to help out, if they wish).

If the heroes accept the Mayor's offer, he smiles and says:

"Excellent. Both the city and I appreciate this. The march is supposed to start around 10 AM tomorrow morning. If it's possible, try and be here before it starts. Again, I appreciate your help."

O'Connor's phone then rings and he politely excuses himself, letting the heroes find their way out. They may then do what they need to prepare for the next day.

SCENE THREE: HATE COMES TO TOWN

The next morning, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

You arrive at City Hall in time to see a short, portly man in a power suit exit a limousine. He looks at you through his glasses and smirks a bit before walking up the steps of the building. Behind the limo is a pair of stretched vans filled with people. On the side of the van it says, "Are You Worthy?" in red lettering. Surrounding City Hall are several protestors with a variety of signs that include messages like "He's Not Worth It!" and "This is Freedom City, not Hate City!" Along with the protestors are contingents of Freedom

City's finest, attempting to calm and contain the growing crowd. A police officer approaches the heroes and introduces himself as Lieutenant Hal Taylor. He explains that he's the officer assigned to the march's escort and is glad the heroes are there as back up.

Lt. Taylor will answer questions for a few minutes, and then excuses himself saying he has to coordinate with his men. After about 20 minutes, the portly man comes out with Mayor O'Connor. As the duo approaches the heroes, read the following:

The Mayor calls you over and says, "Good morning... this is Professor Marko Worth; Professor Worth, these are the heroes that have joined your escort. They are some of the finest Freedom City has to offer."

"Good to know, Mr. Mayor," Worth says with a grin. "But I have my own ... protection. It's nice that your Mayor has accepted our offer, freedom of speech is so underrated these days, wouldn't you agree?"

With that, Worth returns to his limo as the crowd's mood gets worse, throwing beverages and garbage at the car as it pulls from the curb. The heroes have a few minutes before the march starts, so they should have time to come up with any strategy they may need.

If the heroes request info on the march from one of the officers, they will be told the path is near City Center, starting on Madison, then to 28th Ave, on to Foster and onto 4th Ave (see the map on page 26 of *Freedom City*). The march follows the route twice, with Worth riding in a Cadillac convertible surrounded by his followers the whole time and followed by one of his vans. The officer explains that the escort is to drive in front and behind the Professor, but is not allowed to drive beside it and imagines the heroes may have the same limitations (of course that may not stop some heroes). There are several buildings in the area, as well as quite a crowd gathering to see the show, though most seem to have arrived irate.

SCENE FOUR: HATE ON PARADE

As the march begins, there are several events that could happen. Feel free to use any of the following encounters, as well as any of your own, in this scene.

ANY PRESS IS GOOD PRESS

As the heroes escort the precession along Foster, they begin to hear (Notice, DC 10) many of the audience begin to boo them. Read the following to the players:

As you're traveling along Foster, you begin to hear distinctive "Boos" coming from the crowd. Though you've been hearing many words targeted at Worth, these are directed at you! Within the crowd, you begin catching phrases like "You should be fighting for Freedom... Not Hate!" and "Freedom City loves it heroes, not its sellouts!"

How the heroes handle this is up to them, but the solution should be tactful and not incite a riot. You should remind them the mayor is depending on them to keep things in order.

As a variant, perhaps some of the Worthy are playing the crowd and have convinced them the heroes have joined Worth's cause. Or perhaps it's Worth himself, using his powers to goad the crowd further. In any event, the heroes should handle the crowd diplomatically, if possible.

LOOTERS

In the confusion of the march, some of the local thugs have decided to try and loot a few stores nearby, using the commotion outside as cover. If the heroes Notice the thieves (DC 16), they may attempt to stop them and contain some of the chaos. Use the Thug archetype on page 229 of *M&M*. An interesting twist is to have the thugs be the same as the ones in **Scene One**. Perhaps they managed to get out of jail and are up to no good again, or they're working with a faction to distract the heroes so someone can get to Worth. Alternately, they might be working for Worth, using the march as cover for their crimes.

SNIPER!

Professor Worth has made many enemies over the years, and one of them has decided his Freedom City tour is a perfect chance to exact some revenge. While the car crosses onto Foster, the heroes may Notice (DC 17) a slight glimmer from atop of one of the buildings, or perhaps they're doing a Search (DC 15) for anything out of the ordinary. Upon investigating, they'll find a solitary sniper poised on a rooftop and targeting the Professor. Will the heroes stop the sniper? For the sniper's stats use the Assassin archetype on page 226 of *M&M*.

Perhaps the sniper is just an ordinary person driven to the brink. In this case, the heroes may opt to use Diplomacy rather than brute strength to resolve the encounter. If this option is chosen, use either the Bystander or the Solider archetypes from the *M&M* rulebook. If the heroes need more of a challenge, perhaps Orion the Hunter (see page 152 of *Freedom City*) has been hired to take out Worth. Now, the heroes have to not only protect a hate-monger like Worth, but fight one of the deadliest assassins in the world to do it.

... AND THE CROWD GOES WILD

During the march, Worth decides to test the heroes. The Professor uses his Emotion Control to begin a riot initially targeted at him, but, in reality, aimed at the heroes (especially the ones publicly in opposition to his ideas). The heroes must now defend not only Worth, but themselves as well. For members of the crowd, use the Bystander archetype (*M&M*, page 226). If you'd like tougher opposition, feel free to mix in any of the other NPC archetypes in the **Supporting Characters** section of **Chapter 11** of the rulebook.

For a variation on this, perhaps Worth takes hold of one of the heroes and causes them to rebel against their teammates. In this instance, the heroes have to take on one of their own and figure out quickly what's causing them to act strangely. If there are any heroes in the group with Mental Awareness, they may notice the power emanates from Worth himself with a DC 20 Notice check.

A VOLUNTEER FROM THE AUDIENCE

The Professor's Worthy have come into conflict with part of the crowd, the two sides yelling insults at each other as things seem likely to turn violent. The heroes have to contain the potential powder keg by making an interaction skill check (DC 16) to get things under control.

Alternately, perhaps someone from the crowd runs out and attacks some of the Worthy. In conjunction with "The Crowd Goes Wild", perhaps the attackers are under Worth's influence and only serve as a precursor of what's to come.

SCENE FIVE: ENTER THE WHITE KNIGHT

As the march almost completes its second run and rounds onto 4th, read the following to the players:

The convoy is almost at the end of its second pass when you notice a large group of people standing in the street. The group is made up of a variety of people, all wearing a white shirt with the word hate in a crossed circle. Each person is holding hands and has formed a "human wall" in front of the street.

As the car approaches, it comes to a slow stop and Worth hops down into his car, sliding the sunroof shut. The bus pulls up alongside the car and stops, opening its door with a quiet "shush". That's when you see a man of impressive build walk out from the bus. He's wearing a pair of faded jeans, combat boots, a white tunic with a red, cross-like design and white hood, which carries on the cross pattern. He looks to the crowd as bluish-white flames flicker around him, his blue eyes shimmering a cold stare.

The White Knight has entered the fray. His intention is to clear the wall of people before him, but he's also not averse to taking down any of the heroes attempting to stop him. In the ensuing battle, White Knight uses bully tactics, using his Blast to take out any masses of heroes or dazzling someone who looks a powerful and then sucker-punching them.

During the battle, if it seems like White Knight is losing the battle, Worth will begin to use his emotion control to manipulate some of



VARIANTS

Heroes didn't do what you thought they might? Need some additional ideas? Here are a few variations and options you can use to modify the adventure.

THE HEROES LOSE

If the heroes are taken down by the combined might of White Knight and Professor Worth, they'll be trumpeted around town as Worth's trophies. He'll then unveil the next phase of his plan, extending his influence and turning Freedom City into a bastion of his twisted ideals. The heroes will have to find a means to escape so they may save their city, even if the whole city hates them.

A HERO TURNED

If you need additional foes, the easiest option is to place some Freedom City heroes under Worth's influence. The Next-Gen make good choices; they could either be "working" for Worth openly or using disguises and different code-names to hide their true identities until the heroes figure things out. If they don't before pounding some of the hapless kids into the pavement, things could get tricky.

the crowd, hoping to give "his" knight an edge, as well as having the Worthy attack any heroes or police officers in the vicinity. At this point, if any heroes can detect Worth's powers, they may be able to stop him directly, especially if they can think of a way to prove that he's using his abilities. Some ideas the heroes may try include a power stunt to make the Professor's powers visible, allowing others to see, or finding a way to make someone in command "see" what's happening.

In any event, the battle should be challenging, but not overwhelming. In many instances, they may be faced with a person that's not responsible for their actions and should act accordingly.

EPILOGUE: CITY OF THE FREE

When the heroes finally defeat White Knight and get the crowd under control, they have a good chance of exposing Worth for what he is (even without knowledge of his abilities), which could lead to his arrest. Mayor O'Connor congratulates the heroes on a job well done

and speaks highly of them to the press, which will, in turn, applaud the heroes' acts, especially if the crowd was relatively unscathed.

PROFESSOR WORTH

Marko Worth was just a crackpot college professor up until a few years ago. After driving home from a hate rally, he got into a car wreck. Suffering severe head trauma, he was rushed into the local hospital. During the operation to save his life, the surgeon made a slight error, unlocking something within Worth's brain that granted him mental powers.

Upon waking up in the hospital, Professor Worth found he could control the hate of other people, inciting a riot on his floor. Addicted to the rush of control he began using his newfound ability to climb the ladder of success, using various people and gathering followers he called his "Worthy". These days, Worth tours the country, recruiting people into his group and extending his influence to feed his twisted need for control.

WHITE KNIGHT

The White Knight is described on page 225 of *Freedom City*. He's a hate-mongering super-criminal right up Professor Worth's alley, and makes an idea dupe for the manipulative mastermind.

PROFESSOR WORTH

POWER LEVEL 9

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+0	+1	+3	+4	+4
10	11	12	16	18	19
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	
+2		+2		+2	
WILL			WILL		
+7			+11*		

*with Mind Shield bonus

Skills: Bluff 6 (+10), Concentration 6 (+10), Diplomacy 6 (+10), Gather Information 3 (+7), Knowledge (civics) 3 (+6), Knowledge (current events) 5 (+8), Knowledge (tactics) 5 (+8), Medicine 3 (+6), Notice 2 (+6), Search 3 (+7), Sense Motive 6 (+10)

Feats: Assessment, Connected, Distract (Bluff) 2, Fascinate (Bluff) 2, Inspire, Leadership, Master Plan, Minions 8 (the Worthy, cultists, *M&M*, page 226), Second Chance (Bluff)

Powers: Emotion Control 9 (Cone Area, Limited to Hate), Mind Shield 3

Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +3, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +6, Initiative +0

Abilities 26 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 19 + Powers 21 + Combat 18 + Saves 7 = 103

WHITE KNIGHT

POWER LEVEL 11

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+8	+1	+3	+0	+1	+2
26/16	13	16	10	13	14
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	
+12		+7		+4	
WILL			CHARISMA		
+8			+2		

Skills: Intimidate 8 (+10), Notice 4 (+5), Sense Motive 6 (+7), Survival 6 (+7)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Specialization (blast), Minions 6 (up to 25 thugs, *M&M*, page 229), Power Attack, Sneak Attack

Powers: Enhanced Strength 10, Fire Control 11 (Alternate Powers: **Blast 7** [Area Burst], **Dazzle 11** [visual]), **Flight 4** (100 MPH), **Protection 9**, **Strike 11** (fire, Aura), **Super-Strength 4** (heavy load: 6 tons)

Combat: Attack +8 (normal), +10 (blast), Grapple +21, Damage +8 (unarmed), +11 (blast), Defense +10, Knockback -6, Initiative +1

Abilities 22 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 81 + Combat 36 + Saves 14 = Total 169

MAJOR LEAGUE

BY STEVE KENSON

Major League is an introductory adventure for *Mutants & Masterminds* designed for 4-6 Power Level 10 heroes. The heroes encounter another team of superheroes that have gone missing and have now seemingly turned to crime! The heroes' powers and teamwork are put to the test when they have to take on one of the world's most famous hero teams and unravel the mystery behind their sudden and mysterious transformation.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Freedom League is a well-known and respected team of superheroes based in Freedom City. For years they have fought super-criminals and powerful menaces. It's not terribly unusual for the League to disappear from time to time, off on some mission or in some other dimension or the like, but recently the League disappeared and has not been heard from in some time. People are starting to become concerned.

Their concerns are justified when members of the Freedom League show up in the city and begin committing crimes! The former heroes offer no explanation for their behavior and the conventional authorities are nearly helpless against them. If the renegade Freedom League is to be stopped and Freedom City saved from their reign of terror, it will take *new* heroes, which is where the characters come in.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

The actual reason why the Freedom League has apparently turned to evil is up to you, the Gamemaster, depending on the sort of adventure you want to run, and whether or not you want to have the Freedom League around in the future as heroes or villains (or both!). Take a look at the options here and choose the one you think best suits your group and your game. You may want to read through the whole adventure, particularly the **Further Adventures** section, before deciding which way you want to go. If you're unfamiliar with the Freedom City setting, you might also want to read the *Freedom City* sourcebook before deciding on the Freedom League's destiny. You can come up with your own reason behind the League's unusual behavior, in which case you should modify the events in the story accordingly.

OPTION 1: BROKEN MIRROR

The heroes' adversaries aren't actually the Freedom League, they're the members of the Tyranny Syndicate, duplicates of the Freedom League from a parallel worlds known as "Anti-Earth." On their Earth heroes are villains and vice versa. The Syndicate found a way to travel to the Freedom League's Earth, where they ambushed and overcame their doppelgangers. Then the Syndicate members began masquerading as their heroic counterparts, using the League's reputation to sow confusion among the authorities and their own powers to steal the things they need to further their plans.

Major League was first published as an introductory adventure in the first edition of Mutants & Masterminds. This version has been updated to the second edition of the game and the second edition of the Freedom City setting sourcebook.

OPTION 2: INVADERS!

The real Freedom League was captured and imprisoned by shape-shifting aliens called the Grue. A special advance force

of Grue warriors have taken on the forms of the Freedom League, mimicking their powers using advanced Grue technology. They are spearheading an eventual invasion of Earth, first by throwing the authorities into disarray and eliminating Earth's super-powered champions.

OPTION 3: MIND CONTROL

The Freedom League's old enemy Mastermind has developed a device that greatly amplifies his telepathic abilities, allowing him to control the minds of the members of the League! Mastermind has taken complete control of the members of the League and is using them as pawns in his latest plan, to create a larger and more powerful telepathic amplifier that can broadcast his mind control signal around the world. If the League isn't stopped, Mastermind could place the entire world under his mental domination!

OPTION 4: CORRUPTION

Something terrible has happened to the Freedom League. League member Siren discovered an ancient artifact deep beneath the Pacific Ocean and brought it back to Freedom Hall for examination and study. The artifact is a malevolent magical item that belonged to an ancient cult, worshipping horrible creatures from beyond space and time. Its power has slowly corrupted the Freedom League, turning them into slaves of a monstrous, alien god known only as the Unspeakable One. Now the heroes are working to create the conditions that will allow the Unspeakable One to manifest on Earth, turning all humanity into his slaves!

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

The adventure begins when the heroes arrive outside of Freedom Hall, the headquarters of the Freedom League in downtown Freedom City. Exactly why the heroes are there is up to you and to the individual players. Take a moment to discuss things with your players and come up with a reason or reasons why the heroes might be visiting the Freedom League. Also find out if the players want their heroes to already be a team or if they are meeting now for the first time. Some heroes might already know each other, while others are relative strangers. At the very least, all of the heroes should have heard of each other, unless one of the characters is very mysterious.

Here are some reasons why heroes might be visiting the Freedom League:

- They hope to join the League and made an appointment for an interview (or responded to a call for applicants).
- They're looking for training with their super-powers or perhaps even help getting rid of an unwanted power or a weakness.
- They're consulting the Freedom League on another case, possibly

involving one of the League's old foes, a potential tie-in to why the League went missing.

- They're investigating a mysterious series of crimes in and around Freedom City and they want to consult with the city's foremost heroes. Perhaps they even have reason to suspect the League is involved in some way (although you should be careful not to give things away too soon).
- A character with Precognition or a similar power may have received a vision of danger involving the Freedom League.
- The Freedom League asked the heroes to meet with them about something some time ago and the characters are simply keeping their appointment.

The actual reason isn't terribly important so long as the heroes all show up at Freedom Hall at roughly the same time.

STARTING OFF WITH A BANG

In true comic book tradition, you can always set things up so the heroes arriving at Freedom Hall mistake each other for villains and end up in a big fight before they figure out they're all on the same side. A hero might believe someone is trying to break into the Freedom League's headquarters (particularly if that *is* what one of the heroes is trying to do). Perhaps a hero resembles a particular villain, or looks suspicious in some other way. A hero with a less than sterling public reputation may also run into problems.

If the heroes do end up in a fight, try to wrap it up before they do too much damage, to each other or the surrounding area, and give them a chance to go through **Scene One** before the press (or the police) show up. If your players don't want their heroes to fight (or you don't want them to) you can easily skip over this encounter and get right on with the main part of the adventure.

SCENE ONE: A VISIT TO FREEDOM HALL

The heroes gather outside of Freedom Hall, the headquarters of the Freedom League, in downtown Freedom City. Costumed heroes loitering outside the Freedom League's base isn't exactly an unusual occurrence in Freedom City, so passers-by pay little attention to the heroes unless they do something to draw attention to themselves (like spectacular displays of their powers). When the heroes all arrive, read the following aloud to the players:

You're all gathered outside Freedom Hall, the headquarters of the world-famous Freedom League. The building is a five-story structure with sloping walls, making it a sort of truncated pyramid with a flat top. Tall, narrow windows run the length of the building and there's a set of glass double-doors beneath an overhang, leading into the main lobby, which is normally open to the public. The Hall sits in the middle of a small plaza with a finely manicured lawn and a path leading up to the entrance. There's an eight-foot wall around the property, with a single gate along the path to the main entrance.

When you approach the entrance, you can see that the doors are closed and the lobby is empty and quiet. There's a flat, square call-button beside the entrance.

If one of the heroes presses the call button, read the following to the players:

When you press the button, a calm and neutral voice comes from tiny speakers.

"We're sorry," the voice says, "but the Freedom League has been called away on urgent business and Freedom Hall is currently closed. If you have an emergency, please press the call button again and you will be connected to the Freedom City Police Department. If you wish to leave a message for the Freedom League, please do so now."

There's a musical tone, and the voice stops speaking.

If a character presses the call button again during the message, they are connected to the police 911 emergency line in the city. The operator will try to verify the character's identity and ascertain the problem. Needless to say, the authorities frown upon heroes placing false emergency calls, and the characters won't be able to convince the police there's a problem at Freedom Hall without some sort of evidence.

If the characters speak after the tone, anything they say will be audio-visually recorded for later playback. Another tone sounds when the characters stop speaking for more than 10 seconds, indicating the recording is finished. Pushing the call button again simply results in the same message.

NOBODY HOME?

Characters who were asked to come to Freedom Hall may think it odd that the Freedom League isn't there to meet them, although it isn't hard to believe that they were called away on some sort of emergency.

The heroes may try other means of getting in contact with the League. They have a toll-free phone number (1-800-FREEDOM), which characters can find by looking in the phone book (or asking pretty much anyone in the city). Calling the number yields the same message they got at the door of the headquarters. The team also maintains a website and e-mail, but there will be no response if the heroes try contacting them that way either.

LOOKING AROUND

The heroes are free to look around the outside of Freedom Hall. There's a small reflecting pool with benches behind the headquarters. Otherwise the grounds are fairly unremarkable and yield no clues as to the team's whereabouts (but feel free to let the players make Search checks, if they want to).

Heroes with certain sensory powers (such as X-ray Vision or ESP) may want to try and take a look inside Freedom Hall. Feel free to remind the players that spying on fellow heroes is hardly the behavior of a true hero, but let them try it if they want to. The building's structure is heavily shielded, making such powers difficult to use. You can either have the player make a power check (DC 25) or roll a secret check, in which case you can ignore the result and just say that the attempt fails, if you prefer. You can also move on to **Scene Two** just as the heroes are about to start poking around which should give them something else to do.

BREAKING AND ENTERING

If for some reason the players decide to enter Freedom Hall, either by force or by stealth, remind them that they would be trespassing on private property and that the Freedom League no doubt has defenses to guard against intruders entering their headquarters. If they're insistent, let them try, but they shouldn't find breaking into the place easy. See **Scene Four: What's Going on Here?** for guidelines on breaking into Freedom Hall.

You can always have the news crew in **Scene Two** arrive just as the heroes are about to try bashing down the door (or some other means of getting in). The presence of a news camera should restrain any

heroes concerned about their public reputations. If it doesn't, then the heroes can be sure that they'll be one of the lead stories on the five o'clock news that night.

SCENE TWO: BREAKING NEWS

While the heroes are outside Freedom Hall deciding what to do, a news crew arrives outside the building and sets up for a story, and a photo-op for the heroes. Read the following aloud to the players:

As you're standing outside Freedom Hall, a van bearing the logo of Channel 9 pulls up to the curb, just outside the wall. The doors open and a news crew piles out: a cameraman and a technician along with an attractive Asian woman wearing a skirt and blazer and carrying a microphone. They come through the gate and head up to the steps of the building.

"Hi there!" the woman calls to you. "I'm Amy Feng, with Channel 9 news. Are you associates of the Freedom League?"

Ms. Feng and her crew are doing a story on the Freedom League's disappearance. Unless the heroes take off, Amy will ask them for an interview once her initial story is done. If the heroes are rude or discourteous toward Ms. Feng or her crew, they can be sure she won't paint them in a very favorable light on the news. If the heroes simply leave without answering any questions, Amy will raise the question of why they were at Freedom Hall in her report, casting some doubt as to the heroes' motives.

Her cameraman quickly sets up with Amy standing at the foot of the steps to Freedom Hall. He gives a signal and she launches into her report. Read the following aloud to the players:

"This is Amy Feng outside Freedom Hall. For the past week the headquarters of the world-famous Freedom League has stood silent and apparently empty the whereabouts of Freedom City's heroes unknown. This is hardly the first time that the Freedom League has disappeared for an extended period of time, but there is some concern that the team may have encountered trouble too great for even them to handle. Police Commissioner Barbara Lawrence issued a statement that there is no cause for concern, so the citizens of Freedom City can only wait and watch, and hope for the best.

"I have with me associates of the Freedom League, who may have some insight as to their whereabouts."

The camera swings around to focus on you as a microphone is thrust in your face.

"Tell me a little about yourselves and why you're here at Freedom Hall today?" Ms. Feng asks.

Amy Feng briefly interviews each of the heroes on live television. She asks them their names and what their powers are. Some other questions she might ask include:

- Are you associated with the Freedom League?
- Are you all part of a team? What is it called?
- How did you get your powers?
- What are your future plans?
- Do you know where the Freedom League is or what they're doing? Do you know when they'll be back?

Feel free to any other questions you feel are appropriate. If the heroes were rude to Feng, her questions may be a bit more pointed and accu-



satory, such as "Does your presence here have anything to do with the Freedom League's disappearance?" or "Why were you trying to break into Freedom Hall?" Give the players a chance to answer questions (or get grilled) for a little while, then read the following to the players:

"I'm Amy Feng, with Channel 9 Action News."

The technician leans out from the side of the van. "Amy!" he yells. "You're not going to believe this! There's a call on the police band. Members of the Freedom League just broke into ASTRO Labs up in the North End!"

"Then what are you waiting for, Irv?" Ms. Feng says as she dashes for the news van. "Let's roll!"

SCENE THREE: TROUBLE AT ASTRO LABS

When the heroes go to ASTRO Labs, they find trouble in the form of three members of the Freedom League. Read the following aloud to the players:

ASTRO—The Advanced Scientific and Technological Research Organization—has its main facility in the North End of Freedom City. When you arrive, you see a hole smashed in the side of the building, right through solid brick and cinderblock. Suddenly, a figure comes hurtling out of the hole in the wall, but he's not flying, he's falling! There's a yell of terror as the older man in the white lab coat plunges toward the ground, several floors below!

The falling man is Dr. Clarence Macleod, senior researcher at ASTRO Labs. It requires a DC 10 check to catch him, using either Dexterity (to grab him) or an appropriate power, like Snare or Telekinesis. Feel free to modify the Difficulty Class if you want to make sure the hero succeeds, or let a hero who fails grab onto Macleod's lab coat, which rips and sends him falling the rest of the way (giving the heroes another chance to grab him). If Macleod does hit the ground, he's disabled: conscious, but badly hurt and in need of medical attention.

The doctor is shaken up, but he'll tell the heroes that his attackers are members of the Freedom League! He says that Captain Thunder, Lady Liberty, and Johnny Rocket broke into the lab just minutes ago and asked him some questions about a new advanced transmitter under development. After they got their answers, the heroes tossed him out the hole they made in the wall and they're attempting to make off with the device.

THE AUTHORITIES

The Freedom City Police have also responded to the emergency call from ASTRO Labs. They arrive around the same time the heroes do: four patrol cars and a heavy armored van from the city's STAR (Superhuman Tactics and Response) Squad. STAR Squad commander "Bulldog" Maddicks tries to take charge of the situation. He'll tell the heroes to stay out of his way unless they have a particularly good reputation or one of them succeeds at a DC 25 Interaction check (using Charisma or Diplomacy), since Maddicks is initially Unfriendly toward them.

THE GETAWAY

Just after the police arrive, the three Freedom Leaguers make their exit. Captain Thunder and Lady Liberty fly out the hole in the side of the building, with the Captain carrying a heavy-looking crate. Johnny Rocket zooms out the hole and down the side of the building to run past the cops. All three of them are headed east toward the waterfront.

If the heroes confront the Leaguers, they either ignore the heroes or tell them to stay out of their way, or else they're going to get hurt. If any of the heroes attacks one of the Leaguers or otherwise tries to stop them from leaving, they fight back to the best of their ability, focusing on incapacitating the heroes long enough for them to escape. If the heroes are overcome, the Freedom Leaguers get away, since the police can't catch up to them.

THE FIGHT

If and when a fight starts between the heroes and the erstwhile members of the Freedom League, the police will be of little help. They'll focus on staying out of the way and safeguarding innocent bystanders, trying to evacuate the area around the fight. Some things to keep in mind during the battle:

THE CRATE

Captain Thunder is initially carrying a heavy crate (weighing 1,000 lbs.), which contains the transmitter Dr. Macleod mentioned. The Leaguers do their best to safeguard the crate and ensure it isn't damaged. It's Toughness 6. If the heroes take the crate from them, they'll try and get it back. If the crate and its contents are destroyed, the Leaguers will flee the scene as quickly as possible. If the heroes threaten the crate, you can have Dr. Macleod shout out, "Be careful! That equipment is delicate!" Ideally, the heroes should try to save it intact, if they can.

TEAMWORK

Despite their apparent change of heart, the Freedom Leaguers still work quite effectively together as a team. They'll use teamwork

against the heroes, allowing you the opportunity to encourage the players to do the same. Some of the tactics the Leaguers may try include Captain Thunder using his Shockwave feat to knock down heroes on the ground, allowing Johnny to attack them with Move-By Attacks. The Captain may also use his Dazzle power to deafen the heroes so they can't communicate as easily. Captain Thunder and Lady Liberty may try to double-team a particularly tough hero (using flanking attacks). Johnny Rocket may grab a tear-gas gun from a hapless STAR Squad cop and use it against the heroes.

BYSTANDERS

Although the police will try to clear innocent bystanders out of the way, the fight still takes place near downtown in the middle of the day, so there are a lot of people around. Additionally, the cops themselves could be threatened if the Freedom Leaguers start doing things like chucking cars around. Keeping the bystanders safe should be a serious concern for the heroes and the Leaguers don't seem to care who they endanger with their actions.

SCENE FOUR: WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

The heroes have a chance to try and find out more about what's really going on, but they don't have a lot of time, since it's clear that the Freedom League is up to something and they're the only ones that can stop it.

AFTER THE FIGHT

After the fight with the three Freedom Leaguers is over (win, lose, or draw), the police secure the area around ASTRO Labs and offer what assistance they can to the heroes. If the Leaguers won the fight, they leave the heroes where they fell. An ambulance shows up immediately after the fight and injured heroes receive medical attention, if necessary. If the heroes defeated some or all of the Leaguers, then they have prisoners for interrogation. The police place power-neutralizing cuffs on the captured renegade heroes to help keep them from escaping.

Commander Maddicks remains gruff and somewhat dismissive toward the heroes, but if they handled things well, he'll at least be cooperative.

What the heroes do next is largely up to them. Some possibilities are outlined below, but it's up to you to handle whatever course of action the players want to take. You can have Commander Maddicks or Dr. Macleod make suggestions if it looks like the players need some help or one of them spends a hero point for inspiration.

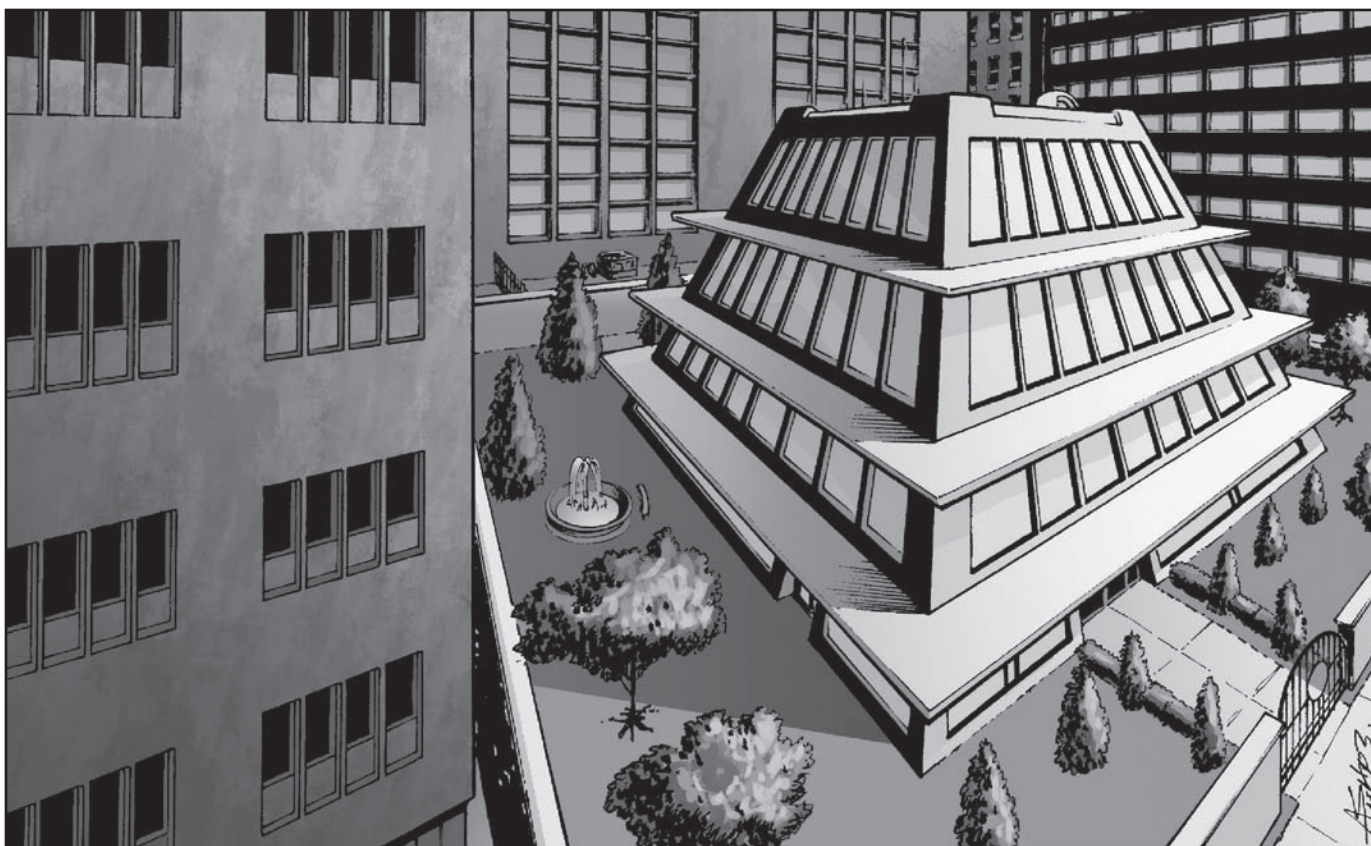
INTERROGATION

If the heroes captured any members of the Freedom League, they can interrogate them to try and find out what is really going on. The Leaguers will be extremely resistant to interrogation, with attitudes Hostile toward everyone else. Heroes can attempt interaction rolls to convince them to cooperate. Heroes with powers like Telepathy may also try using them to get information out of the captured heroes.

Naturally, the truth depends on the option you choose for the adventure, but the two main things the heroes can find out are the League's plans and the fate of the real Freedom League.

THE PLAN

The Freedom League's plan is to send a special satellite payload created by Daedalus into orbit. The satellite will broadcast a powerful mind-con-



trol ray that will spread out from Freedom City, putting more and more people under the League's control until they eventually dominate the Earth. If you chose the "Corruption" option for the real reason behind the adventure, then the satellite is actually intended to create a mystical sigil high above the Earth that will drive people to madness and permit the Unspeakable One to manifest on Earth. Otherwise the mind-control option will allow the Tyranny Syndicate, the Grue, or Mastermind (whoever you decided is behind it all) to control the world!

The transmitter the Leaguers stole is intended to boost the mind-control device's range and power. It's the last component the League needs, which means they're nearly ready to put their plan into action. If the heroes interrogate captured Leaguers one may sneer that they're "nearly out of time" or that "it's too late to stop us."

THE REAL LEAGUE

What happened to the real Freedom League (assuming the heroes' adversaries are not the genuine article) is also up to you. The default assumption is that the real Leaguers are being held prisoner in their own headquarters in suspended animation. The heroes can go to Freedom Hall, find the real Leaguers, and revive them, although they'll be too weak to offer much help apart from telling the heroes what happened to them and possibly filling in information about the villains' plans.

If you don't want the Freedom League as regular NPCs in your series, you can either keep them missing or decide that the villains killed the real Leaguers when they took their place. In that case, the heroes can find the Leaguers' bodies hidden in their headquarters, grim evidence that their foes are deadly threats.

Finally, you can leave the real Freedom League's whereabouts a mystery that the heroes can investigate in a future adventure (see the **Further Adventures** section for more on this).

INVESTIGATE FREEDOM HALL

Whether or not they captured some of the Freedom Leaguers, the heroes may want to go and investigate Freedom Hall looking for clues about the League's behavior and their plans. They'll have to find a way of getting into the headquarters and overcoming its security systems.

GETTING IN

Freedom Hall is locked and sealed up. Its walls, doors, and windows are made from materials with Toughness 18, making them fairly difficult to damage. It requires a DC 30 Disable Device check to open the lock on either of the doors (front or back) and a DC 25 Disable Device check to shut down the security system. The heavy shielding on the outside walls and windows requires a DC 25 power check to see inside the headquarters using powers like ESP or to pass through the walls using Insubstantial or Teleport, for example.

A captured member of the Freedom League can get past the security systems (which are keyed to recognize members of the team and respond to them). Of course, any captured Leaguers aren't likely to cooperate, although coercion like Mind Control or Possession can secure their assistance. A hero with Shapeshift may be able to fool the security system and Datalink adds its rank as a bonus to the Disable Device check to overcome the security system.

SECURITY

Freedom Hall's security system sets off an alarm when an intruder is detected in the building. This alerts the police as well as any members of the League on duty. Additionally, there are blasters positioned in the lobby and corridors of the headquarters. Two of them can fire into any given area, with an attack bonus of +5. They do +10 stun damage if they hit. The blasters are Toughness 8. Hits reduce their

HANDLING THE FIGHT

The final fight with the Freedom League may prove difficult, especially if the three Leaguers from **Scene Three** escaped to rejoin their teammates. The Freedom Leaguers are slightly higher level than the heroes, although the overall difference in power may not be that great. They probably also outnumber the heroes. So a full-on fight between the heroes and the entire Freedom League might end up with the heroes defeated. Here are some suggestions for handling things so the heroes have a fighting chance:

Let them whittle down the League's numbers. **Scene Three** is intended to do that, by giving the heroes a chance to defeat almost half the team before the final confrontation. If they all escape, you might want to give the heroes another crack at some of the Leaguers before the final scene, just so they can even things up a bit.

Stealth is the heroes' friend. If they arrive on Star Island covertly, they may be able to ambush some of the Leaguers out patrolling the island before anyone is even aware that they are there. That can make the final fight easier for the heroes.

Hopefully, the players take a hint from the Freedom League's use of teamwork in their first encounter and use some of their own to take down their opponents. You can have the Freedom Leaguers become increasingly irrational and uncooperative, while the heroes are working together. That can give them an edge.

Careful planning can also help the heroes out. After all, the Freedom League is pretty well known, so with a little forethought the heroes can prepare for what they're likely to face. Captain Thunder is vulnerable to attacks that drain his electrical power (something another character with Electricity Control might do, or a possible gadget for a hero to whip up). Raven and Johnny Rocket are hard to hit, but things like area attacks and shockwaves may be useful against them. Lady Liberty loses her powers if she's bound or grappled. Give the heroes a chance to exploit these weaknesses and any others they come up with.

damage by one each and they stop functioning if they are disabled. The blasters have a Defense of 14 because they are fairly small targets, but characters at melee range get a +4 bonus to hit them.

THE REAL FREEDOM LEAGUE?

If you have decided that the real Freedom League is imprisoned in their headquarters, then heroes who investigate Freedom Hall will find them here. The Leaguers are held in individual capsules filled with a gas that keeps them in a state of suspended animation. A successful Disable Device, Medicine, or Science check (DC 15) can revive them, although they will remain weak and dizzy for several hours afterward. The Leaguers will tell the heroes what they know about the situation (perhaps filling in details they have missed) and will encourage them to go after their doppelgangers before it's too late.

For a particularly cruel trick, you can decide that the "Freedom League" the heroes rescue isn't the genuine article either. Perhaps they're clones or a backup squad of alien warriors. Or maybe it is the real Freedom League but the capsules they were in were also brainwashing them in addition to keeping them in suspension. You can run a future adventure where the heroes start to notice that the Freedom League is acting suspiciously again, only this time they're moving more carefully, and they know the first obstacle they need to eliminate is the characters...

TRACK THE FREEDOM LEAGUE

If some or all of the Freedom Leaguers escape from the fight at ASTRO Labs, the heroes might come up with a way of tracking them. They can plant a tracking device of some kind on one of the Leaguers, use various super-powers, or try to come up with a technological solution (such as a device to track Captain Thunder's unique bio-electric signature). This allows the heroes to track the Freedom League to Star Island and move on to **Scene Five**.

BAIT A TRAP

Alternately, the heroes might decide to lay a trap for the other members of the Freedom League. If the transmitter was recovered or destroyed during the fight, it's possible the League may try to steal it or something similar again. The heroes can bait a trap with

the necessary equipment (advised by Dr. Macleod, if necessary) and lie in wait for the Leaguers to show up. Then they can either try to capture them and discover their plans, or track them to find out what they're up to.

If the heroes lay a trap, then the Freedom League takes the bait. Three members of the League (any of them except Daedalus) show up to get the equipment. Their tactics are the same as in **Scene Three**: get in and get away as quickly as possible. If the heroes capture some or all of them, use the guidelines under **Interrogation** above. If the heroes follow the Leaguers, go right on to **Scene Five**.

SCENE FIVE: BATTLE ON STAR ISLAND

The heroes have a final confrontation with the members of the Freedom League out on Star Island that will decide their fate and possibly the fate of the world as well.

STAR ISLAND

Star Island is a few miles off the coast from Freedom City. It's the location of a government launch site and space control and monitoring station. The Freedom League took it over to complete their plan of launching a satellite equipped with a mind-control device by Daedalus. The transmitter from ASTRO Labs was intended to be the last component of the device. Without it, Daedalus has been forced to improvise a substitute, which has slowed things down somewhat, but now the device is ready for launch. The only things that stand between the Freedom League and victory are the heroes.

The only structures of any significance on the island are the buildings of the Space Control Center and the launch pad. A small rocket is ready for launch; the countdown begins when the heroes arrive.

The remaining members of the Freedom League are in the control center, watching the launch. The countdown begins at 60 seconds (10 combat rounds) when the heroes arrive on the scene. The Leaguers try to intercept the heroes and keep them away from the rocket until it launches. Any members of the League that the heroes encountered before that got away are at the island unless circumstances prevent it.

THE LAUNCH

Ten combat rounds (one minute) after the action starts, there is a roar from the launch pad, and the rocket blasts off. The rocket is Toughness 15 and must be disabled for it to be incapable of launching. A DC 25 Computers Skill check can also shut down the launch program from the main console in the control room, assuming the heroes can reach it in time. Simply destroying the control room won't stop the launch; it only keeps anyone from using the controls there to stop it (so the Freedom League might destroy the controls to keep the heroes from using them).

Once the rocket blasts off, it begins accelerating. It moves at a speed of 30, doubling every round, until it achieves escape velocity. A fast-flying hero may be able to keep up with the rocket for a while, and possibly disable it, causing it to crash into the ocean. Flying members of the Freedom League—notably Captain Thunder and Daedalus—protect the rocket if they can.

EPILOGUE

If the heroes defeat and capture the members of the Freedom League and disable or destroy the rocket (or its satellite payload), then they are successful.

If the heroes fail to stop the rocket before it achieves orbit, then the Freedom League's mind control satellite begins bathing the Earth with its powerful rays, starting with the Freedom City area. Everyone within a radius of 20 miles is affected by Mind Control at rank 12. You can safely assume that most people fall under the satellite's control. The heroes may escape the satellite's effects and try to knock it out somehow (although they'll have to reach it first).

If the heroes stop the launch but don't defeat the Freedom League, they may end up their prisoners (and either brainwashed or replaced like the Leaguers). You can either give the heroes a chance to escape, and figure out how to stop the Freedom League now that they control a large part of the world. Or you can have the players run another group of heroes that show up to rescue the heroes from the League.

REWARDS

If the heroes successfully thwart the Freedom League and either restore them to normal or bring them to justice, they each earn a power point at the end of the adventure. They also likely gain the trust and respect of the authorities in Freedom City (and the members of the Freedom League, if they are returned to normal).

You can choose to give other rewards to the heroes depending on how the adventure went. For example, Daedalus and Dr. Metropolis might assist the heroes in creating a headquarters of their own, or the city might offer them funding, or even the use of Freedom Hall, if the League isn't around any more.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

What happens after this adventure depends on two things: what you decide is really going on and how the heroes handled the situation. Here are some possibilities for using this adventure as a kick-off for an ongoing *Mutants & Masterminds* series.

JOINING THE LEAGUE

If the heroes rescue or restore the real Freedom League by the end of the adventure, then they'll certainly make an impression on the other heroes and may be invited to join the League. They can become a regular part of the team in Freedom City, or they can form an expansion team located in another city, if you plan on setting your series elsewhere. This gives the heroes a ready-made team, headquarters, and resources to work with, although they'll also get a ready-made rogues gallery of villains, many of them looking to make their mark by defeating the newest members of the Freedom League. Perhaps they think that these new heroes will be easy pickings. It'll be up to your players to prove them wrong.

REPLACING THE LEAGUE

It's quite possible by the end of this adventure that the Freedom League is no more: either the Leaguers have permanently turned to evil, they're missing (see below), or they might even be dead. The incident might damage the League's reputation so badly that they're forced to disband, with some of them continuing on their own and others retiring from the hero business. In this case, Freedom City is in need of another hero team, and the characters can take on the job, especially if they proved themselves by stopping the Freedom League. The former Leaguers or the city government may offer the heroes the use of Freedom Hall and some of the League's resources, or the heroes may choose to start fresh, with their own HQ, team name, and resources.

RESCUING THE LEAGUE

It may be that by the end of the adventure the fate of the Freedom League remains undecided. For example, mind-controlled Leaguers may escape, or the heroes may overcome imposters, but the fate of the true Leaguers may remain unknown. Perhaps they are trapped in another dimension, or stricken with amnesia and unable to remember their heroic identities. In this case, you can create further adventures where the heroes try to find out what happened to the Freedom League, and rescue them, if they can. This can lead to one of the options above, where the heroes replace or join up with the Leaguers once they are rescued and returned to Freedom City.

FURTHER PLOTS

Finally, there's the matter of the plot that started the events in this adventure. If aliens were behind the abduction and replacement of the Freedom League, what will they do once their initial takeover plans are thwarted? Will they stage a massive invasion? Try to kidnap and replace the characters (or perhaps replace people close to them in order to spy on and eventually eliminate them)? If Mastermind's control over the Freedom League is broken, will he go after the characters next? If the heroes defeat the Tyranny Syndicate, are there evil duplicates of them from a parallel Earth waiting for the opportunity to strike? You can spin off whatever adventure hook you use into future adventures and you can take the options that you didn't use and make them into further adventures. Perhaps Mastermind seizes control of a different hero team or tries controlling the characters. Perhaps shapeshifting aliens infiltrate after the Freedom League goes bad, and so forth.

THE PROTEUS PLOT

BY STEVE KENSON

A seemingly routine robbery involving the Foundry turns out to have far more serious implications for the heroes when they begin having dreams about becoming super-criminals, dreams that, it turns out, may not be dreams at all!

The Proteus Plot is an adventure for the *Mutants & Masterminds* Superhero RPG. It is intended for a group of four to six Power Level 10 heroes, although the Gamemaster can scale the adventure to make it suitable for higher or lower level heroes by increasing or decreasing the power levels of the villains as appropriate (generally by approximately the same amount as the heroes). Since the heroes provide some of their own challenge in the adventure, it shouldn't be difficult!

The adventure is set in Freedom City (described in the *Freedom City* sourcebook available from Green Ronin Publishing). Although *Freedom City* is recommended for running this adventure, it is not required. All the necessary material is included in the adventure and in the *Mutants & Masterminds* core rulebook.

Players intending to play in this adventure should read no further. The rest of the text is for the *Gamemaster only*!

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The heroes are summoned to deal with a seemingly routine raid by the Foundry on the ASTRO Labs facility in Freedom City. During the fight, the heroes are hit with a cloud of opaque gas that blinds them for a moment. After the gas clears, the heroes mop up the Foundry force easily enough, earning the gratitude of ASTRO Labs and the city.

Later, the heroes have an unusual dream of breaking into the same ASTRO Labs facility. The dream apparently comes true quickly leading to the conclusion the heroes are responsible! The authorities have no choice but to try and arrest them. The heroes can either surrender or flee and try to prove their innocence. Either way, they've got a serious problem.

Then the *real* heroes regain consciousness in a Foundry lab, where the robot villain Talos tells them they've become the subjects of a new experiment. Using technology similar to that used in his android creation Argo, the metal mastermind created "protean" duplicates of the heroes, programmed to carry out crimes for the Foundry and ruin the heroes' reputations in the process!

CONVENTION PLAY

The *Proteus Plot* was originally designed as a convention adventure. If you're running it at a convention or as a demonstration of how to play *Mutants & Masterminds*, you can use the Freedom League heroes from *Freedom City* as ready-made player characters, letting the players choose which heroes they want to play and reserving any other Freedom Leaguers as NPC heroes for the adventure.

Notes are given in various places in the adventure on how to handle specific situations involving the Freedom League heroes in the adventure. If you're just running *Proteus Plot* as part of a regular *M&M* series, and the players are not running the Freedom League characters, you can ignore these notes.

The real heroes must escape the authorities and confront their artificial duplicates in order to restore their good names, and before the doppelgangers can do something even worse than commit a few thefts!

SCENE ONE: LOST IN A FOG

It's an otherwise ordinary day in Freedom City when the heroes are alerted to trouble at ASTRO Labs in the North End (see *Freedom City*, page 59, for details). There's a break-in at the facility!

The heroes can become aware of the situation in any number of ways. If they're officially sanctioned—such as members of the Freedom League—the authorities alert them immediately. They can also pick up the emergency on the police frequencies or simply hear an explosion coming from ASTRO Labs. Heroes may know someone working there, or may even work there themselves in their secret identities! Whatever the case, the heroes hear there is trouble and rush off to the rescue.

The trouble at ASTRO Labs comes in the form of several Myrmidon robots that have broken into the lab building and are stealing some schematics from a high-security safe. When the heroes show up, the robots turn their attention to them. On their initiative, the robots release an impenetrable cloud of fog (actually made up of countless billions of nanotech machines). The heroes are engulfed in the cloud along with the robots. Ask the players to make Will saving throws for their heroes (DC 20). Anyone failing the save is stunned for one round; anyone succeeding feels a moment of dizziness and disorientation, which quickly passes with no other effect. The cloud also functions as a limited visual Obscure effect filling the room, giving everyone within partial visual concealment. This limits even the robots, but then their purpose is not really to fight the heroes.

The robots try to escape with the stolen schematics and only fight the heroes who try to stop them. If the robots are defeated or captured (or it looks like they may be), they self-destruct, leaving little, if any, evidence behind for the heroes and the authorities to examine. A loud whine and a visible build-up of energy precede the Myrmidons' self-destruct, allowing the heroes a few rounds to try and evacuate the immediate area or to contain the explosion (generally speaking, any attempts to do so should automatically succeed, although you make want to have the players roll a suitable power or skill check).

Award the players a hero point for the events of the scene, plus any additional points for GM Fiat or complications.

SCENE TWO: DARK DREAMS

Once the heroes have dealt with the Myrmidon robots, things seem to return to normal in the city for a time. The police take the heroes' statements about the break-in and they have ASTRO Labs' gratitude (which may come in handy later in this adventure or in a future adventure). Tell the players things seem to have settled back into a steady routine, then read the following:

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

What the players don't know is the fog released by the Myrmidons is actually a key component in a teleportation trap set up by Talos. When the heroes were engulfed in the mist, they were actually teleported to stasis chambers at a Foundry base, while their proto-matter duplicates were activated and left in their place. The moment of disorientation the heroes feel doesn't come from the gas, but from the fact that they are actually the duplicates, teleported in and newly activated!

From this point on until **Scene Five**, the players are actually playing the duplicates, rather than their real characters, imprisoned by the Foundry. The real heroes return in **Scene Five**, until then, the players run the duplicates as if they were their real characters. Some players may begin to suspect something is amiss very early on. Allow them to speculate and even investigate, but keep in mind the Foundry duplicates are programmed not to be consciously aware of their true nature. So any investigation the bogus heroes undertake is ultimately doomed to failure, since they're

IN MEDIA RES OPTION

If you want to dive right into the action of the adventure, rather than starting with the heroes getting a call for help from ASTRO Labs, begin in the middle of the fight with the Myrmidons when the duplicate heroes "wake up" amidst the cloud of nano-mist, having just been activated and teleported in.

Tell the players their heroes are in an unfamiliar lab, surrounded by white mist (that provides partial concealment), and hostile Myrmidon robots. Chalk up any memory-loss of how they came to be at ASTRO Labs to the effects of the mist with witnesses saying they saw the heroes arrive, even if they don't recall it.

This approach can make the revelation later in the adventure more effective as the heroes realize the reason for their "memory loss" is the fact that they're not the real heroes at all, and their "real" memories effectively begin at that moment in ASTRO Labs.

A full night's rest is a pleasant reward after dealing with a crisis, but your sleep is not entirely peaceful. You have the strangest dream about you and your teammates, dressed in your costumes and approaching ASTRO Labs in the dead of night. The schematics the Foundry robots attempted to steal are still inside and you know that you have to get them.

Explain to the players that their characters dream about breaking into ASTRO Labs to get the schematics the Myrmidon robots attempted to steal, and run the break-in like an actual encounter, letting the players decide how they want to go about it. Tell them they need to come up with some way to get inside, past the guards and security systems, and take the plans, ideally without getting spotted.

Overcoming the exterior security systems at ASTRO Labs requires a Disable Device check (DC 30) while the security on the lab requires the same check. Getting past the guards unnoticed requires a Stealth check (DC 15) while accessing the necessary computer files takes a Computers check (DC 20). The schematics are stored in a Toughness 15 wall-vault while the walls of the lab are reinforced Toughness 10 material; the doors, however, are only Toughness 8, with security key-pads (the aforementioned Disable Device DC).

It should be a fairly simple matter for the heroes to break into the lab and acquire the plans and computer files. The guards on-duty are no real match for them (use the Police Officer archetype on page 228 of *M&M* armed with +5 damage blasters); neither are the security systems. It's no problem if the characters slip-up and alert security, since it plays right into the next scene (if everything goes smoothly, then the characters are simply unaware they've been noticed).

Once the heroes have the materials, they feel drawn to an alleyway in a nearby part of the North End, where a spider-like robot (a Foundry Charibdrone) emerges from a sewer tunnels, takes the stolen goods, and disappears back beneath the streets of the city. Things fade slowly to black and the characters awaken in their own beds the next morning.

If players are suspicious about the dream, tell them it seems perfectly normal to their characters; they don't know why they're doing what they're doing, but it's just a dream, isn't it? If the players stubbornly refuse to go along with playing out the events of the break-in,

don't force matters, just skip over the scene and tell them their characters wake up the next morning after a strange dream where they broke into ASTRO Labs.

Award the players a hero point for the events of the dream. It's a complication, even if they don't know it yet...

SCENE THREE: RUDE AWAKENING

The heroes wake up thinking the events of the previous night nothing more than an unusual dream (since, as duplicates, they're programmed not to question their orders). They might well compare notes over breakfast, at a meeting, or during a morning patrol or the like, discovering they all had an identical dream. Let them play out the scene a bit, their suspicions and concerns growing, then let the other shoe drop.

ASTRO Labs notified the authorities about the break-in and AEGIS immediately assumed control of the case. If the heroes left blatant evidence of their involvement (e.g. they busted through the walls of the labs, scattered the guards, and walked out with the stolen goods), AEGIS has managed to cover things up for the time-being and the media is only reporting that there was a break-in by a person or persons unknown, assuming it was the Foundry trying again. If the heroes were subtler in their theft, then AEGIS has hidden surveillance footage of their involvement, but has kept news of it and the break-in out of the media for the time being. The agency wants to avoid dragging the heroes' reputations through the mud if they can.

Director Harry Powers (*Freedom City*, page 72) personally leads the team of AEGIS agents to confront and possibly arrest the heroes. It includes one MAX armor agent for each hero as well as one uniformed AEGIS agent for each hero. The AEGIS personnel turn up on the doorstep of the heroes' headquarters (if they have a public HQ), or track down the location of any secret headquarters the heroes might have, so long as it is accessible. If the heroes' headquarters is out of AEGIS' reach (like the Freedom League's orbiting satellite, the Lighthouse), the agency invites the heroes to a meeting with the Director at AEGIS headquarters in Freedom City or the agency team shows up the next

time the heroes appear in public (keep in mind the heroes have little reason to suspect anyone is after them at this point).

Powers tells the heroes about the break-in, and the details match their dream exactly. He also tells them AEGIS has evidence of the heroes' involvement. The exact nature of the evidence depends on how things went in **Scene Two**. If the heroes made any mistakes whatsoever, Powers now uses them as evidence: security system tampering, video footage, clues left behind at the scene, or eye-witness reports from the guards, for example. If nothing else, you can have Powers tell the players that he suspected the Foundry might try again and arranged with ASTRO Labs to have additional covert surveillance measures installed, which captured them in action.

After presenting the evidence, Powers asks the heroes to explain. Even if they tell him the truth, he says that he has no choice but to ask them to surrender to AEGIS' custody until the matter can be resolved. Until the heroes' names are cleared, they cannot be allowed to go free. They'll be placed in special custody in Blackstone Prison pending an investigation and, possibly, a trial. The characters can either choose to turn themselves in and go peacefully, or they can try and escape.

If the heroes surrender, go right to **Scene Five** and pick up the action there, where the real heroes show up to confront their doubles. If the heroes choose to make a run for it, perhaps hoping to clear their good names, the AEGIS agents attempt to stop them. Run the confrontation and, if the heroes win and escape, go on to **Scene Four** for what happens next.

SCENE FOUR: HUNTED!

If the heroes choose to fight the AEGIS agents or simply go on the run, they become wanted criminals. Director Powers uses his authority to put out an all-points bulletin to all local law enforcement and even to UNISON (the United Nations International Superhuman Oversight Network), meaning police around the world will be on the lookout for the rogue heroes.

More importantly, word goes out to other heroes in Freedom City, who start looking for their colleagues who have broken the law. This is a great opportunity to involve other heroes from the *Freedom City* sourcebook in the adventure, from members of the Freedom League to the Atom Family or the Next-Gen, who might take it upon themselves to try and apprehend the "rogue" heroes, especially if they considered them role-models or peers in any way.

If you don't have access to *Freedom City*, you can use some of the hero archetypes from the *M&M* rulebook as an ad hoc team of heroes who come after the characters (sample characters Sentinel and Lux are good for this in particular). Archetypes from the *Archetype Archive* collection or *Instant Superheroes* can also be used in this manner. If you want to introduce a new NPC superhero team and give the players reason to dislike them or treat them as rivals, this is a golden opportunity to do so.

This scene is fairly free form: let the players decide what their characters are going to do. Obviously, the longer they stay out in public, the greater the chance AEGIS and other heroes will be out in force after them. They're likely to go to ground, perhaps using their secret identities (if they have any) or some other sort of disguise so they can regroup and plan their next move. Allow them the opportunity to do so, perhaps providing a brush with local law enforcement (a beat cop asks them some routine questions, for example, or they're asked for identification at a port of exit).

The heroes should be trying to figure out who set them up, and they may very well suspect the Foundry, given the encounter in **Scene One**. If they want to try and run scientific tests, they'll need access to equipment, and odds are their headquarters is being watched (if its location is known to AEGIS or other heroes). Tests don't reveal anything conclusive anyway, although you can hint at some "biological anomalies" or the lingering presence of some nanotechnology to keep the players wondering what's going on.

Once the players have had a chance to catch their breath and take some steps, it's time to have a group of NPC heroes find them and try to take them in. The other heroes might be sympathetic to the situation, and even willing to listen to what the characters have to say, but they're unbending in demanding the rogue heroes' surrender. If they're really innocent, they say, let the justice system do its job. Running or fighting just makes the heroes look guilty.

Again, if the characters surrender, go to **Scene Five**. If not, then the other heroes try to take them by force. If you want to make sure there's a fight, you can have the NPCs skip trying to talk and just jump the heroes as soon as they can, perhaps hoping to take them down quickly before they realize what's happening.

If the heroes win, go to **Scene Five**, where the *real* heroes show up to put things right. If the heroes lose, you can skip **Scene Five** and go right to **Scene Six** where the real heroes escape from Talos' clutches, then to the **Epilogue**, since there's no need for the real heroes to confront their doppelgängers.

HARD TIME

If the heroes surrender to the authorities and you want to extend the events of the adventure, you can play out their incarceration and subsequent efforts to escape from prison in order to prove their innocence (once it becomes clear the case against them is solid enough to ensure a conviction and a long-term prison sentence). In this case, assume Talos keeps the real heroes "on ice" for some time, perhaps taking comprehensive atomic or quantum scans or the like while they're unconscious and recording their brain engrams and neural maps (in order to perfect the duplication process).

If you have the *Freedom City* sourcebook, you can send the heroes to Blackstone prison (*Freedom City*, page 75), where they have to deal with Warden Drummer and the prison's various inmates, some of whom the heroes may have been responsible for capturing! Drummer isn't inclined to show much sympathy to "heroes gone bad" and things in the prison can get as ugly as the tone of your series can handle while the heroes work out an escape plan.

Alternately, if you have the *Lockdown* sourcebook, the heroes can end up at the Buckner Ridge prison facility, where things can get even more complicated as they come into contact with the super-prison's diverse inmate population, and perhaps discover some of what's going on behind the scene there. You can have some fun playing out life in prison for the heroes, since you know they're not the *real* characters, which allows you considerable latitude in doing bad things to them. A "hero" could get seriously hurt or even killed in *Lockdown* without impacting the actual characters, since the whole thing is something of an "imaginary story."

Eventually, the duplicates escape from prison (perhaps with some inside help, if they're really willing to sell their souls for the opportunity to redeem them). Then you can move along to **Scene Five**, where the real heroes show up to reclaim their lives from the imposters.

SCENE FIVE: THE MIRROR CRACK'D

In this brief scene, the real heroes return to confront their doubles. Read or paraphrase the following to the players, then cut to **Scene Six: Escape From the Foundry**:

Suddenly, there's a crash and you turn towards a group of figures standing in a spreading cloud of dust and debris: they're you! Or at least they look exactly like you.

"This ends now, imposters!" one of them says.

Adjust the arrival of the real heroes to suit the situation occurring when this scene comes into play, such as if the duplicates are in AEGIS headquarters, the heroes' headquarters, a hideout somewhere, or having just defeated another team of heroes. Don't give the players much time to think about it, just cut directly to **Scene Six**, where they discover things aren't as they appear.

SCENE SIX: ESCAPE FROM THE FOUNDRY

After the revelation in **Scene Five**, cut to a flashback scene of how the real heroes managed to escape. Read the following to the players:

A short while ago, in a hidden lair deep beneath the streets of Freedom City...

Consciousness returns slowly, then quickly as you realize you're virtually unable to move. Heavy metallic cuffs bind your hands at your sides and hold down your feet, while a tube of clear material arcs mere inches away, encasing your entire body. You're lying on a steep angle, nearly standing upright, and you see your teammates inside similar transparent tubes spaced along the curved wall of the room.

"Awake, and sooner than expected, interesting," says a deep, metallic voice, muffled only slightly by the material of the tube. "Don't bother struggling; the containment tubes completely nullify your powers. I designed them myself."

Turning toward the sound of the voice, you see a massive, nine-foot bronze figure, like a statue of an Ancient Greek warrior come to life, complete with crested helm. Red light burns in his eyes like a banked fire, but his face is as cold and emotionless as an actual statue: Talos, the renegade robot and master of the Foundry!

"Welcome to one of my labs," Talos says. "I would not expect a rescue as, you see, the rest of the world doesn't even know you are here. This device," the bronze giant gestures to a casket-like machine off to the side, "is a protomatter duplication matrix, much like the one that granted my wayward creation Argo with his abilities. It creates an exact duplicate of any being, perfect down to the molecular level."

"When my Myrmidons surrounded you in nano-mist, the matrix instantly created near-exact copies, while you were transported here. Under my command, your duplicates have replaced you and carry out my plans, while you remain here for my experiments."

"With the help of your duplicates, I will replace the other heroes of Freedom City as well, and soon I will have an army of super-duplicates at my command!"

"Once you've completely shaken off the effects of the nano-mist, I can begin my experiments. In the meanwhile, Scylla will watch over you while I check on the progress of your replacements, won't you, my dear?" A wide view screen set above the door comes on to show the smooth, golden-skinned face of a woman with silvery hair, a representation of the Foundry's master control computer looking down on you without a trace of compassion in her eyes.

"Try not to struggle too much," Talos continues. "I wouldn't want my new subjects damaged needlessly." The doors slide open and the clanking, metallic footfalls of the mad robot fade away as they close behind him.

Note that the heroes have three additional hero points each: one for their capture by Talos, one for the trap in which they find themselves, and one for playing their own doubles in the previous scenes. You can add an additional hero point or two for particularly good roleplaying in the earlier scenes as well, if you wish.

The heroes are held in Toughness 10 tubes of Plexiglas-like material, bound in Toughness 10 manacles with a continuous Nullify 12 effect that dampens their powers. Any Devices or equipment have been removed and sit on a long laboratory table on the opposite side of the room. At the touch of a button, Talos can also flood any of the tubes with anesthetic gas (Stun effect, DC 22 Fortitude save each round) or send a powerful electrical charge through the manacles (same effect and DC, different descriptor, for those targets immune to the gas). Scylla can also control these systems, but won't use them except as a last resort, since Talos wants the prisoners conscious and in the best possible condition.

Slipping free of the manacles requires an Escape Artist check (DC 30), while overriding the locking mechanisms to open the manacles and the tube requires a Disable Device check (DC 30). It's possible to take 10 or take 20 on either check, provided the character is not being watched. Characters with full use of their powers can probably escape more easily: they can use extra effort to obtain an additional Will saving throw against the Nullify effect (DC 22) and can spend a hero point on the save (as well as to shrug off fatigue from the extra effort).

Efforts to escape while Talos is in the room are largely fruitless unless the heroes can manage to distract both the robot mastermind and Scylla while they make their attempt: this requires a successful Bluff check against both by the distracting character, as well as a successful Stealth check against both by the character making the escape attempt, although both checks don't have to come from the same character.

Things get easier once Talos is out of the room. Then the heroes only need to keep Scylla's attention occupied. She has Notice +17 and Sense Motive +13; if a hero successfully Bluffs her the other heroes can make an escape attempt without being noticed immediately.

When the heroes escape, Scylla alerts Talos and a skittering group of Charibdrones (one per hero) emerges from the walls of the room to restrain them. The characters shouldn't have much difficulty plowing through them, but a group of Myrmidon robots (again, equal in number to the heroes) waits on the other side of the lab's Toughness 11 door.

The robots' primary job is to keep the heroes busy so Talos can escape. The robot mastermind doesn't intend to take on an entire team at once, so he orders Scylla to set the lab to self-destruct and leaves via a teleportal platform (**Teleport 10**) for one of the Foundry's other facilities, scrambling the location in the teleportal's computer when he disappears.

The heroes need to overcome the robots and reach the teleportal in time to escape themselves before an energy pulse that burns out electronics and living nervous systems alike destroys the lab and everyone in it. Use the tension of the energy buildup to lend urgency to the

FREEDOM LEAGUE ESCAPES

The Freedom League heroes have a number of ways in which they might escape from Talos' trap. The following are some suggestions you can give players if they spend a hero point for inspiration or simply seem stuck for ideas:

- **Captain Thunder:** With his powers, Captain Thunder can tear apart the manacles and the tube easily, but he first needs to make a successful Will save against the Nullify effect as extra effort. A blast from his Electrical Control could also overload the lab's systems, helping to free his teammates.
- **Daedalus:** Although deprived of his armor, Daedalus is still a genius. He has a very good chance of making the Disable Device check to override the systems, but first needs to get his hands free. You may let him make a DC 35 Disable Device check to "pick" the electronic locks on the manacles first (which he can accomplish on a roll of 13 or better with his skill).
- **Dr. Metropolis:** With his powers, Dr. Metropolis could simply pass right through the manacles and the tube! His Animate Objects could likewise help to free the others. With his Will save bonus, he has a good chance (a roll of 12 or better) to overcome the Nullify effect.
- **Johnny Rocket:** Johnny can't do too much without his powers, although he does have a modest Bluff skill (for distracting Scylla, or helping another character do so). With his powers active, he could do Insubstantial 4 as a power stunt, vibrating through the material of the manacles and the tube.
- **Lady Liberty:** Lady Liberty is the most hampered, since imprisonment negates her powers anyway! However, once she's free, she can fairly easily Nullify the imprisoning effects on her teammates.
- **Pseudo:** The alien shape-shifter can easily escape by flowing out of the bindings and tube once his powers are restored. He also has the second best Bluff check bonus on the team, when it comes to distracting Scylla.
- **Raven:** Raven has no powers to lose, although she is without her equipment. Note that she suffers a -4 penalty to Disable Device because of the lack of tools (spending a hero point for the Improvised Tools feat overcomes it). She has the best Bluff check bonus (+14), giving her a good chance of distracting Scylla.
- **Siren:** Short of a power stunt of some sort, Siren's only real means of escape is breaking out with her Strength once her powers are restored, since her Super-Strength gives her a fair chance.
- **Star Knight:** Deprived of her armor, Star Knight has few options for escape. If you prefer not to hinder her player quite so much, leave her armor in place, but have the manacles Nullify it like the other heroes' powers.

Let the players get as creative as they want in coming up with their escape attempt, and allow them to talk amongst themselves to come up with their plan, given the heroes' long experience in working together.

fight as the heroes get to the portal. A Knowledge (technology) check (DC 20) is required to operate it.

SCENE SEVEN: DOUBLE TROUBLE

This is it, the climatic confrontation scene. Essentially, approach **Scene Five** from the "opposite angle," with the real heroes arriving to confront their doubles just as they did before the flashback, picking up the action where it left off.

Talos programmed a fail-safe in the duplicates so they would attack the real heroes if they managed to escape, and that's exactly what happens: when the heroes show up, the doppelgangers attack and it's a fight to the finish! Here are some things to consider when running the fight:

- Clever fighters on both sides may take advantage of the fact that the doubles are practically indistinguishable from the originals; a successful Bluff check, for example, might cause a foe to attack a teammate, mistaking him or her for a someone on the other team. Shapeshifters like Pseudo might be able to take similar advantage.
- Characters who make impassioned pleas to the duplicates to shake off Talos' influence, appealing to their sense of heroism, should get to make Diplomacy checks (Charisma for unskilled use) against the hostile duplicates. Any duplicate moved to friendly stops fighting, while any moved to helpful actually aids the heroes!
- While the characters know the capabilities and weaknesses of their doppelgangers, the reverse is also true. Still, the heroes should have a greater store of hero points, so try to avoid using GM Fiat too much for the benefit of the duplicates at this point; the heroes are supposed to win this one.

An unconscious or dying duplicate dissolves back into formless proto-matter, and the same happens to the remaining doubles when the fight is over: another fail-safe mechanism to ensure they couldn't get out of Talos' control.

EPILOGUE

Once the heroes' doubles are defeated, it's a simple matter for them to clear their names and get back into the good graces of AEGIS and the other authorities. An examination at ASTRO Labs shows the heroes are none the worse for wear for their ordeal, although the doctor mentions that it might be impossible to tell the Foundry's duplicates from real people, so who is to say for certain that the heroes are *really* real? Just something for the players to think about....

FURTHER ADVENTURES

If you're running *Proteus Plot* as part of an ongoing *Mutants & Masterminds* series rather than as a one-shot adventure, you might want to keep the heroes' duplicates around at the end of the adventure rather than having them melt into puddles of proto-matter. The experience of having their true nature exposed has two key effects: first, it frees the duplicates from most, if not all, of Talos' programming, giving them free will. Unfortunately, the exposure of their true (or technically, false) nature also unhinges their personalities, giving them an obsessive hatred of the real heroes.

Now you have a new group of supervillains with not only the same capabilities as the heroes, but also aware of virtually everything that they know. The duplicates can eventually break out of prison and form a "Doppel-Gang" dedicated to either getting revenge on their "progenitors" (and possibly Talos, or both) or trying to eliminate and replace the real heroes in order to have lives of their own. Their "evil twins" can return to plague the heroes again and again, and face them with the question of whether or not it's ethical for them to destroy their doubles. Are they really "alive"? Do they deserve a chance at an independent existence?

There's also the matter of Talos' Proteus technology. Assuming the robot mastermind escapes, there's always the possibility of using it to duplicate other people in the future. The Foundry might try to replace important governmental figures with duplicates, for example, other heroes or even other villains could be targeted for replacement; enough so the characters have a difficult time knowing who's real and who isn't and whom they can really trust.

MYRMIDION MARK III (COMBAT MODEL) POWER LEVEL 8

Str 20	Dex 18	Con —	Int —	Wis 12	Cha 10
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Skills: Notice 8 (+9)

Feats: Accurate Attack, Assessment

Powers: **Blast 9**, **Immunity 30** (Fortitude), **Leaping 2**, **Protection 9** (Impervious), **Speed 2** (25 MPH), **Strike 4** (Mighty), **Super-Senses 3** (darkvision, radio)

Combat: Attack +7, Grapple +16, Damage +9 (unarmed or blast), Defense +7, Knockback -9, Initiative +4

Saving Throws: Toughness +9, Fortitude —, Reflex +4, Will —

Abilities 0 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 78 + Combat 28 + Saves 0 = Total 110

SCYLLA POWER LEVEL 11

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
—	—	—	+9	+9	+3
—	—	—	28	28	16

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+12	—	+0	+11

Skills: Computers 12 (+21), Concentration 8 (+17), Disable Device 12 (+21), Knowledge (technology) 12 (+21), Notice 8 (+17), Search 8 (+17), Sense Motive 4 (+13)

Feats: Assessment, Eidetic Memory, Fearless, Equipment 3

Powers: **Comprehend 2** (languages), **Datalink 10** (Machine Control), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude), **Mind Shield 5**, **Protection 12**, **Summon Charibdrones 6** (Continuous, Fanatical, Progression 7 [up to 250 per base]), **Super-Senses 7** (infravision, radio, radius visual, X-ray vision)

Headquarters: Scylla is always installed within a Foundry base (her Equipment feat). Adjust feat ranks as needed for her current "home."

Combat: Attack +10, Grapple —, Damage +12 (base weapons), Defense +0, Knockback —, Initiative +9

Drawbacks: Action (Summon Charibdrones takes a full round, -1), Disabled (immobile, very common, minor, -3)

Abilities 12 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 100 + Combat 20 + Saves 2 - Drawbacks 4 = Total 152

CHARACTERS

The following are the stats of major characters appearing in *The Proteus Plot*. Other *Freedom City* characters may appear based on your choice of NPC heroes to oppose the characters' doubles.

MYRMIDONS

Myrmidons are the Foundry's generic robots provided to cash-and-carry customers from supervillains to the Mob to SHADOW. The robots are modular and can be made to order; the Marks I-IV are baseline models, all of which can have weapons, and other upgrades as the assignment (and the size of the commission) warrants.

CHARIBDRONES

POWER LEVEL 7

Str 14	Dex 16	Con —	Int —	Wis 14	Cha 1
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Skills: Craft (electronic or mechanical) 12 (+12)

Feats: None

Powers: **Additional Limbs 2**, **Elongation 4**, **Immunity 30** (Fortitude), **Protection 8**, **Shrinking 4** (Permanent, Innate), **Super-Movement 1** (wall-crawling), **Super-Senses 3** (darkvision, radio communication link with Scylla), plus a movement power (choose one of **Burrowing 6**, **Flight 3**, or **Swimming 6**) and an offensive power (choose one of **Blast 7**, **Dazzle 7** (visual), **Drain Strength 7**, **Fatigue 7**, **Snare 7**, or **Stun 7**)

Combat: Attack +8 (includes +1 size), Grapple +11, Damage +2 (unarmed) or by power, Defense +7 (includes +1 size), Knockback -3, Initiative +3

Saving Throws: Toughness +8, Fortitude —, Reflex +3, Will —

Abilities -15 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 74 + Combat 26 + Saves 0 = Total 88

TALOS

POWER LEVEL 14

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+15	+2	—	+14	+5	+2
40	14	—	38	20	14

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+15	—	+5	+12

Skills: Computers 8 (+22), Craft (electronic) 12 (+26), Craft (mechanical) 12 (+26), Craft (structural) 12 (+26), Disable Device 8 (+22), Knowledge (business) 2 (+16), Knowledge (history) 10 (+24), Knowledge (physical sciences) 10 (+24), Knowledge (technology) 12 (+26), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 2 (+16), Notice 4 (+9), Sense Motive 8 (+13)

Feats: Accurate Attack, Eidetic Memory, Fearless, Improved Pin, Improved Tools, Inventor, Power Attack

Powers: **Blast 12** (fire, Alternate Power: **Strike 12** [heat, Aura]), **Growth 4** (large, Permanent), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude), **Protection 13** (Impervious 11), **Regeneration 7** (+5 recovery bonus, resurrection 1/day, Persistent, Regrowth), **Super-Senses 2** (darkvision), **Super-Strength 6** (heavy load: 1,600 tons)

Combat: Attack +9 (includes -1 size), Grapple +34, Damage +15 (unarmed), +12 (blast), Defense +9 (includes -1 size), Knockback -15, Initiative +2

Abilities 66 + Skills 25 (100 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 114 + Combat 40 + Saves 9 = Total 261

SEED OF DESTRUCTION

BY STEVE KENSON

A new evil grows deep in the heart of Freedom City! The vegetative villain known as the Green Man has turned the forces of nature against the city itself and only Our Heroes stand between him and complete domination of the natural world.

Seed of Destruction is an adventure for the *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG. It is intended for a group of four to six Power Level 10 heroes, although the Gamemaster can scale the adventure to make it suitable for higher or lower level heroes by increasing or decreasing the power levels of the villains as appropriate (generally by approximately the same amount as the heroes).

The adventure is set in Freedom City (described in the *Freedom City* sourcebook available from Green Ronin Publishing). Although the *Freedom City* book is recommended for running this adventure, it is not required. All the necessary material is included here and in the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The Green Man (*Freedom City*, page 200) is a former botanist who transformed himself into an intelligent plant with power over the vegetable kingdom. He is obsessed with "protecting" the natural world from human civilization, generally by leading a "green revolution" and conquering humanity.

One of the Green Man's most implacable foes has been Dr. Metropolis (*Freedom City*, page 116) an "urban spirit" and the living embodiment of Freedom City. Dr. Metropolis represents everything the Green Man despises about civilization. However, he also represents an opportunity the Green Man has now realized.

The Green Man created a "meta-seed" using his powers and scientific knowledge. Luring Dr. Metropolis into a trap, the villain has "planted" the meta-seed in the hero's body, allowing him to tap into Dr. Metropolis' power and add it to his own. The Green Man is now more powerful than ever, and can extend his domination over the natural world to vastly speed up the processes of plant life reclaiming the land "stolen" from it to create cities, starting with Freedom City!

SCENE ONE: TROUBLE SPROUTS

In this scene, the heroes see the first signs of the Green Man's expanded power as his plant minions strike Freedom City. Read the following aloud to the players:

It's a pleasant day in downtown Freedom City and you are on the steps of City Hall, where Mayor O'Connor is preparing to recognize your contributions to the city. A podium is set up on the steps where the Mayor and a number of VIPs are gathered while at the foot of the steps stand various reporters and cameramen. Beyond them are a crowd of onlookers and well-wishers, kept at a distance by officers of the Freedom City Police Department.

The crowd falls silent as the Mayor approaches the podium and prepares to speak. Suddenly, a rumbling breaks the silence as a tremor shakes the ground. Then the pavement bursts upward as one, two giant vines erupt from the ground. Several others quickly follow. Like the giant tentacles of some subterranean beast, the vines thrash and flail. One reaches out toward the Mayor while others grab City Hall pillars, people from the crowd, or simply smash into parked cars or anything else in their path!

Adjust the introduction to suit the heroes' group. If they're entirely new, they might meet for the first time when this crisis erupts (especially since the Freedom League is mysteriously absent). If they're not likely to receive accolades from the Mayor, they might be on-hand for a meeting with Police Commissioner Barbara Kane or FC District Attorney Daniel Durgan. For a real alternate kick-off, maybe the "heroes" are actually super-criminals on their way to arraignment at the courthouse. When the vines crack open the van they're in, they have a chance to help out. If they save the city from the Green Man, they might get a suspended sentence and "community service" as superheroes!

Whatever the case, the heroes should be on-hand when the first of the Green Man's plant minions begin attacking the city. They have a chance to intervene and try to contain the damage.

Have the players make Notice (listen) checks (DC 15) to avoid being surprised by the vines as they burst up out of the street. Those that succeed can act normally during the surprise round. If none of the heroes succeed, the vines all get a surprise round before the heroes get to go. Use this to further complicate matters: having vines grab the Mayor and a few other people, send cars flying into crowds, or cracking the support pillars of the City Hall facade.

Once the heroes spring into action, the vines begin focusing on them, especially once the heroes start inflicting some damage. The giant vines are essentially mindless, but driven by the Green Man's vastly expanded awareness. They don't have much in the way of tactics, just flailing away or trying to grapple and crush the heroes. A vine might try and use a car or chunk of masonry as a weapon, but that's about it.

This encounter is intended as a "warm up" for the heroes. The vines shouldn't be too challenging, and the heroes should be able to deal with them in fairly short order. Run the battle as long as it's interesting. If the heroes seem to be cleaning up the vines a little too quickly, you can have some others sprout up as a setback. If they're having trouble, they can get some help from the police officers at the scene, from the STAR Squad (*Freedom City*, page 68) or from one of Freedom City's other heroes. Use the scene to award hero points for handling the initial outbreak and any other complications that crop up (no pun intended).

SPREADING SEEDS

Once the heroes have handled the immediate threat, they discover similar things are happening all over Freedom City: monstrous vines are bursting up from beneath streets and basements. Ivy and creepers are growing at incredible speeds up the sides of buildings. Kelp and seaweed is choking off Great Bay and even grappling ships, try-

ANIMATED VINES

POWER LEVEL 8

Str 30 Dex 10 Con 22 Int – Wis 10 Cha 1

Skills: None

Feats: None

Powers: **Elongation 6, Growth 8** (Huge, Permanent, Innate), **Protection 4**

Combat: Attack +6 (–2 size included), Grapple +26, Damage +10 (strike), Defense +6 (–2 size included), Knockback –13, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +10, Fortitude +6, Reflex +0, Will +0

Abilities –11 + Skills 0 + Feats 0 + Powers 35 + Combat 32 + Saves 0 = Total 56

ing to drag them underwater. The plant kingdom is in revolt against the city and its inhabitants!

If the heroes want, allow them to try and deal with some of the other crises around the city. You can extend the adventure by providing a few other encounters with animated plants (use the abilities of the vines as a guideline): saving a ship from giant animated kelp, evacuating a building being undermined by fast-growing ivy or roots, and so forth. You can also point out how other Freedom City heroes are responding to the crisis, with more than enough emergencies to keep everyone busy (in case players are wondering where, say, the Freedom League or Atom Family is during all this).

SCENE TWO: BRIDES OF THE GREEN

Eventually, the heroes should realize they're fighting a losing battle against the encroaching plant life and start looking for the source of the problem. Once they do, read (or paraphrase) the following:

All variety of plant life grows riot across Freedom City. Animated vines and creepers dig into building foundations, crack walls, and split support pillars. Mosses and lichen cover the streets while thick roots and sprouting grasses buckle the sidewalks.

Most prominent is the growth in Liberty Park, in the midst of the city. The formerly pleasant swath of greenery has become a primeval forest, with trees towering up above the nearby buildings. A thick canopy of foliage spreads overhead while the trees' massive roots have begun digging up 52nd street and the other areas surrounding the park.

It shouldn't take long for the heroes to figure out Liberty Park is at the center of the plant growth or for them to investigate. When they do, the Green Man has his three "brides" intercept the heroes. He needs a few moments to finish drawing upon the power of the meta-seed, since the massive surge of power triggering the sudden plant growth has momentarily drained him.

When the heroes approach, Maxima, Flora, and Venus Man-Trap emerge from the heavy woods to confront them. They tell the heroes they are forbidden to enter the sanctum of their lord and master, the savior of the natural world. The ladies are happy to bandy words with the heroes (since it's their job to delay them, after all). If the heroes are defiant, or try to get past them, then they attack. Any effort to convince the Brides what the Green Man is doing is wrong is likely

CALLING THE FREEDOM LEAGUE...

If you're using the *Freedom City* setting, you or your players might wonder where the rest of its heroes are during this crisis. If you like, you can decide the Green Man trapped all the members of the Freedom League individually (even though he was only after Dr. Metropolis). The rest of the League is imprisoned (in suspended animation) deep in the Wharton State Forest (*Freedom City*, page 52). They're freed only when the Green Man is defeated.

Alternately, the Green Man may have arranged a false trail of clues to lead the Freedom League off on a wild goose chase as they search for the missing Dr. Metropolis. While this adventure takes place, the League is deep in the Amazon Jungle, dealing with the Green Man's various deathtraps.

Of course, if the heroes *are* members of the Freedom League, they may be the ones looking for Dr. Metropolis when the Green Man makes his move. It's up to them to realize the two events are connected. Freedom City's other heroes, such as the Atom Family and the Next-Gen, can be off handling cases of their own, or trying to keep the rioting plants under control while the characters confront the Green Man and his Brides. Once things start happening, there's more than enough chaos and confusion in the city to keep several teams of heroes scrambling to keep up!

doomed to failure; the three are fanatically devoted to him and the cause of "saving" the plant kingdom from humanity.

See the end of the adventure for the Brides of the Green's game stats.

PULLING WEEDS

Odds are the heroes outnumber the Brides and exceed them in power, so they should be able to win the fight without too much trouble. This is a good place to use GM Fiat to help keep the fight interesting and prevent the heroes from defeating the villainesses too quickly.

Use GM Fiat to help the Brides if they badly fail an initial Toughness saving throw or two. You can also provide them with some innovative power stunts as needed. Flora can come up with some other attack effects (such as Drain or Paralysis) or an Area version of her existing effects. Maxima can use Super-Strength power feats, and Venus may add stunts to her Plant Control. The Brides target the heroes' weak points and work well together, supporting each other's attacks. If they need to flee, Flora teleports them to the Green Man's side in the depths of Liberty Park (allowing you to have the Brides on-hand for the final confrontation with the master villain, if you want).

If the Brides manage to defeat the heroes, pick up with **Captured!** Otherwise, move on to **The Heart of Darkness**.

SCENE THREE: HEART OF DARKNESS

After the heroes defeat or drive off the Brides of the Green, they can enter the primeval forest Liberty Park has become.

Within moments of stepping into the forest, you've lost sight of Freedom City altogether. An eerie silence hangs over the green twilight in the park: no traffic noise, no urban

hum, not even the sounds of woodland creatures or birds. There is nothing but silence. The air is heavy with moisture and the scent of living plants. Thick trees create a leafy canopy filtering out the sun, casting greenish shadows over the thick bed of grasses, creepers, and spongy moss covering the ground. Of the old trails, fences, and other artifacts of humanity there are no signs, as if the forest simply swallowed them whole.

In the depths of the foliage, a low hill rises amidst a small clearing. On top of it is a palace of living wood: trunks and branches intertwined to create a palisade wall, with a natural gateway in between two trees. Within is a kind of courtyard carpeted in soft grass, surrounded by high trees, their trunks like pillars. In its midst is the most massive tree you've seen yet, towering above the rest. The front of its gnarled trunk and roots are shaped into a throne-like chair, where sits a figure of leaf and bark who blends into the surroundings so he nearly disappears.

"Welcome," he says in a voice like creaking branches. "Welcome to my domain. I am the Green Man, the new king of this world. What you have seen in this city is just a sample of the power that is now mine to command. I am now the supreme power in this city. You may serve the green world as its protectors... or as fertilizer. The choice is yours."

The Green Man is quite drunk on his newfound power (see his stats at the end of the adventure). He's certain the heroes pose no threat to him (and he's right, to a degree). If allowed the opportunity, the Green Man launches into a speech about how he has claimed his rightful place as the savior of the natural world, and how Freedom City is just the beginning of his plans. Soon, the plant kingdom will rise up in revolt against the animals enslaving and torturing it, and his vegetable followers will restore the world to its rightful natural balance. The works of humanity will be swept away, the slate wiped clean once more! Award a hero point to any player encouraging the monologue to give the heroes more time or to find out more about the Green Man's scheme.

The Green Man offers the heroes the opportunity to join his crusade, hinting at promises of greater power and understanding. If they refuse, he rises to his full height and commands the trees of the forest to destroy them as an example to the rest of the world. If the heroes appear interested or try bluffing him, the Green Man tells them of how he can transform them to survive in the world to come. Go on to **Captured!** to get an idea of how. The heroes might be able to lull the Green Man enough to figure out what's going on and surprise him (have them make Bluff checks against the Green Man's Sense Motive check result).

In his current state, the Green Man is a significant threat. Among other things, his Impervious Toughness makes him virtually immune to most attacks, and his Regeneration allows him to recover quickly from attacks that actually manage to damage him. He's superhumanly strong and capable of rooting to the ground, making him difficult to move. Critical hits inflict no additional damage on him, so it takes a fairly major Power Attack (or something similar) to overcome his defenses.

The Green Man also has a virtually unlimited number of animated trees at his command. For every one the heroes fell, another steps in to take its place. Remember, Liberty Park is filled with trees, and they're spreading out into the rest of Freedom City. You don't need to bother keeping track of the Green Man's minions; in this adventure, they're practically limitless.

Of course, overcoming the Green Man through brute force isn't the point, although it may take the players a few failed attempts to realize this. Feel free to have the Green Man simply laugh off their attacks, proclaiming his own invincibility and telling the heroes they'll never defeat him. He counters any attacks by trapping heroes in tangles of vines and small tress, bringing larger trees to life to attack them, and spraying clouds of choking pollen. As an additional benefit of the meta-seed, you can use GM Fiat to allow the Green Man to use extra effort a few times without fatigue, doing things like Area versions of his attacks, or acquiring some other power stunt useful against a particular hero. Award the players a hero point when you do this for the setback.

There are basically two outcomes to the encounter with the empowered Green Man: either the heroes are defeated and captured, or they figure out the source of the Green Man's power and try to free Dr. Metropolis from the villain's clutches.

CAPTURED!

If the Green Man or his Brides defeat the heroes in combat, the vegetative villain has a particular fate in store for them.

You awaken slowly in a green twilight. With a start, you realize your hands and feet are securely bound. Your back is pressed against the massive trunk of a tree, your limbs wrapped in its thick branches. Tendrils of creeper grow all over you, as if you have been hanging here for days or weeks. You feel weak and tired, listlessness seems to creep over you. It would be so easy to just slip back into the comforting darkness of unconsciousness...

"Ah, awake again," a voice says. "Don't worry, it won't be for long..."

The captured heroes are each bound to one of the great trees in the depths of Liberty Park. When they awaken, the Green Man gladly explains to them how the trees are leeching off both their powers and their life force. They are being absorbed into the trees and, when the process is complete, they will be transformed into plant-hybrids, the first of a new species to live in harmony with the natural world.

The Green Man tells them the process shouldn't take long and they're best off to not resist it. He then leaves to continue his conquest of Freedom City, leaving them to their inevitable fate.

Don't forget to award the players a hero point for the capture, as well as a hero point for being put into the transformation trap. The heroes can escape from the Green Man's trap in various ways. Feel free to allow the players to come up with their own escape plan, using the information here as a guideline. The point isn't to transform the heroes and end your game, but to create tension since the players have no idea how long the process actually takes. Make liberal use of extra effort and hero points in implementing the heroes' plans. Some things they can try include:

- Using Plant Control or similar powers to get the trees to release them. Perhaps the hero actually has to converse with the collective awareness of the trees and convince them what the Green Man is doing is wrong.
- Using extra effort and/or hero points to overcome the Nullifying effect of the plants, then use their powers to break free.
- Using extra effort or hero points to expend *more* energy and overload the plants so they let the heroes go.
- Mystically influencing or interfacing with the plant kingdom to convince it to aid the heroes against the Green Man. Alternately,

heroes might somehow tap into the “urban power” of Dr. Metropolis and use it to aid them.

- Finding a way to free Dr. Metropolis also frees the heroes if they're not already (see **Freeing Dr. Metropolis**).

Whatever plan the players come up with, you can have them roll dice, but you're better off to roll in secret, asking the players for some extra effort or hero point expenditure. Then just have the plan work if it's plausible, and the heroes get another shot at figuring out how to overcome the Green Man.

FREEING DR. METROPOLIS

The key to defeating the empowered Green Man lies in the heart of the giant tree at the center of his new domain. Dr. Metropolis' inert body is encapsulated inside the wood, paralyzed and weakened by the meta-seed embedded in his chest and extending root-like tendrils all across his gray concrete body.

The heroes can uncover Metropolis' location in various ways: using Super-Senses like detect, ESP, or X-ray vision, by trying to trace the Green Man's new energy source (using various powers or devices), or by using extra effort to acquire the necessary power stunt to track down the captured hero.

Clever players may trick the Green Man into telling them the source of his power. A successful Bluff check against the villain's Sense Motive result causes him to morph open the tree trunk, revealing Dr. Metropolis. The Green Man gloats how he has turned “this unnatural abomination into a weapon that will help me destroy these blights on the land.”

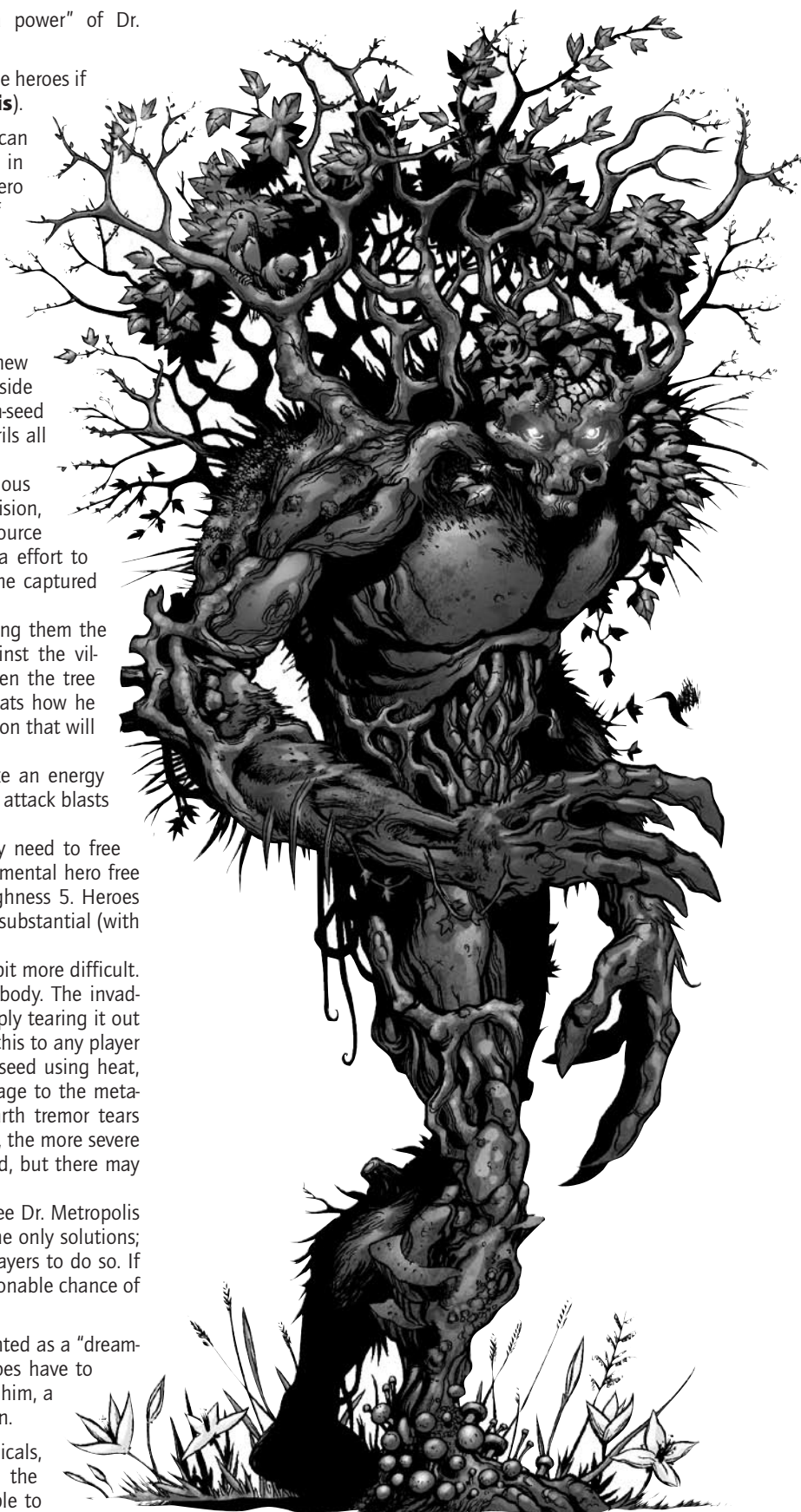
As a last resort, you can have a stray attack—like an energy blast that misses the Green Man—strike the tree. The attack blasts away part of the trunk, revealing Dr. Metropolis.

Once the heroes have found Dr. Metropolis, they need to free him from the grip of the meta-seed. Getting the elemental hero free of the tree trunk is the easy part; the wood is Toughness 5. Heroes can also get him out of the tree using powers like Insubstantial (with Affects Others), Teleport, Transform, and so forth.

Freeing the good Doctor from the meta-seed is a bit more difficult. It's not just a matter of tearing the seed from his body. The invading parasite has extended so many tendrils that simply tearing it out could cause irreparable harm to Dr. Metropolis (tell this to any player who considers such a plan). Simply destroying the seed using heat, electricity, or the like is also problematic. Any damage to the meta-seed causes Dr. Metropolis to convulse and an earth tremor tears through Freedom City; the more serious the damage, the more severe the tremors. The heroes might destroy the meta-seed, but there may be nothing left standing in Freedom City if they do.

There are a few approaches heroes can take to free Dr. Metropolis from the meta-seed's grip. These are by no means the only solutions; feel free to come up with your own, or allow the players to do so. If they come up with an interesting plan, give it a reasonable chance of success. Some suitably dramatic options include:

- Telepathically enter Dr. Metropolis' mind (represented as a “dreamscape” identical to Freedom City). There the heroes have to find Dr. Metropolis' trapped psyche and help free him, a scene or even a potential mini-adventure of its own.
- Douse Dr. Metropolis in defoliant or similar chemicals, which cause him no harm, but wither and kill the meta-seed. If nothing else, the heroes may be able to



find such chemicals in a maintenance shack in the park (hidden beneath the thick plant life).

- Mystically grapple with the spirit of the meta-seed on the astral plane to free Dr. Metropolis from its influence. Alternately, communicate with the forces of the plant kingdom and convince them to help loosen the meta-seed's grip.
- Bring Dr. Metropolis into an untouched urban environment. There his power is restored sufficiently to overcome the meta-seed. There might be an untouched corner of Freedom City, or the heroes might have to move the stricken hero to a nearby city using superspeed or teleportation. Star Island and Blackstone Prison, both just off the coast from Freedom City, count as sufficient environments (and you might mention this if any of the players think to ask or spend a hero point for inspiration).
- Freeze the meta-seed (again, doing no harm to Dr. Metropolis) using cold control powers, liquid nitrogen, Freon gas, or something similar. The icy coating over Dr. Metropolis cracks as he regains consciousness and breaks free.

The difficulty of removing the meta-seed is complicated by the fact that the Green Man automatically senses when the heroes free Metropolis from the tree and attempt to remove the seed. He instantly transports to where they are and does whatever he can to stop them. Some heroes might need to distract the Green Man (and possibly his Brides) while the others try to free Dr. Metropolis.

OVERCOMING THE GREEN MAN

While the easiest route to victory is for the heroes to free Dr. Metropolis, with the resulting backlash disabling the Green Man, it isn't necessarily the *only* way for the heroes to win. Clever players may come up with other plans to overcome the vegetative villain, or they may insist on accomplishing it on their own with no help from the spirit of Freedom City.

Gamemasters are encouraged to improvise based on whatever plan the heroes use. For example, they might create a device intended to block off the Green Man's extra power, use defoliants against him, or make innovative use of their powers (especially with extra effort and power stunts). The possibilities are endless.

Essentially, any plan that cuts the Green Man off from his source of power can defeat him. This can involve somehow severing his connection to the meta-seed and Dr. Metropolis or more directly breaking his connection with the plant kingdom itself. For example, if a hero makes psychic or mystical contact with the plant kingdom to escape from the Green Man's metamorphosis trap, he might be able to use that connection to convince the spirit of the plant world to turn against the Green Man (keeping in mind the plants may need convincing on the value of humanity and its cities).

If you find having the Green Man defeated immediately by the loss of his power anticlimactic, you can simply reduced his power level to the default given in the *Freedom City* book, or even lower, and allow the heroes to overcome him in combat. This may provide a more satisfactory ending for some groups, and it can extend the adventure a bit. Rather than immediate defeat, removing the Green Man's extra power just gives the heroes a fighting chance, allowing them to defeat the villain on their own.

THE CITY RESTORED

Once Dr. Metropolis is free of the meta-seed, the Green Man cries out in fear and frustration. A backlash of power strikes the villain and he's suddenly rooted to the spot. As the heroes watch, the Green Man struggles, but to no avail. His feet turn into thick roots, digging

deep into the ground. His legs fuse together into a single trunk as his body extends and elongates. His arms, thrown up in defiance, spread and sprout branches, his fingers extending, until the villain becomes a majestic, immobile tree, standing in Liberty Park (or perhaps elsewhere in the city).

If you want, you can allow the heroes to fight the de-powered Green Man (using his normal stats from *Freedom City*) so they can have the pleasure of trouncing him before his transformation takes place. When the Green Man is knocked out or disabled, he transforms as described. Either way, the villain is removed as a threat. With the Green Man's defeat, his Brides surrender to the heroes (although, again, you can extend the fight if you prefer).

EPILOGUE

The restored Dr. Metropolis channels his powers into the city, glass eyes glowing with green light. The Green Man's mutant plant life withers and turns to dust. The plants in Liberty Park return to their normal size, and any damage to the city is repaired before the heroes' eyes. Metropolis then turns to them. Read the following aloud to the players:

"I thank you," Dr. Metropolis says in a deep voice. "If not for your aid, I would not have been able to overcome the alien force sapping my strength and my power. You have saved us all this day. If a city can be said to have friends, then you may count Freedom City... and me... as yours."

The concrete and pavement ripples beneath Dr. Metropolis' feet like the surface of a pond, and he sinks into the ground. Then the ripples pass and the pavement is solid again. Freedom City is safe once more.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

You can use *Seed of Destruction* as a springboard to further adventures in Freedom City involving these characters. Consider the following:

- Although the Green Man is trapped in his tree form, something may set him loose again. Perhaps the tree is struck by lightning or a stray power cable knocked loose by a storm (created by Dr. Stratos, perhaps?). An attempt by city workers to cut down or remove the tree could also rouse the Green Man. His "exile" in the depths of the plant kingdom could drive him even more insane, or change his powers in various ways. Certainly, the plant mastermind will want revenge on the heroes who thwarted him.
- One or more of the Brides of the Green might fixate on a hero. She might want to avenge the Green Man, or she might decide to "change sides" and make romantic advances toward the hero. Is this a true change of heart, and how does the hero react?
- The supernatural forces unleashed in the struggle between the avatars of the urban and wilderness environments might lead to the creation of new heroes or villains. Perhaps some of the Green Man's animated trees retain their awareness. What do they do now that their "savior" is gone and they are confined to Liberty Park? Likewise, maybe Dr. Metropolis' revival spawns new "city spirits" for good or for ill.
- The crisis offers plenty of opportunities for looting and other villainy while the heroes were busy. Following up on these crimes can take several adventures. Could it be the Green Man had help capturing Dr. Metropolis and the whole thing was just a distraction for some other mastermind's evil plan? Dr. Sin or Mastermind might be behind such a scheme. Why do it, and what is the real plan?

CHARACTERS

The heroes' foes in *Seed of Destruction* are the empowered Green Man and his three "brides."

THE BRIDES OF THE GREEN

The so-called Brides of the Green are three women biologically altered by the Green Man's botanical technology into his superhuman followers. The Brides are all fanatically devoted to their "master" and to his cause of saving the natural world.

FLORA POWER LEVEL 9					
Str 10	Dex 16	Con 16	Int 10	Wis 14	Cha 14
Skills: Bluff 6 (+8), Diplomacy 6 (+8), Notice 4 (+6), Survival 4 (+6)					
Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 4, Attractive, Defensive Roll 5, Dodge Focus 2, Endurance, Evasion					
Powers: Dazzle 9 (visual, pollen-spray; Alternate Powers: Mind Control 9 , Stun 6 [Ranged], Suffocate 6 [Ranged]), Immunity 2 (own powers, starvation), Teleport 6 (Progression 3)					
Combat: Attack +5 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +5, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +10 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -4, Initiative +3					
Saving Throws: Toughness +8 (+3 flat-footed), Fortitude +7, Reflex +9, Will +6					
Abilities 20 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 14 + Powers 38 + Combat 26 + Saves 14 = Total 117					

Flora is a true "flower child" with long, flowing blond hair with greenish highlights and vividly green eyes. She wears a flowing gown of pastel flower petals and a crown of living flowers. She is the most innocent and naive of the Brides, although still willing to do whatever her master wishes. She typically attacks by blowing handfuls of dusty pollen at her foes and can appear or disappear in a cloud of fragrant petals.

MAXIMA POWER LEVEL 9					
Str 30	Dex 10	Con 22	Int —	Wis 10	Cha 1
Skills: Climb 4 (+7), Intimidate 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+4), Search 4 (+4), Survival 4 (+4)					
Feats: Endurance, Power Attack, Stunning Attack					
Powers: Growth 8 (Huge, +16 Str, +8 Con), Immunity 1 (starvation), Protection 2					
Combat: Attack +9 (-2 at full size), Grapple +12 (+28 at full size), Damage +3 (unarmed, +11 at full size), Defense +10 (-2 at full size), Knockback -3 (-13 at full size), Initiative +1					
Saving Throws: Toughness +6 (+10 Full Growth), Fortitude +8 (+12 Full Growth), Reflex +4, Will +5					
Abilities 20 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 27 + Combat 38 + Saves 12 = Total 105					

Maxima has short brown hair, brown eyes, and an athletic build. She wears a green one-piece covering her torso over a brown body stocking, with short green gloves and boots. Twining vines decorate the green portions of her costume while her face and head are bare and unmasked.

VENUS MAN-TRAP

POWER LEVEL 9

Str 12	Dex 18	Con 18	Int 13	Wis 15	Cha 17
Skills: Bluff 6 (+9), Intimidate 6 (+9), Knowledge (life sciences) 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+6)					
Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 3, Attractive, Defensive Roll 3, Endurance, Evasion					
Powers: Plant Control 9 (Alternate Powers: Blast 9 [carnivorous plants], Create Wooden Objects 9 , Photosynthesis), Regeneration 3 (injured, 1/20 minutes, disabled, 1/hour)					
Combat: Attack +6 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +7, Damage +1 (unarmed), +9 (blast), Defense +11, Knockback -3, Initiative +4					
Saving Throws: Toughness +7 (+4 flat-footed), Fortitude +8, Reflex +6, Will +6					
Abilities 33 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 24 + Combat 34 + Saves 10 = Total 116					

Venus Man-Trap wears dark green leather, fishnet stockings, and chains crossing her chest and wrapped around her waist. Her hair is vivid green and flowing; she accents it with deep green lipstick and eye shadow.

THE GREEN MAN

POWER LEVEL 15

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+1	+4	+3	+2	+0
16	12	18	16	15	11
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+20	+10	+4	+16/+8		
Skills: Intimidate 6 (+6), Knowledge (life sciences) 12 (+15), Notice 4 (+6), Profession (scientist) 8 (+10), Sense Motive 6 (+8)					
Feats: Improved Initiative, Minions 10 (up to 500 Animated Trees, page 238, <i>M&M</i>)					
Powers: ESP 8 (all senses, Medium: plants), Immovable 10 (+40 bonus), Immunity 12 (aging, critical hits, life support), Mind Shield 8 , Plant Control 16 (Alternate Powers: Nauseate 10 [pollen cloud, Area Burst], Summon Animated Trees 2 [<i>M&M</i> , page 233, Horde, Perception Range, Progression 9 (up to 1,000)]), Protection 16 (Impervious), Regeneration 16 (bruised 1 round, injured 1 round, disabled 1 round, Regrowth), Super-Movement 3 (permeate, Limited to vegetation), Super-Strength 10 (heavy load: 117 tons), Teleport 9 (Medium: plants)					
Combat: Attack +10, Grapple +23, Damage +3 (unarmed), Defense +10, Knockback -28, Initiative +5					
Drawbacks: Vulnerable (defoliants, +50% damage, -2 points)					
Abilities 28 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 168 + Combat 40 + Saves 15 - Drawbacks 2 = Total 269					

These stats reflect the Green Man's traits as enhanced by the meta-seed. See his description and stats on page 200 of *Freedom City* for the Green Man's background and normal traits. In this state, he is truly a force to be reckoned with in the World of Freedom!

TOYS WILL BE TOYS

BY K.G. CARLSON

Those rotten little thieves at Fun-Time Toys are planning on marketing some of the last toys designed for them by Desmond Lettam, the former CEO exposed by the Raven as the villainous Toy Boy. And they'll probably make millions, too! It's just not fair! Toy Boy won't allow this, no sir. He's crafted some "deluxe" versions of those soon-to-be-mass-marketed cash cows, and Fun-Time will be sorry. But what if those pesky super heroes stick their noses where they don't belong? Lucky for Desmond an old friend just dropped by for a visit....

Toys Will Be Toys is an adventure for a group of four to six Power Level 10 heroes, although the Gamemaster can scale the adventure to make it suitable for higher or lower level heroes by increasing or decreasing the power levels of the villains as appropriate (generally by approximately the same amount as the heroes).

The adventure is set in Freedom City, although the *Freedom City* sourcebook is recommended for running this adventure, it is not required. In **Scene Six**, tracking character movement will be important. The *Masterminds Manual* discusses tactical movement on pages 115-116, but all you need to run that encounter is covered in the *M&M* book on page 33 under **Movement Pace**. So, while the *Freedom City* book and the *Masterminds Manual* can add to your adventuring experience, all the necessary material is included here and in the *Mutants & Masterminds* core rulebook.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Desmond "Toy Boy" Lettam was furious when he saw the commercial on Channel 25. "Fun times are coming soon!" it proclaimed, and the screen displayed shadowy images of his line of Space Patrol figures clustered around a RoboPoochie, flanked by a pair of Box'N'Bots, all of whom were peacefully oblivious to the Gigantosaurus looming behind them. Those were *his* designs! Somehow Fun-Time Toys must found his schematics and decided to take them into production.

A few computer hacks later, and Desmond knew the truth. After having his super weapons manufacturing operation exposed by the Raven, those toy designs must have been scooped up by the police. The police had confiscated the plans from the headquarters he had been operating from at the time, and having found them to be harmless toy designs returned the schematics to Fun-Time Toys.

Desmond retreated to his lab, turning away any new customers eager for his unique brand of weaponry. In about a week, he had perfected his stolen ideas and was ready to teach his ungrateful former employees a lesson they'd never forget!

But in the wake of his recent defeats, Desmond's confidence was shaken. There were an awfully lot of super heroes in Freedom City these days; it seemed like more cropped up every day. As the hour slipped closer to midnight, his fears gnawed at him. What if they interfered? What if this time he were captured and sent to prison?

As if on cue, Quirk appeared in Toy Boy's current hideout with an audible pop. Quirk was bored...*again*...and wondered if his old pal might have any ideas for a good time. That whole escapade with the Realizer Ray had sure been a blast.

Since Desmond seemed inclined to whine, Quirk seriously considered leaving immediately. However, his rolling eyes seized upon the still glossy box of a new video game called *Crawlways & Corridors*.

Secret agent Mortimer B. Quick had to scurry through an intricate maze beneath the capitol and defuse a bomb left by the evil Bim-Sala-Boom. Quirk settled in with the game controller and tuned out the sob story.

More than a little miffed, Toy Boy ordered his newest creations into the van that he'd sent Chuckles the Clown to steal earlier that day. He didn't need Quirk's help, even if he was hurrying over to Fun-Time Toys in the hopes that some part of Quirk's cosmic intellect was keeping watch.

The heroes will have to foil Toy Boy's fire-filled plans for vengeance on his former company, and then face the challenge of entertaining a bored Quirk before all is secure once more in Freedom City.

In the *Freedom City* sourcebook, see page 35 regarding Fun-Time Toys, page 222 for details on Toy Boy, and page 215 for the inside scoop on Quirk. All the game statistics for the villains can be found in the **Rogue Roster** at the end of this adventure.

SCENE ONE: AT THE GATES

It's late at night in Freedom City, and all is not well. A thick fog rolled in off the ocean shortly before sundown, and a whole fleet of undead pirates is attacking the city. Most of Freedom City's defenders are hard pressed to keep the monsters contained east of the Centery Bridge, and are slowly but surely pushing them back out to sea. Not wanting to leave the rest of the city undefended, the characters have been stuck on monitor duty. The players may feel slighted at this; they may in fact be correct in stating that they could do a great deal of good against the pirates. But Captain Thunder (or another appropriate leader) will point out that the villains may try something while most of the heroes are otherwise occupied, and he'd feel better knowing that the character's heroes are ready to answer the call of duty should that occur.

After several hours of watching all the action on the monitors, the heroes should be more than eager to jump at the chance to do something, even if it is just a burglary alarm at Fun-Time Toys (location 42 on the Freedom City Western Side map on page 26 of the *Freedom City* sourcebook). For those of you without access to that book, there is a map of Freedom City on page 241 in the *Mutants & Masterminds* book. It is located in the theater district, very close to the Beaudrie Opera House.

The streets of the theater district seem quiet and dark. Although the mysterious fog that enshrouds that eastern part of the city is nowhere to be seen, there are few people about. Nearby, the glowing marquee of the Beaudrie Opera House casts deep shadows down the street where the Fun-Time Toys building awaits in the foreboding gloom.

As the heroes approach the Fun-Time Toys building, have them roll a Notice check. A Notice DC 10 will reveal a white florists van sitting out from with the rear doors opened, a Notice check of 15 will reveal that the front doors appear to have been forcibly removed from their frame, and a DC 20 will reveal three small, four-legged forms stand-

ing in the shadowy archway. Characters with Super Senses (Low-Light Vision) should receive a +2 to their check, and characters with Super Senses (Darkvision or Ultravision) should receive a +5. A high-speed approach or sudden appearance at the front door will not need to roll; those heroes automatically Notice all those details. They have other problems.

The three small forms standing watch in the ruined doorway are RoboPoochies, although these are not as cuddly as the commercial would suggest. These have no furry exteriors, only a hardened shell to protect their vaguely canine bodies. And the diamond-carbide teeth will be a nasty surprise for anyone who gets attacked. The main function the RoboPoochies provide to this expedition of Toy Boy's vengeance is observation and communication.

Lurking just inside the doorway is one of the Box'N'Bots. A Notice DC of 25 or a Search DC of 20 will spot him lurking just inside the building (or any spoilsport with Super Senses: X-Ray Vision will see him immediately). He is ready to attack anyone who enters, and will do so until ordered otherwise by Toy Boy. If the RoboPoochies outside begin barking, he will initiate a "Rush'N'Attack" on the nearest intruder.

Other than Chuckles the Clown (who is this adventure's Sidekick), all of Toy Boy's minions are mindless automatons. He did, however, download the layout of the building into all of their main memory cores so they will not get lost and will proceed with speed and accuracy to anywhere in the building they may be summoned to.

If necessary, two of the RoboPoochies will assist the Box'N'Bot in dealing with the intruders while the third will use its communication link to inform Toy Boy of the situation, via its counterpart accompanying him.

SCENE TWO: A FINE MESS

After the players have defeated the front line defense, they can proceed through a broad entry foyer into the lobby of the Fun-Time Toys building. Read aloud the following:

The lobby of the Fun-Time building is a shambles. The main reception desk has been smashed, and two battered security guards lay unconscious in the middle of the room. Water creeps across the marble tile from a broken fountain basin, and a wide corridor continues deeper into the building beyond the reception desk.

The Fun-Time security guards are both dying, but its only been about fifteen minutes at most since they were rendered thus (unless the heroes took a detour on the way here), so there is plenty of time before that first saving throw for the heroes to stabilize them. Use the stats for Police Officer on page 228 of *Mutants & Masterminds*. If returned to consciousness, they will require little coaxing to vacate the premises. Four robots that match the description of the Box'N'Bot at the front door attacked them; they saw no one else.

Any characters wanting to access the building's computer network from the reception desk will need to roll a Computers DC 25 to break through the security (unless of course they happen to work here in their "other" identity). If successful, a window will pop up on the screen indicating that the burglar alarm has been switched off from this location. From this access, they can get information regarding the layout of the building. To access the security cameras will require another Computers DC 25, unless they beat the initial check by 10 or more.

Whether they find out via the security cameras, or an old fashioned search, Toy Boy is upstairs in the research and development labs, mak-

ing sure to eradicate all traces of his "stolen" toy designs. The R&D labs are located on the fourth floor. Players remote viewing will see four Box'N'Bots and what appears to be a clown accompanying Toy Boy. A Notice check DC 15 will also spot the Tiny figures of the Space Patrol.

After a few rounds in the lobby, the next wave of defenders arrives. Ask for a Notice check from any players in the lobby; a DC of 25 will hear the faint ring of the arriving elevator. Modify this check appropriately for any Super Senses related to hearing.

SCENE THREE: TROUBLE AT THE CROSSROADS

The elevator bank is 30 feet back the wide corridor behind the reception desk, and the five Tiny Gigantosaurus figures have arrived, accompanied by a RoboPoochie for observation. The electronic canine will hang back and avoid combat. The toy Gigantosaurus have been instructed to keep the heroes from accessing the elevators. Toy Boy has already made sure that the stairwell doors onto the fourth floor are sealed shut.

When the heroes have defeated two of the five Gigantosaurus models, or at least two of them have exhausted their "nuclear" breath, RoboPoochie will signal for the Space Patrol. The flying star warriors will arrive on the scene in three rounds, soaring out of another elevator.

If the players defeat this group of defenders, they can continue their search for Toy Boy. Depending on how long that takes will determine the extent of his destruction. First, he will write a computer virus and upload it to destroy any electronic records of his creations into the company's network. Then he and his robotic toy minions will thoroughly destroy the R&D labs and the records room. After that's done, he'll override the fire control system and torch the building. Hopefully before his plans reach that point, the heroes will arrive to save the day.

Depending on the powers of the heroes, their search for Toy Boy may take several unconventional paths as well as the more predictable sweep and clear or electronic searches. When the heroes have finally caught up to Toy Boy, go to Scene Four.

SCENE FOUR: THE MOST TOYS

At this point, depending on how the heroes have approached their infiltration of the Fun-Time Toys building, they may have avoided one or both of the previous encounters on their way into the building.

If the heroes are approaching Toy Boy and have avoided the encounters in both Scenes One and Two, all of his minions are with him except for the Box'N'Bot and three RoboPoochies guarding the front door. So in addition to Toy Boy, the heroes will face Chuckles the Clown, two RoboPoochies, four Box'N'Bots, the five Gigantosaurus and all five members of the Space Patrol. This will make for a much larger battle in the lab area, and the heroes will hopefully pause a moment to carefully plan their assault.

If the heroes engaged the front door guardians in any way, even if they disengaged without defeating any of them, Toy Boy will have dispatched a RoboPoochie and the five Gigantosaurus down to guard the elevators, but will still have a RoboPoochie, four Box'N'Bots and the Space Patrol with him.

COMBAT AND TACTICS

Chuckles the Clown will be bouncing jauntily as he stands guard over Toy Boy, staying between his master and the heroes. He will not attack unless he is the last toy standing or the heroes move against Toy Boy. If several heroes begin closing in at once (i.e. in the same round), he will use his horn, regardless of the fact that other toy minions may be in the cone of effect.

Any **RoboPoochies** will similarly stand guard over Toy Boy, unless there is more than one present and the battle seems to be going poorly for the toys. A red-faced Toy Boy will shrilly order them to attack, keeping one at his side for communications and surveillance purposes.

The **Gigantosaur** figures will fire until their "nuclear" breath is exhausted, then will use their "rocket fist" Thrown Strike as often as they can. While mindless automatons, reloading the detachable fist with the other, fully functional hand, is part of their programming. All of the Gigantosaurus were stamped from the same mold, so if some are destroyed their rocket fist can be loaded into another Gigantosaur.

The **Box'N'Bots** are pretty straightforward combatants; they just wade into melee and start flailing away until their opponents drop or their master gives them another order.

Any undefeated minions still roaming the ground floor can be summoned upstairs to battle the heroes, unless they have the means and the wits to discover that Toy Boy is using the Super Senses (communications link) of the RoboPoochies for command and control of his minion groups.

Any remaining toys still active downstairs will arrive on scene in five rounds if one of them is capable of operating the elevator; if another toy is dispatched to fetch them, add three rounds. Only the Space Patrol or the Box'N'Bots have the means to reach doorknobs and elevator buttons. Chuckles the Clown can, but his is not leaving Toy Boy's side. If the Gigantosaurus were more than mindless automatons, they might conceive a way to fire their rocket fists at the elevator buttons to operate them. Perhaps version 2.0 will make that leap.

Regardless of how many toys are protecting him, Toy Boy is not at all happy to see the heroes. Read or paraphrase the following:

"No. No! NO!" the diminutive Toy Boy shrieks, spittle flying. "Always you costumed do-gooders ruin my fun! Destroy them!" He stabs a finger accusingly at you and his robotic horde surges forward to attack!

The heroes may have quite a fight on their hands, even if they have thinned the herd by battling and defeating the robotic toys in Scenes One and Two. Toy Boy's minions will use the following tactics in the desperate battle to protect their master. Remember to eliminate any toys defeated in earlier encounters.

Win or lose, when this fight is over, our heroes are herded into Scene Five. You should award hero points appropriately at this time.

SCENE FIVE: A QUIRK OF FATE

If the heroes have defeated Toy Boy and his mechanical minions, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

Toy Boy sinks to the ground among the shattered ruin of his robotic servants, sniveling like a child who has just had his favorite toys destroyed by a bunch of playground bullies. "I hate you!" he cries as tears spill down his face. "I'll get you for this, if it's the last thing I do!"

As the heroes move forward to apprehend the sobbing villain, they are shocked to find that they are suddenly unable to move!

With an audible pop, a young blond-haired boy appears out of thin air, grinning broadly. "Hey, that was great fun! What's next?"

On the other hand, if Toy Boy and his automatons defeated the heroes, read or paraphrase the following to them as soon as they awaken:

You awaken to the aches and pains of your battered body shoving their way into your consciousness. As your eyes slowly focus, you behold the gloating, childlike face of Toy Boy smiling at you in triumphant glory. "You're not so tough now, are you, super zeroes," he sneers.

You hear a strange popping noise, and suddenly a young blond-haired boy is standing next to Toy Boy, looking petulant. "I'm bored," he says, as if this is a significant revelation. "Isn't there anything fun to do around here?"

If the characters are the core team of the Freedom League, or have been operating in Freedom City for several years, they no doubt recognize the other-dimensional troublemaker, Quirk. If not, a DC 15 check of Knowledge (arcane lore) or (current events) or a DC 20 check of Knowledge (popular culture) or (streetwise) will identify Quirk.

Even if they don't recognize the new kid, the heroes will no doubt want to begin setting plans in motion. Victorious or defeated, once Quirk has arrived he has frozen the heroes in place until they can think of a new game to play. Aren't Power Level X villains great?

The appearance of Quirk will have a varied effect on Toy Boy, depending on how the events of Scene Five unfolded. If Toy Boy was victorious, he will be unhappy that Quirk is here, trying to upstage him. If the heroes defeated Toy Boy, his spirits will be immediately lifted and he wipes away his tears at this turn of events.

In either case, inspiration seizes Toy Boy as he remembers what Quirk was doing the last time that he'd seen him. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

Toy Boy turns to the helpless heroes with a malicious gleam in his eyes. Grinning, he asks his friend, "So Quirk, how did you like playing Crawlways & Corridors?"

With a shrug, Quirk replies, "Ah, it was okay. Not the best game I've ever played."

Toy Boy waves a hand at the captive audience and says, "But look at all these new Mortimers! Let's take it to the next level!"

Ask the heroes for a Knowledge (popular culture) check, giving all teen heroes a +5 to their roll. A DC of 8 knows that it is the latest first-person-shooter style, maze running video game. A DC of 13 knows that the hero is a secret agent named Mortimer B. Quick, with an exaggerated, anime-style humanoid appearance. A DC of 18 knows that the main villain is a terrorist named Sim-Sala-Boom who likes to blow things up by building an elaborate, deathtrap-filled

maze below important buildings with a bomb hidden in them. Makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

Whether the heroes are familiar with the game or not, they're about to get a first-class introduction. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

A joyous grin spreads across Quirk's face. "Brilliant!" he says, and with a snap of his fingers, the world dissolves in a flash of light.

Since they've just been hijacked by Quirk, award the heroes a hero point before moving on to Scene Six.

SCENE SIX: THE GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

The heroes appear in a subway tunnel, still immobilized by Quirk's power. They will quickly notice that they are staring into a ten-foot wide corridor in the side of a subway tunnel. Above the entrance is a large digital clock.

Being a true sportsman, Quirk has healed any and all injuries that the heroes may have accrued until now. His powers render all the walls, floors and ceilings of the maze indestructible, so no one will be burrowing their way to victory. Have the characters roll their initiatives. When you are ready to begin, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

Quirk rubs his hands together in delight, eager for this new game to begin. Toy Boy looks on smugly.

"Okay heroes, the game is simple. You have to get through that maze," Quirk says, pointing, "and find and disarm a thermonuclear bomb before it blows up City Center!"

Indicating the digital clock, he states, "The clock will start when you do. Go!"

With a snap of his fingers, the heroes are suddenly freed of their invisible bonds as an ominous beep sounds from the clock.

The walls, floors and ceilings of Quirk's "virtual" reality video game appear to be a dull, metallic substance that is impervious to anything the heroes can do to harm it. The doors and other fixtures contained within are not indestructible. The entire structure is well lit, although there are no visible light sources.

There are ten combat rounds per minute. Either with a battlemat and miniatures, or on a copy of the map provided, it will be important to track the location of the characters and the elapsed time.

If any of the heroes make an attempt to nab Toy Boy, Quirk will freeze them in place with a snap of his fingers and say something like, "That's not very sporting. It's the penalty box for *you*. Get moving, heroes; you're running out of time!" The offending hero will remain frozen for a number of rounds equal to the number of minutes that the clock started with. Any and all characters moving after Toy Boy will suffer this fate; hopefully at least one hero will be making his way to the bomb before the first round is over. Once all the heroes are running the maze or frozen in place, Toy Boy will beat feet for a hasty retreat. Quirk is much too amused by his own version of *Crawlways & Corridors* to care.

If any of the heroes attempt to attack Quirk...well, that's just ridiculous. A large wooden mallet appears out of thin air and smacks said idiot with a 15 damage modifier. Laugh that off, smart guy.

Should any of the heroes be alarmed at how often Quirk can act

in a round, he'll just remind them snidely that not all life forms are created equal.

After each hero has had a turn to act, or not act (no stopping the clock with infinite delaying, meta-gamers!), a round expires and the city is one step closer to oblivion. The heroes may recall that Quirk's reality alterations disappear when he does, but don't remind them of that. Let them sweat the fear of thermonuclear holocaust for just a few minutes. If a player specifically asks about it, have them roll a Wisdom check. If they roll a DC 20, they will recall that; anything less and they're not too sure. Quirk has nullified any heroes' Eidetic Memory feat; he's looking for an action-packed thriller here!

KEY TO CRAWLWAYS & CORRIDORS

1 and 2 Side Treks are nothing more than dead ends, meant to make the heroes exploring them and waste time.

3. The Labyrinth is a series of winding passageways that, like areas 1 and 2 are designed to delay our intrepid heroes. Area 3 is different in that if any one travels into the maze beyond the 3 on the map at speeds 10 mph or greater, the walls of the maze will begin to shift and change the configuration of the passageways. Anyone in that area will need to make a Wisdom DC 20 to escape, as well as make a Reflex save DC 15 every round they are in the moving labyrinth or get smacked by a high speed wall and make a Toughness save against a +8 (the walls are indestructible). If any high-speed character slows down to "normal" speed, there is one final round of dodging for their life as the maze resets to its standard pattern. If you are using a battlemat, do not waste your time drawing the reconfigured maze every round, just move any characters in that area off the map until they find their way out or it resets to its default setting. Anyone bravely (if foolishly) charging into that area suffers from the same effects.

4. Lockdown is a dead-end corridor that will automatically drop a portcullis, trapping anyone who wanders in. Since a tiny portion of Quirk's mind is the "A.I." for this game, he may hold the door until the end of a round if it looks like he might snare additional prey. Characters within the cell will need an effective Strength of 25 to lift the portcullis, and it has a toughness of +10 against the heroes' efforts to damage it. Heroes who roll a Notice DC 25 or a Search DC 20 will find a small, slightly discolored square on the rear wall that will open the secret door on the wall opposite the portcullis. The

RACING THE CLOCK

How much time is on the clock? Well, that depends on the powers of the assembled heroes.

If most or all of them have any of the following powers, there are two minutes on the clock: Flight, Insubstantial, Spatial Control, Speed, Super-Speed, Teleport or Time Control. Be aware of any shape-shifting, magic or Alternate Power Feats that allow them to duplicate these powers.

If only one or two heroes have those abilities, give them three minutes on the clock. You might also consider giving this extra time if there are fewer than five heroes about to enter the maze.

If no one in the group has the "short-cut" powers listed, or there are only one or two heroes running the maze, give them five minutes.

Two minutes may not sound like a long time, but twenty combat rounds are *plenty* of time for characters who can cover vast distances quickly. Remember that even one rank of Speed or Flight means a movement of 88 or 100 ft per round, as per the *M&M* book page 32 (**Under the Hood: Miles per Hour vs. Feet per Round**).



secret door on the far end of the passage has an obvious activation lever mounted on the wall beside it. There is no control on the other side, although heroes passing by made see with a Notice DC 30 or a Search DC 25 if actively looking in that area.

5. Battle Royal is the only "interactive" combat in the game. There are combat drones here (use the statistics for combat robots on page 243 of *M&M*), one for each hero in the game, although not necessarily in the room. This is one reason why splitting up can be a bad thing.

6. Impasse is a large, 30-ton block of stone. Being twenty feet thick, it will be difficult to break. There is a niche above it, so a character with sufficient Strength or Telekinesis can raise it up and allow others to pass through. Or they can push it back towards Area 7 and shorten the jump.

7. The Bottomless Pit has no discernable bottom, and it's up to you where you want to send any heroes who take the plunge. If the stone block from Area 6 is pushed in, it will wedge itself into the whole at roughly floor level with the corridor, effectively halving the distance across the bottomless gulf. How convenient.

8. Almost Home is simply a small platform with a non-descript metal door and a security panel on the wall next to the door. Check the description of Area 18 in regards to non-standard means of entry to that room. A Disable Device DC 30 will open the door, and this staple of science fiction has a Toughness of +10 for any traditional attempts at door opening.

9. Small Folk Welcome is a long straight stretch of corridor crisscrossed with laser beams. Beings larger than Medium cannot pass without getting a Blast 10, with a +1 increase for every addi-

tional five feet they move through the corridor. A Medium character can crawl slowly through at five feet per round and making a DC 15 Reflex save to avoid the same Blast. Small characters can move at half speed with no save, or full speed with the same Reflex save. Beings Tiny and smaller can move through uninhibited. The door at the far end of the corridor, which leads to Area 10, is locked. It needs a Disable Device DC 30 to open. A Medium character will have a -2 to any attempt to open this door, as the laser network does have a small gap in front of the door, but not large enough to work comfortably in. The door has a Toughness of +10, but destroying it may have unforeseen consequences. See the description for Area 10.

10. More than Meets the Eye is an odd-shaped room that has many hidden dangers. Unseen from within, the walls and doors are reinforced with an energy field. This would prevent any character with less than Insubstantial 4 from phasing into the room. While this energy field is not quite as powerful as a force field, and thus does not add to the Toughness of the doors, breaking the circuit (by breaking the doors) could have explosive results. Any character standing adjacent to a door to Area 10 that is battered down before the energy field is turned off will need to make a Toughness save against a small energy surge with a +1 damage modifier. The controls to disable the laser network are just inside the doorway from Area 9 (no check, just an on and off switch). On the far side of the room is the door leading to Area 18 and a computer terminal on a pedestal (marked on the map). This terminal controls the energy field enveloping this room and will allow remote viewing of the room in Area 18 with a Computers DC of 20. Unfortunately, anyone on the ground passing within five

feet of the door to Area 18 will trigger a gas trap that fills that half of Area 10. A Notice DC of 30 or a Search DC 25 if actively checking will spot the trigger plate and a Disable Device DC 25 will disarm it. All characters in the affected area roll a Fortitude save DC 20. Those who make it are hacking and coughing but okay. Those who fail are *sickened* and *staggered*, and any who fail by 5 or more are also *unconscious* (see *M&M* pages 170-171 **Condition Summary**). Heroes affected by the gas may make a new save to recover, with a +1 per check, at every interval on the **Time and Value Progression Chart** (*M&M* page 70). Characters immune to Fortitude effects or the proper selection of Immunity powers are unaffected by the gas. The door to Area 18 has the same statistics as the other door to this room.

11. The Gauntlet is a ten-foot wide corridor connecting Area 5 to Area 12, and is lined with ten snare cannons that have an Attack +5 and hit with a Snare 5. The snare cannons fire a black, viscous substance that sticks to its target. The cannons will fire until there are no targets in range or any targets are completely immobilized. They can target the square they are in and any square touching the one they occupy, although they will not fire into Area 5. In this video game reality of Quirk's, any globs that miss simply disappear rather than pile up on the floor.

12. Shell Game has two alcoves hidden by holograms. The computer terminal that the heroes can see as they move up the corridor will deactivate them with a Computers DC 15. Anyone investigating the alcove on the right will fall into the ten-foot deep pit trap damage +1, Reflex DC 15 to avoid, Climb DC 25 to escape. The door in the left alcove, unlike the others in this deathtrap, is not locked. Its stats are identical, on the off chance the heroes try to batter it down without trying.

13. Chestnuts Roasting seems an innocent enough chamber on first inspection. However, any character that approaches by floor within five feet of the door to Area 18 will hear a distinctive clicking as dozens of secret hatches open in the floor, walls and ceilings to reveal blackened nozzles that fill the room with a blazing inferno! A Notice DC of 30 or a Search DC 25 if actively checking will spot the tiny trigger plate and a Disable Device DC 25 will disarm it. Characters in the room may make a Reflex DC 15 to half the damage modifier to +4 the first round, but any characters who fail the initial save or stay in the room as the nozzles continue to burn will need to make a Toughness save against the raging inferno damage +8. The fire does not stop, and there are no control panels to turn them off once activated. If the heroes do not have the means to ignore or control the fire, they will need to find another way into Area 18. That door is locked, with a Toughness +10 and requiring a Disable Device DC 30 to open the lock.

14. Down the Rabbit Hole is another tight fight for Medium characters. While not quite cramped enough to require Escape Artist checks, it does slow movement to ten feet. Heroes larger than Medium size cannot fit through this passageway. At the turns it is such a tight fit that Medium sized characters must make a Dexterity or Escape Artist check DC 15 to get by. Failure means they are unable to negotiate the turn, failure by 5 or more means they are stuck. A successful Escape Artist DC 15 wriggles free on the side of the bend the hero started on. Small heroes can move freely through the straightaway, losing an extra five feet of movement squeezing around the corner. Tiny and smaller heroes can move freely through the tunnel. You might consider giving Medium sized heroes with Flight (unless they're winged!) a slight boost to their travel speed.

15. Washout Lane may prove little more than a nuisance, but by this point the heroes may be at their wits end and could use a good laugh. Characters approaching Area 15 will see that there are

small openings on the floor, walls and ceiling of that section of corridor with a Notice check DC 10. Any characters passing through those squares will be blasted from all sides by jets of water. While not forcible enough to cause physical harm, this trap is designed to slow down the heroes. Every round spent in the thirty-foot section indicated on the map will require a Balance DC 12 to remain standing. Add any ranks of Impervious Toughness or Immovable to the Reflex save roll.

16. Squeeze Play will trigger after the *second* hero enters that section of corridor; the walls begin to move inward. It requires an effective Strength of 30 to hold the two sections of wall apart. Any character holding the sections of wall apart can only move forward five feet per round and must make a Reflex save or slip. The wall sections will slam closed with a damage bonus of +10, and continue to do that damage every round until forced apart again or they no longer meet any resistance and close completely. Characters trapped in the space between the walls must reposition themselves to bring their Strength to bear before they can again begin forcing the walls apart, which requires a Dexterity or Escape Artist DC 15. A character with an effective Strength of 60 or higher can push outward even from their awkward position. Any characters with Impervious Toughness +11 or higher will not be harmed by the crushing walls, but they are still pinned. The sliding walls will stay closed for the remainder of the adventure unless forced open by the heroes, which may very well seal off this route of access.

17. Where Do We Go From Here? will likely seem exasperating after the narrow escape just around the corner. The passageway turns right and seems to come to a dead end. Heroes will find with a Notice check DC 25 or a Search DC 20 that there appears to be a small square section of wall to their right that appears to be a panel of some kind. Pressing that panel will open the secret door that bars the way into Area 18. Although the secret door appears to be made of the same material as the walls of the complex, it can be battered down, though it has Toughness save +10.

18. The Grand Finale is the heroes' ultimate goal. In addition to the nuclear device displayed rather prominently in the center of the room, there is a multiphase field disruption generator tucked away in the corner. This device will attempt to disrupt any attempts to enter the chamber via any means other than physical. Characters attempting to enter must make an opposed power check against the generator's +15 field. Heroes who try to enter using the Insubstantial power who fail their check will find themselves unable to pass through the walls. Heroes who try Teleport or similar means of travel and fail their opposed roll, roll a d20 to determine the results: 1-5 go nowhere, 6-10 appear outside the door connecting Area 10 to 18, 11-15 appear outside the door connecting Area 8 to 18, 16-20 the door connecting Area 12 to 18. These results may give the hero a very unpleasant surprise. The multiphase field disruption generator can be switched off with a Disable Device check DC 20. The thermonuclear device can be shut down with a Disable Device DC 25; failure by more than 5 will detonate it.

SCENE SEVEN: GAME OVER, MAN!

All good things must come to an end. And whether the heroes have won the day, ran out of time, or botched the attempt to diffuse the nuclear bomb, this adventure too must close.

If the heroes were successful in disarming the thermonuclear device, any heroes elsewhere in the complex suddenly appear in Area 18, as does Quirk. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

"That was awesome," Quirk crows, pumping his fist in the air. "You guys are a lot more fun than grumpy ol' Cap'n Thunder! We're gonna have lots of fun together. I gotta run, but I'll be back soon."

A blinding flash of light fades to reveal the damaged interior of Fun-Time Toys R&D labs, but Quirk and Toy Boy are nowhere to be found.

If the heroes failed to prevent the thermonuclear device from detonating, read or paraphrase the following:

A blast of heat slams into you before you fade into oblivion. What could be an instant or an eternity later, you find yourself miraculously whole, and surrounded by your equally healthy fellow heroes. As far as the eye can see is a charred and lifeless wasteland.

"Well, that sucked," a childish voice complains.

You whirl to find Quirk kicking at some charred debris. His eyes narrow as he looks at you. "You got no skills!" he accuses.

Quirk and the ruined landscape disappear in a blinding flash, and when the light dims you find yourself in the subway tunnel facing a blank wall.

If the heroes were particularly obnoxious to Quirk, there may be a subway train hurtling down the tracks. If not, the heroes can find a platform and then proceed to the surface to find themselves in City Center. As usual, when Quirk departs he takes his mess with him.

EPILOGUE

The heroes can make their way home from wherever Quirk left them.

Toy Boy has gone into hiding; his near capture has him spooked, and has perhaps added some new names to his list of enemies.

Strangely enough, the undead pirates that had been attacking the eastern shores of Freedom City seemed to have disappeared right around the time Quirk did. Just a coincidence, I'm sure....

The characters should probably make it back to headquarters before their weary colleagues return from the waterfront. It should make for some interesting role-playing, to say the least, when they meet. Award the heroes a power point if they thwarted Toy Boy before Quirk arrived, and another if they successfully win their game of *Crawlways & Corridors*.



CHARACTERS

Heroes go up against the following villains in *Toys Will Be Toys*:

QUIRK

Quirk is a Power Level X Plot Device character who typically appears as a young blond-haired boy, but is in fact a cosmic being of immeasurable power. Read about Power Level X characters in *Mutants & Masterminds* on page 211. You can learn all you ever wanted to know about Quirk in the *Freedom City* sourcebook on page 215.

TOY BOY

Toy Boy is detailed on page 222 of *Freedom City*. Although legally an adult, and a genius intellectually, his body stopped maturing at age eight. This has made the diminutive toy maker more than a little bitter, and less than sane.

TOY BOY

POWER LEVEL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-2	+1	+0	+11	+1	+1
6	13	10	32	13	12

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+0	+2	+4	+4

Skills: Bluff 8 (+9), Computers 8 (+19), Craft (electronic) 8 (+19), Craft (mechanical) 8 (+19), Craft (structural) 4 (+15), Knowledge (popular culture) 8 (+19), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+19)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 4, Attractive (adorable), Improved Initiative, Inventor, Luck, Master Plan, Minions 20, Sidekick 20 (toys), Taunt

Powers: Shrinking 4 (Permanent, Innate)

Combat: Attack +4 (melee), +8 (ranged, includes +1 size), Grapple +2, Damage -2 (unarmed) or by weapon, Defense +12 (includes +1 size), Knockback +1, Initiative +5

Notes: Toy Boy's Minion and Sidekick points have all been spent for this adventure on the robotic toys listed in the Rogue Roster

Abilities 30 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 50+ Powers 5 + Combat 28 + Saves 8 = Total 134

CHUCKLES THE CLOWN				POWER LEVEL 6		
Str 20	Dex 11	Con –	Int 10	Wis 11	Cha 8	
Skills: Acrobatics 10 (+10), Bluff 4 (+3), Disable Device 4 (+4), Drive 6 (+6), Escape Artist 6(+6), Perform (comedy) 4 (+3), Sleight of Hand 6 (+6)						
Feats: None						
Powers: Corrosion 8 (acid squirting flower, Extended Range 2, 10 ft.), Device 3 (horn, easy to lose, Blast 5 [sonic Area: cone], Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects), Protection 10 , Snare 5 (crazy foam)						
Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +10, Damage +5 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback -5, Initiative +0						
Saving Throws: Toughness +10, Fortitude –, Reflex +3, Will +0						
Abilities 0 + Skills 10 + Skills 0 + Feats 0 + Powers 77 + Combat 10 + Saves 3 = 100						

Toy Boy modeled his Sidekick as a clown because, for reasons he didn't understand, many people are actually afraid of clowns. Hopefully, Chuckles can raise that number substantially with his high-powered horn or his acid-squirting flower. And just to make sure nobody leaves before the show is over, the industrial grade crazy foam that he shoots from his fingers is sure to keep them in their seats!

ROBOPOOCHIE						POWER LEVEL 4					
Str 9	Dex 9	Con —	Int —	Wis 11	Cha —						
Skills: None											
Feats: None											
Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects), Protection 2 , Shrinking 8 (+2 Att & Def, -8 Str, -10 ft move, Permanent, Innate), Strike 4 (bite, Penetrating), Super Senses 14 (communication link radio, darkvision, infravision, low-light vision, radio, scent, time sense, tracking, tremor sense, ultra hearing, ultravision)											
Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +0, Damage +4(bite), Defense +2, Knockback +1, Initiative -1											
Saving Throws: Toughness +2, Fortitude -, Reflex +2, Will -											
Abilities -31 + Skills 0 + Feats 0 + Powers 63 + Combat 10 + Saves 3 = 45											

The original design for this toy was a cute and cuddly automated dog that had a logic chip built into it that could actually learn tricks. Toy Boy's redesign stripped off the soft fur and replaced it with lightweight armor, and a new computer module that includes a high tech surveillance and communications array. And for protection, the newest model has diamond-carbide teeth that can cut through the toughest opposition. They would be prohibitively expensive if the construction materials weren't stolen. The new and improved RoboPoochie makes the perfect watchdog.

BOX'N'BOT						POWER LEVEL 7					
Str 20	Dex 9	Con —	Int —	Wis 11	Cha —						
Skills: None											
Feats: None											
Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects), Protection 10											
Combat: Attack +7, Grapple +10, Damage +5(unarmed), Defense +4, Knockback -5, Initiative -1											
Saving Throws: Toughness +10, Fortitude -, Reflex +2, Will -											
Abilities -20 + Skills 0 + Feats 0 + Powers 40 + Combat 22 + Saves 3 = 45											

These toys were inspired by an older, much more simplified version that had limited mobility. Toy Boy's 21st century model was fully independent, and with a logic chip similar to the one he designed for RoboPoochie, the Box'N'Bot could learn as it fought and actually improve with use. The Box'N'Bot intended for mass marketing was only six inches tall and had a battery life of about two months, but his shock troop models are adult human sized and built to keep on ticking! For nostalgia's sake, when a Box'N'Bot is defeated, it's head pops off.

GIGANTOSAUR						POWER LEVEL 5					
Str 1	Dex 10	Con —	Int —	Wis 11	Cha —						
Skills: None											

Feats: Improved Critical 3 (fire breath), Improved Critical 3 (rocket fist), Instant Up

Powers: **Blast 5** (Fades), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude effects), **Protection 5**, **Shrinking 8** (+2 Att & Def, -8 Str, -10 ft move, Permanent, Innate), **Strike 5** (Thrown)

Combat: Attack +7, Grapple +0, Damage +5(fire breath, crit. 17-20), Damage +5(rocket fist, crit. 17-20), Defense +2, Knockback +0, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +5, Fortitude -, Reflex +3, Will -

Abilities -30 + Skills 0 + Feats 7 + Powers 55 + Combat 10 + Saves 3 = 45

The real Gigantosaur is an enormous purple reptile who occasionally terrorizes coastal cities. Desmond Lettam could think of no reason why he couldn't also be a bestselling toy. He decided that the real life model was very boring without his enormous size, so Toy Boy took a few liberties with his scaled down version. A mechanism on his back would cause a hidden bulb to light up in Gigantosaur's mouth, simulating his "nuclear" breath attack. Another bit of exaggeration was the detachable, spring launched right fist, or "rocket" fist. Toy Boy's combat model has real fire for his breath weapon (although the size of the toy limits the available fuel), and a much higher powered launching mechanism for the fist. Another item missing from the mass-market edition is the computer module that makes the little Gigantosaur autonomous and target-assists his two attack forms for precision strikes. These little monsters are also quick to get up when you knock them down.

SPACE PATROL						POWER LEVEL 6					
Str 1	Dex 9	Con —	Int —	Wis 11	Cha —						
Skills: None											
Feats: Move By Action, Precise Shot 2											
Powers: Blast 8 (wrist laser, Fades), Flight 2 (jet pack, 25 mph), Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects), Protection 7 , Shrinking 8 (+2 Att & Def, -8 Str, -10 ft move, Permanent, Innate), Strike 2											
Combat: Attack +7, Grapple +0, Damage +2(unarmed), Defense +2, Knockback -1, Initiative -1											
Saving Throws: Toughness +7, Fortitude -, Reflex +2, Will -											
Abilities -31 + Skills 0 + Feats 3 + Powers 60 + Combat 10 + Saves 3 = 45											

Of all Toy Boy's recent designs, this one was the crowning jewel. In addition to a complete line of action figures and vehicles, Desmond had been in negotiation for a cartoon series based on the Space Ranger toy line. He only needed to put the finishing touches on the villains, and he'd be making millions. The fools at Fun-Time hadn't even bothered to finish up Lettam's work, they just planned to sell the five heroes he'd already designed: Cap, the square-jawed leader; Trixie, his often-captured girlfriend; Geezer, the old-timer who liked to remind these whippersnappers that they wouldn't last five minutes in *his* Space Patrol (but that was a long time ago); Ratchet, the mechanical genius who could fix anything, except his alarm clock; and Afterburner, the hot-shot pilot who took the Space Patrol anywhere they needed to go, about twice as fast as they needed to. Toy Boy's combat model Space Patrol differs only in cosmetic appearance; their game statistics are identical. Like the Gigantosaur, their small size limits the energy capacity for their wrist mounted lasers, so when they have exhausted their range weapons they will fly in with their mini-jetpacks to harass the heroes with Move By Action and a punch.

CAPERS

BY JASON ORMAN, RODNEY THOMPSON, WARREN BANKS, SHAWN CARMAN & TOREN ATKINSON

Each of the following mini-adventures presents a detailed encounter or related series of encounters suitable for a night of *Mutants & Masterminds* gaming.

BOOSTING THE BOOSTER

BY JASON ORMAN

A liquid fuel rocket booster for the X-Prize space tourism contest is being transported to Freedom City's Lonely Point Naval Station for relocation to the Star Island Space Control Center. Students and instructors from Freedom City University and Freedom College have been working on the project together in hopes of raising the attendance and standing of both schools in relation to the prestigious Hanover Institute of Technology. The governor has dispatched the National Guard to protect and transport the potentially deadly cargo. Unknown to the public, however, the uniformed soldiers are actually disguised henchmen of the racist White Knight (*Freedom City*, page 183), who plans to explode the volatile rocket booster in a Fens slum, cleansing Freedom City's racial impurity with white-hot fire.

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

The heroes might become involved when representatives from one of the sponsoring colleges (perhaps a colleague of a character with a scientist or professor secret identity) asks them to support the National Guard as they ferry the explosive booster to the Lonely Point Naval Station. In this case, the heroes travel alongside the convoy during the entire encounter. Alternately, you may wish to clue in the PCs after the hijacking has taken place. The heroes see or hear a police pursuit as the convoy defects from its original route and heads toward downtown Freedom. If one or more characters have ties to the military, perhaps the tip-off comes from agents of the Lonely Point Naval Station itself, who have learned of the convoy's course change and know that calling in superheroes might just be the last chance to prevent a catastrophe.

LOCATION

According to the X-Prize team's explicit instructions, the National Guard escort is to take the booster rocket from its construction site near the Freedom Municipal Landfill to the Lonely Point Naval Station, where it will be transferred by ship to the Star Island Spaceport for launch in a week's time. The White Knight and his lackeys instead plan to drive the booster north along Route 6 and into Freedom City's Fens district, home to the type of "inferior" minorities so hated by the Knight and his bigoted minions. If the heroes do not have access to high-speed travel and are not able to escort the vehicle the entire length of the trip, the hijacking takes place near the intersection of Routes 4 and 6, taking the booster north along Route 6 rather than taking the planned turn toward the interchange. This should give the heroes more time to catch the convoy before it reaches its new destination. Using this option, the vehicles exit Route 6 on Broadway and turn south on 70th Street into the Fens.

If the heroes do have transportation or are traveling with the convoy, the hijacking becomes apparent just after the trucks have crossed the South River.

OBSTACLES

The liquid fuel booster is protected against casual bumps and jarring, but must be handled with extreme care when it comes to the use of superpowers (especially those involving fire) or gunplay. Once the convoy is hijacked, the heroes must come up with a way to stop the truck as well as the criminals without destroying the vehicle or letting the villains do the same in their attempt to escape justice.

EVENTS UNFOLD

The ultra-racist White Knight has long attempted to cleanse Freedom City of the unclean mongrels that infest the metropolis. In his eyes, God himself granted him the flames of justice to purge the city of the lesser races. Time and time again, the White Knight has made his attempts and failed, always stopped by squads of "bleeding-heart" superheroes.

A security guard prior to the encounter that made him a supervillain, Daniel Foreman had on many occasions met others who shared his views, but also spent time as reserves in the National Guard. It was through a handful of these contacts that he learned of the rocket to be transported today, and through them that he arranged for the hijacking that would at long last allow him to solve the city's "race problem" for good.

Several of the National Guard escorts, including the driver of the truck, are plants working with the White Knight. The minions believe that, with the help of the booster rocket's fuel, the purity of the White Knight's flames will not be stopped this time. They're counting on the risk of accidental explosion being so great that do-gooder superheroes will be forced to accept the lesser of two evils, allowing the booster to reach the slums before attempting to make a move against them. At that point, they reason, it will be too late.

The convoy consists of three vehicles: a large flatbed truck carrying the booster and two Humvees. The unwitting crew of the first Humvee is unaware of the events that will take place, and misses the initial turn off of the other two vehicles. As the truck diverts from the charted path, the lead vehicle reports the situation but stalls in catching back up to the truck while talking. Even if it accelerates, the flatbed truck never breaks 15 mph, and isn't terribly difficult to keep up with (the driver is aware that they must avoid large bumps and jarring movements).

If questioned, the driver of the truck attempts to Bluff anyone questioning him that he was given new orders from his commander—a detour to avoid a possible "situation"—and refuses to say more than that. If heroes attempt to pursue the issue further or seem ready to take action to stop the vehicle, the passenger (the White Knight) of the trailing vehicle leaps from the Humvee, bursting into flames as he takes flight.

At some point, a battle is likely to begin between the heroes and the hijackers. The White Knight, not wanting to ruin his chances, taunts the heroes with comments such as "If you harm or stop my driver I promise you a rain of fire the likes of which this city has never seen!" He is more than happy to do what he can to battle the heroes, distracting them as the truck ponders along its path toward its destination, knowing in his heart the these inferiors have no chance of defeating him on this, his day of glory. The other passengers of the

Humvee attempt to fight while staying in the vehicle, firing their rifles from the windows at heroes.

The White Knight's plan is to turn the truck south at 70th Street into the Fens, at which point he plans to save the citizens and the police the trouble of having to clean out this hood with a quick and devastating explosion capable of leveling an entire city block.

You can find White Knight's game stats on page 225 of *Freedom City* as well as in the **Hate Is a Four-Letter Word** adventure previously in this book. For the White Knight's cronies, use the Soldier archetype on page 229 of *M&M*.

BOOSTER EXPLOSION RULES

If the rocket booster goes up in flames due to a stray shot, a misplaced explosion, or a flaming character being thrown through the tanks, an explosion of catastrophic proportions takes place. For game purposes, the explosion is considered a +20 Area Effect (fire) attack. The size and intensity of this blast is likely capable of leveling everything within a 100 ft.-radius of the point of origin. This explosion has serious potential to disable if not kill many heroes and all civilians that may be in the area.

If such an event occurs, the GM is encouraged to remind heroes about spending hero points to re-roll their dice when saving against the explosion. (If you are using the optional damage rules, characters who miss a roll by 20 or more are killed by an attack). Scattered civilians within buildings around the explosion center make for extremely heroic rescues as buildings catch fire and start to crumble. While the casualty toll of such an event could be high, the characters have the capability to severely reduce the damage done.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Whether they're successful or not, the heroes soon learn that their attempt to thwart the White Knight has a number of unintended consequences. If the booster explodes, the PCs must deal with a terrible blow to their reputation, as images of their failure appear on local and national cable news networks for much of the next week. If the booster blew up due to negligence or carelessness on behalf of the heroes, they may face criticism from established heroes like the Freedom League.

If the White Knight's plans are foiled, the heroes will have plenty of work sweeping up his minions and possibly helping the National Guard root out other terrorists within their ranks. They'll also be invited to the private launch of the X-Prize rocket, and end up reaping potentially useful contacts with the scientists behind the project. These contacts present the perfect means by which the heroes might embark on a later journey to the stars for a series arc set in outer space. Win or lose, the heroes will have made themselves known to the bottom-feeding racist devotees of the White Knight, who will prove troublesome throughout the rest of their careers.

CLEAR FOR LAUNCH

BY RODNEY THOMPSON

Six months ago, a supervillain by the name of Hivemind broke into a top-secret government space research facility and kidnapped a number of technicians who were working on new satellite technology. Despite the best efforts of the authorities and various superheroes, the technicians were never recovered and Hivemind was not seen for some time. This all changed when a police bulletin announced that the Star Island Space Control Center had come under attack by Hivemind and his agents. When the call went out, Hivemind had seized control of a launch pad containing a rocketed

slated to place a communications satellite in orbit. Hivemind has seized control of the rocket and the launch controls and plans to launch a satellite of his own, one that amplifies his already considerable mind control powers and that will allow him to take control of minds all over the globe.

The heroes must venture to the Space Control Center and stop Hivemind before he can launch his satellite. While doing so, they must remember that the citizens under Hivemind's control are unable to control their actions and are considered innocent bystanders even if they are forced into attacking the heroes.

LOCATION

Star Island Space Control Center's Launch Pad #4 is used primarily for unmanned rockets and test-firings. No space shuttles have ever launched from the site. Before the arrival of Hivemind, a government-funded communications satellite was scheduled to be launched from Pad #4, and a brand-new three-stage rocket had been prepped and was waiting on the pad when the supervillain and his agents arrived.

The launch pad consists of a single durable slab at the base of the rocket capable of withstanding the intense heat of a rocket blast. Nearby, a metal tower with a freight elevator leads to a similar metal sky bridge that attaches to the rocket's storage area. Security cameras monitor the launch while a control tower stands several hundred yards away, well clear of any of the heat or force generated by takeoff. The rocket itself is a top-of-the line expendable rocket designed to reach orbit, shedding stages along the way that burn up in the atmosphere and depositing its cargo in orbit. The fact that the rocket itself is expendable does not mean that the heroes should be reckless in damaging or destroying it—those rockets cost taxpayers a lot of money.

OBSTACLES

A launch pad is a dangerous place, even for trained technicians that know what they're doing. In addition to having a massive rocket filled with explosive fuel nearby, innocent technicians and security guards under the influence of Hivemind's mind-controlling powers make it difficult to disable the satellite or defeat Hivemind himself. In fact, should the rocket sustain enough damage to pierce the (Toughness 15) hull, rocket fuel could leak out and be ignited by Energy Blasts or the sparks of combat. Moreover, the metal tower that grants access to the rocket's cargo area is made of incredibly strong metal and can be torn apart and used as a weapon. A fall from the tower would be fatal to most people, a concern when dealing with the technicians and security guards.

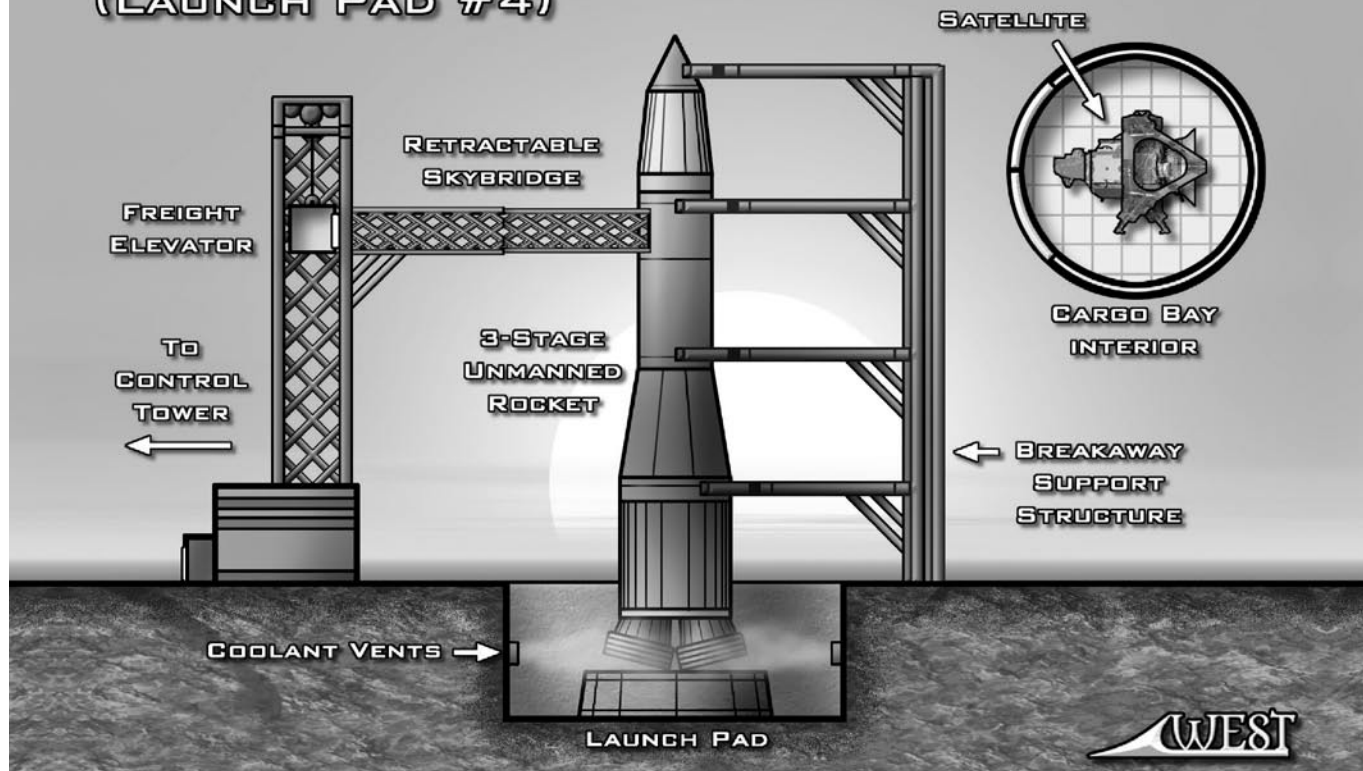
COOLANT VENTS

Since the rocket fires intense jets of flame as it takes off, the launch pad has four nozzles connected to high-pressure coolant tanks that spray coolant on the pad and support structures to keep the pad and other nearby materials from melting to scrap. These coolant vents fire at the base of the pad and douse everything with incredibly cold fumes every 18 seconds (every 3 rounds) leading up to and during the takeoff of the rocket. Anyone standing on the launch pad when one of these vents fires a steam of frozen gas must deal with an Energy Blast (cold) +15 attack.

TEST-FIRING ROCKETS

The minutes leading up to the launch of the rocket do not pass idly, and frequent test-firings from the rocket engines result in short bursts of fire shooting out the bottom of the rocket. These test fires burn quickly and intensely and are gone almost as soon as they begin. The rockets test fire once every 30 seconds (once every 5 rounds) and are considered an Energy Blast (fire) +20 attack.

STAR ISLAND SPACE CONTROL CENTER (LAUNCH PAD #4)



HIVEMIND

POWER LEVEL 12

Str 10 **Dex 14** **Con 14** **Int 17** **Wis 18** **Cha 14**

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+6), Bluff 4 (+6), Computer 8 (+11), Craft (electronic) 8 (+11), Disable Device 8 (+11), Knowledge (physical sciences) 8 (+11), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+11), Notice 4 (+8), Search 4 (+7), Sense Motive 4 (+8)

Feats: Defensive Roll 2, Move-by Attack

Powers: **Device 11** (harness, hard to lose), **Telepathy 12** (Alternate Powers: **ESP 8** [visual, auditory, mental], **Mind Control 12**, **Mind Control 8** [Sustained], **Mind Control 8** [Sensory Link])

Harness: **Blast 10** (mini-missiles; Explosion), **Flight 5** (250 MPH), **Protection 8** (Impervious 2), **Strike 4** (talons; Mighty)

Combat: Attack +10, Grapple +10, Damage +4 (talons), +10 (missiles), Defense +12 (+6 flat-footed), Knockback -7, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +12 (+10 flatfooted), Fortitude +7, Reflex +7, Will +9

Drawbacks: Power Loss (flight, if wings are restricted, -1 point)

Abilities 27 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 72 + Combat 44 + Saves 15 - Drawbacks 1 = Total 175

The villain known as Hivemind is an insane criminal mastermind who was driven mad by his own psychic powers. When he first realized he could control the minds of others it was already too late; he had damaged the minds of those he loved and could not get their thoughts out of his head. By the time he mastered the control of his powers he had already been driven insane and had embarked on a life of crime.

At first, Hivemind used his powers for petty reasons, like small-time thievery and exacting revenge on his enemies. Over time Hivemind learned to fine-tune his powers and coordinate those under his influence into a well-oiled machine, working together with an efficiency unheard of by most people. Hivemind was at one time a mechanical engineer who designed airplane parts for various manufacturers.

When he began his life of crime and adopted his insect motif (as well as his nickname), it was a simple matter to engineer a set of high-frequency wings that would allow him to fly or hover as needed. Hivemind is capable of maintaining mental control over several people at once and can manipulate and coordinate them by using his own mind as a central thought hub. Hivemind believes that by spreading his influence further across the planet he can organize all of mankind into some greater purpose and eliminate all the petty conflicts and struggles that come from individual thought.

In combat, Hivemind prefers to use those he has under his control as cannon fodder rather than attacking directly. Sometimes he uses the minions under his control as distractions, while other times he wears down a target by throwing a seemingly endless number of minions at them, finally swooping in for the kill when his foe is weakened. Hivemind also likes to fly high over the battlefield and let the fight play out at a distance; if push comes to shove, he exhausts his supply of miniature stinger missiles first before resorting to engaging in hand-to-hand combat. Hivemind occasionally tries to take over the mind of young or weak-willed heroes, but only if he thinks he has a clear chance of succeeding in sustaining control over the subject.

BASE SECURITY

Star Island Security is used to dealing with super-powered heroes, but rarely have they had an up-close brush with a villain. Sensing their

lack of preparation, Hivemind was able to seize their minds with ease and has turned them into his personal security force. There are four base security guards on the landing platform, two in the freight elevator, four on the sky bridge, and two inside the rocket's cargo area. All are under Hivemind's influence.

Use the Soldier archetype, *M&M* page 229, for the base's security.

KIDNAPPED TECHNICIAN

The satellite technicians that were captured from the government facility are actually some of the top communications experts in the nation. Hivemind used them, along with a few other experts on psychic power, to create a satellite that amplifies his abilities and gives him the range to control any being on the planet. The technicians have little knowledge of how to handle themselves in a fight but have a knack for getting in the way, especially when being manipulated by Hivemind. There are six technicians on the sky bridge loading the satellite into the rocket. All are under Hivemind's influence. Use the Scientist archetype, *M&M*, page 229, for the kidnapped technicians.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

You can spin-off the events of *Clear for Launch* into the following adventures.

LOST IN SPACE

Hivemind may (or may not) have gotten his rocket into space, but that isn't the end of the fight. If he seems to be losing, Hivemind jumps into the cargo hold of the shuttle, where he has stored an emergency escape pod. Once the rocket has reached orbit, Hivemind jettisons the pod and returns to Earth well away from the grasp of the authorities. The heroes must follow him into space and stop him from getting away and escaping justice.

NOT THE ONLY SATELLITE

Like any good villain, Hivemind had a backup plan. The satellite he was defending was only the primary satellite, and a second less-powerful one was launched later, disguised as a government spy satellite. With people all over the country succumbing to Hivemind's control, the party must find the hidden base from which he broadcasts his psychic signal and shut down the transmitter before the villain causes too much damage.

RALLY TIME!

BY WARREN BANKS

When former owner Desmond Lettam (aka Toy Boy, *Freedom City*, page 181) was incarcerated, control of Fun-Time Toys passed into the hands of its board of directors. In an attempt to prevent the negative publicity generated by Lettam's criminal activity, the board decided to put a unique spin on the situation. They decided to use the attention to announce that the company would develop a series of toys based on the various superheroes and villains (most notably Toy Boy) of Freedom City.

These new toys, called Sock'em Superbots, could be controlled via remote and made to battle one another. The losing robot would fall apart, only to be easily snapped back together for yet another fight. Various attachments and replacement limbs were then marketed to increase the collectibility of the toys.

To make this project fly, Fun-Time Toys recruited famed Japanese toymaker Hiro Shidachi (a renowned eccentric with a penchant for publicity) to head up the production team with the lure of complete creative control. The line of toys proved successful, and Fun-Time Toys started looking for a new market to expand into. While attending a

Freedom City Blades game, Shidachi realized that certain professional sports involve rigorous physical contact not unlike battles between superhumans. He also realized that the sports market had not been truly tapped by the toy market. And so Shidachi came up with new tabletop robotic sports games called Sock'em Sportsbots.

In their inaugural season, behind the stellar play of scoring sensation Andre Leroux as well as solid play from several league veterans, the Freedom City Blades managed to secure the final playoff spot in their division. Combined with the poor play of the Freedom City Rayguns (the only other active professional team at the moment), the city has gone hockey crazy. To support the team, Mayor Michael O'Connor, Jr. has called for a rally this Saturday at Riverside Park. The event is being co-sponsored by Fun-Time Toys, who are using it as a Freedom City launching point for their Sock'em Sportsbot line. Of course, Desmond Lettam has something to say about the misappropriation of his designs for Fun-Time Toys' profit.

LOCATION

The rally takes place in Riverside Park not far from the Sentry Statue. The city has set up a stage and a PA to address the crowds. The rally takes place from 5:00 until 6:00 P.M., providing fans with enough time to make it to the Shuster Arena for the game's 7:30 P.M. start time. In attendance is the entire Freedom City Blades hockey club, Mayor Michael O'Connor, Blades owner Kurt Carmel, Blades coach Dennis Allenby, Hiro Shidachi, and Roselee Sutter, a Fun-Time Toys public relations representative. The event is MC'd by Freddie Lemanche from rally co-sponsor WNTT-FM. The rally begins with Mayor O'Connor speaking about the Blades. Next up is Hiro Shidachi, who speaks about how the Blades inspired him to create Sock'em Sports hockey robots. Hiro is dressed in a rather oversized Blades jersey and giant foam cowboy hat. Finally, coach Allenby gets up and introduces the team and fields a few fan questions before taking the team to the arena to prepare for the game. Several vendors have set up shop in the park, mostly selling Blades merchandise and simple food like hot dogs and ice cream. Fun-Time Toys has set up several demo models of their new Sock'em Sportsbot hockey game for people to try. WNTT is also broadcasting live from the park and providing music for those who arrive early. A section of the park has been cordoned off to allow quick travel for the several vehicles needed to carry the team from the park to the arena.

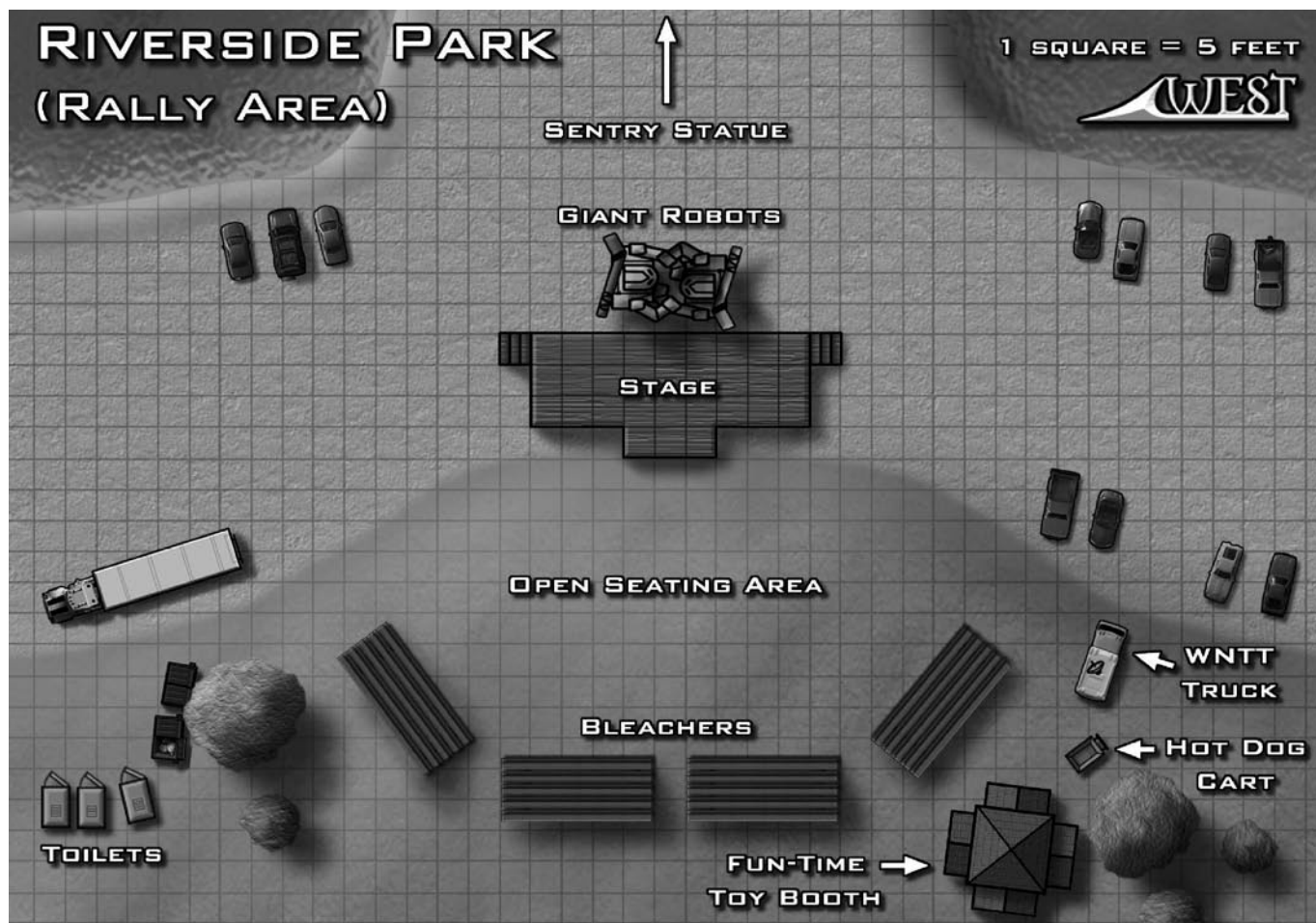
OBSTACLES

As part of the backdrop to the stage, Fun-Time Toys has provided two huge animatronic hockey players who are clutching each other's jerseys and continuously punching one another. The robots are part of the company's huge Sock'em Sports advertisement series. Unknown to everyone but their creator, the two robots were placed there by Desmond Lettam. The robots are completely under Desmond's control. If the heroes are of lower power level, feel free to reduce the number of robots to one.

SOCK'EM SUPERBOTS

POWER LEVEL 10

Str 30	Dex 9	Con —	Int —	Wis 11	Cha —
Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+6), Bluff 4 (+6), Computer 8 (+11), Craft (electronic) 8 (+11), Disable Device 8 (+11), Knowledge (physical sciences) 8 (+11), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+11), Notice 4 (+8), Search 4 (+7), Sense Motive 4 (+8)					
Feats: Defensive Roll 2, Move-by Attack					
Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects), Protection 15					
Combat: Attack +9, Grapple +10, Damage +10 (unarmed), Defense +4, Knockback -5, Initiative -1					



Saving Throws: Toughness +15, Fortitude —, Reflex +2, Will —

Drawbacks: Power Loss (flight, if wings are restricted, -1 point)

Abilities -10 + Skills 0 + Feats 0 + Powers 45 + Combat 26 + Saves 3 = 64

TOY BOY

Toy Boy has been watching the release of the Sock'em Superbots and Sock'em Sportsbots with keen interest. The technology used to create the toys was based entirely on designs he created for his deadly assassin bots. The following Sock'em Superbots ad series only guaranteed his vengeance upon Fun-Time Toys when the company went to great lengths (in his opinion) to paint Toy Boy as an incompetent dolt. The eccentric and loveable Shidachi taking Lettam's credit was the straw that broke the camel's back. Toy Boy has built two giant hockey player robots and placed them as a backdrop behind the stage used for the rally. He is able to completely monitor the proceedings through the robots via tiny cameras placed around the park. He is also able to broadcast his voice through the robots' mouths.

Toy Boy waits until Mayor O'Connor finishes his talk and Shidachi is up at the podium before attacking. Toy Boy grabs Shidachi and Ms. Sutter, then proceeds to announce to the crowds that this imbecile is as much a toymaker as the moon is made out of cheese. Toy Boy continues to ridicule and denounce Fun-Time Toys while terrorizing the crowds by kicking over vending carts and other large objects with the giant robots.

Once the heroes arrive, all bets are off and the real combat starts. The heroes must work fast to save Shidachi and Ms. Sutter. Toy Boy uses the two as human shields to keep the heroes from attacking the robots at full power. He taunts the heroes into attacking and at the same time poses the moral quandary "How do you stop my robots and not kill these poor, innocent fools?"

You can find Toy Boy's game stats on page 222 of *Freedom City* as well as in the adventure **Toys Will Be Toys**, also in this book.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

You can spin-off the events of *Rally Time!* into the following adventures. You might also want to use *Toys Will Be Toys*, previously in this book, as a follow-up adventure, once the heroes have tangled with Toy Boy.

TONIGHT'S GAME

The attack at the rally was not only Toy Boy sending a message to Fun-Time Toys. It is also a taunt to the heroes to try to stop him. An avid fan, Shidachi will not be persuaded from missing the Blades game, which he watches from Fun Time's luxury box. He has heightened security to prevent Toy Boy from reaching him and once the hockey game starts, he forgets all about the danger. Toy Boy will of course make his move at the game, but from where? And when? Perhaps the flying blimp shaped like a hockey skate that comes out between periods sprays the crowd with a gas that causes violent outbursts? Perhaps the zambonies are transforming robots that unfurl and begin launching rockets at the pressboxes? Or perhaps Toy Boy will be subtler and send tiny remote controlled planes to attack any who challenge him?

TOTAL CONTROL

Because Fun-Time Toys followed the blueprints of Toy Boy's original designs to the letter, Toy Boy is now able to control all Sock'em Sport and Superbots with one master control. Toy Boy has built the remote, but is still looking for a transmitter powerful enough to reach all the Sock'em bots in Freedom City. He can target any number of places, including any of the local TV and radio stations. The heroes will probably have their hands full battling numerous tiny robots, but should eventually trace the broadcast signal to a specific location and attempt to disable it.

DIVERSION

The attack at the rally was only a diversion. In the ensuing bedlam, Toy Boy captured Andre Leroux, his intended target. Leroux's stellar playoff performance was costing the much wealthier owner of an opposing NHL team a chance at the Stanley Cup and costing him major revenues. The greedy team owner hired Toy Boy to kidnap Andre Leroux and replace him with a robotic double. The robot double plays terribly, and the plan appears to have worked until the robotic Leroux is hit too hard into the boards. The ensuing examination reveals Leroux to be a robot. Carmel is grateful to the heroes for saving everyone at the rally and asks the heroes to find the real Leroux before the Blades are knocked from the playoffs.

WALKING IN A WINTER WONDER-WASTELAND

BY SHAWN CARMAN

"This is Oliver Clark of Channel 3 Action News with a breaking story. Police reports indicate that Ashton Mall has been almost completely encased in ice! There are no indications as to the cause at this time, but superhuman activity is suspected. We now go to Amy Feng, live on the scene. Amy?"

"Walking in a Winter Wonder-Wasteland" pits your heroes against the misguided but very dangerous efforts of Glacier, a lonely superhuman madman desperate to recreate the lost civilization of his prehistoric people. In the early hours of the morning, Glacier entered the Ashton Mall and activated a strange device. This device augmented his natural abilities considerably, allowing him to extend a vast ice field over the entire mall and subjugate those within it to his will, instantly creating a miniature kingdom of ice for him to lord over.

The reaction of local authorities to Glacier's proclamation of sovereignty has been frigid, so say the least. The local police and SWAT units were sent in, but the ice field surrounding the mall halted most. Those who did make it to the mall were defeated and captured by Glacier's ice-clad minions only to reappear as minions themselves a few short hours later. Conventional means of law enforcement are simply ineffective against Glacier. Heavier ordinance or flame-based weapons might prove effective, but the mall's owners and investors are prominent members of the community and are postponing any potentially property-damage causing measures for as long as possible.

Clearly, the situation requires heroes.

LOCATION

The site for this adventure is Ashton Mall, a relatively new shopping center located in the suburb of Ashton, just outside the crime-ridden West End section of Freedom City. Despite the recent construction, there have already been concerns that the upscale mall will be dominated by young gang members from the West End. Ironically, the mall's first major problem is considerably worse.

Glacier has covered all but two mall entrances with at least a foot of rock-hard ice that is both difficult and conspicuous to break through. The ice field extends through most of the parking lot, turning it into a rather lengthy obstacle course. The entire area is treated as if subject to a Slick effect, as per Glacier's Energy Control (cold) abilities (see *Obstacles* below for more information).

The mall's interior is much like any other mall, and contents of individual stores may be generated from the following table:

ASHTON MALL STORES

Roll	Location	Roll	Location
1-2	Retail clothing outlet	11-12	Shoe store
3-4	Restaurant/Food services	13-14	Specialty goods
5-6	Mall office	15-16	Medical (optometrist, etc.)
7-8	Electronics	17-18	Toy store
9-10	Bookstore	19-20	Other

CENTER COURT

Glacier's impromptu headquarters is located directly in the mall's center, where the food court surrounds a picturesque fountain that serves as the mall's centerpiece. Despite the pyramid of ice that surrounds the fountain, the water within remains unfrozen. The entire area, including chairs, tables, kiosks, and a small merry-go-round, are completely encased in ice, making it very difficult ground to cover. Half-speed is the best anyone can manage under such circumstances.

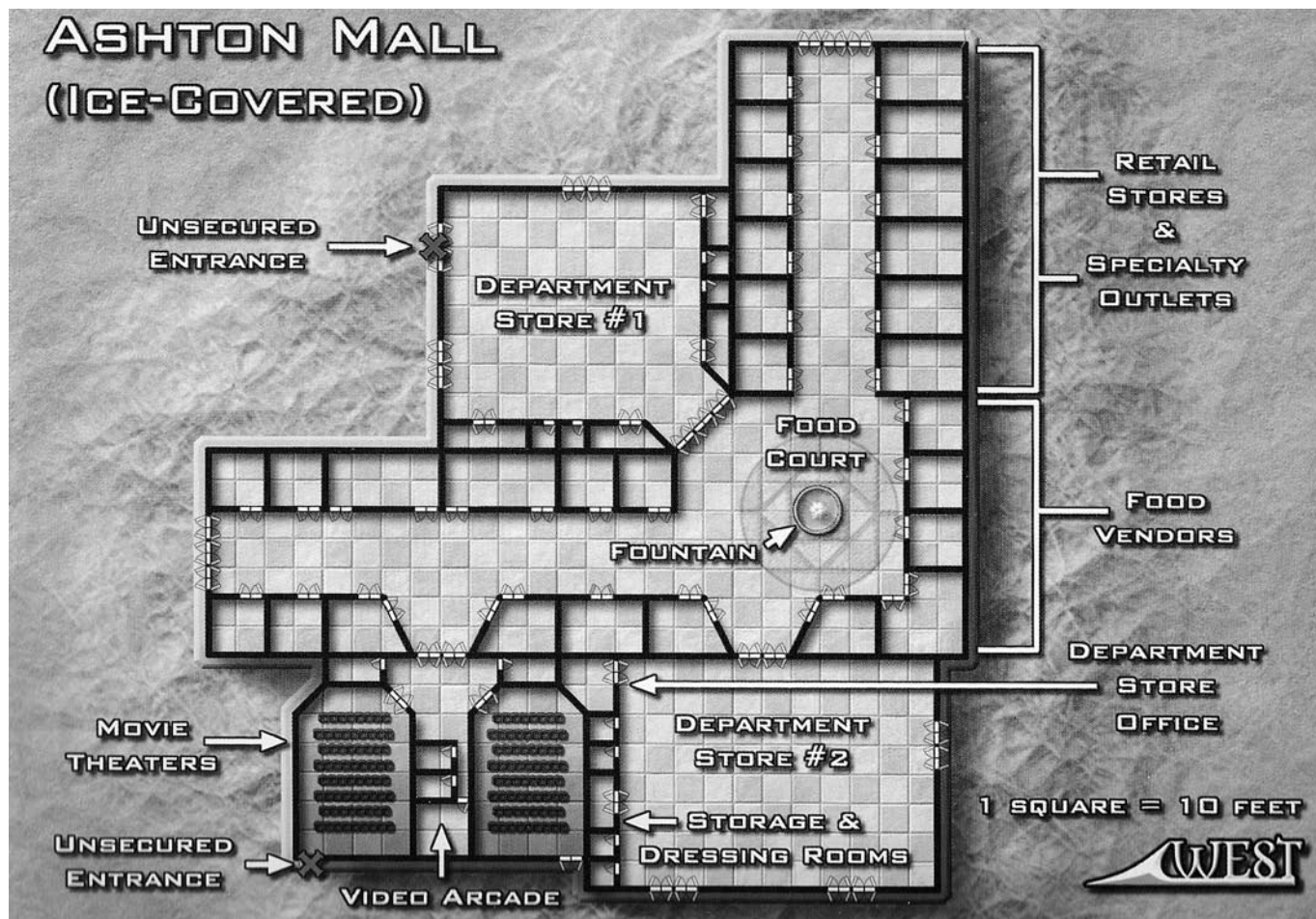
OBSTACLES

There are a number of obstacles standing in the way of heroes attempting to remove this threat, the greatest of which is Glacier and his frozen soldiers. Most others involve the surroundings, and include the following:

- **The Parking Lot:** The mall's vast parking lot is covered in ice. Anyone attempting to traverse it must make a successful Reflex save (DC 23) every round or fall and risk injury.
- **Mall Interior:** The mall ceiling is coated with large stalactites that threaten to break free with any strenuous physical activity. If combat breaks out within the mall before the party reaches the Food Court, there is a 20% chance each round that one will fall, inflicting +12L damage on anyone unfortunate enough to be struck.
- **Security Systems:** Miraculously, Glacier has maintained the mall security system in perfect working order, making it virtually impossible to reach his inner sanctum in the mall's center without being detected. Any Stealth checks made within the mall are at a significant disadvantage, and those opposing them gain a +15 bonus on Notice checks to detect interlopers.

THE CRYOGENESIS

The artifact Glacier has employed to perform this incredible task is a strange device he calls the Cryogenesis. At first glance, the device does not conform to any traditional technological means of construction, although its exact origin is left to the GM's discretion. The abilities relevant to the adventure are that it exponentially increases the range of Glacier's ability to create ice fields. Its other, more sinister ability is to enslave others' minds. Anyone held submerged in the fountain's waters (which remain mysteriously liquid despite the ice surrounding them) must make a Will save versus a rank 15 Mind Control effect. Those so enslaved take orders from Glacier as if he were the one who possessed Mind Control.

**GLACIER****POWER LEVEL 11**

Str 25	Dex 14	Con 16	Int 14	Wis 12	Cha 14
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Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+10), Intimidate 8 (+10), Investigate 8 (+10), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+11), Knowledge (earth sciences) 8 (+10), Notice 12 (+13), Survival 16 (+17)

Feats: Attack Focus 1 (ranged), Critical Strike, Environmental Adaptation (extreme cold), Favored Environment 3 (extreme cold), Master Plan, Power Attack

Powers: Cold Control 12 (Alternate Powers: Absorption 6 [cold], Blast 12 [ice], Blast 8 [cold; Fortitude save], Create Ice 12, Ice Slick 12 [Burst Area Trip], Snare 12 [ice bonds]), Protection 10 (icy armor)

Combat: Attack +8 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +15, Damage +7 (melee) +12 (ice blast), Defense +10, Knockback -13, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +13, Fortitude +13, Reflex +10, Will +13

Drawbacks: Vulnerable (Fire; Common, +50% damage) (-3 points)

Abilities 35 + Skills 17 (64 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 40 + Combat 36 + Saves 40 - Drawbacks 3 = 175 Total

A tragic villain at best, Gelaziir is a remnant of a civilization that perished when the world emerged from the last Ice Age. An Arctic expedition discovered him frozen in a vast wall of ice years ago, where he was carefully removed and returned to civilization for study. Much to everyone's amazement, he awoke from his slumber when he was thawed out for examination. Gelaziir spent some time among scientists from all across the globe and was something of a media sensation for

a short while, gaining the nickname Glacier from the mispronunciation of his true name. In time, however, he grew listless and returned to the Arctic in search of his people. He found a small number frozen in the ice as he was, but has been unable to revive them due to the changes in Earth's atmosphere since the days of their empire. Why Gelaziir could be revived remains unknown, just as does the origin of his ice powers, but his loneliness and despair have driven him to madness.

For years, Gelaziir has sought to plunge the world into a new Ice Age in a desperate attempt to reawaken his people. He has been opposed by many heroes, most frequently Johnny Rocket and the Freedom League. Gelaziir has also spent considerable time in psychiatric care at an institution for superhuman criminals. Thus far, his rehabilitation has not progressed particularly well. Two weeks ago, he escaped from his incarceration and has been at large ever since.

In the depths of his dementia, Glacier has vowed to recreate his lost world. Using a device of unknown origin, possibly a remnant of his people's civilization, he appeared in Ashton Mall during the morning hours and quickly transformed the large building into a frozen wasteland. The employees and customers have become virtual automaton, obeying Glacier's every whim. To Glacier, this is not a crime, but the beginning of a new frozen empire that shall bring the world to its knees.

Glacier fights with the ferocity of a man defending his home. He uses his Cold Control to coat the entire floor with ice, limiting ground movement. He attacks airborne targets first, then attempts to Snare anyone fast enough to be a problem on the ground. If losing, he retreats farther into the mall so that the confined quarters limit the number of opponents who can face him at one time.

FROZEN MINIONS

There are approximately 75 frozen minions under Glacier's control. Their mental domination has left them virtually mindless, and they mob anyone Glacier commands them to stop. They fight with no thought for their own safety, and use very simple group tactics to the best of their limited ability.

Use the Bystander archetype, *M&M*, page 226, for the Glacier's frozen minions, with the addition of **Cold Control 4** (*Alternate Power: Strike 4* [cold]), **Immunity 10** (cold damage and effects), and **Protection 4**. While they are not Vulnerable to heat or fire, exposure to such does give a Frozen Minion a new saving throw against Glacier's Mind Control each round (with the usual +1 cumulative bonus).

FURTHER ADVENTURES

The characters may take pity on Glacier's misery and attempt to find a way to reawaken his people. This could result in an ongoing subplot, perhaps even involving trips to the Arctic for the purposes of research. The device Glacier used in his assault on the mall is clearly a recent creation, and bears the mark of a twisted genius. The characters may take it upon themselves to find its creator and discover what other deadly devices are loose on the market.

It is possible that those enslaved by Glacier may retain some of the abilities they possessed during the incident. How will the characters deal with a sudden influx of literally dozens of cold-wielding superhumans?

WAXWORKS

BY TOREN ATKINSON

The Hunter Museum of Natural History is having a special exhibit opening this week—a series of tablets from ancient China that purportedly bear strange mystical runes. News of the exhibit flows quickly through occult circles around town, possibly drawing the interest of characters intrigued by mysticism or esoteric history. Tensions among the museum staff run high, as employees fear the mysterious tablets will draw the attention of one or more of the city's infamous supervillains. In fact, the exhibit has brought a foreign villain to the city, a runic sorcerer who goes by the name Goldclaw.

LOCATION

Heroes scoping out the museum on the exhibit's opening day can make a Notice check (DC 10) to notice a Chinese man who seems to be deeply interested in the tablets. He spends most of the day wandering about the museum, mentally noting the placement of security cameras or guard stations. The man, Lin Mao Hii (alias Goldclaw), is very interested in stealing the tablets, and has concocted an elaborate scheme to rob the museum of its newfound treasure. If he feels that he's under scrutiny he attempts to calmly and nonchalantly slip away, doing everything he can to shake off trailing PCs. His van is parked nearby, but if need be, he teleports away to a nearby safe house—an abandoned wax museum.

The tablets themselves are naturally kept under glass, and a museum guard watches the exhibit constantly during museum hours. Characters examining the tablets can attempt a DC 13 Knowledge (occult) check to determine that the tablets bear genuine mystical runes. Characters able to sense mystical forces immediately notice that the tablets hold a great deal of magical power. The exact nature of the magical runes is up to the Gamemaster, but might include hints regarding future adventures or an ongoing mystical plotline of your own design. The true story behind the tablets is not relevant to this adventure.

If none of the PCs have a viable connection to the museum or an interest in the tablets, one or more of the heroes can come across the museum

heist while out on patrol. As they're swinging, flying, or jumping by the museum, they see a handful of oddly dressed figures skulking toward the site, recalling a recently read news item about the new exhibit.

THE HEIST

Once Hii is satisfied that he's not being followed, he returns to his base of operations, an old wax museum in the Boardwalk district, right behind the Golden Calf casino. The wax museum has been closed down and was derelict for years until Hii finally leased it about a month ago. From here he has been preparing for the heist—acquiring resources, creating an army of wax dummy automatons, and gauging possible opposition and obstacles. He may well know about the character heroes, and has taken special steps to thwart them.

That night, Goldclaw cleans out his work area and moves his equipment into a van on the corner of Charles and 40th Street, just two blocks from the Hunter Museum of Natural History and alongside a construction site. In the van are two very special magic boxes—the Twin Cabinets of the Ba Xian. The person wielding its twin can remove an item placed into one of the brass cabinets. Essentially, the bottom interior of one box functions as a lid to the other. A Tiny creature or shapeshifter could conceivably use the cabinets as a makeshift teleportation device.

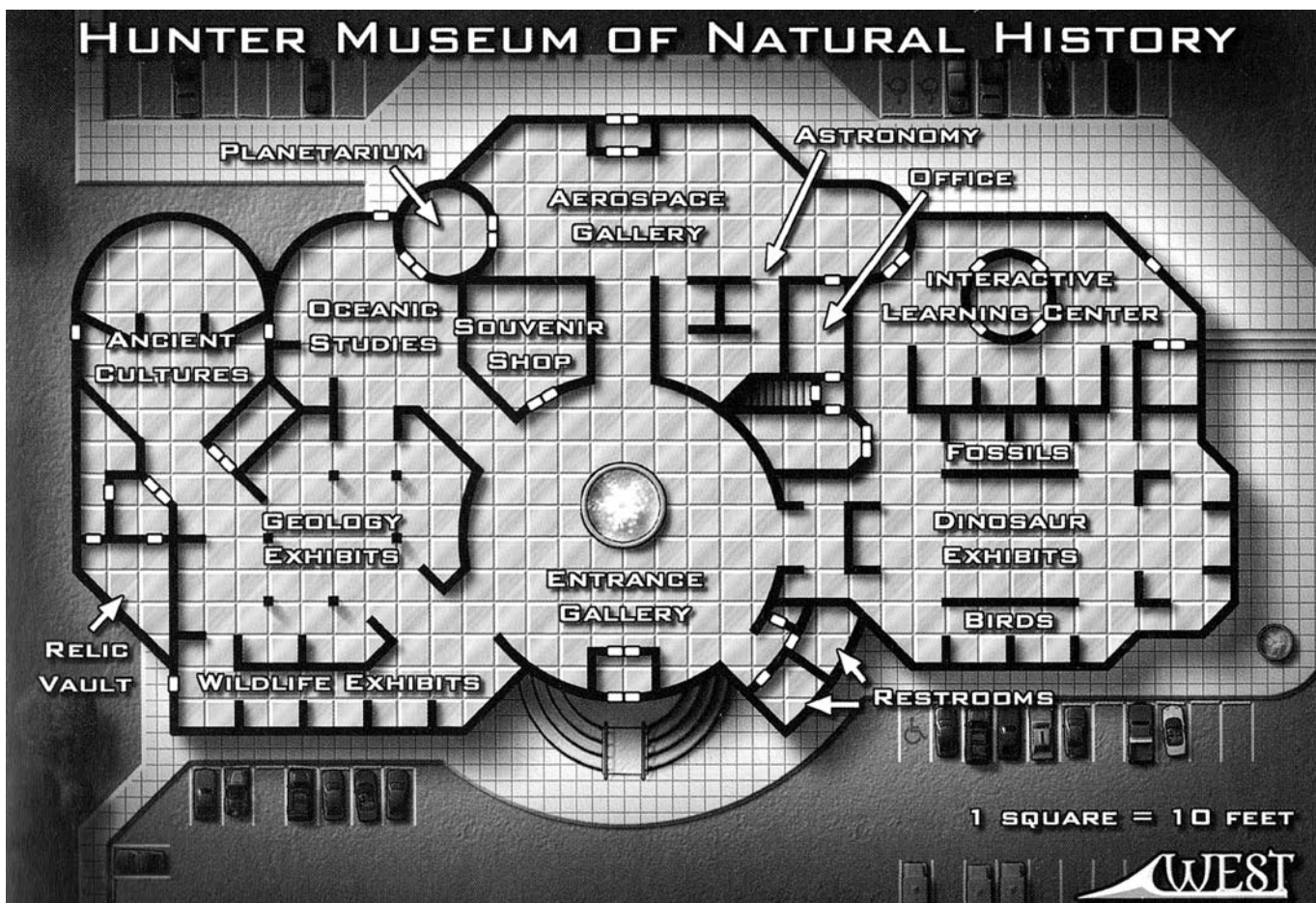
At dusk, or about an hour after the museum's closing time (which-ever is later), his rune-animated wax dummy minions start to siege the museum, using their weapons to break through doors and windows. One of the dummies carries one of the Twin Cabinets, surreptitiously if possible. Goldclaw has ordered his dummies to smash through the tablets' glass display and place the purloined artifacts into the Twin Cabinet. From the safety of the wax museum, Goldclaw waits with the matching cabinet. The fate of his constructs (and even of the Twin Cabinet they bear) is unimportant to Goldclaw, who covets the tablets more than anything else.

How many wax dummy constructs you choose to pit against your heroes is a matter of discretion. As a guideline, try three personalities per character; introduce more as required. Any character who gets into close quarters with or specifically studies a wax dummy can make a Notice check (DC 15) to notice its faintly glowing forehead rune.

Obviously, fighting inside a museum is tricky business. The heroes may win more enemies than friends around town if they aren't careful not to damage the many invaluable exhibits. No museum counts on superheroes to protect their exhibits, so a decision will need to be made on internal security. Are there watchmen on duty round the clock in the museum, or do they depend on motion sensors and laser detection grids? Will any guards confront supervillains? Is the alarm silent? Are there steel doors and shutters around particularly sensitive exhibits that close when the alarm goes off? Will Goldclaw need to deal with these systems?

The heroes may choose to investigate Goldclaw's waxworks. Goldclaw is not so foolish as to remain there, but he does leave some enchanted attack dummies that spring to life if anyone intrudes on their domain. Although he believes he has covered his involvement in the heist, his arrogance has allowed him to forget about a crumpled take-out menu from the Wading Way Brewery, where he takes many of his meals. A successful DC 15 Search check turns up the menu at the bottom of a trash basket in the waxworks' simple front office. The staff of the Wading Way Brewery knows Hii by sight, and the mysterious man has become a favorite conversation topic at the restaurant. The employees even know what kind of van he drives—a tan 1977 Chevy Sport van.

If Goldclaw obtains the tablets and gets away, the heroes may still be able to find him. They should be able to determine without much work that the wax museum was leased to one Lin Mao Hii. This information may come alongside a trail of credit card bills and bank account information that leads wherever you wish (airplane tick-



ets, car payments, antique and rare book purchases, motel bills, etc). Once the tablets and Twin Cabinets are in his possession, Hii means to drive north on Route 6 until he reaches his favorite out-of-town motel to study his spoils.

OPTIONS

Normally, Adrian Eldrich screens any mystical item before it is put on display at the Hunter Museum, often constructing a replica in concert with Daedalus so that the proxy item is put on display and the original is not subject to potential theft. It may well be that Eldrich is indisposed during the week of the display. If not, Goldclaw and the heroes may find themselves fighting over a useless replica. Alternately, Goldclaw may know that the display tablets are fake, and seek out the authentic ones that are kept under lock and key in the museum's basement.

It may make more sense for your scenario to have Goldclaw perform his heist the night *before* the opening, or even the day that the tablets arrive at the museum, if your characters can logically get involved in time. You may also opt to not use the Twin Cabinets and have Goldclaw himself steal away the tablets, using his dummies to sow confusion and help cover his escape.

A fun part about Goldclaw's wax dummy minions is you can have the characters fighting whatever historical personalities or celebrities you see fit. Use your knowledge of your players to pick suitable or ironic wax characters for them to battle. Some options might include: Blackbeard the Pirate (with sword); Queen Elizabeth II; Abraham Lincoln; Genghis Khan (with sword); Ghandi; Liberace; Hitler; Shakespeare; Pope John Paul II; Jesus; King Tutankhamen; The Executioner (with axe); Dracula; Frankenstein's Monster; Tiger Woods

(with club); Michael Jackson; or legendary heroes from the past including Centurion, Freedom Eagle, or the Bowman.

CHARACTERS

In *Waxworks*, the heroes are up against Goldclaw and his unusual wax dummy minions. Use the Skeleton archetype on page 235 for the animated wax dummies, with the addition of the drawback Vulnerable to Fire (+50% damage).

GOLDCLAW

POWER LEVEL 11

Str 18	Dex 18	Con 15	Int 18	Wis 20	Cha 15
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Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+8), Disguise 6 (+8), Escape Artist 8 (+12), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+12), Language 1 (Mandarin), Notice 5 (+10), Sleight of Hand 4 (+8), Stealth 4 (+8)

Feats: Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Ritualist, Stunning Attack, Surprise Strike

Powers: **Device 5** (mystic amulet, hard to lose), **Magic 5** (*Spells: Blast 5* [mystic flame], **Dazzle 5** [visual], **Teleport 5**), **Protection 10** (Impervious 5), **Strike 7**, (metallic claws; Mighty), **Super-Strength 4** (heavy load: 4,800 lbs.)
Mystic Amulet: Blast 5 (electricity; Aura, Sustained)

Combat: Attack +11, Grapple +19, Damage +11 (claws), +5 (blast), Defense +10, Knockback -9, Initiative +8

Saving Throws: Toughness +12, Fortitude +8, Reflex +10, Will +10

Abilities 44 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 63+ Combat 42 + Saves 17 = Total 181

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Toren Atkinson was raised by *Thundarr the Barbarian* and *The Superfriends*, and decided to write his own superhero RPG (from which sprang Goldclaw) after playing *D&D* in the 9th grade. In 1992, he and some friends formed the H.P. Lovecraft-inspired punk band The Darkest of the Hillside Thickets. He also co-wrote the award-winning *Spaceship Zero* RPG for Green Ronin Publishing. Toren continues to make music, dress up in monster costumes, write, act, draw, and watch cartoons in Vancouver, BC.

Keith Baker is the last son of a world where cows evolved from men. Rocketed to Earth to escape the destruction of his home, he uses the cover of mild-manner game-designer to conceal his bovine heroics. Keith designed the world of *Eberron*, chosen among thousands of entries by Wizards of the Coast to be an official *D&D* setting and has since worked on numerous products for the line, fleshing out and expanding the world, along with a trilogy of *Eberron* novels.

Warren C. Banks is co-author of the award-winning *Spaceship Zero* RPG for Green Ronin Publishing, something he has yet to exploit for his personal gain. He has also worked on the *Living Greyhawk* campaign and the *Delta Green* setting for *Call of Cthulhu*. In his free time, Warren plays guitar for the H.P. Lovecraft-inspired punk band The Darkest of the Hillside Thickets. He would like to thank his mom, dad, and younger brother Ryan for always supporting him and his wacky ideas.

DT Butchino went from *M&M* fandom to freelancer with "Hate Is a Four-Letter Word," his adventure in this book. He has gone on to write for *Paragons* and *Worlds of Freedom*, where he describes the near future of Freedom City and its heroes. He lives in Plattsburgh, New York.

KG Carlson also went from *M&M* fan to author with his contributions to the *M&M* website, like the adventures featured in this book. He has also contributed by running *Mutants & Masterminds* game events at local stores as well as national conventions like Origins in Columbus, Ohio, and being an active presence on the Atomic Think Tank forums.

Shawn Carman was born and raised in the South, where gamers are sometimes hunted for their shiny pelts. Oblivious to the potential danger, he took to comic books at an early age and branched out into roleplaying games in high school. An abundance of unstructured free time led to a desire to write, and eventually to a regular paycheck, mainly for his work on the *Legend of the Five Rings* roleplaying game.

Steve Kenson is the author, designer, and developer of *Mutants & Masterminds*, starting out as a full-time freelancer doing some work for Green Ronin Publishing. His lifelong love of superheroes and comic books led him to design what became the *Freedom City* setting, and to pitch it to Green Ronin. That led to a deal to create a d20-based superhero RPG and the rest, as they say, is history. Steve lives in Merrimack, NH, with his partner, author Christopher Penczak.

Christopher McGlothlin is a lifelong Virginia, whose prior work for Green Ronin has included *Golden Age*, *Time of Vengeance*, *Noir*, and *Time of Crisis*. He's a high school social studies teacher and moderator for the New Gamers Order pro wrestling game industry discussion group. McGlothlin is a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the Military Order of the Stars & Bars, and the Confederate States Army. All good things in his life are made possible by God and his wonderful wife, Tannith.

Jason Orman alias "Valdier" is an avid software programmer and game-store owner. After many harrowing years as a playtester for games such as *GURPS Supers*, he has now settle on harassing game designers to get his name into the credits of their games. In his spare time, when not hatching nefarious plots from his base in Los Angeles, he does volunteer work for conventions around the United States and pursues the quest for the perfect gelato.

Steven E. Schend has been working in the RPG business for well over a decade. He was a contributing editor for *Freedom City* and, before that, worked on the *Gamer's Handbook of the Marvel Universe* series for TSR. His work on the *Forgotten Realms* setting includes *City of Splendors*, *Lands of Intrigue*, and *Cormanthyr: Empire of the Elves*.

Rodney Thompson is an ENnie Award-winning writer and designer from Chattanooga, Tennessee. He's best known for his work on the *Star Wars Saga Edition* roleplaying game and is now developer for the game for Wizards of the Coast. Rodney wrote *The Noble's Handbook* for Green Ronin Publishing, as well as "The Last Voyage of the Stellar Galleon" for the *True20 Narrator's Kit*.

Hal Mangold 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.

Darren Calvert was raised in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies by a pack of wild squirrels, and rose from his humble beginnings to graduate from the University of Alberta with a degree in Industrial Design. He now works full time for Art Attack, an Edmonton company specializing in custom theming for the amusement industry. In his spare time, he spends way too much time reading comics, playing video games, watching movies, and working on freelance illustrations for the RPG industry.

Eric Canete is an accomplished illustrator, designer, and storyboard artist. He began his career as designer and board artist on Peter Chung's highly-acclaimed MTV series *Aeon Flux*, currently in development as a live-action feature at Paramount with *Terminator* producer Gale Anne Hurd. He has since provided concept

art, designs, and boards for projects including *Men In Black*, *Godzilla*, and *Starship Troopers* at Sony and the Cartoon Network's revival of *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. Select comics credits include *Mr. Majestic* and *Cybernary 2.0* at DC Comic's WildStorm imprint, *Superman*, and Marvel Comics' *Deathlok* (which is also in development as a feature at Paramount). He is once again working with director Peter Chung, this time on a brand new animated franchise at Universal Pictures. For more of Eric's talent and imagination, please visit his studio website at <http://www.blackvelvetstudios.com>.

Christopher Jones is the penciller of *The Batman Strikes* for DC Comics, and the co-creator and artist of *Dr. Blink*, *Superhero Shrink* with John Kovalic. Visit his web site at www.ChristopherJonesArt.com

Greg Kirkpatrick graduated from the University of Kansas with a Bachelors of Fine Arts. He currently resides in South Florida with his wife and children. Greg has worked on *Savage Dragon*, *Living in Infamy* and other small press publications.

Jonathan Kirtz currently plies his artistic trade for EA Mythic, working on the *Warhammer Online* MMORPG.

Axel Ortiz A Latin boy who got out of Art Center College of Design and went out to the cruel world, Ortiz works at Sony Picture Family Entertainment. Axel has contributed conceptual designs for Steve Johnson's XFX, and Creature Effects Studios for small movies and videos. Lucky number 13, Axel also has contributed work to many Wildstorm Studio's projects

Tony Parker is an Arizona-based artist who has worked in the fields of RPG illustration, graphic novels, card art and book cover art. He still enjoys giving hugs.

The majority of **Ramon Perez's** artistic catalogue can be found in Role-Playing Games, Collectible Card Games and related publications. A veteran of the industry he has worked on *Rifts*, *Mutants & Masterminds*, and *Star Wars* amongst many others. He is also a regular contributor in the pages of both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. Currently, Ramon is making his move into mainstream comics with his current monthly book *Spell Game* for Speak Easy Comics as well as his creator owned *Butternutsquash*. Other projects have seen him work on Marvel's elusive *Hulk: Gamma Games* and such high profile projects as *The Incredibles* for Dark Horse Comics. Check out his work at calaverastudio.com and butternutsquash.net.

Andy Smith has been working as a professional artist since 1991. Mostly working in the field of comic books for major publishers such as Marvel, DC, Image, Acclaim and Cross Gen Ent. Not content with just comic book projects Andy has also done a variety of commercial jobs for clients such as Bally's Total Fitness, Real Song Records, and Fidelity Investments. Andy is also the best selling author of *Drawing Dynamic Comics* published by Watson-Guptill in 2000. The book is currently in it's sixth printing.

Udon is a collective of artists formed in 2000 based out of Toronto, Canada. Udon provides top quality artwork and creative services to many fields including gaming, comic books, toy design, video games and advertising. **Chris Stevens** is a veteran Udon illustrator working out of Winterville, North Carolina. His detailed line work and dynamic action scenes have graced role-playing game books for White Wolf, Paizo and Hero Games as well as comic book series for Marvel and Devil's Due Publishing.

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 *Tasslehoff's Map Pouch: War of the Lance* and is the sole cartographer behind all three *Tasslehoff 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.

Christopher West has been a lifelong fan of all things fantastical or futuristic, and began his career in cartography with a wide range of freelance projects for Wizards of the Coast. His work can be found in the *Power of the Jedi* sourcebook, as well as numerous issues of *Dungeon*, *Dragon*, and *Star Wars Gamer*. More of his work can be found at www.velocity.net/~westwinds. Chris holds a BFA degree in Applied Media Arts and lives in a small Pennsylvania town with his beloved wife, darling son, and antisocial cat.

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